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The Religion and Philosophy of India

THE PHILOSOPHY
OF
THE UPAHISHADS

BY

PAUL DEUSSEN
PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF KIEL

AUTHORISED ENGLISH TRANSLATION

By REV. A. S. GEDEN, M.A.

TUTOR IN OLD TESTAMENT LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE, AND CLASSICS,
WESLEYAN COLLEGE, RICHMOND

EDINBURGH: T. & T. CLARK, 38 GEORGE STREET
PREFACE

Dr. Deusser’s treatise on the Upanishads needs no formal introduction or commendation to students of Indian thought who are familiar with the German language. To others I would fain hope that the translation here presented, which appears with the author’s sanction, may serve to make known a work of very marked ability and of surpassing interest. As far as my knowledge extends, there is no adequate exposition of the Upanishads available in English. The best was published by Messrs. Trübner more than a quarter of a century ago, and is in many respects out of date. As traced here by the master-hand of the author, the teaching of the ancient Indian seers presents itself in clearest light, and claims the sympathetic study of all lovers of truth.

For the English rendering I am alone responsible. And where I may have failed to catch the precise meaning of the original, or adequately to represent the turn of phrase, I can only ask the indulgence of the reader. Dr. Deusser’s style is not easy. And if a more capable hand than mine had been willing to essay the task of translation, I would gladly have resigned my office. With whatsoever care I can hardly hope entirely to have
escaped error. But for any indication of oversight or mistake, and any suggestion for improvement, I shall be most grateful. The work has exacted many hours that could be ill spared from a very full life. If however it conduce in any way to a better understanding of the mind and heart of India I shall be amply repaid.

A. S. GEDEN.
The present work forms the second part of my *General History of Philosophy*. It is however complete in itself; and has for its subject the Philosophy of the Upanishads, the culminating point of the Indian doctrine of the universe. This point had been already reached in Vedic, pre-Buddhist times; and in philosophical significance has been surpassed by none of the later developments of thought up to the present day. In particular the Sâñkhya system has followed out lines of thought traced for it in the Upanishads, and has emphasized realistic tendencies already found there (*infra*, pp. 239–255). Buddhism also, though of entirely independent origin, yet betrays its indebtedness in essential points to the teaching of the Upanishads, when its main fundamental thought (*nirvâna*, the removal of suffering by the removal of *trishnā*) meets us expressed in other words (union with Brahman by the removal of *kāma*) in the passage from the Brihadârañyaka quoted below.¹

The thoughts of the Vedânta therefore became for India a permanent and characteristic spiritual atmosphere, which pervades all the products of the later literature.

¹ *Bṛih. 4. 4. 6*, *infra* p. 348.
To every Indian Brâhman to-day the Upanishads are what the New Testament is to the Christian.

So significant a phenomenon deserved and demanded a more comprehensive treatment than it had yet obtained. And my hope is to remove in some measure the cloud which hitherto has obscured this subject, and to exhibit order and consistency in place of the confused mass of contradictory conceptions, which alone had been supposed to exist. If the result is not a uniform and unified system, there is yet found a regular historical development, the key to which is an original, abrupt and daring idealism; and this in its further progress by a twofold concession, on the one hand to traditional beliefs, and on the other to the empirical prepossessions natural to us all, was gradually developed into that which we, adopting Western phraseology if not always in a Western sense, call pantheism, cosmogonism, theism, atheism (Sâñkhya), and deism (Yoga). Chap. ix., "The Unreality of the Universe" (pp. 226–239), which by its paradoxical title attracts attention and provokes contradiction, or the final survey at the close of the book (p. 396 ff.), may well serve as a first introduction to these oriental teachings.

A remarkable and at first sight perplexing feature in this entire evolution of thought is the persistence with which the original idealism holds its ground, not annulléd or set aside by the pantheistic and theistic developments that have grown out of it. On the contrary it remains a living force, the influence of which may be more or less directly traced everywhere, until it is finally abandoned by the Sâñkhya system. Adopted by the Vedânta it is proclaimed as the only "higher knowledge" (parâ vidyâ),