

I. Vedanta -- Conclusion of the Vedic revelation

- A. Upanisads are the subject of 4th and final degree of Vedic scholarship
 - 1. Therefore Upanisads known as vedanta, "the conclusion of the Veda."
 - 2. The sage Vyasa systematized Upanisadic teachings in Vedanta-sutra or Brahma-sutra
 - 3. Texts of Upanisads extremely difficult to fathom -- understood only under guidance of spiritual master (guru)
- B. There are 5 main schools of vedanta, each established by an acarya who explained sutras in bhasya (commentary)
 - 1. One school, Shankara's, is impersonalist (Supreme Being explained in impersonal terms)
 - 2. Schools of Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka and Vishnusvami explain God in personal terms

II. Shankara and Buddhism

- A. Shankara's advaita vedanta commentary presented in books about Hinduism as if it is original/only vedanta philosophy
 - 1. Shankara's philosophy is more akin to Buddhism than vedanta is widely acknowledged
 - 2. Ideas of Buddhist sunyavada (voidist) philosophers "very close" to Shankara's. Sunyavada
 - a. The word sunya (void) refers to impersonal emptiness that Buddhists believe pervades all things
 - b. In Vedanta commentary Shankara states same idea of emptiness, substituting brahman (Absolute) for sunya
- B. Shankara is not disrespected by Vedantists of other schools of Vedanta
 - 1. Shankara's purpose was to revive interest in vedanta in an India largely rejected Vedas in favor of Buddhism
 - 2. This task he accomplished brilliantly, albeit by artificially incorporating Buddhist ideas into his commentary

III. The nature of God in Vedanta philosophy

- A. Brahma-jijnasa (inquiry into Brahman) is Vedic metaphysics (meta = beyond, physic = matter)
 - 1. Jijnana (inquiry) indicates that God is not a being radically divorced from sensory experience
 - 2. He is not only known in terms of what He is not "via negativa" of European theology
 - 3. God as object of positive inquiry is defined:
"He, from whom proceeds creation, maintenance dissolution of this universe, is Brahman."
- B. Universe has form; if God is origin of universe, then He must Himself possess form
 - 1. But Vedic scriptures declare that this form is not limited and imperfect like forms of material creation
 - 2. From Upanisads we learn God's qualities:
 - a. Satyam Jnanam Anantam Sundaram Anandamayam Smalam:
 - b. "Eternity, Knowledge, Endlessness, Beauty, Bliss, Perfection."
 - c. This means that God's form is one of infinite and all-pervasive sublime consciousness

IV. Relation of God to the world

- A. Nyaya: God is operative cause of world, but atoms are material cause
Note: in philosophy 4 ways to explain causation, as example of causation of a house:
 - 1. The construction company is the "operative cause"
 - 2. The bricks, cement and other building materials are the "material cause"
 - 4. The original type of house upon which this house is modelled is the "formal cause"
 - 5. The purpose of the house, i.e. someone wants to live in it, is the "final cause"
- B. Sankhya: creation is regarded as spontaneous result of contact between prakrti and purusa
- C. Patanjali: God is the Supreme Self distinguished from other selves, and intelligent governor of prakrti and purusa
- D. Mimamsa: God as creator plays no essential role - believes world is eternal, though gross manifestations come and go

- E. Vedanta: Defines God as He who alone is simultaneously operative, material, formal and final causes of cosmos
1. As the intelligence behind creation, He is operative cause
 2. As the source of prakrti and purusa, He is the material cause
 3. As the original transcendental form of which the world is but a shadow, He is the formal cause
 4. As the purpose behind the world, He is the final cause

V. Christian view of creation compared with Vedanta

- A. Christian theologians not attempted explain relationship of God to world in rigorous philosophical fashion as Vedantists

1. Augustine's doctrine is called creation ex nihilo, "creation out of nothing."

- a. God is eternal and transcendental but creation had a beginning and God created the world out of nothing
- b. Vedantist reply that if something can come of nothing, then logically anything could come out of anything

B. What about final cause i.e. purpose of creation?

1. According to Augustine, God does not create to attain something, for He is infinitely perfect
 - a. He was not compelled to create, but His love inclined Him to create as an expression of His goodness
 - b. All creatures represent and participate in divine goodness
 - c. This doctrine has given rise to "the problem of evil" that has bewildered Western philosophers
2. Vedanta-sutra takes up the question of purpose of creation and problem of evil
 - a. First is established that God has no need to fulfill in creating material world
 - b. The motive is lila, "play" -- not play of a man bored in need of recreation, but play of exuberance of spirit
 - c. This lila is natural to God, because He is full of self-bliss