CHAPTER 3
SOURCES OF WISDOM

Chapter Outline:

1. Where Do We Find Wisdom
    - A. Sources of What?
    - B. What Sources
2. On Philosophical Literature
    - A. How to Read Philosophical Writings
    - B. An Example of Philosophical Writing: Shankara on the Unity of the Self

Chapter Objectives:

In this chapter you will explore our sources of wisdom: those people and resources we look to as teachers, mentors, or "advice givers" with regard to our life. You will explore what it means to consider something as a source of wisdom. Then you will explore various kinds of sources. In particular, this chapter will introduce you to the world of philosophical literature, the writings of the scholars and sages of past and present. You will have a lesson in reading: how to read philosophical writings. You will then get to apply this reading lesson using a sample of philosophical writing from the early Medieval Indian philosopher Shankara. Along the way in this reading you will learn something about clay, human being, and religion. In the journal exercise you will have a chance to examine your own sources of wisdom. After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- describe what "sources of wisdom" are and what makes them sources of *wisdom*.
- summarize in what way(s) philosophical writings qualify as sources of wisdom.
- list the main different kinds of sources of wisdom.
- summarize how to read philosophical writings and apply this in your own reading

- reconstruct the basic points of Shankara’s commentary on the Brahma Sutra: (1) what text(s) was he commenting on (identify what topic or illustration is presented)? (2) what point(s) does Shankara make about the text(s)/topic/illustration? (3) how does Shankara respond to objections that might arise concerning his point(s)? (4) what consequences result from a belief in his thesis?
- take a first stab at identifying your own sources of wisdom.

Where Do We Find Wisdom?

Who do you trust?

Let’s just say, for example, that your vehicle has developed a strange “ticking” noise when you drive it above thirty miles-per-hour. Everything else appears to be fine and you have found no broken parts lying under the vehicle. Is this OK? Does this model tend to “tick” when it gets older? Or perhaps it is a sign of something bad, something that needs attention now, before it gets worse. So where do you go for help? Do you immediately run to a mechanic? Do you talk to a friend? Do you turn on that call-in radio program where the guys talk about fixing cars? Do you putter around a bit yourself? Who do you trust to provide the right information about your vehicle?

Let’s take another example. Let’s say that you are sick. You’re not quite sure what’s wrong, but you’re sure that *something* is wrong. Where do you go first in this situation? Do you call up your physician and make an appointment? Do you talk to a relative? Do you look up your ailment in a book or on a web site? Where would you go if you were looking for *expertise*? Where would you go if you were looking for *wisdom*? What is the difference between the two?

Now let’s look at one more example. You wonder what’s next ahead in life for you. You’re old enough to have made some mistakes, but young enough that there’s still a lot of life ahead. You know that you can’t just sit still and do nothing, but you’re not sure just why you would choose *this* as opposed to *that* way of life. Is it all just about getting a job, raising a family, and dying in old age? And so you find yourself asking those weird questions about "meaning." But, they're not just weird questions, because here you are trying to decide what to do with your life. Here you are, examining your life. So, again, where do you go for wisdom? To a friend or relative? To a book? To a web site? To your own intuition?

Philosophy--the love of wisdom--is the art and science of learning to respond, with all of our resources, to the fruit of a careful evaluation of life. It is the pursuit of an examined life, exploring the relevance of values and beliefs for the context of the concrete realities of our lives. And just as we can speak of "masters," and "mentors" with other art forms, so, in the art of living we can find our own masters and mentors. I call them *sources of wisdom*.

Sources of What?

It helps to be clear about what we are looking *for* when we use a source of wisdom. We are sick and we turn to mother for help. Is it *diagnosis* we are looking for? Is it *understanding*? Is it *comfort*? Perhaps a little of all three? It is near election time and we decide to look up a couple of articles on the latest topic of national debate. Are we looking for *information*? for *perspective*? for *reassurance*? Now think about your own major questions of life--where you are going, choices to make, key relationships--what does it mean to be looking for *wisdom*?

Different sources provide us with different kinds of help appropriate for different situations. Take our "shopping" example from chapter one. Let's listen to a conversation between Terry and the store employee whom Terry turns to for help.

Employee - "So, this is your first time in the store. What kind of food are you interested in?"

Terry - “I’d really like to buy some bread. Can you take me to the bread aisle?”

Employee (*takes Terry to the aisle*) - “Sure, here you are. Anything else?”

Terry - “I see that this loaf right here appears to be the cheapest loaf.”

Employee - “Yes, I think so. Yes it is.”

Terry - “But it’s not organic is it?”

Employee - “No it’s not. Certified organic bread is over here, see.”

Terry - “Oh, but that bread is very expensive. Do you know what the requirements are for bread to be certified organic?”

Employee - “Not at all. Those requirements are way too complicated for me to understand. I just know that organic bread is supposed to be healthier. Perhaps you could call the county extension office or something.”

Terry - “But what about *this* loaf. The label here says that the bread is grown right here.”

Employee - “Yes, it actually is. This family grows the wheat and bakes their own bread and delivers it here a couple of days a week.”

Terry - “But is their bread organic?”

Employee - “I don’t think so. They would have said so if it was. You’d have to ask them.”

Terry - “But it was produced locally, so that should save on the world’s use of oil and help the environment and world peace. Right.”

Employee - “I guess so. I don’t know much about those things. I never went to college.”

Terry - “Now I don’t know what to do. Should I buy the cheap bread (which would save me money), the organic bread (which would be better for my health), or the locally produced bread (which is better for the economy)?”

Employee (*making a move to leave*) - “I can’t help you with that one. I guess it depends on which is more important to you and whether you have enough money to afford expensive bread.”

Terry - “Don’t leave. Stay here and help me for a moment. You see, I’ve been wondering about things. Everybody nowadays says I should buy organic and buy locally produced food. But does it really matter? I mean aren't we all going to die someday anyway? And what is one loaf of locally produced bread going to do for the economy? How can anyone know what's right?

Employee - "Sounds like this inexpensive bread is for you."

Terry - "No, No. You don't understand. It's not about *bread*. Its about life. Its about reality. Its about truth."

Employee (*leaving*) - "Listen, I've really go to get on with my work. I'd tell you to talk with our manager, but I'm not sure he could help you either. I hope you find the bread you want."

Terry (*cries out in despair*) - "Can't anybody help me?"

Employee (*at a distance*) - "Maybe you should take a philosophy class at the local college."

Where did Terry go for help? To this store employee--for *everything*. The employee was able to provide information (about pricing, location, even facts about the local bread). Expertise about the qualifications of certified organic bread, however, was asking too much. Knowledge about world economy and politics was out of the employee's range of possibility. And probing the employee for wisdom about life, reality, and truth was truly ridiculous.

We use different "sources" for different purposes. Even when it comes to the world of "information" different sources provide different kinds of help. It is one thing to explore detailed descriptions of physical or mental disorders online. It is quite another to search for wisdom about how to face a crippling disorder personally in terms of what is really important in life. *Wisdom* involves the particular (this disorder, this loaf of bread) as it is related to the general (those values which are most important) applied to our own life. Some of our sources of wisdom may speak to us about values. Others are able to speak about the details of practice. Still others may speak to us how to put the two together. Some of the best sources of wisdom are able to speak to all of these.

What Sources?

So where do we turn to find sources, not merely of expertise or understanding, but of *wisdom*? I mentioned some of these already in previous chapters, but it might help to cover this again in greater depth.

One key source of wisdom is our own experience. No one knows ourselves like we do. Our experience is a vast storehouse of particular details somewhat-integrated in terms of the values we have brought with us to the present. And the strengths and the weaknesses of personal experience lie right here. Our particular perspective enables us to appreciate things no other person can appreciate in quite this way. Just think about it. There is no one in the world that _________ like you. But our particularity also means that we have a rather narrow perspective on things. Have you ever gotten to know a friend, and in the process discovered that their view of something was different than yours, and that *they were right*? Personal experience is perhaps the most central of our sources of wisdom. But it is a dangerous source when used alone.

Another source of wisdom is nature, the world itself. We watch the land respond to this or that season. We see how different things grow when planted in this or that way. We sit with the things that stay the same and the things that change. We see “the way things are,” and we let nature “speak” to us. And nature, the world itself, becomes for us a source of wisdom. Nature itself is a synthesis of the very particular with the larger questions of life, with “the way things are.” Careful scientific analysis is not just the wisdom of others, but also the wisdom of nature itself. Consequently, through scientific study we are giving ourselves, in a sense, to nature as a source of wisdom.

A third source to which many turn for wisdom is an Ultimate Source. People speak of “God” or “Truth” or another similar term, usually associated with religious reality. We may turn to this source through prayer or meditation and experience an inflow of wisdom to our hearts and minds. We may turn to this source through a sacred text and find a summary of values, an authoritative account of reality. Whether we like “religion” or not, the fact is that especially when we look outside the confines of modern Western philosophy, we quickly discover that the search for wisdom cannot be fully divorced from religious concerns. As you shall see later in this chapter, the fruits of “a careful evaluation of life” and an account of “Ultimate Reality” are often considered inextricable enterprises. Consequently to attune ourselves to Ultimate Reality is to adjust ourselves with the way things really are. In this case wisdom and Wisdom are one.

And then there are other people. This begins early and unconscious, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Father says so, and so it is right. We grow up in the country and so we value animal life (everyone around us does). We are raised in front of a television and we assume that a good life is about the things and services advertised. We are born into a modern European rather than an ancient Grecian world. And we may assume that the ideal life may have something to do with personal expression rather than distinguishing oneself through battle. But we also have our conscious “masters” and “mentors”: close friends who have known us for a long time and have permission to confront our weaknesses; those few books that seem to speak to us every time we read them; that *hero* we look to for a model of how to live. I have known people who find a key source of wisdom in a certain musical group’s lyrics. Again, there is a blend of those who have expertise about the particulars, those who know the larger questions of life, and those who know us. Other people present to us models of life (we might not have known that life with a sports car was possible had we not seen it in a movie) and perspectives on life (we develop a friendship with someone of another ethnicity and discover a new world of ideas and practices) that take us outside the narrow confines of our own experience.

But if it is to be wisdom *for us* the perspective or model must be explored not only as *theirs* but also as a possible *mine*.

Other people can provide expertise about the values of life (much of the formal discipline of philosophy does this [discourse about philosophy]). And other people can provide us with insight concerning the integration of values and life (some philosophical writings--and hopefully this text will--provide a bit of this [philosophy itself]). A well-examined life looks carefully to see just what is being supplied by whom. Especially at the beginning of the examined life, there is a need to spend some time "getting acquainted" with a few lovers of wisdom from various points of view. With that in mind, let us look more carefully now at the world of philosophical literature.

On Philosophical Literature

The writings of philosophical wisdom come in a wide range of shapes and sizes. There is the single question of the Zen "koan," a question used to stimulate thinking and the discovery of wisdom in Japan:

> "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

And then there are the writings of a philosopher like John Dewey, whose "collected works" are published in 37 volumes. Philosophical writings are technical essays and tender poetry, personal stories and impersonal analyses; allegories, aphorisms, and *lots of argument.* Because the subject matter of philosophical writing is often at the edge of what can be communicated with words, sometimes what counts is not so much what the texts *say*, but what they *do* to us as we read them. And because philosophical writing deals with matters that are deep, complex and of long history, they can be difficult to read.

How to Read Philosophical Writings

Reading philosophical writings can be a bit scary sometimes. “How do I make sense of all the big words and the complex argument?” Even the names of the key figures and important terms may be unfamiliar to many of us. It may seem like philosophers take a very long time to say so little. Here are a few steps to help make the task a bit easier and more enjoyable.

Step One - Skim

First, “breeze” through the text. Give it a “once over.” Look to see what the text is about. Do you find any initial signs of structure (headings, numbers . . .)? Are there key ideas printed in *italics* or **bold**? Glance at the words along the way. Does this text seem to be a precise logical analysis of a proposition, a development of an argument or theme, or a more general personal reflection on life? What themes seem to appear again and again? Are their any unfamiliar words that are common? Is there one person “talking” in the text or many people? This will help you gain an overview of the whole and to notice key elements to look for in your more thorough reading later on.

Also take an initial reading of your own response to the reading. Are you interested after a first glance? Bored? Confused? Ask yourself why. Evaluating your own responses to the text will help you know what you need to do to understand the text better. It also may reveal something about your own philosophy. You may want to record what you notice at this first reading.

Step Two - Close Reading

Now it is time to give the text a much closer reading. In this reading you are trying to pay attention to structure, content, and context (I’m not sure there is any particular order to this).

Look for structure. Examine the “flow” of the text. How does each paragraph follow the other. If it helps, you might want to outline the text (or review the outline of another), identifying each major and minor point to see how it all fits. Where do you see "thus," or "therefore," or "in conclusion," or the like (signs that the author is summarizing something)? Where do you see the presentation of examples of a point ("the Stoics, for example . . .")? Are there different periods of time that are surveyed in the text? What do the examples or the historical surveys have to say about the point? How does each point relate to the next? How does the author lead to a conclusion or conclusions? Below is a list of a few things to look for

Things a Philosopher Might Do In a Text:

- State a thesis - defining a given point that is to be defended or from which further points are to be made
  ("This is what I intend to do," "This is what I believe" . . .)
- Present a definition - stating what one means by a term or a concept; also philosophers spend a great deal of time clarifying what they do *not* mean by terms and concepts
  ("by *x* I intend the reader to understand," "*x* is *y*," "now by *x*, I do not assume" . . .)
- Make an appeal - to science, reason, sacred text, authority, experience . . . as a way of arguing for a point
  ("because," "how so," "in the text" this could not be the case if . . .)
- Illustrate a given point - so the reader can understand it better
  ("just as," "it is like" . . .)
- State objections and reply to objections - frequently, in philosophical writings, an author will anticipate what someone who disagrees with them might say. These comments are called "objections" to the author's position. In philosophical writings, an author will describe the objections to their own view and then proceed to reply to those objections.
  ("some say, . . but I say"; "but this argument is untenable because" . . .)

- State conclusions, summary - presenting the essence of a large argument in a short, concise statement.
  (“therefore,” “in conclusion,” “we see now that” . . .)
- Present consequences - what we are to believe or do as a result of a given point
  (“If we believe this, this is what follows”)

Contemporary articles in academic philosophy are usually carefully structured in order to make sure the reader is clear what the author is *not* saying. Positions and counter-arguments are often reviewed in a systematic manner. Older works of philosophy (and some recent writings) are less systematic. The difficulty with these writings is trying to figure out the language and context of the text.

Look for content. What words and concepts are used? Look up unfamiliar terms in a dictionary or dictionary of philosophy. Remember: philosophers sometimes use words that may be familiar to us in common parlance in a technical sense. We often think of “judgment” as a condemning attitude toward others. But when philosphoers speak of “making judgments” the are usually speaking about drawing conclusions about a state of affairs. When reading philosophical writings it is helpful to ask who the author is arguing *against* and why. A good clue to an author’s argument is to identify the author’s “enemy.” Also you may want to ask how what is said in *this* paragraph is different from what is said in *that* paragraph. What contrasts or comparisons are made? What schools of thought are mentioned? Why? Look for repetition, emphasis, or conclusion to identify the key content of a text. If you need to, write down your summaries of the sections or subsections of the text. From the observations of structure and content, you should be able to identify what an author is doing in each paragraph of a text, and from this to create an outline of the author’s argument and writing.

Don’t forget to look for the context of the author’s ideas (inasmuch as you are able). Knowing what the world is like for the author helps us to understand what that author is saying. What worlds of ideas surround this author? Where does this author live or work?

Now, take note of your own thoughts and feelings. What does the text *do* to you? How have you been responding to the text as you have grown in your understanding? Or you may wish to get together with others and talk about the text. What did they get out of it? How does your assessment and another's assessment compare?

Step Three - Summary

Now you are ready to draw things together. All in all, what do you think this text is trying to say? What do you think it is trying to get you to think, feel, or do? After reading, what questions do you have of the text? What questions does the text have to ask of *you*? How has the text shaped your own thinking? What consequences might flow from reading/believing/practicing this text? What do you think about this?

Of course, you may not have time to follow this procedure point by point with every reading. But if these kinds of questions and procedures are in your mind as you read a piece of philosophy, you are more likely to understand and enjoy reading philosophical writings. Now that you know the basics of how to read a piece of philosophical material, let's apply these principles to a particular example.

An Example of Philosophical Writing: Shankara On the Unity of the Self

Our example of philosophical writing is taken from Shankara's (also spelled Samkara - *c*.788-820 ce) commentary on Badarayana's summary of the teachings of the Upanishads (the "end of the Vedas") of India. Here we find one of the most influential philosophical works of the East. This sample brings to our attention a feature which we mentioned above and is especially common in Eastern philosophical writing, but is found everywhere: namely that philosophical reflection is often conducted as part of religious life. More particularly, philosophical writings come to us in the form of comments on sacred texts.

In the case of our example, Shankara's discussion of the unity of the Self (the belief that the universe is ultimately a single reality) is given in the context of his interpretation of another person's (Badarayana's) interpretation of the sacred books of India. The Upanishads were written largely between 800 and 300 bce. Badarayana's interpretation, the *Brahma Sutra* was written somewhere between 500 and 200 bce. Shankara's commentary on these writings appears nearly a thousand years later **[Got that? *THREE pieces of literature*: Sacred text (*The Upanishads*), Interpretation of sacred text (Badarayana's *Brahma Sutra*), and philosophical discussion (Shankara's *Commentary*)]**. There is a lot of distance between the suggestive religious dialogues of the Upanishads, the terse and nearly incomprehensible summaries of Badarayana, and Shankara's attempt to unpack the philosophical meaning within these texts for his own day. And then there is the distance between Shankara and us, the readers today!

What you will find below are the three writings. First, you will read a segment of the Hindu sacred text of the Upanishads. Then, below that, is a single line from Badarayana's *Brahma Sutra* summarizing one aspect of the teaching of the *Upanishads*. Finally, below, that you will read Shankara's commentary on that one line, a commentary which refers back to the *Upanishad* you have already read. First "skim" all the writings below as you have now learned. Then look below at the section following the writings for further instructions.

-------------------------- First Text ------------------------

UDDALAKA'S TEACHING CONCERNING THE ONENESS OF THE SELF

from the *Chandogya Upanishad* VI-VIII (*c.*800-700 bce)

VI.I.(1)*Aum*. There was Svetaketu Aruneya. His father said to him, 'Live the life of religious student, verily my dear, there is no one in our family who is unlearned (in the Vedas), who is a Brahmana only by birth.' (2). . . [after Svetaketu returns from his training, his father asks the son] 'did you ask for that instruction (3) By which the unhearable becomes heard, the unperceivable becomes perceived, the unknowable becomes known?'

'How, Venerable Sir, can there be such a teaching?'

(4) 'Just as, my dear, by one clod of clay all that is made of clay becomes known, the modification being only a name arising from speech while the truth is that it is just clay . . . (6) Just as, my dear, by one pair of nail scissors all that is made of iron becomes known, the modification being only a name arising from speech which the truth is that it is just iron: thus my dear is that teaching.'

(7) 'Verily, those venerable men did not know this; for if they had known it, why would they not have told it to me? Venerable Sir, please tell me that,'

'So be it, my dear,' said he.

II. (1) 'In the beginning, my dear, this was Being alone, one only without a second. Some people say 'in the beginning this was non-being alone, one only; without a second. From that non-being, being was produced. But how, indeed, my dear, could it be thus? said he, how could being be produced from non-being? On the contrary, my dear, in the beginning this was being alone, one only, without a second. (3) It thought, May I be many, may I grow forth. It sent forth fire. That fire thought, May I be many, may I grow forth. It sent forth water. Therefore, whenever a person grieves or perspires, water is produced from the fire (heat). (4) That water thought, May I be many, may I grow forth. It sent forth food. Therefore, whenever it rains anywhere then there is abundant food. So food for eating is produced from water alone.

III.(1) Now of these (living) beings there are only three origins, those born from an egg, born from a living being, born from a sprout. (2) That divinity thought, ‘Well, let me enter into these three divinities by means of this living self and let me develop names and forms. (3) Let me make each one of the three threefold.’ The divinity entered into those three divinities by means of the living self and developed names and forms . . .

IV. (1) Whatever for fire has it is the form of heat, whatever (is) white (is the form) of water. Whatever (is) dark (it is the form of) earth. Thus vanishes the quality of fire from fire, the modification being only a name arising from speech while the truth is that it is only the three forms. . . . (5) Verily it was just this that the great householder and great students of sacred wisdom knew when they said of old ‘no one now will mention to us what we have not heard, what we have not perceived, what we have not thought.’ For from these (three forms) they knew everything. . . .

VIII (5) Now when a person here is thirsty, as it is called, heat only is leading (or carrying off) what has been drunk (by him). So as they speak of a leader of cows, a leader of horses, a leader of men so one speaks of heat as the leader of water. On this my dear, understand that this (body) is an offshoot which has sprung up, for it could not be without a root. (6) And what else could its root be than water? With water, my dear, as an offshoot, seek for heat as they root; with heat, my dear, seek for Being as the root. All these creatures have their root in Being. They have Being as their abode, Being as their support. But how, verily, my dear, each of these three divinities, on reaching the human, becomes threefold has already been said. When, my dear, a person departs from hence, his speech merges in his mind, his mind on his breath, his breath in heat and heat in the highest divinity. (7) That which is the subtle essence (the root of all) this whole world has for its self. That is the true. That is the self. That art thou, Svetaketu.

------------------------- second text -------------------------

Badarayana’s *Brahma Sutra* (*c.*500 and 200 bce)

II.i.14 The non-difference of them [i.e. of cause and effect] results from such terms as “origin” and the like.

------------------------------ third text ---------------------

SHANKARA’S COMMENTARY ON THE BRAHMA SUTRA (*c.*788-820 ce)

The refutation contained in the preceding *sutra* [which you have not read] was set forth on the condition of the practical distinction of enjoyers and objects of enjoyment being acknowledged. In reality, however, that distinction does not exist because there is understood to be non-difference (identity) of cause and effect. The effect is this manifold world consisting of ether and so on; the cause is the highest *Brahman*. Of the effect, it is understood that in reality it is non-different from the cause, i.e., has no existence apart from the cause.--How so?-- “On account of the scriptural word ‘origin” and others.” The word “origin” is used in connexion with a simile, in a passage undertaking to show how through the knowledge of one thing everything is known; viz., *Chandogya Upanishad* VI.I.4, “As, my dear, by one clod of clay all that is made of clay is known, the modification (i.e. the effect; the thing made of clay) being a name merely which has its origin in speech, while the truth is that it is clay merely, thus," &c. --The meaning of this passage is that, if there is known a lump of clay which really and truly is nothing but clay, there are known thereby likewise all things made of clay, such as jars, dishes, pails, and so on, all of which agree in having clay for their true nature. For these modifications or effects are names only, exist through or originate from speech only, while in reality there exists no such thing as modification. In so far as they are names (individual effects distinguished by names) they are untrue; in so far as they are clay they are true.--This parallel instance is given with reference to *Brahman*; applying the phrase "having its origin in speech" to the case illustrated by the instance quoted we understand that the entire body of effects has no existence apart from *Brahman*.--Later on again the text, after having declared that fire, water, and earth are the effects of *Brahman*, maintains that the effects of these three elements have no existence apart from them, "Thus has vanished the specific nature of burning fire, the modification being a mere name which has its origin in speech, while only the three colors are what is true"

(VI.IV.1).--Other sacred texts also whose purport it is to intimate the unity of the Self are to be quoted here, in accordance with the "and others" of the *sutra*. . . .

--On any other assumption it would not be possible to maintain that by the knowledge of one thing everything becomes known (as the text quoted above declares). We therefore must adopt the following view. In the same way as those parts of ethereal space which are limited by jars and water pots are not really different from the universal ethereal space, and as the water of a mirage is not really different from the surface of the salty steppe--for the nature of that water is that it is seen in one moment and has vanished in the next, and moreover, it is not to be perceived by its own nature (i.e., apart from the surface of the desert)--; so this manifold world, with its objects of enjoyment, enjoyers, and so on, has no existence apart from *Brahman*.

-- But--it might be objected--*Brahman* has in itself elements of manifoldness. As the tree has many branches, so *Brahman* possesses may powers and energies dependent on those powers. Unity and manifoldness are therefore both true. Thus, a tree considered in itself is one, but is manifold if viewed as having branches; so the sea is in itself one, but manifold as having waves and foam; so the clay in itself is one, but manifold if viewed with regard to the jars and dishes made of it. On this assumption, the process of final release resulting from right knowledge may be established in connexion with the element of unity (in *Brahman*), while the two processes of common worldly activity and of activity according to the Veda--which depend on the *karmakanda* (texts of injunction)--may be established in connexion with the element of manifoldness. And with this view the parallel instances of clay &c., agree very well.

This theory, we reply, is untenable because in the instance (quoted in the *Upanishad*) the phrase "as clay they are true" asserts the cause only to be true while the phrase "having its origin in speech" declares the unreality of all effects. And with reference to the matter illustrated by the instance given (viz., the highest cause, *Brahman*) we read, "In that all this has its Self"; and again, "That is true"; whereby it is asserted that only the highest cause is true. The following passage again, "That is the Self; thou art that, O Svetaketu"! teaches that the embodied self (the individual self) also is *Brahman*. (And we must note that) the passage distinctly teaches that the fact of the embodied self having its Self in *Brahman* is self-established, not to be accomplished by endeavour. This doctrine of the individual self having its Self in *Brahman*, if once accepted as the doctrine of the Veda, does away with the independent existence of the individual self, just as the idea of the rope does away with the idea of the snake (for which the rope has been mistaken). And if the doctrine of the independent existence of the individual self has to be set aside, then the opinion of the entire phenomenal world--which is based on the individual self--having an independent existence is likewise to be set aside.

Now that you are finished with your "skim," make a list of the things you noticed. What do you learn from what you noticed. Here's a few things I noticed:

- The first piece from the *Upanishad* had numbers of various kinds. I often see numbers with sacred texts as a way of designating where things are (like the verses in the Bible).
- But the numbers did not always follow in neat order and there were some "dot,dot, dots" (. . .) here and there. There must be some of this material left out.
- The first piece was some kind of dialogue between two people, a father and his

son.

- I noticed the word “origin” here and there, and something about “clay.”
- As mentioned above, the second piece was only one line, and some of that line was in parentheses.
- It had numbers and the word “origin” in it, too.
- The last piece was the longest - I have no idea what it means
- It talked about *Brahman* and “origin” again.
- It looked like some kind of argument (words like “refutation,” “assumption,” “it might be objected” stood out to me.).

> Now that you have skimmed the writings, go back through and “slow read” the whole example once and the final writing (Shankara’s commentary) one or two more times. Your aim is to understand Shankara’s commentary, but you cannot do so without reference to the other two texts. Look for all the features we talked about above (context, content, structure, your own responses). Identify the “things that philosophers do.” Take notes and see if you can outline the development of Shankara’s commentary. When you have completed your own slow read of the examples, return here for your next step.

How did you do? Let’s look at each piece. Look back to your text step by step as we summarize. The first from the *Upanishad* is, like Plato’s Cave, a dialogue. You have to put yourself in the shoes of Svetaketu. You have to imagine his questions and see how his father takes him step by step to a deeper realization of the truth. But what is this truth? Wasn’t this just some strange creation story? Yes, but don’t get lost in the details. Look for the main point. Where did this story begin? With Being. Where did it move? Through some kind of “threeness” into the multiplicity of beings of all kinds. Where did it end? With Being again. It is a story of the *origin* of things. And what about the illustration of the clay? Did you imagine this? I take clay and make it into a snake. I take clay and make it into a pot. But each is still clay. The origin of the clay pot tells us what is really real about the pot. Then, right after this talk about clay, the father talks about Being again. What the father is trying to tell the son is that we seem to see different "things" here and there, but it is really only Being we see [whatever "Being" is]. Our origin--and our most fundamental reality-- is Being. And in the end the father says that the son is Being, too ("That art thou").

Badarayana, in the single line from his *Brahma Sutra* speaks of the "non-difference" of cause and effect. And he seems to argue that this non-difference has something to do with the use of "origin" and such. Remember, Badarayana is summarizing the teachings of the *Upanishads*, so his reference to "origin" must have something to do with the use of this word in the *Upanishads*. And indeed, you have already read a discussion of "origin" in the *Upanishads*, haven't you?

And this brings us to Shankara's commentary. Shankara knew that people would have difficulty understanding the meaning of these obscure one-line statements by Badarayana, so he wrote his commentary to help others understand what they meant. And this piece of commentary is a discussion of the one line from Badarayana's *Sutra* that you have read.

Shankara begins by connecting this line to the previous (which you have not read). A practical distinction had been made between objects and those who relate to them. But indeed, Shankara states, "that distinction does not exist because there is understood to be non-difference (identity) of cause and effect." Shankara restates the line from Badarayana, but in doing so he presents his thesis: there is a fundamental identity of cause and effect. But what does he (or Badarayana) mean by "cause" and "effect"? Shankara answers in the next sentence. The effect is the manifold world. The cause is the highest *Brahman* (you might think of "God" or "Ultimate Consciousness" here). And he restates the thesis again: no difference of effect (manifold world) from cause (God).

Wow! It sounds like he is saying that everything is really God. How can this be?

Indeed, Shankara anticipates our question in his sentence. “How so?” Having presented his thesis, he will now present arguments to support his point (or to explain how Badarayana supports his point). First, there is no-difference because of the *scriptural* word “origin” and others. So Badarayana (and Shankara) are here making appeals to sacred text. There is no difference between the world and Ultimate Consciousness because the *Upanishads* teach that there is no difference. Then Shankara summarizes the illustration of the clay you read in the *Chandogya Upanishad* VI.I.4. By knowing the originating substance (the clay) all that is made of the clay is known. The names of the objects of clay are just that, merely names. Then Shankara applies this statement to *Brahman* (Badarayana spoke simply of “Being,” but Shankara clarifies this point by specifying Absolute Being as *“Brahman*”).

Shankara then makes reference to “later in the text” and “other texts,” showing that this one text is not the only place where the *Upanishads* make this claim of non-difference. He defends his thesis by appealing to a number of points in scripture. Then Shankara makes a *logical* argument connected to what he had already stated. How could we hold that by the knowledge of one thing everything else is to be known (which is now assumed). Then he summarizes his point, saying “We therefore must adopt the following view.” After his summary he makes a couple of *illustrations* to make his point clearer. Think of “space”; some of space is inhabited by things, but it is still the same space. Think of a mirage. It is *really* just the salty steppe. In the same way the manifold world (objects, things, people and so on) are *really Brahman*.

Shankara has stated his thesis and defended it with scriptural arguments, a logical argument, and a couple of illustrations. What does Shankara do now? Did you catch the clues (“But--it might be objected”)? Shankara anticipates disagreement and here states these *objections* and *replies* to them. Some might argue that *Brahman* or Ultimate Consciousness has a kind of manifoldness in itself (think of the Christian Trinity, for example). Can't we think of *Brahman* in terms of *both* unity and manifoldness? But Shankara disagrees with this view ("this theory, we reply, is untenable") turning us once again to the specifics of the language of the *Upanishad*. Then he points out other passages that appear to Shankara to state not both unity and manifoldness, but rather a complete unity of self and *Brahman*.

Finally, Shankara, develops a couple of *consequences* of the doctrine of the identity of the manifold world and *Brahman* ("This doctrine . . . if once accepted . . . does away with . . .). According to Shankara, the notion of the independent self should be rejected. Indeed, our sense of the entire phenomenal world (a world of independent "things" or "selves") should be set aside. For Shankara, reality is *really* undifferentiated *Brahman*. You may *think* you are an independent being (you may think it is a snake), but *really* you are *God*.

Now it is time for you to summarize Shankara's writing. Ask again those questions listed in my description of the "Summary" process of reading philosophical literature. What do you think of Shankara now? Would you consider him a candidate for a source of wisdom? What advice do you think Shankara would give to someone shopping for bread?

We have, in this chapter, explored the sources of philosophy as the love of wisdom. We have discovered that philosophy is pursued as an integration of life. As we stated, at the beginning of philosophy there is the need for a kind of "getting acquainted" with Masters of wisdom and scholars of philosophy. In particular we discovered the need for learning how to read the writings of philosophy. We have explored an example of philosophical writing from the East. You will spend more time in this text reading samples from both East and West. Having been introduced briefly to our sources of wisdom, we are now ready to further explore these sources by considering the skills of wisdom.

Journal Assignment 3.1
The Sources of My Philosophy

A careful look at the sources of our wisdom is a worthwhile endeavor. As one pop singer put it, “you’ve gotta know who to, and not to listen to.” Quite often, we simply do not think about who we listen to. We live how we live because that’s the way those around us live, or because that’s what was advertised. Consequently, we do not live our values. Rather, we live by default.

The philosophical life is an examined life, lived in the midst of thinking about it. And part of the thinking about it is identifying those sources which have shaped us, and those we wish to shape us in the future. In *Love Wisdom*, we have discovered a variety of sources that people use to find wisdom. This journal assignment is an opportunity for you to review each of these areas with regard to your own growth in the love of wisdom.

Personal Experience -

Let’s begin with a review of your own story, for wisdom grows when enriched through experience. First, look back through your personal history. Think of the places, the seasons, the highs and lows, in a general way. Where have you found wisdom over your life? Where has wisdom slipped you by? Think about the key events in your life. What have you learned from those events? How have those events served as a “source” of wisdom for you? How might you use key events as sources of wisdom in the future?

Think about your environment: the structures, the culture, the institutions, the media that have surrounded you. Think of how you spend your time. What forces have influenced you over the years? Ask yourself, “Who have I listened to? Who have I not listened to?" What has brought you integration? What has brought you dis-integration? If you were in love with wisdom, what forces might have more of a hearing in the future?

Others -

Probably, you have already thought about some of this. It is pretty hard to review our personal experience without thinking about the key relationships in our life. Now, name the names. Just *who* have you listened to? *Who*, specifically, do you listen to now? Who do you turn to for comfort? Who do you turn to for expertise? Who do you turn to for *wisdom*? Who are your heroes, your mentors? Are there friends or relatives who seem to be exceptionally wise? Are there sources of wisdom of whom you have not taken advantage?

What about the ancient Masters of wisdom? Make a list of the five top "books of wisdom" you have read. Take a look at that list. What have been the most significant works? What works might you be interested in reading someday? Now think about a list of the "books of foolishness" you have read. What do you learn from this list? Are there any musicians, movies, radio or television shows or other forms of art or media that serve as sources of wisdom for you (Oprah, Dr. Laura, Rush Limbaugh, Enquirer . . .)?

What about contemporary works of philosophy? Have you read any philosophical writings? What might you like to read in the future?

World -

Next consider your use of the world itself as a source of wisdom. Think of your contact with the world: your body, the land, your physical environment, and so on. Consider, how have you listened to the wisdom of the world itself? What does the world tell you? How might you discover the world itself as a contribution to your philosophy in the future?

Ultimate -

Finally, you may wish to reflect on any religious Source(s) of wisdom you may have. In what ways has your association with the things of religion (or with some kind of Ultimate, apart from any formal religion) served as a source of wisdom for you? In what way has this brought you confusion rather than wisdom? How might your approach to Ultimate concerns (or how might the Ultimate Itself) become for you a source of your philosophy in the future?

Putting It All Together -

Now, review your reflections as a whole. Think now about where you might *want* to spend your time. What kinds of sources have appeared as key sources of your philosophy? Who will you listen to?