APEIRON

The Journal of Philosophy and Religion at Washington College

Volume 10, April 2012
APEIRON

Apeiron: [Gk. απειρον, unlimited, indefinite, indeterminate]

n. 1. Name used by Anaximander to refer to ultimate reality; the unformed source of all that exists.

2. The arche, that is the beginning or principle of all things, the unlimited. (The term is capable of various constructions, depending upon how one understands the term 'unlimited'—indeterminate, unbounded, without form, without beginning or end, without internal limits.)

3. An undergraduate journal of philosophy for students of all majors at Washington College.
Foreword

With the publication of this tenth annual issue of *Apeiron*, we continue a tradition that was initiated by Professor Peter Weigel in 2003, and sustained by him for six straight years. The first six issues presented many very solid papers written by Washington College students on a broad variety of philosophical topics. While the authors of many of these papers were philosophy majors or minors, some of them majored in other disciplines. We note, too, that submissions of work with philosophical significance by Washington College students are always welcomed to be considered for publication in *Apeiron*—no matter what their major might be.

Volume 10 begins with three essays on the philosophy of time. The first is by Patrick Cannon; the second is by Jim Schelberg, and the third is by Kristine Sloan. All three were written for Professor Peter Weigel's class and deal with many facets and, ultimately, take different perspectives on the ontological status of time.

Then we have three outstanding essays on Hinduism. The first written by Julie Armstrong, the second written by Emily Alicia Lasin, the third was composed by Erin Cooper. All three were written for Professor Kevin M. Brien's comparative Eastern Religions class. All three are very interesting, with the authors drawing from personal experience and connecting that to their study of Hinduism.

Finally, the tenth volume of the Apeiron ends with an essay by Taylor "Lenny" Johnson on the subject of the philosophy of science. Johnson's essay explores the subjective aspects of science.

<>
Introduction

This eighth edition of *Apeiron* features a variety of essays that we are very proud to present, all of them written in the spirit of fearless investigation, engaging inquiry, and delight in contemplation. As you read, we invite you to speculate – as all these authors have in some form – about the future of human kind in a rapidly changing world.

**Student Editors:**

Patrick Cannon ’12 - Carissa Marcelle ’14 - Kristine Sloan ’12

**Faculty Editor:**

Kevin Brien

**Cover Image:** “Hover,” by Dora Malech
Contents

The Epistemology of Time

   by Patrick Cannon........................................6

Augustine’s Frustration and Bergson’s Solution:
   A Critique of Object-Based Time-Language

   by Jim Schelberg........................................14

Untitled

   by Kristine Sloan.................................21

A Study on Splendor: Hinduism

   by Julie Armstrong...............................28

The Cosmic Web of Hinduism

   by Emily Alicia Lasdin..........................41

Misunderstood: Exploring Hinduism and the
   Western Christian Perspective

   by Erin Cooper......................................52

The Subjectivity of Science

   by Taylor "Lenny" Johnson......................64

Contributors..............................................70
A popular sub-field within the larger branch of metaphysics is the inquiry into the nature of time. Time is an extremely important aspect of our lives, dictating our daily schedules. We live our lives by the clock: waking up, racing to work, going to bed, etc. The colloquialism is often heard that we are "racing against time." What exactly, then, are we racing against? Many thinkers contend that time exists, the only issue is figuring out exactly how it exists. Others hold that time is altogether illusory, that is, it has no ontological status. I maintain, however, that it exists outside our scope of understanding. That is to say, whatever time's ontological status, it is probably not the kind of thing we can never be totally confident in knowing about.

If we take the proposition seriously that we are biological creatures, then it follows that our cognitive faculties, like our other faculties, have limitations. For example, our vision only allows us to detect electromagnetic radiation roughly between 380 nanometers and 740 nanometers. Other animals detect spectra of radiation we cannot: snakes can, in some sense, "see" thermal radiation while butterflies' vision is gauged heavily toward ultraviolet. Take olfaction as another case. Dogs have a much wider scope of smell than we, picking up trace pheromones totally undetectable to human beings. Since our visual and olfactory faculties—just to name a few—have limitations, it logically follows that our cognition has like shortcomings as well.

Citing Noam Chomsky, Colin McGinn explains that different sorts of issues may confront a particular type of cognitive being B: two such types of issues may be categorized as either problems or mysteries. "A problem," McGinn writes, "is a question to which B can in principle find an answer, and is perhaps designed so to do, for biological or other reasons; or at least is of such a type as B can [advanced a certain, knowable]
answer."\(^1\) On the other hand, mysteries are problem-like in their naturalness, differing "only in respect of the contingent cognitive capacities that B possesses: the mystery is a mystery for that being."\(^2\) Chomsky himself explains that when we face a problem, while we may not know its solution, we at least have some insight into what a potential answer might look like. When we face a mystery, however, "we can only stare in wonder and bewilderment, not knowing what an explanation would even look like."\(^3\) But how are we to know if an issue we encounter is a legitimate mystery?

Chomsky tells us that while we can never actually know directly if a particular aspect of the world is outside our cognitive scope, necessarily, there are some signs indicating a mystery. For example, if it is not even clear why an issue is mysterious, that is to say, if it is mysterious as to why an issue is mysterious, that would seem to portend a legitimate mystery. By their very nature, mysteries lie outside our scope of understanding. Therefore, it should only make sense that a potential solution is elusive. Note that this does not mean potential explanations cannot be advanced. It only follows that the correct explanation is wholly inaccessible given our cognitive architecture—even if we've arrived at the correct solution we can't know it's correct.\(^4\) It is also the case that what were once thought to be mysteries were later demoted to problems, possible examples maybe being rainbows and the mechanisms of procreation. I believe there is a high probability time is a legitimate mystery.

Perhaps the best way to begin our investigation into the nature of time is to examine time as in relation to space. We perceive space directly and time indirectly, so it would make sense to inquire into temporal organization against the background of spatial organization. Albert Einstein postulated

---


\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) Noam Chomsky, "Linguistics & Philosophy" (presentation, Durham, NH, April 12, 1995).

\(^4\) Ibid.
that in addition to the three spatial dimensions we are all familiar with there is a fourth dimension—time.\(^5\) But time has extremely different features than space, even if they share a few similarities.\(^6\) We ought to immediately be struck by the question of why there are three spatial dimensions and only one temporal dimension, while the one temporal dimension seems appropriate and intuitive and the number of spatial dimensions seems arbitrary. We can seemingly move any direction we want in space, but technically only two “directions” along the temporal continuum: “pastward” and “futureward.”\(^7\) However, we seem to only be able to “futureward.”

John W. Carroll explains that space is indiscriminate, all locations are spatially equal. Space just "sits there: a gigantic, three-dimensional continuum, static and homogeneous, with nothing but their contents to distinguish one spatial region form another."\(^8\) Carroll has a good point; save for the contents of space, space itself lacks any qualitative aspect. On the other hand, time is dynamic. Unlike space, time has distinctive directionality always pointing toward the future. Time is also qualitative, “your temporal location does matter, ontologically speaking: for the past is the domain of has-beens, and the future is a land of mere potential. Only the present [seems] truly real.”\(^9\) The philosopher Terence McKenna makes it clear that time is extremely qualitative. Sometimes it feels like everything is going wrong, while in other periods of time it feels like we can do no wrong.\(^10\)

\(^7\) Ibid., 73.
\(^9\) Ibid.
Perhaps the strangest aspect of time is its apparent “flow,” its seeming directional movement. We have a tendency to want to privilege the present: it is as if “each moment of time approaches inextricably from the future, enjoys its brief heyday in the spotlight of the present, and then ever after recedes serenely into the shadowy realm of the past.”\textsuperscript{11} Much of the debate within the philosophy of time is structured around arguing for or against the description time as “tensed” (as in \textit{past}, \textit{present}, and \textit{future}) or the idea of time as wholly relational (i.e., \textit{earlier than} an event, \textit{later than} an event).\textsuperscript{12} One prominent proponent of the relational description of time is John Perry.\textsuperscript{13} Perry argues that a relational description of time is all we need. Let's say we know a given sequence of moments. That is, we know how these moments will be sequentially arranged. If we gain knowledge like "Today is X," then, necessarily, argues Perry, we will know which moments are past, present, and future. Therefore, a relational theory of time actually provides us with tensed information as well.\textsuperscript{14} A proponent of the tensed description was the Oxford philosopher A. N. Prior.

Prior argues that the tensed theory of time is our default, commonsensical theory of time. For example, if one has an excruciating toothache, then that pain subsides, one often exclaims "Thank goodness that's over!" We do this, Prior says, because intuitively it makes the most sense to think of time (like the collection of moments when one's tooth hurt) as existing sequentially. So, when we say, "Thank goodness that's over," what we're really saying is "thank goodness that collection of moments is now in the past." Prior says that this type of statement accounts for a type of experience which tenseless accounts of time cannot.\textsuperscript{15} The fact of the matter, as tensed

\textsuperscript{11} Carroll and Markosian, op. cit., 159.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 160.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 78.
theorists see it, is that we make intelligible statements about objective, temporal facts all the time. But, like the above sentence, one isn't saying anything about relation (i.e., "Thank goodness my toothache was related in such a way to other moments so as I'm no longer experiencing pain.") This would be unintelligible, and indeed no one ever says that. Instead, we talk about objectively existing "presents" as if they are objectively existing and locatable utilizing the language of past, present, and future.\(^{16}\) However, there’s also a third position claiming that the notion of time is altogether illusory.

The most famous partisan of this school is J. M. E. McTaggart. McTaggart originated the language of tensed vs. tenseless time. He argues that time, by necessity, requires change. By change, he means to say that events have a set start and end point, whereby a new event takes place, etc. In this way, event M always precedes N, and N always precedes O. We can, in some sense then, use a relational lexicon to discuss the organization of events.\(^{17}\) But, for there to be a sequence at all there must be some form of objective change, for without change there would be no time—change is essential to time and a tensed organization is essential to change. Therefore, says McTaggart, the tensed theory of time must be correct, the tenseless theory of time is inadequate.\(^ {18}\)

However, the tensed theory of time cannot be the case. If we take a single moment in time, say M, which genuinely exists as it must for there to be change, then that means M must be equally past, present, and future. For “to say that [M] is past at a moment of future time, and to say that it was future is to say that it is future at a moment of past time.” This obviously is a contradiction since a single moment can’t be located in both the past and future, and since this is the case for all moments, time is too contradictory to be real. Therefore, it is illusory.

\(^{16}\) Carroll and Markosian, op. cit., 170.


\(^{18}\) Carroll and Markosian, op. cit., 161-2.
I happen to believe that all three species of argument say something potentially true about the nature of time. For I think Perry is right that if we know about relations of moments and then we're informed that “now” is a particular moment, it would seem to follow that the tenseless theory of time also accounts for past, present, and future organization. However, as Prior points out, it would be absurd to speak about moments this way. Moreover, it seems to be the case that the “present” actually does exist. For there to be relations of time there must exist segments of time to be related in the first place. Therefore, Perry seems to have it backwards: we don’t deduce tensed facts from relational facts, we deduce relation from tensed facts. Likewise though, I think McTaggart’s argument that the tensed-lexicon is inherently contradictory is correct. Meaning, Prior’s theory of time goes out the window. As for McTaggart’s argument itself, I think it too is problematic. He wants to argue that change is essential to time. This may not be the case.

Aristotle says that while time may be linked to change, it is distinct from change. His main point is that not “only do we measure change by time, but [we measure] time by change also, because they are defined by one another.”\textsuperscript{19} Key here is the notion, all too intuitive, that we measure change by time. This is commonsensical to separate change and time. For example, we measure years (a unit of time) by the movement of the Earth around the sun. Therefore, McTaggart’s premise that “change is essential to time” seems to be something of a conflation. Change in spatial configuration and temporal duration ought to be regarded separately, as we are inclined to do and as Aristotle suggests. Where, then, have we arrived?

I hope to have demonstrated that all three positions, the tenseless description of time, the tensed description, and the illusory description of time all seem plausible. Perry’s tenseless account is conceivable and squares with our experience, so does

Prior’s tensed account. Both seem, at the same time, equally plausible and, importantly, equally problematic. Even McTaggart’s theory of time as an illusion, I think, corresponds to our commonsensical view of time. It does seem awfully arbitrary to chop up time into segments the way we do. Vonnegut captures this sentiment well: “We have all these instruments for slicing [time] up like a salami, clocks and calendars, and we name the slices as though we own them, and they can never change—‘11:00 AM, November 11, 1922 [Vonnegut’s birthday],’ for example.”\(^\text{20}\) In this sense, and only this sense, I think McTaggart is right in regarding time as an illusion.

All three positions to some extent say something important about our experience of time. The problem being that we don’t have any good evidence for asserting that any of the positions are more than just phenomenological descriptions. For this reason, I think there is good evidence that time perhaps is a legitimate mystery. While we can speculate and philosophize all we want, it doesn’t seem we will ever have good evidence that our theories actually say anything representative of time in and of itself. If indeed it lies outside our cognitive scope—as I believe it does—then we would precisely be in the situation we are now, advancing theories without knowing if they are right or wrong. Since philosophers and scientists have been thinking about the nature of time for over 2,000 years and no solid evidence for or against a particular theory has surfaced, there’s a high probably there will never be any conclusive evidence. Time, it would seem, is a mystery.

Bibliography


Augustine’s Frustration and Bergson’s Solution: 
A Critique of Object-Based Time-Language

Jim Schelberg

If the problem of time had to be distilled into one over-arching question, none would seem more basic than Augustine’s repeated, “What, then, is time?” Paradoxically, there are few components of the world with which we have more familiarity than time, yet our subjective experience with it yields little in the way of satisfactory linguistic description. As Augustine put it, “I know well enough what [time] is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled.”

Our subjective experience of time may very well be clear and distinct—but when forced to translate our subjective sense of duration into some objective description, we fail—time and time again. This wide gap between the subjective familiarity with time and its objective description is due in part, I shall argue, to our conceptual and linguistic habits of dividing reality into discrete, individual objects. These habits of conceptualizing the furniture of reality as individuals are not only unfit to describe the nature of time, but also lead to unnecessary philosophical problems, such as Jonathan Edwards’s rejection of autonomous time. A solution may lie in conceptualizing time in a more process-based manner, one that is in line with Henri Bergson’s philosophy.

Though Augustine was primarily venting his frustration with the inadequacies of human language and cognition when he stated, “I know well enough what [time] is, provided that nobody asks me,” he began to uncover the tension between two senses of “knowing time,” intuitive understanding and objective description. These two senses of knowing time deserve some explication. To do so, it would be helpful to apply these senses of knowing within Bergson’s approach to metaphysical

---

22 Augustine, 116.
investigation.

If one were to ask Augustine, “Do you know what time is?” he would have likely replied that in one way he does, but in another he does not. Augustine would certainly claim to know the concept to which the word referred, since he maintained that “we certainly understand what is meant by the word [time] both when we use it ourselves and when we hear it used by others.” So Augustine would claim a sort of referential competence. Additionally, Augustine would claim a non-linguistic, intuitive understanding of the interaction between himself and time, understanding all too well that time maintains a dominion over himself as a subject. He would personally experience, and therefore have substantive familiarity with, the phenomena of duration and change.

Bergson would describe this sort of personal understanding as a metaphysical intuition, or “the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible.” In other words, this is the view from the inside out, as opposed to an external, objective view. Through this intuition, one is granted access to the internal nature of some component of reality. What is peculiar to this form of internal understanding is that it is acquired not through language, description, or analogy, but rather by pure experience within the subject itself. This learning is internalized, but “cannot be expressed in symbols, being incommensurable with everything else.” According to Bergson, humans simply lack the cognitive tools to translate perfectly that which is essentially a feeling into words. So, intuition resists expression in symbols.

It is at this point—the crux at which Augustine must translate his feelings into symbols and linguistic explanations—

---

23 Augustine, 118.
25 Bergson, 71.
that he becomes baffled. In this objective sense, which Bergson would call “analysis,” Augustine can no longer claim to understand what time is.\(^{26}\) He is being asked for an external description of time—though he has only personal, internal experience of time that is inexpressible by symbols. To clarify the difference between intuition and analysis, two key differences should be noted. First, according to Bergson, symbols are quite able to express facts about those objects and points of view that are outside one’s self.\(^{27}\) This is of course different from ineffability of intuition. In other words, while Augustine may not be able to fully articulate his intuitive understanding of his own passions, personal identity or subjective experience of time, he is adequately equipped to describe things outside himself. Using scientific terminology, Augustine could provide a fairly comprehensive description of a desk, or maybe even the external qualities of another person. Secondly, an objective description of time requires one to be placed outside the object in question. Therefore, the nature of one’s description will be significantly dependent on the point of view at which we are placed and on the symbols by which we express ourselves.”\(^{28}\) From this, we may infer that taking an external view of an object actually limits that description to a certain degree of relativism.

I bring up the two different senses of “understanding time,” mainly for the purpose of illustrating the fact that these two approaches yield variant conceptualizations of time that are fundamentally at odds with one another. From our subjective point of view, we experience time as a perpetual unfolding, or a constant flowing. This may seem at first to be somewhat poetic language, but it is not intended to be so. Rather, the terms “unfolding” and “flowing” are meant to indicate that we do not experience any distinct discontinuity in the subjective passing of time. We do not experience time as if we were ticking clocks, sensing a felt change or “tick” between one second or

\(^{26}\) Bergson, 71.
\(^{27}\) Bergson, 71.
\(^{28}\) Bergson, 71.
millisecond and the next.

An objection may be raised here: if we did not “sense” the division of time, then we would not have any accurate sense of time-intervals. Since, however, we obviously do have a working sense of time intervals, it seems evident that we sense time divisions. My response to this objection is that, admittedly, we have a sense for different intervals of time, some being long and others being short. It should be remembered, however, that those limits are fluid and highly dependent on one’s activity. By this, I mean that what may seem like a moment in a relaxing environment, say, when reading a novel, will be far different than what will seem like a moment in a highly stressful environment, say, when in a physical altercation. So if there is any reality of “moments” it seems to be highly contextual and psychologically imposed by one’s self. Further still, even in these different contexts, there is no distinctive break felt between moments. Rather, they seem to simply flow into one another seamlessly, washing away the notion of any individual “moments”. To sum up our subjective experience, I shall say that it is characterized by a continuous flow of time, unbroken by any felt demarcated moments.

Our objective description of time, however, is of a completely different nature than how we subjectively experience it. When we speak of or conceptualize time, it is in a manner similar to the way we describe the rest of reality, being largely couched in object-based language and concepts. Let us consider, for instance, how we would describe any event distinct from ourselves. If I were to look outside my window, and describe the events I am witnessing, I would say something like this: “I see many cars that are driving on the road and passing by my house.” I have just described one state of affairs as consisting in the interactions between various independent objects. There are individual cars, each distinct from one another, that are moving along a road, which is itself a distinct object. As I describe it, my perceived reality consists in discrete entities, all of which have their own independent reality and identity. Thus, there may be
said to be a described discontinuity in reality, and this discontinuity lies in the demarcation of individual entities. Whether or not there actually do exist things such as discrete entities may or not be true—but that is a separate question entirely. The point here is far more simple and obvious: we speak of reality as consisting in individual entities.

So, when we describe time, our conceptualization and language naturally follow suit, taking on the appearance of a discontinuous, object-based reality. I am speaking here primarily of common descriptions of time that take the form of “time is a series of moments or instants,” and the like. In such descriptions, a moment is a discrete temporal entity, or maybe an atom of time—a time-slice so inconceivably small that it either cannot be divided further or has no temporal width at all. At this point, we may do well to ask if it makes sense to let our linguistic and conceptual habits have dominion over our felt experience of time. Is it philosophically sound to take our subjective experience of time’s continuity and project onto it our descriptive tools of discontinuous moments?

Emphatically, I answer no. Such conceptions mislead us into unnecessary philosophical problems and paradoxes. To fully grasp the philosophical danger of conceiving time as consisting in discrete temporal objects such as moments, let us consider an argument from the Early American philosopher and theologian Jonathan Edwards. In *Original Sin*, Edwards rejects the notion that time can exist separately from the will of God, arguing instead that time and the world must be recreated from anew every single moment.29 In Edwards’s view, if we were to take any moment of existence and ask how it came to be, we could not logically maintain that its antecedent moment brought it about. For any one moment, since it is an infinitely thin time-slice, cannot reach out of its own momentary existence to cause the creation of a following moment because if a moment reaches beyond itself, it ceases to be that moment to which we were

---

previously referring. In other words, in order to effect change in a time and place that does not yet exist, a moment must exist actively in another moment—in which we are no longer talking about the original moment. Therefore, Edwards concludes, our notions of the autonomy of time are false, since any moment in existence cannot be said to naturally follow from a preceding moment.  

This argument, however, is predicated on a notion of time that consists in discontinuous temporal atoms, each one possessing its own discrete identity. There is, of course, a difficulty in this object-based conceptualization because we simply have no reason, logical or empirical, to posit any sort of temporal objects. We have simply labeled them as moments, and absorbed the notions their real existence into our philosophy without much critical reflection. We do, however, have much experiential familiarity that suggests that time is most likely not a series of temporal atoms.

I would argue, along with Bergson, that given the rather implausible and problematic conclusions of an object-based vocabulary, we may do well to re-work how we speak of time. Our improved time-language should “exclude all idea of juxtaposition, reciprocal externality, and extension,” and instead endeavor to include a more action and process based language. To borrow an analogy from Bergson, we should speak of time as if we were passing through a spectrum of light. As we pass through, each shade of colored light we perceive includes in it the tones of its neighbor shades. As such, it is almost incorrect to speak of any one shade in a spectrum, since every real interval will necessarily contain more than one shade. The individual shades of the spectrum dissolve into the whole spectrum, just as one fleeting time-experience dissolves into the whole of temporality.

30 Edwards, 400.
31 Bergson, 73.
32 Bergson, 73.
Admittedly, this new vocabulary (which may consist largely of verbs like “gradationing,” “motioning,” or “passing”) would be both unwieldy and silly at first. Detractors would indeed have fair reason to believe that this reworking of vocabulary could result in an inability to discuss the philosophy of time in any meaningful sense. Philosophers of time run the risk of constantly talking past each other by using terms that have only individual meaning. Further, they could argue, who would have both the authority and creativity to restructure our descriptive habits? I readily admit, that I have few suggestions for appropriate terms and concepts—but that is not to say that once we abandon our old habits of speaking that we may not naturally form new and more effective ones. Further, I would respond, it seems far more appealing to sacrifice a handsome, but unfit, vocabulary for a philosophy free of unattractive paradoxes.

A first effective step in revamping our vocabulary of time could be to come full circle, and reformulate the most basic question in the philosophy of time. Perhaps we should not ask, “What is time?” since the “what” in this question anticipates an answer in the form of some described object or objects. Let us anticipate, instead, an answer that describes to us the manner of time’s action and process. So, I will make my first suggestion for the re-working of time’s fundamental question to be, “How does the flowing of time flow?”

<>

Bibliography


In the evaluation of the issue of time and how human beings participate in the creation of time, I will be invoking the question “What does it mean to be in time?” rather than “What is time?” To speak of time is to speak of the meaning of time to human beings rather than an actual externally independent entity which we term “time” due to our limited, temporal scope. If an infinitely flowing metaphysical entity termed “time” does exist, then “it would not be available to us in any existential way.” Though St. Augustine wrestles with the issue of time, he did so in a way as to supplement more non-time concerned questions about the nature of God. In his wish to know a divine mystery, he implicitly asked (or others asked, rather), “How can God exist out of time if he created the world within time?” Such a question poses a threat to St. Augustine’s conception of God, as well as others’ conception for those who studied and believed within the same theological framework. In the end, St. Augustine, too, owns up the mystery of time to being a divine mystery due to the limitations of what humans can know. In placing the emphasis of the issue on this limitation, I will argue that time is a concept used to describe human beings’ self-awareness of “once having been” and “the possibilities of what can be” as opposed to time as an externally existing entity.

Since St. Augustine was well-aware that he is a temporal being who does not have access to God’s ever-present being in any clear way, his meditation begins with trying to understand the notions of past, present, and future. If past, present, and future are ideas designated to a relative, temporal being, then it seems a sensible place to begin since surely these are things which can be known with some certainty. Augustine quickly comes to the conclusion that there are no such real entities as

“past” and “future” since the former is drawn from memory and the latter comes from predicting current “signs” or “causes.”

“For these three do exist in some sort, in the soul, but otherwhere do I not see them; present of things past, memory; present of things present, sight; present of things future, expectation.”

Here, Augustine collapses the past and future into the present due to particular features of the mind. By “sight,” he seems to be saying that mental perceptions constitute the present, or perhaps mental activity in general. In any case, Augustine is aware that time is, at the least, dependent on the subject-perceiver.

If a human mind is necessary for a perception of time, then the next thing to ponder is how such perceiving occurs. Augustine discusses such perception as to “measure times as they pass,” which would mean to say one measures something flowing through the present. However, there is no discernible “time” which occupies a present space, so the question of measurement, too, becomes a mystery. Although one can presently speak of being “in” time, “a long time,” or as “having no more time,” there does not seem to be a thing which occupies a physical space. There are physical bodies whose movement one uses to measure time, yet the movement itself doesn’t seem to be time, at least for Augustine. He seems to argue that the movement of the sun itself is relative, upon which its movement a measurement is placed; thus, the sun alone cannot be the arbiter of time in the temporal realm. The sun is moving within time. He, then, places emphasis on the perception, and thus measurement, of movement as being relative, too. If one moves from place A to place B, Augustine says he can make no claim on exactly how long, although he could state that one movement was longer than another. “Seeing therefore the motion of a body

35 Ibid., 24-25.
36 Ibid., 25.
37 Ibid.
is one thing, that by which we measure how long it is another.”  

Though people speak of time in terms of space and claim that it passes through the present, even the present, too, cannot exist. Augustine argues that time “flies with such speed from future to past, as not to be lengthened out with the least stay. For if it be, it is divided into past and future. The present hath no space.” By the “time” one comes to conceive of a present, it has already become the past. Thus, not only do the past and future not exist, but the present doesn’t seem to exist either. There is nothing to measure, and perception of reality is ever-flowing that the present cannot be reduced to any given length or moment. Time cannot be possessed with the hands, and barely it cannot be possessed with the mind.

However, time can be possessed by the mind insofar as time is an extension of the mind. Augustine seems to be saying that reality, as it moves and changes, leaves impressions upon the mind which remain fixed in the mind; thus, one does not measure an external time, but rather the internal impressions by which reality is known. “Time,” then, is a practical concept used by human beings to understand reality, and perhaps even to construct reality. People move through reality, judging everyday tasks by practical measurements within a set system of units. Minutes, hours, days, and months pass by at the convenience of everyone’s schedules. Even when one decides to take the day off and stay at home to contemplate metaphysical mysteries, there is still a flow of activity in the mind. Everything changes constantly, both internally and externally; and at the end of the day, one is self-aware of “impressions” with which a kind of linear narrative is constructed in order to make sense of experience.

However, what seems important to me is Augustine’s emphasis toward the end of his essay on the past and future, or

---

38 Ibid., 26.
39 Ibid., 23.
40 Ibid., 26.
rather memory and expectation, as opposed to the present activity of the self. Augustine entertains the experience of reciting lines from Psalm, and it seems that the past and future stand out much more in this experience than the present. This passage reads as follows:

Before I begin, my expectation is extended over the whole; but when I have began, how much so ever of it I shall separate off into the past, is extended along my memory; thus the life of this action of mine is divided between my memory as to what I have repeated, and the expectation as to what I am about to repeat; but “consideration” is present with me, that through it what was future, may be conveyed over, so as it become past. Which the more it is done again and again, so much the more the expectation being shortened, is the memory enlarged; till the expection be at length exhausted, when that whole action being ended, shall have passed into memory.\(^{41}\)

The present consideration is the self-awareness one has of anticipating activity and activity becoming past. Augustine’s present is simply self-awareness and self-reflection, perhaps an awareness particular to the human mind, of one’s internal reality which consists of memories and expectations. The mind is mostly past and future; the present is mental activity which cannot be reduced or defined in exacting terms (such one’s mind is a dynamic complexity of which one cannot, as far as one knows, ever become full aware).

The position that Augustine takes is one which I generally agree with. I do not necessarily reject his broader conception of a divine being existing in a transcendent time, which isn’t “time” at all, due to the simple fact that humans cannot know in any clear way, or at all. However, I do not use this God-being and God-realm in my own thoughts about time (obviously so, since my purpose is not an attempt to defend such a conception). Just

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 28.
as Augustine, I recognize the limitations of what a human being can know, and as such I’m interested in the question previously stated “What does it mean to be in time?” Although my question leans in a different direction than Augustine’s question, I do find his conclusion to be hitting close to the target answer. His emphasis on the significance of “past” and “future” to human beings doesn’t seem to be answered in full. Although people use these terms in a casual, everyday manner for utility’s sake, there seems to be more meaning in these terms than Augustine had realized. My own thoughts on the existential bearings of one’s past and future are not entirely original since, as of late, I’ve been drawing from my readings in Heidegger’s Being and Time.

Heidegger places existential significance in the future and past above the present as well. However, he maintains more of a hierarchy; future is the most important, then past, and then present.42 Such a hierarchy can’t be quite explained in term of Augustine’s “impressions.” If ontological entities termed “past,” “present,” and “future” are not actual entities, then they must exist as a meaningful human construct. One may say that a past exists insofar that human being can remember and forget, yet memory doesn’t seem to be quite the entire story. Despite the fact that the human brain is wired to retain a “memory” of experiences, it is primarily important to be aware of the fact that “I have been” or “I am as having been” since these phrases are grounded in the present.43 In other words, one’s awareness is a present activity which finds the past meaningful. How one has existed before the present is meaningful since how one has existed before shapes one’s understanding of how one exists in the present. For example, I am a philosophy major because I know at some previous state of existence such a choice appealed to me. Whether or not I enjoy philosophical endeavors now as I did as a freshman is another matter, or a present matter rather. To some extent, I am presently aware of my previous states of existence. I may remember a time when I was depressed, and

43 Ibid.
because I am no longer in that state I may be able to reflect upon that previous state with more clarity.

Furthermore, I am able to anticipate the future with such relative self-knowledge. In other words, the past serves as a ground for the present, yet the present is characterized in full by the future. The nature of one’s present activity is anticipatory towards possibilities that could be.44 Thus, both the present and past serve in the constant activity of anticipation. All my present activities can be traced back, whether I am aware of it or not, to my own projection of possibilities. Currently, I am thinking about what to type next in this paper because I want to finish this paper; I want to finish this paper so I can get a passing grade in the metaphysics class; I want to pass the class so I can graduate; and so, such a strand of thought can continue. Not to say that the nature of anticipating is tracing out linear goals, that was simply the layout of the example. I am always thinking about what I hope to gain and what I hope to become and accomplish in the near and distant future of my life. Although I may be content with my current mode of existence, my more trivial activities can still be described in such a manner. Again, I want to finish this paper before a certain time so I can eat my sandwich and talk with my suitemate.

Even thoughts which dwell in memories can be said to have this anticipatory characterization. It’s possible that tomorrow I may get into another car accident and get a severe injury which paralyzes most of my body. I’d have to recognize on some level in my mind that my possibilities have been significantly cut off. My new mode of existence is one in which I had been thrusted into, and so significant is the change that I cannot produce meaning in the same way as before. My existential processes of possibility-projection would have then become crippled. Again and again my mind would return to my previous state of existence because my psyche wouldn’t know how to deal with my new situation. In being “crippled”, it can be said that my

mind may be attempting to redirect its projection of possibility toward my previous state of existence. This can be said to be one way to understand the state of mourning. However, my mind would eventually have to recognize the true mode of my present existence and redirect such an existential process toward my current state of existence (although it’s possible this could never happen, or at least not in full).

Although I’ve rejected, or placed aside, Augustine’s belief in an eternal time of which humans are not a part of, I’ve integrated his larger message on the internal construction of past, present, and future in human cognition and self-awareness, as well as building further upon his emphasis on the past and future as holding great meaning to one’s mode of existence. Although the terms “past,” “present,” and “future” are practical in everyday use, they are not actual ontological entities. Rather, they seem to inevitably spring forth in one’s understanding as an inevitable result of one’s self-awareness. As such, people use these terms in discussing their everyday lives, but whether one is aware of their deeper existential meanings is another matter.

<>

**Bibliography**


A Study on Splendor: Hinduism

Julie Armstrong

Found at the very heart of the Hindu faith is the desire to break through the veil of ignorance which covers every human existence and subsequently attain enlightenment. The enlightened person can finally gain spiritual peace and harmony in solidarity with the energy and soul of all living things, Brahman, with the knowledge that he or she is not a defined fragment or a lone figure with a single life to live, but a quantum of the spirit of the entire world. Every person is divine energy, or Atman, placed within the shell of a body. Guidelines for finding one’s true self within the all-encompassing spiritual energy of the universe appear in the form of The Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. These two Hindu texts, which read like books of poetry, not only give advice to the seeker of enlightenment, but also detail in beautiful, compelling imagery the vast interconnectivity of the universe.

One of the most remarkable qualities of the “Katha Upanishad” is the absence of fear in the characters when faced with the ultimate terror for a mortal creature, death. This tale told in the Upanishads follows a boy, Nachiketa, and Yama, king of death. Nachiketa, embodying the innocence and wisdom so often touted in children, notices that his father, to gain favor, is sacrificing cows which can no longer give milk. He innocuously inquires of his father what can be gained by sacrificing something which does not have true value to him. Angered at being confronted by his son and caught in the act of something he knows is wrong, Nachiketa’s father sends his son to death in a fit of rage. Ever obedient, Nachiketa simply goes, without trepidation or fear whatsoever, thinking, “I go, the first of many who will die, in the midst of many who are dying, on a mission to Yama, king of death.”45 Finding the place where death lives to be empty, Nachiketa waits for three days and finally confronts

Yama when he returns to his house. The boy berates Yama for not welcoming such a spiritual guest immediately, and Yama acknowledges this oversight and offers Nachiketa three boons in reparation. In the midst of Nachiketa’s questions about death and life afterwards, death himself becomes the boy’s teacher and spiritual guide.

Nachiketa, “full of faith in the scriptures,” is unafraid of Yama from the beginning because he is already aware that death is not truly the final step in the life cycle. “There is no fear at all in heaven; for you (Yama) are not there…” and, likewise, there should be no fear on earth, because death is not the extinction of life. According to many different faiths, Hinduism included, immortality cannot be achieved until a person sheds his or her mortal body and dies, freeing the soul. For Hindus specifically, dying allows the eternal self within to ascend and become part of Brahman, from which it originated. In other words, Yama himself, death, is the way to eternity. Once a person who has attained enlightenment dies, he or she can never really die again. Nachiketa, wise beyond his years, and fully aware of samsara (the cycle of life, death, and rebirth) and the miracle of the immortal spirit, knows and believes what few human beings do—that Yama, death, should not be feared, but rather accepted and peacefully anticipated as the gateway to life eternal.

The next section of the “Brihadaranyaka Upanishad” highlights the parting dialogue between a wise sage, Yajnavalkya, and his wife Maitreyi. Yajnavalkya is leaving his home to go on a quest for self-realization, and just before he leaves, his wife asks him a question about whether wealth will help her to “go beyond death.” The resulting answer morphs into a conversation of divine importance as Yajnavalkya becomes more than husband to Maitreyi; like Yama to Nachiketa, he becomes her spiritual instructor, opening her eyes to the Self and revealing the path to enlightenment.

---

46 The Upanishads, 69.
47 The Upanishads, 71.
48 The Upanishads, 99.
This particular Upanishad focuses on the bond among all living things because the Self, that which is a quantum of Brahman, is within every one of them. Yajnavalkya tells Maitreyi, “As a lump of salt thrown in water dissolves and cannot be taken out again, though wherever we taste the water it is salty, even so…the separate self dissolves in the sea of pure consciousness, infinite and immortal.”49 This is the true way to immortality, not wealth or material possessions as Maitreyi supposes. One must give up the illusion of separateness from other human beings and living creatures, for, Yajnavalkya goes on to say, “A wife loves her husband not for his own sake…but because the Self lives in him. A husband loves his wife not for her own sake…but because the Self lives in her.”50 This beautiful message of equality in marriage goes on to become an ideal state for accepting and loving all other creatures as oneself. For the simple reason that the Self is shared in all people, all people should be loved and love others in return. Yajnavalkya sums his entire argument for Maitreyi in this particular passage:

As long as there is separateness, one sees another as separate from oneself, hears another as separate from oneself, smells another as separate from oneself, speaks to another as separate from oneself, thinks of another as separate from oneself, knows another as separate from oneself. But when the Self is realized as the indivisible unity of life, who can be seen by whom, who can be heard by whom, who can be smelled by whom, who can be spoken to by whom, who can be thought of by whom, who can be known by whom, who can be known by whom?51

Yajnavalkya is not saying that when a person gives him- or herself up to the universal Self and loses his or her inherent separateness that the senses become clouded, or that all other

49 The Upanishads, 102.
50 The Upanishads, 100.
51 The Upanishads, 103.
creatures become unrecognizable; instead, when separateness is washed away, all other creatures manifest themselves as they emerge from Brahman and are all fully equal in the Self.

The “Chandogya Upanishad” deviates slightly from this intimacy of specific relationships within the Self to go back to the beginning of time to the origin of prayer, the “OM”. This is the noise of meditation, the simple sound from which all things sprang at the beginning of time. This is a facet of the creation story in Hinduism; while scientists search for evidence of the beginning of life from the remnants of the physical universe, ancient Hindu sages listened for the OM, and from it discerned the laws of existence. 52 Leaving science completely out of the equation, this Upanishad advocates strictly listening to nature and to one’s own rhythms to discover the pulse and song of a cycle of life in one’s own living body and soul.

The rest of this Upanishad builds on this idea, and continues on in the voice of a wise man named Shandilya to describe the paradox of the Self. It is within all things, the life-giving force of the world, “greater than the sky,” 53 yet it is smaller than the smallest grain and dwells in the heart of even the least of creatures. Inherently the Self is the mightiest of all forces, yet it also consistently humbles itself to miniscule, invisible proportions to eternally lend its energy to all things, and to give all things rest when they seek for it.

A later chapter of the “Chandogya Upanishad” delves into the power of the Self within the natural world; and it tells the story of a boy named Satyakama, who wishes to find a spiritual teacher. He asks his mother what name he should give to the teacher to prove his family’s lineage, but his mother answers that she does not know who Satyakama’s father is; he was conceived when his mother, Jabala “was young and going from place to place as a servant”. 54 She advises him to call himself Satyakama.

---

52 The Upanishads, 121.
53 The Upanishads, 127.
54 The Upanishads, 127-128.
Jabala, a combination of their two names. When the boy seeks out his teacher, Haridrumata Guatama, he gives him this name, saying truthfully that he does not know his ancestry. The teacher recognizes Satyakama’s honesty and refusal to be ashamed of his lack of a father, and agrees at once to teach him. Guatama gives the boy four hundred sickly cows to tend, and he promises himself that he will not return to his teacher until he has one thousand cows. Years pass with Satyakama in the forest, tending his herd, when one day one of the bulls speaks to him, saying that there are now one thousand cows, and that the boy can finally go back. Then the bull tells Satyakama one of the four feet of Brahman, knowledge of which must be gained to reach enlightenment. The boy, remarkably accepting and unsurprised by the manner in which this wisdom is being relayed to him, listens closely to the words of the bull and understands them. As he continues on his journey back to his teacher, he learns the three other feet of Brahman, the second from a flame in his fire, the third from a swan, and the fourth from a diver bird.

These non-human teachers embody the Hindu ideal of prakriti, or the energy of Brahman manifested throughout all nature. Each time he is spoken to, Satyakama, wise in the ways of prakriti and understanding that it is now expressing itself and its wisdom to him, wholly accepts the unusual and respectfully receives the truths of Brahman. In the end, he returns to his teacher, glowing “like one who has known the truth”.\(^55\) When asked who has taught him, Satyakama says that he was not taught by another human, yet he still wishes to know what the teacher has to tell him. Even though he has been taught the four feet of Brahman, he still knows that only a teacher’s wisdom will “come to fruition,”\(^56\) and so he still desires to hear the knowledge only his teacher can give him. Satyakama has obviously been chosen to bear the wisdom he was given from prakriti, but he does not brag or spin an animated yarn about how animals and inanimate objects spoke to him; instead, he humbles himself, minimizes the great things that have happened to him, and

\(^{55}\) The Upanishads, 131.

\(^{56}\) The Upanishads, 131.
continues to learn all he can.

This Upanishad teaches many things. The first lesson is to not hide from the truth of oneself, even if others find it disgraceful. Family lineage holds little power in spiritual matters. Being born out of wedlock is not shameful; anyone can seek knowledge and enlightenment, no matter the circumstances of his or her birth. To hide from the truth of oneself is to be unable to accept true wisdom when it comes, which leads smoothly into another lesson: that of keeping an open mind. Satyakama proves that an open mind is important when on the path to enlightenment. Not to question spiritual wisdom when it is given to you is very important, even if it is brought by someone or something completely unexpected. In other words, the real focus of this story is that outward appearances do not and cannot affect the spiritual wisdom found within. To rely on appearance is to halt one’s path to enlightenment, for an open mind and an open heart are the things which guide you into the truest understanding of yourself and of the world around you. Many of the Upanishads express this view in an abundance of ways, leading the reader into a true acceptance of his- or herself and bringing him or her closer to an understanding of Brahman and of the Hindu faith itself.

Just as The Upanishads have been compared to the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, so is the Bhagavad Gita compared to the New Testament. The Bhagavad Gita is taken by most Hindus to be more of an allegory than a historical account meant to be taken seriously (although some of the events can be traced back to actual historical occurrences), for there are many attributes of it which, if taken otherwise, are in direct opposition to the peaceful teachings of the Upanishads. The text opens at the cusp of a war between two families. The soldiers stand, ready for battle, and the two men who become the focus of the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna, the human incarnation of Vishnu, the Preserver and second in the Hindu trinity of gods, and Arjuna, Krishna’s cherished disciple and friend, ready themselves in the chariot they share. Arjuna requests that
Krishna drive their chariot between the two armies to see who will be loyal and fight alongside him.

As Krishna obliges, Arjuna sees, scattered amongst both armies, relatives of his—uncles, grandfathers, brothers, sons—people he loves dearly. He despairs at the thought of his kinsmen turning against each other, slaying and being slain, and the fire of battle leaves him. Disconsolate, Arjuna laments this comprehension to Krishna, asking how he can possibly dare to kill his own family members. He and his army would become sinners, he says, were they to kill the other men before them. Confused, disparaging, Arjuna drops his bow and arrows, sits down on the floor of the chariot, and refuses to fight. Krishna admonishes Arjuna for his “despair and weakness in a time of crisis” and puts the battle into different terms so that he will be able to comprehend it.

There is no cause for sadness, Krishna says, because every person present on the battlefield has always existed and will always exist. “Death is inevitable for the living; birth is inevitable for the dead.” Here again Krishna refers to the cyclical nature of life, samsara, and how one can never not exist in some form or another. Existence is constant, whether a person exists in life or in death, because people are not their bodies, but are instead shared energy; that is, the energy of Brahman which can never truly die. The senses of the body and the body itself are fleeting, only to be replaced through reincarnation, the transfer of life energy from lifetime to lifetime, constantly. “The body is mortal,” Krishna proclaims, “but he who dwells in the body is immortal and immeasurable…One man believes he is the slayer, another believes he is the slain. Both are ignorant; there is neither slayer nor slain. You were never born; you will never die. You have never changed; you can never change.”

---

59 *The Bhagavad Gita*, 11.
60 *The Bhagavad Gita*, 10.
harsh, Krishna’s words hold exactly the same truths as those illustrated in the Upanishads. The body is mortal, but the Self within is immortal, energy siphoned off from Brahman and destined to return to Brahman ultimately when a person achieves moksha—when separateness is understood to be an illusion and the unity of all life is realized.

Krishna urges Arjuna to take up the highest form of meditation, which is yoga. Yoga is the true path that leads to union with the Creator. It clears the mind and brings the understanding that life is utterly unified. Sages long ago separated four types of yoga for four different categories of people searching for enlightenment. The purpose of each path is to be suitable for the different types of people so that unity with the Self may be attained in the best way possible.61 In the fourth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna lists the different types of people and the subsequent ways they make offerings to Brahman, which shows that the Creator understands each person equally, and allows for the unique ways they sacrifice and pledge themselves to him. The different paths of yoga and styles of meditation allow for variation and freedom in the way people serve their Creator, and it illustrates what Krishna means when he says in the same chapter that there are many paths but, in the end, all paths inevitably lead to him.

The first two paths which Krishna created when the universe began are jnana yoga, which is the path pertaining to the contemplation and studying of spiritual wisdom, and karma yoga, which is designed for those who are naturally active and advocates selfless service to Brahman through service to others.62 Karma itself, from the word kri, “to do”, is both action and the notion that certain actions lead to certain results in a constant cycle of cause-and-effect. 63 Both types of yoga

62 The Bhagavad Gita, 17.
63 The Bhagavad Gita, 115.
transcend the physical senses and pleasure of life which can tempt a person off the spiritual path and create a channel through which energy can be spent in a healthy, spiritually sound manner. One path of yoga does not lead to the supreme goal any quicker than the other, but, Krishna says, a path that calls for taking action is better than that which calls for renouncing action, which is what Krishna has been attempting to tell Arjuna all along in relation to the battle he must fight.64

This is where the allegorical nature of the Bhagavad Gita comes into play. While the Upanishads urge the seeker of enlightenment to give up strong emotions in favor of peace, harmony with the world, and a simple, quiet strength of mind, the Bhagavad Gita seemingly contradicts those virtues in favor of action, battle, and victory. In reality, many Hindus take it as an allegory for the constant battle within each person between good, the purity of the Self, and evil, the vices of the material world. Indeed, the title of the first chapter of the Bhagavad Gita is “The War Within”, which supports this idea quite literally. In this case, action against temptations is infinitely better than allowing oneself to stagnate and letting in vices to cloud the mind and heart.

Throughout the entire conversation between the two, Arjuna has been begging certain clarifications from Krishna and Krishna has obliged him. In the end, satisfied, Arjuna acknowledges Krishna as “Brahman supreme, the highest abode, the supreme purifier, the divine, eternal spirit, first among the gods, unborn and infinite…You alone know yourself.”65 Awash in wonder over the things he has heard, Arjuna wishes to know more about Krishna’s glories and entreats Krishna to show him his divine form if he finds Arjuna worthy of beholding it. Krishna reveals himself to Arjuna in all his divine glory, giving Arjuna spiritual vision with which to see his wonders, as his physical eyes cannot perceive them. It is here in the Bhagavad Gita where the terrible power of Krishna is described. Arjuna relates his majesty, his

64 The Bhagavad Gita, 29.
65 The Bhagavad Gita, 53-54.
“million divine forms, with an infinite variety of color and shape…the entire cosmos turning within [his] body…” along with “all gods and every kind of living creature…”66 With all these wonders, however, Arjuna also sees much destruction, and Krishna lapping “the worlds into [his] burning mouths and swallow[ing] them.” Arjuna watches as “the whole of creation bursts into flames.”67 Frightened and in awe, Arjuna bows and proclaims Krishna’s glory, believing in him and worshiping him fully.

In the next few chapters, Krishna tempers these visions of terror and devastation and reasserts his mercy, grace and love of all things. He reminds Arjuna that, although he is the destroyer of the world, he is likewise the creator, and the perpetrator of the constantly rotating life cycle. As terrible as the destruction of the world is, creation inevitably follows on its heels. Life springs out of death, so there is no need to feel sorrow or fear at its passing.

While studying the facets of Hinduism, I was irrevocably drawn into the beauty of the descriptions and images, the power of the promise of the ascension of the Self, and the alluring nature of the interconnectivity of the whole universe. I was brought up in a Christian household, and, although it was only recently that I began to understand what being Christian was all about and to truly believe in it, it has shaped who I am as a person and how I live my life. Two of my four classes this semester have happened to concentrate on religions other than my own; we focused on Islam in my Western Civilizations class, and then on Hinduism in this class, Philosophy and Eastern Religions. While learning about both, I was astonished at how similar these two religions are to my own, as I had had no inkling of the subtle connections among them. As a result, of course, I was, and still am, incredibly fascinated. It made me really consider for the first time all of the reasons why human beings turn to a higher power or to a religion. Many like having a powerful being at their backs, while some just want someone to

67 The Bhagavad Gita, 61.
trust and turn to in times of need. Others just want to be accepted and loved. There are many different reasons, many emotions merged into one great desire, but I believe that the all-encompassing motivation is this: The pull of religion, all religions, is the knowledge that every person has the equal opportunity for some sort of life after death.

Death is a cause for much anxiety in mortal creatures. It is inevitable and, for the living, a complete mystery. Some kind of solution or explanation must be fashioned so that human beings are able to live without fear of this great unknown that lurks at the end of all lifetimes. For Hindus, there is the possibility of enlightenment and the promise of an infinite number of second chances when one fails to comprehend it. Every human being, male or female, young or old, etc., when he or she fails to attain nirvana in one lifetime, can just reincarnate and begin a new life with a better chance to understand, believe, and become enlightened. It’s somewhat of a softer destiny than that of Christianity, in which there are two final, distinct destinations: heaven and hell. People who believe in Jesus Christ as the savior of humanity will go to heaven after death, and people who do not go to hell.

There are many variations and disputes on that particular subject, but the main gist is that after death, people do not get a second chance. Of course, forgiveness abounds in the Christian faith, which is one of the reasons it draws so many followers, and one of the reasons I personally am able to hold my own head up when I recall how many mistakes I’ve made and continue to make. In Christianity, living sinners who repent are forgiven, and their sins are swept away and even forgotten by God. Yet if belief in Jesus is not acknowledged during a person’s lifetime, there is no turning back; there are no second chances. But Hinduism offers what Christianity and many other religions lack: eternal second chances. Refusing to understand and believe in one’s place in the universe in one life simply leads to another life, during which, perhaps, the non-believer will finally come to know Brahmin and to lose him- or her-self within it; to finally
know what it is to be at peace amid the rest of the life-energy of the universe.

Another reason I found Hinduism strangely comforting and hopeful, despite the fact that I am Christian—or perhaps because of it—is, I think, because it is so similar to my own beliefs in many ways. Knowing this, I unconsciously merged it with my own conceptions of religion and the God I believe in with all my heart. Both of these Hindu texts and the Christian Bible are beautifully written, eloquent, poetic, and stunning in the images and stories they provide, but I am used to the Bible in that I’ve been hearing and reading it my entire life. Inevitably, I have become somewhat desensitized to it until someone or something comes along and makes me look at the parables and teachings in a fresh, new light. And even though I respect *The Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita* as being from another religion and I am not attempting to belittle Hindu beliefs in any way at all, I still found myself looking at the Christian God I believe in through the eyes of a Hindu seeing Krishna.

It is wonderfully calming to read and visualize images about the Lord as “the supreme poet...”\(^{68}\), or seeing him describe himself as “the taste of pure water and the radiance of the sun and moon...the sacred word and the sound heard in air, and the courage of human beings...the sweet fragrance in the earth and the radiance of fire.”\(^{69}\) It’s incredibly uplifting and stirs my heart to be told to “just remember that I [Krishna] am, and that I support the entire cosmos with only a fraction of my being.”\(^{70}\) Studying Hinduism has definitely solidified my understanding, not only of the Hindu faith, but also of my own religion, and I am eternally grateful for the beauty and overwhelming simplicity with which this religion in particular makes itself known. I am humbled that I am able to study this beautiful religion and now, because of it, I am stronger in my own more than ever before.

\(^{68}\) *The Bhagavad Gita*, 44.  
\(^{69}\) *The Bhagavad Gita*, 40.  
\(^{70}\) *The Bhagavad Gita*, 42.
Bibliography


http://bhoffert.faculty.noctrl.edu/rel100/04.hinduism.fourpaths.html.
Hinduism is a web that never stops spinning. While Hinduism is one of the world’s most well-known religions, many people are uninformed as to what Hinduism is, what beliefs it is founded on, and all of the intricate aspects that make Hinduism one of the world’s oldest and most practiced religions. There are nine aspects of Hinduism that make up the foundation of its web and they are the notions of Brahman, Atman, karma, samsara, reincarnation, the four paths of yogas, moksha, or nirvana, prakriti, and the enlightened person. Once an individual understands these nine aspects of the web, it is made apparent that Hinduism presents an allegory for the battle within every creature, the battle between the Shining Self and the ego-self, with the Shining Self being “hidden in the lotus of the heart”.  

The victory of the Shining Self brings the ultimate fulfillment and goal in life, to be re-united with Brahman, the absolute reality. Although not every human will be able to kill the illusion of the ego-self and achieve immortality with Brahman, Hinduism urges everyone to “Get up! Wake up!” Hinduism is an intricate web that explains the significant relationship shared between humanity and the cosmos as well as the creator God and the soul. Through the use of poems and allegories, Hinduism argues that the only way to attain fulfillment in life is to kill the illusion of the ego-self and become one with Brahman, the ultimate reality.

The center of the web of Hinduism is the fundamental idea of Brahman. Brahman is defined as “The supreme Godhead, beyond all distinctions or forms; ultimate Reality”. Not only is Brahman the ultimate reality, he is also the energy that created

---

72 Ibid., 82
73 Ibid., 399
the entire universe with “only a fragment of [his] being”. Although Hinduism is a polytheistic religion with many godheads and cosmic beings whom each have to fight the internal battle between the ego-self and the Shining Self, Brahman is the force that manifested the universe into what it is today. Brahman is in all of creation and all of creation is in Brahman. Through this belief, Brahman is presented as not just the manifested reality and pure consciousness of the world, but also the driving force behind the connection between the cosmos and humanity.

The Hindu idea of universal interconnectedness creates an epiphany that nothing is separate, that the Self connects everything together, and that it exists to become one with the ultimate reality. In *The Upanishads*, Eknath Easwaran explains that “The ideal of the Upanishads is to live in a world in full awareness of life’s unity, giving and enjoying, participating in other’s joys, but never unaware even for a moment that the world comes from God and returns to God”. Through this sense of interconnectedness and how the Self originates and diminishes in Brahman, the web of Hinduism paints a clear picture of humanity’s relation to the cosmos. Humans are not here without a reason, but rather their reason is to be one with pure consciousness and realize the spark of the divine that inhibits in their very soul.

While Brahman plays a fundamental part in the relationship between humanity and the cosmos, this relationship would not be able to be sustained without the Atman. The Atman is described as the “Self, the innermost soul in every creature, which is divine”. The Atman not only connects the soul to the divine, but also the soul to the universe. In this concept, Hinduism makes a distinct singular relationship between humanity’s purpose and Brahman’s calling. While many

---

75 *The Upanishads*, 44.
76 Ibid., 339.
Western religions convey the belief of the divine-human relationship as paralleling a father-child relationship, Hinduism paints the picture that there is no distinction between the creator God and the soul. The relationship shared between the Atman and Brahman is not a father-child one, but rather a relationship within the same Being.

Brahman illustrates this in *The Bhagavad Gita*, telling Arjuna that “I am the true Self in the heart of every creature, Arjuna, and the beginning, middle, and end of their existence.” The singular relationship that Hinduism illustrates between the Atman and the creator God, Brahman, creates a purpose for human souls and a path that has a destination of immortality. The act of following this path and achieving oneness with not only the Shining Self, but also with the very force that created the universe is one that *The Bhagavad Gita* and *The Upanishads* make clear is not easy, but it also reminds those who are awake to Hindu teachings that this path is not impossible to tread.

In order to fully understand the next aspect of Hinduism, karma, one must first look at what Hindus describe as samsara. Samsara is “The phenomenal world; the cycle of birth death, and re-birth”. Samsara illustrates the natural world in correlation with the cosmos as well as the cyclical nature of human beings, life, and death. While many would describe samsara as the fundamental idea behind the Hindu belief of re-incarnation, samsara is also present in the Hindu notion of karma. By life being a never-ending cycle where human souls, the Atman, never stop being in existence, Hinduism is adding the concept of consequence to its intricate web. The idea that a certain action can affect ones next life cycle sets the stage for the notion of karma and warns humanity to chose carefully before acting because one never knows how an action may affect the cycle of this life and the next.

The next aspect of Hinduism, karma, is defined as “action;
former actions that will lead to certain results in a cause-and-effect relationship.” The cause-and-effect relationship presented in karma adds a layer in the web of Hinduism that makes the path to immortality in Brahman more defined. If every action has a direct reaction and the cause of every effect determines the destination of one’s Atman than it seems that the only way to avoid bad karma, or negative reactions to a specific action, is too only make pure actions. Yet, Hinduism makes it clear that there are more dimensions behind karma than just making sure to partake in only pure actions.

The Bhagavad Gita uses poetry and allegory to illustrate the concept of karma and the cyclical nature of life by giving specific directions as to how to receive good karma. Krishna, who portrays Brahman, tells Arjuna to “Be fearless and pure/ never waver in your determination or your dedication to the spiritual life/ Give freely/ Be self-controlled, sincere, truthful, loving and full of desire to serve.” Krishna is not only teaching Arjuna that while bad karma exists to follow negative actions, good karma also exists and is not impossible to attain; it only requires a pure heart. By following these actions one will not only achieve good karma, but also their “divine destiny.” Within this idea, karma is creating eternal punishment and eternal reward in the cosmic web of Hinduism. While one is able to decide what actions to partake in and what actions to abstain from, there are punishments and rewards for every action done. Thus, karma brings to life the next aspect of Hinduism, re-incarnation.

Re-incarnation is one of the most popular aspects of Hinduism and has become Westernized in much of the developed world, yet the common concept of re-incarnation does not agree with the beliefs that Hindus have about the transmigrating soul and how it develops through karma and samsara. Although many people believe that re-incarnation is

79 The Bhagavad Gita, 115.
80 Ibid., 81.
81 Ibid.
centered around the idea of the soul going through many life cycles and never experiencing the full effects of death, the Hindu perspective of re-incarnation include a deeper concept focused around the trans-migrating soul. To Hindus, re-incarnation is not just a cycle of Atmans. Rather, it is a fundamental process for the immortal joining between the Shining Self and Brahman. *The Bhagavad Gita* and *The Upanishads* use allegory and poetic devices to explain why re-incarnation is important by illustrating the transmigrating soul as a temporary way station to the greater goal of immortality. More specifically, “Indian religious systems hold as a core belief that the individual is not that which dies: it is more accurate to think of ourselves as the forces which brought our body and personality into existence”.  

Thus, re-incarnation is a symbol for the destiny that every human has in joining in Brahman as well as the realization that the Atman may experience many life cycles before it becomes awake.

The process of re-incarnation is timeless, illustrating that there is no beginning or end to the cosmic web of Hinduism and asserts the belief that it does not matter how long an Atman takes before it becomes awake and reaches ultimate fulfillment; it matters only that the Shining Self achieves immortality with the creator God. “According to Hinduism, a being has to live many lives and undergo many experiences before it attains perfection and becomes one with the Divine.” Though re-incarnation may seem to be an impossible path to tread, it once again reminds one that the web of Hinduism leads to a worthwhile reward.

The sixth aspect of web of Hinduism encompasses four threads: the four paths of yogas. In *The Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna makes the path to immorality even finer by creating four distinct methods of achieving the ultimate goal. These four yogas are *jnana yoga*, *karma yoga*, *bhakti yoga*, and *raja yoga*. While each path has distinct qualities and methods, they all lead the Atman

---

82 *The Upanishads*, 320.
to the same destination. The first path of yogas is jnana yoga, “the Way of Wisdom.” Jnana yoga illustrates the underlying thread that weaves through the web of Hinduism: the basic idea that there is no separateness, no distinctions between the cosmos and humanity and between the creator God and his creation. Jnana yoga helps people to “See that where there is One, that One is me; where there are many, all are me; they see my face everywhere.” Jnana yoga is the way to wisdom not only of the oneness shared between Brahman and the Atman, but also the realization that there are no distinctions made between the Lord of Love and his universe.

Another path that leads to this realization is that of karma yoga. Karma yoga is “The Way of Action; the path of selfless service.” Krishna devotes much of The Bhagavad Gita to explaining the significance of selfless service, saying that “Selfish action imprisons the world. Act selflessly, without any thought of personal profit.” In this idea, Hinduism brings to life the very nature of humanity: that actions are only made if there is a direct beneficial reward. Krishna urges us to throw away the urge for a reward and take up the action which yields the ultimate prize: that through making actions without a care about the rewards immortality will be acquired. This fulfilling and ultimate reward, as well as karma yoga, corresponds with jnana yoga by bringing to light the realization that there is no reward greater than that of being re-united with the Being that created the entire universe.

The third path of yogas, bhakti yoga, is “The Way of Love.” Bhakti yoga is tied together with the Hindu belief of re-incarnation because once one succeeds in this yoga, there is an end to re-incarnation and subsequent reunion with Brahman. Krishna gives hope for those who believe and love, saying that

84 The Bhagavad Gita, 114.
85 Ibid., 48.
86 Ibid., 115
87 Ibid., 18
88 Ibid., 112
“But they for whom I am the supreme goal, who do all work renouncing self for me and meditate on me with single-hearted devotion, these I will swiftly rescue from the fragment’s cycle of birth and death, for their consciousness has entered into me.”

Krishna is re-asserting the old saying “there is light at the end of the tunnel” by re-assuring the people who believe that their hard work will not go unrewarded and that the ultimate goal, immortality, is theirs and theirs only to attain.

The final path of yogas, raja yoga, brings full circle the four ways to acquire the ultimate goal of immortality. Raja yoga is “The Royal Path; the path of meditation”. Although this is the last path presented in The Bhagavad Gita, it can be argued to be the hardest and one of the most important due to the fact that meditation requires the pointed focus of the mind as well as the body. Raja yoga incorporates all of the yogas, showing once again how everything in the web of Hinduism is interconnected.

Continuing with the major underlying thread of interconnectedness in the cosmic web of Hinduism is the seventh aspect, moksha. Moksha, also referred to as Nirvana, is “Liberation (from samsara, the cycle between birth and rebirth), illumination, Self-realization.” Moksha re-asserts the Hindu belief that immortality can only be acquired through the death of the ego-self and the rise of the Shining Self, which leaves nothing in the way of the Atman re-uniting with Brahman. When Moksha occurs, it means that the journey of the Atman has finished, the purpose has been fulfilled, and the obstacles that stand in the way of the re-union between the soul and the creator God have been relinquished. This leaves only harmony, immortality, and the all-fulfilling relationship shared between the Ultimate Reality and the soul in a state of complete perfection.

The eighth and ninth aspects of the web of Hinduism,

89 Ibid. 66.
90 Ibid, p. 117.
91 The Upanishads, 341.
prakriti and the enlightened person, share the same prevailing interconnectedness that pervades all of Hinduism. Prakriti is part of Brahman and the energy used to create the world, or more clearly defined as “The basic energy from which the mental and physical worlds take place; nature”. While prakriti is the force by which the universe was manifested, the enlightened person is one whom is awake. Prakriti and the enlightened person are interconnected because they are both a manifested form of the One who is unmanifest, and both are seen in the natural world. Prakriti and the enlightened person may be hidden from the eyes of those ruled by the ego-Self, but they are the highest visible form of Brahman in the natural world and are apparent in the caste system.

The caste system is one of the most fundamental and distinguishing aspects of Hindu culture. The most fascinating aspect of the caste system is that although Hinduism believes that everything is interconnected and that there is no distinctions in the universe, the caste system makes rigid distinctions between people. The purpose of the caste system is the most confusing aspect of Hindu culture. Why would a society who believes that there are no distinctions in life and that the only way to achieve immortality is to relinquish all notions of separateness create a system that defines people by categories? Although the answer is still unclear, there is no denying the importance of the caste system in Hindu culture. The caste system exists because “Each Hindu belonged to one of the thousands of Jatis (communities/sub-communities that existed in India. The Jatis were originally defined by the person’s profession.” Although the caste system is an important and old aspect of Hindu culture, it does not correspond with any of the aspects previously mentioned. In fact, the caste system completely disregards the Atman because it forces someone to be categorized into a specific group, although the Atman is the

92 The Bhagavad Gita, 117.
same in everyone and is thereby indistinguishable. Another aspect of the caste system confusing and seems to disagree with the threads that make up the web of Hinduism is the limiting factor that castes puts on people for no reason other than their family occupation. Never once is it mentioned in *The Bhagavad Gita* or *The Upanishads* that it matters whether a person is a doctor or a teacher. Rather, it is made clear that what is important is someone’s beliefs and religious prowess, stating that “the deathless Self has neither caste nor race”.⁹⁴ Thus, there is no correlation between the existence of the caste system and the intricate threads that create the web of the Hindu religion.

The use of poems and allegories presented in *The Bhagavad Gita* and *The Upanishads* help to clarify what Hinduism was all about. Not only was the information and principles presented in a creative, lyrical way, but it also brought to life the idea that a battle takes place in every creature between the ego-self and the Shining Self. The use of allegory is central in *The Bhagavad Gita* and it helped to explain the intricate connection between the Shining Self and creator God, as well as making the reader a part of the story. We are all Arjuna facing the battle within ourselves. Although we may not want to fight, the ego-self must be killed in order to reach ultimate victory. In respect, Krishna is a symbol for the part of ourselves that we desperately desire without even being aware of that desire. Similarly, *The Upanishads* uses lyrical poems to set guidelines and create a roadmap to get to the destination that is unknowingly in front of us. Although there were points were all of the threads that make up Hinduism was confusing and unclear, such as the four paths of yogas and prakriti, the information and the way it was presented helped to clarify the fundamental threads of the web of Hinduism.

Although a heaven and hell is never specifically mentioned in *The Bhagavad Gita* and *The Upanishads*, it is made clear that karma is the underlying factor that brings either eternal punishment or eternal reward into the cosmic web of Hinduism.

⁹⁴ *The Upanishads*, 186.
If one receives good karma, that will help a person to acquire good things in the next life cycle and may even result in immortality, which is the highest reward. Similarly, if one receives bad karma and continues to receive bad karma for actions transversed, there is a high chance that immortality will not be reached, which in itself is a version of hell. This thread is fascinating because humans must do at least a thousand actions everyday, ranging from small things like brushing your teeth to bigger decisions like deciding on a career choice. Yet, Hinduism regards each action, big or small, as equal because every action made generates karma. The karma that you receive determines whether you are punished, which means the absence of reunion with Brahman and inevitably death, or rewarded with immortality. Eternal punishments and rewards are seen everywhere in the universe and it makes sense that it would be seen in the cosmic web of Hinduism.

Hinduism is a web that includes many intricate layers. There are nine aspects that are central to this web and they are Brahman, the Atman, Karma, Samsara, Re-incarnation, the four paths of yogas, moksha, prakriti, and the enlightened person. While these nine aspects may seem very different, they each have the same idea as a foundation: everything in the universe, with no exceptions, is interconnected. These aspects and their underlying sense of interconnectedness explain the relationship shared between humanity and the cosmos as well as the creator God and the soul. Through the use of the poems and allegories shown in *The Upanishads* and *The Bhagavad Gita*, Hinduism argues that the only way to attain fulfillment in life is to kill the illusion of the ego-self and become one with Brahman, the ultimate reality. While many people have yet to agree or disagree with this argument, it is made clear that the web of Hinduism has been spinning for thousands of years and will continue to spin for a thousand more. Yet, the choice of becoming immortal and re-uniting with the creator God, who has been eagerly awaiting this re-union since he created you, is a choice that is left for you to make.
Bibliography


Jayaram, V. “Hinduism and the belief in rebirth”. *HinduWebsite.*  

I once had the opportunity to hear a Methodist minister speak about his experience leading mission work abroad in India. He had just recently returned from one of these trips, during which he taught a seminar to missionaries and clergy from all across India. During this talk, the minister related some of the difficulties he and those he taught had faced in trying to spread the Christian faith to local Hindu populations. These difficulties were not due to resistance or poor reception, as the Hindu men and women readily accepted the Gospel message of the missionaries. They prayed for salvation and were baptized, accepting Jesus Christ as their savior. The missionaries couldn’t have asked for anything more. The problems faced by the Christian clergy in India arose rather with the ways in which Hindu practitioners thought of Christianity in relation to their own religion. After their conversions, the minister told us, they would return to their homes only to incorporate Christian icons with those of Hindu gods and goddesses, and rituals into their pre-existing religious practices at home. They seemed to be practicing both religions simultaneously. Christianity, then, was not understood in the same way that the missionaries conceived of it. It was understood not as the sole path to ‘the one God,’ but rather as one path with one god among many others.

From my own experiences attending several Christian primary and secondary schools of various denominations, this multiplicity can easily be misunderstood and seen in a negative light. After all, to Christians, there are not many immanent gods but rather one transcendent God. There are not many paths, but a single ‘straight and narrow’ one. We do not have many lives in which to travel this path, but one. Hinduism, with its fire rituals and its ancient oral traditions, its pantheon of gods and its

95 The Upanishads. Trans. and with Introduction by Eknath Easwaran
elaborate temples and images dedicated in their honor, can easily come across to those used to monotheistic Judeo-Christian traditions as a primitive faith based in idol worship and pagan rituals.96

This idea of primitivism is especially problematic to our understanding of Hinduism, as it limits the way we think about the religion. In Eknath Easwaran’s introduction to his translation of the sacred Hindu texts known as The Upanishads, he describes how, at the beginning of his own study of the tradition, he did not expect to find much information of relevance to his own life in a modern context, given its age.97 What he found in Hinduism, however, was not an antiquated mythology, but rather an incredibly complex and sophisticated belief system that carried direct relevance to his own life.98 Just as the practitioners of any other religion, ancient Hindus found a way to understand the world that they experienced around them, the same world which we inhabit today. Instead of considering the age of Hinduism as detracting from its complexity or sophistication, we should instead marvel at its ability to stand the test of time, still relevant to millions of practitioners today.

Connected to the misconception of primitivism, there is also a fundamental disconnect regarding the metaphysical nature of Hinduism and its gods. During my own Christian school experience, it wasn’t uncommon for Hinduism to be described as a kind of older, Eastern counterpart to the religions of the Greeks and Romans, with their multitudes of gods and myths with which Western students were more familiar. In these cases, not only

---


were the teachers inviting students to think about the Hindu faith as an outdated tradition based on ‘misguided’ interpretations of the world, but they were also inviting them to understand the nature of the relationship between Hindus and their gods in the same way that we think about the Greek and Roman pantheon. Understood this way, practitioners worship gods which are immanent in their universe to solve specific problems and worries. And when we observe the Hindu men and women worshipping Jesus alongside their many other gods, we might come to this conclusion about them, also. In a sense, it is true. The worship of deities is an important aspect of Hinduism. The trick is that Hinduism isn’t limited to this form of worship. The deeper problem we have is that we misrepresent the distinction between gods and humans according to Hinduism, and even the nature of everything else in the universe. We misinterpret Hinduism not only by thinking of it as a primitive religion, but also that it is a polytheistic tradition. It is not based on the distinctions between things, but rather the fundamental interconnections between them.

Hinduism

Religion is fundamentally a way for us to understand the world in which we’ve found ourselves. We are born into the world, grow up in it, and experience it all around us. The next logical step is to try and make sense of that world. If we start from our experiences and progress backward, though, we take our senses for granted in order to make assumptions about the world, which becomes problematic when we use those assumptions to make broader statements about the nature and source of reality. Hinduism offers an alternative. A Hindu verse states, “No one can understand the sounds of a drum without understanding both drum and drummer”. 99 In order to know anything about our own experiences, the sound, we need to first understand the source of the sound and the means by which it is created. The knowledge of the world around us comes last. This

is because we must know the truth of what the physical universe, and the rest of reality for that matter, actually is in order to know how to interpret our experiences correctly.\textsuperscript{100} To Hindus, everyone is on this path to truth in some way, and with an infinite number of lives and paths to achieve this goal, enlightenment becomes more a question of ‘when?’ than one of ‘if.’ We will all find our way eventually.

This brings us back to the problem of apparent multiplicity. To come to this assertion about the tradition, one needs only to point out the millions of Hindu gods, the many paths to enlightenment, and even the acceptance of other religious traditions as ways to the goal of Hinduism.\textsuperscript{101} Plurality in Hinduism, as many Western Christians would see it, rests on the concept of separateness. Humans are separate entities from other humans, and certainly from the gods they worship, it would seem. Were the assumption of separateness true according to Hinduism, one would be correct to call it polytheistic.

Separateness is instead directly refuted by Hinduism. “The universe confuses those who regard it as separate from the Self,” one verse from the Upanishads states.\textsuperscript{102} This leads one to ask why we are able to perceive of distinctions between each other and aspects of the world around us. The experience of separateness, however, is based on an illusion that arises when we identify our sense of self, our ‘souls,’ so to speak, with our own bodies.\textsuperscript{103} We perceive the world via the senses, and interpret ourselves as distinct conscious entities.\textsuperscript{104} The key to

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid, 101.

\textsuperscript{101} The Bhagavad Gita, 50.

\textsuperscript{102} The Upanishads, 101.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid, 102.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid, 102.
enlightenment is to get past that “physical identification.” Once we accomplish this, we experience our own interconnection and sameness with everyone and everything else. The idea of a separate ‘self’ is then rendered impossible. Instead, it is replaced by another concept—Brahman.

To begin to understand Hinduism, we must address the concept of Brahman. In Hinduism, Brahman is the ultimate Reality of the universe. It is pure consciousness, unmanifested energy, and is the only thing that is real. Non-physical, it is the source which allows all things to grow. From solar systems and gods to humans and insects, even actions and thoughts, everything is a projection of Brahman energy. For Hindus, then, the goal of life is to overcome the ego self, to experience their own connection to Brahman, and through this, their connection with everything else in the world. This state is known as moksha.

Interestingly enough, we actually have this experience regularly. We aren’t aware of this, however, because it only occurs while we are asleep. Dreamless sleep, according to scripture, is actually the state of being “one with the Self [Brahman].” One has no sense of ‘I’ during dreamless sleep, nor does one perceive sound, or sight, or anything else for that matter. Yet, despite this lack of perception, the person’s consciousness hasn’t ceased to exist. It must be present at some capacity. The Hindu answer for this is that the sleeping person’s

105 Ibid, 102.
106 Ibid, 124.
108 The Bhagavad Gita, 48.
109 The Upanishads, 112.
110 Ibid, 133.
consciousness transcends illusion and the sense of self for this brief time, which attaches that soul to what does truly exist—Brahman.\textsuperscript{111}

Yet, if Brahman is the only thing that exists, we must then ask what everything else is that we perceive, and also how that has come to be? We know that we must rejoin with Brahman, but how have we become separate to begin with? To understand this, we will examine the Hindu creation story of the Day of Brahma.

The days and nights of Brahma are responsible for creation, rebirth, and finally the return of creation back to Brahman. Everything that exists is made up of energy from Brahman, however, which is itself made up of unmanifested energy.\textsuperscript{112} At the “dawn” of a Day of Brahma, which lasts for billions of our years, some of this unmanifested energy becomes manifest to create the many forms in the universe.\textsuperscript{113} This energy which is manifest is called prakriti.\textsuperscript{114} Contained within prakriti are the elements of nature, sense perception, action, and the mind.\textsuperscript{115} Within this, however, is a bit of unmanifested energy which constitutes the soul element for living beings.\textsuperscript{116} This is called the Atman soul, and is what distinguishes living beings from other kinds of objects.

Throughout this day of Brahma, a process called

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid, 133.
\textsuperscript{112} \textit{The Bhagavad Gita}, 45.
\textsuperscript{113} Kevin Brien, Eastern Religions, Lecture, January 23, 2012.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, 117.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, 69.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid, 71.
transmigration occurs.\textsuperscript{117} This process takes place as the Atman soul advances through a progression of reincarnations, through various kinds of life forms and animals, until it reaches the self-reflective form of humanity.\textsuperscript{118} Here, humans begin to perceive themselves as separate objects from other objects. They become “dependent” on these objects, which limits their ability to achieve knowledge of the true nature of everything.\textsuperscript{119} These hang-ups on one’s journey to enlightenment are called karma.\textsuperscript{120} If one dies in this state, without having overcome his or her karma to know the true Self, they are reincarnated again.\textsuperscript{121} These subsequent reincarnations are based on the kinds of karma which are accumulated throughout a person’s life.\textsuperscript{122} In this way, if one is particularly hung up over an obsession in one life, the next reincarnation will address this problem to balance the person out. This balancing cycle of birth and rebirth is known as Samsara.\textsuperscript{123} Once one has figured out the ultimate goal in life, they overcome their karma and find that underneath everything is Brahman, which is “unmanifested and unchanging.”\textsuperscript{124} This allows one to experience moksha, never to be reincarnated again. Everyone is somewhere along this road, and will eventually come to be joined with Brahman. At the end of the day of Brahma, the forms of everything will come together again and be united.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{117} Kevin Brien, Eastern Religions, Lecture, January 23, 2012.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{119} The Upanishads, 142.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid, 340.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid, 142.

\textsuperscript{122} The Upanishads, 109.

\textsuperscript{123} The Bhagavad Gita, 118.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid, 45.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid, 45.
Now we have established that Brahman is the nature of ultimate reality, and that the ultimate purpose of our lives is simply to experience our own interconnection with this Being again. In order to do this, we must overcome any sense of ego self as well as our misinterpretations of the illusion of prakriti. This leads us to an awareness of our interconnection to everything else around us through the Being that binds us all together. The next question to ask is this -- how one might actually go about overcoming the ego self and finding the way back to Brahman?

There is a story in the Chandogya Upanishad which answers just this question. It tells of a man’s own journey to enlightenment. Blindfolded and led from his town and into the wilderness, he looks out into the darkness and shouts, “I am left here and cannot see!” Here he remains until he is found by another man who removes his blindfold, and points out to him the direction of the lost man’s home, and the path which he might follow to find it. Informed and with his sight restored, the man then goes from village to village asking directions, and finally finds his homeland again. We can understand our own path to enlightenment in much the same way. Just as we are trapped by our senses of the world around us, we are blind and do not know how to return to Brahman. What makes the key difference here is the instruction of the enlightened individual, who helps us onto the path to find our own way home. His help allows us to see clearly so that we can know the world for what it is, and act based on that knowledge. The Upanishads are full of stories of students coming to enlightenment due to the guidance of sages and those established in Brahman to the path of Truth.

What about the path itself? Arjuna, the hero of the Bhagavad Gita, is guided in much the same way as the

126 The Upanishads, 137-138.

blindfolded man. Lost and despondent, he is instructed by Sri Krishna, who shows him ways to reach enlightenment.\textsuperscript{128} These are known as the four paths of yoga. They allow one to break the binds of karma in order to get closer to enlightenment.\textsuperscript{129} Each person comes to the spiritual path in different ways, though, for different reasons. This is further explained by Krishna, who explains that, “Some come to the spiritual life because of suffering, some in order to understand life; some come through a desire to achieve life’s purpose, and some come who are men and women of wisdom.”\textsuperscript{130} When one sees a deficiency in himself, he engages in a path of yoga to rectify this, though it is possible to engage in yoga without even being aware of it. The four paths of yoga include the paths of love, selfless action, knowledge, and meditation, and are all based in finding the interconnections between everything. For this reason, they are not mutually exclusive. Some paths are better suited to realize this goal than others, which are more difficult for most people.\textsuperscript{131} To illustrate this, we will examine two yoga—love and knowledge.

The yoga of love, called \textit{bhakti} yoga, is the easiest of the four paths.\textsuperscript{132} To understand why this is, we must examine the concept of love in Hinduism. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, this is explained when the wise man Yajnavalkya tells his wife that, “Everything is loved not for its own sake, but because the Self lives in it.”\textsuperscript{133} So, when we love another person, it is because we see this shared Self in them. Based on this assertion,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{128} \textit{The Bhagavad Gita}, 12.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Ibid, 12.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Ibid, 40-41.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Ibid, 66.
\item \textsuperscript{132} Ibid, 66.
\item \textsuperscript{133} \textit{The Upanishads}, 100.
\end{itemize}
we can understand how a yoga of love would lead one to Brahman quickly, as those who love and “strive for the good of all beings,” seeing the Self in them, will then come to realize the equality, sameness, and interconnection of beings and engage in selfless action for their benefit.\textsuperscript{134} These realizations cause the practitioner to “enter into” Brahman, having overcome bonds of karma built on personal obsessions and the illusion of the ego self.\textsuperscript{135} As something nearly everyone is able to practice, the yoga of love is by far more accessible than the other path under discussion—the path of knowledge.

The yoga of knowledge is known as \textit{jnana}, and is the most difficult of the four paths to follow. It is, as Krishna tells Arjuna, “hazardous and slow… [and] difficult for physical man to tread.”\textsuperscript{136} There are two main reasons for this. The first is that the study necessary for jnana is suited to fewer people than other paths, such as \textit{bhakti}, for example. Not everyone has the financial capability or certainly the inclination to spend their lives studying, whereas most people are capable of loving others. The second reason for its difficulty is simply that it can be misleading to practitioners. Chapter seven of the \textit{Chandogya Upanishad} tells the story of a man named Narada, who had spent his life studying everything, from the Vedas and the epics to nearly every other field of knowledge.\textsuperscript{137} And yet, even with all of this knowledge, he was not able to learn about the nature of the Self, and was miserable. Though he learned that one must go beyond the physical world to the Self to attain happiness, he had no idea how to experience this for himself. He had only ‘empty knowledge,’ so to speak, of nature and physical things, and wished to learn how to transcend these from the sage. As we can

\textsuperscript{134} \textit{The Bhagavad Gita}, 66.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid, 66.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid, 66.

\textsuperscript{137} \textit{The Upanishads}, 139.
see, it has taken this man a long time and a lot of effort to come to know that his own understanding is limited, as opposed to a person who finds his way through love, which is experientially based and more direct.

Effort does not go in vain, however, as Narada’s studies have led him to an illumined teacher, who will help to lead him to Brahman. It is important to note here again that paths are not exclusive, and that one way might lead to another, as in the case of Narada. Just as easily, one might follow many or few paths at once, consciously or unconsciously on the path towards enlightenment.

Enlightenment, moksha, or nirvana—whichever name you choose, to firmly establish yourself in this state is the ultimate goal of Hinduism. One who has done this is no longer affected by the pains and the pleasures of this life. He is instead “incapable of ill will… [and] is friendly and compassionate.” He is no longer bound by his own concept of separateness. The enlightened man instead acts selflessly in all he does, able to look “upon friend and foe with equal regard.” He no longer sees the distinction between himself and others, and has attained immortality at last.

Conclusion: Revisiting Hinduism from the Western Christian Perspective

In this context, we can again look to the misunderstandings between Hinduism and Christianity that were observed before, as seen in the case of the school teachers and the Methodist

---


139 Ibid, 67.

140 Ibid, 67.

141 Ibid, 67.
missionaries. The problematic assumptions of primitivism, idolatry, and polytheism melt away in this light. Far from primitive, the enormous scope and complexity of Hinduism encompasses all traditions and gods in its wake. It meets each individual at their own level and bestows to him or her a path to ‘salvation.’ Polytheism in Hinduism is also rendered incorrect based on the nature of the unity of Brahman.

While many aspects of these problems of interpretation are fundamentally based on a lack of knowledge about the other religion, respectively, on a deeper level there is a fundamental difference in how each views the world. Christianity sees a clear and infinite chasm between its God and its practitioners. Hinduism, we have seen, is built on the incorporation of many gods and traditions within the religion, everything a projection from the source of ultimate reality—Brahman.

<>

Bibliography


The Subjectivity of Science

Taylor Johnson

In the work “Objectivity, Value Judgment, and Theory Choice,” Thomas Kuhn attempts to highlight the subjective element present in choosing a scientific theory. In order to do this, Kuhn first maps out a set of objective criteria in which one chooses a theory. He then explains how the application of these criteria is by nature subjective. Although one may view Kuhn’s assertion that science is subjective as stunting the growth of science, this is not the case. By analyzing Kuhn’s theory, one can come to realize that a level of subjectivity lies in the choosing of scientific theories, but this subjectivity is necessary for the advancement of science.

Kuhn asserts that the five criteria in which a scientific theory should be judged on are accuracy, consistency, scope, simplicity, and fruitfulness. Each one of these criteria is a characteristic of a good scientific theory and exists as objective and holds a great individual importance. However, problems lie in the fact that an individual’s application of the criteria is imprecise because one criterion can easily conflict with another. The scope of a theory may be superior to another theory while its accuracy is to the same extent inferior. Kuhn finds accuracy to be the most decisive of the criteria, but still finds accuracy to fail in definitely discriminating between some theories. For example, a theory of Copernicus was originally much less accurate than a theory of Ptolemy, but eventually Kepler revised Copernicus’ theory and consequently improved its accuracy. If Kepler had merely judged Copernicus’ theory based on its accuracy, it would have never been improved and no advancement of science would have been made. Consequently, a theory cannot merely

---

143 Ibid., 201
144 Ibid
be chosen based on its accuracy.

Even if the other criteria are also applied in the evaluation of a theory, problems remain. Kuhn displays this by again bringing up the theories of Copernicus and Ptolemy. He asserts that consistency could be viewed as favoring Ptolemy while simplicity could be seen as favoring Copernicus. On the other hand, one could also view Ptolemy’s theory as being simpler than Copernicus’. A problem arises due to the fact that one theory seems superior in one criterion while inferior in another. Furthermore, the theory of Ptolemy is simpler than Copernicus’ theory when it comes to laborsaving techniques, but Copernicus’ theory is simpler than Ptolemy’s in the mathematical apparatus used.\(^{145}\) Two theories may both meet the criteria in different manners than one another. One theory may better uphold the criteria of simplicity than another in a certain area, but be less simple in another area.

The problem lies in the fact that two people who judge two theories using the same criteria may come to completely different conclusions as to which theory should be accepted. This occurs because one person may apply a criterion such as simplicity in a different manner than another one does.\(^{146}\) Because of this, one must come to understand that the criteria in which Kuhn had laid out cannot be the only factors in choosing a theory. The process for determining a theory must also lie in something which does not exist in the sciences. This could lie in the previous experiences and influences of a scientist. For example, Kepler’s advancement of Copernicus’ theory may have been due to the Neoplatonic and Hermetic movements occurring in his lifetime. Other factors may include personalities and preferences, which vary from scientist to scientist.\(^{147}\) The point Kuhn makes is not that science is completely governed by subjective factors, but that science is a mixture of objective and shared criteria coupled with subjective and individual criteria.

\(^{145}\) Ibid., 202
\(^{146}\) Ibid.,
\(^{147}\) Ibid
One may object to Kuhn’s assertion that theory choice must hold a level of subjectivity by asserting that research may eventually lead to a set of weighted criteria, which will objectively choose the correct theory. Kuhn attempts to reject this objection by stating that the search for objectively weighted criteria has gone on for an extended period of time, but research has failed to create a system which has been able to objectively weigh the criteria of a theory. Because of this lack of advancement towards this objective system, Kuhn asserts that most philosophers of science will agree with him that completely objective criteria are not realistic. Kuhn cannot reject the possibility that there exists a completely objective set of criteria for choosing a scientific possibility, but is successful in demonstrating how the possibility of that set of criteria does not exist as a sound basis for one to reject his theory.

It seems his theory is unattainable. In order to understand this, one only needs to notice the nature of those who make scientific decisions. It seems unrealistic for a scientist to forgo all his/her personal biases when choosing a theory. This becomes evident when one observes that the first proponents of a theory tend to hold the same individual concerns as the scientists who discovered the theory.

Outside the field of science, there exists situations where shared criteria may guide one to make a decision, but where this criteria does not definitely determine which decision must be made. A person may hold that both freedom of speech and preservation of life and property are values. However, randomly “yelling” fire in a crowded building would cause these two values to conflict with one another. To allow someone to yell in this situation would uphold the value of freedom of speech, but could cause panic and injury which would infringe upon the value of preservation of life and property. On the other hand,

---

148 Ibid., 203  
149 Ibid  
150 Ibid., 204  
151 Ibid., 205
infringing upon a person’s freedom of speech can prevent panic and preserve life and property. Similar to the choosing of scientific theories, personal biases will cause differences in opinion and decisions. This, however, does not usually lead a person to assert that his/her values should be abandoned. Instead, one should come to realize that it is unavoidable that a level of personal preference accompanies most criteria or value-based decisions.

Kuhn finds these possible differences in an individual’s application of values to be necessary for the advancement of science to occur. If a shared algorithm existed for choosing a scientific theory, scientists would not be inclined to test new theories which may not originally conform to the algorithm. It is the disagreements within the scientific community which allow for the advancement of science. The persuasiveness of this argument can be seen by again bringing up the contradiction between a person’s right to a freedom of speech and a person’s right to the preservation of life and property. It is fair to say that no algorithm exists which determines whether or not an action can be considered morally right or wrong, but by examining different values, the rules governing morality can be advanced. Contradicting values allow for the ethics to be questioned and re-questioned. This then allows for the advent of new ethical theories, which may better guide a person in making a decision than past theories have.

Although Kuhn asserts that subjectivity allows for the advancement of science, he also seems to imply that no objective truth exists. The subjectivity, which accompanies science, seems to display it as a social process. It seems unlikely that a process completely dependent on personal preference is leading science toward an objective truth. According to Steven Weinberg, Kuhn has frequently used the metaphor of biological evolution to describe the scientific process. Although the process does seem to advance itself, it is not moving toward a fixed goal or truth.

152 Ibid
153 Ibid., 206
New scientific theories are better at solving some problems than their predecessors, but this improvement of problem solving is not moving toward an objective truth.\(^{154}\)

This assertion that an objective truth does not exist may be objected to. It seems counterintuitive to believe that no objective truth exists. By appealing to common sense, a person can understand that there must be an objective truth. During a person’s lifetime, he/she perceives the world and the changes occurring within it. Because of this perception, one usually concludes that either a world or thoughts exist. If something exists, it must exist in a certain way. There must be some objective truth describing how something exists. Simply by knowing the existence of a thing, a person understands that there exists a truth concerning how that thing exists. However, this does not prove that science is moving toward an objective truth.

If there does exist an objective truth, it does seem as though science is advancing toward it. The acceptance of current scientific theories have led to the creation of cell phones, televisions, computers, the internet, and many other technological advancements. The efficiency of these advanced technologies seem to imply that science is moving closer toward an objective truth. It seems irrational to assume that the science behind these technologies is completely false. A person can call a friend and have a conversation from across the world via cell phone. Few people would find the science behind this call false because the phone functioned in manner way that it was intended and expected to. It could be true that the scientific theories backing the invention of the cell phone are false and it is by complete chance that the phone functions correctly. But the odds of this being the case are slim. Nevertheless, it is still very possible that the scientific beliefs held inventors of the cell phone could be completely different than the reality of how a cell phone functions.

Kuhn’s work “Objectivity, Value Judgment, and Theory Choice” offers a very convincing theory concerning the subjectivity involved in science. This argument makes it seem very plausible that individual biases are present in the choosing of scientific theories in fashion similar to the way in which it exists in making moral judgments. Furthermore, Kuhn’s method of theory choice allows for the advancement of science although, according to Weinberg, Kuhn does not believe in an objective truth of science. Whether or not a person believes in the existence of an objective truth, one cannot deny that the subjective element of science seems to push science in a positive direction.

<>

Bibliography


Contributors

Patrick Cannon is a senior majoring in Philosophy with a minor in Political Science.

Jim Schelberg is a senior double-majoring in Humanities and Philosophy.

Kristine Sloan is a senior double-majoring in English and Philosophy.

Julie Armstrong is a freshman majoring in English and considering a minor in the Humanities.

Emily Alicia Lasdin is a freshman majoring English with a Creative Writing minor.

Erin Cooper is a junior majoring in Political Science with two minors, one in Religion and another in Art History.

Taylor "Lenny" Johnson is a senior Philosophy major with a Religion minor.

<>