
UNIT 4 BRIEF HISTORY OF INDIAN METAPHYSICS

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4.0. OBJECTIVES

The present unit is oriented to:

- Provide an overview of the main metaphysical trends in India
- Provide the students with an opportunity to appreciate the metaphysical heritage of India

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Indian metaphysics has developed over more than three thousand years. It is a plurality of the ways of understanding Being, from a rich source of ideas reflected in the Vedas, the Upanishads, and particularly in the classical systems of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Metaphysics becomes explicit at various levels and in different contexts; in debates on soul, God, substances, universals, time, change, permanence/impermanence, one and many, etc.

4.2. THE VEDAS

The Vedas are seen as the fertile ground of Indian metaphysics. The Vedic seers did not stop with a mythological view of Reality. They did not rest content until they had a vision of the unlimited Being (*Tadekam*). The hymn where the unlimited Being appears is the *Nasadiya-sukta*, which has been praised as containing ‘the flower of Indian thought.’ This hymn is the quintessence of Indian metaphysics. All things are traced to one principle. Opposites like being and non-being, life and death, night and day, are shown to be the self-unfolding of ‘That One.’ *Tadekam* is the ground of the universe. Because it is devoid of differences and definiteness, it is referred to as ‘That One’ ‘which is in some way’. It is neither a particular being nor non-being (nothing) but ‘something’ which is beyond them while being their core and ground. In this way, the hymn traces the origin of the universe to a single Primordial ground which unfolds itself or the universe in all its diversity: ‘That One’ (*Tadekam*). The hymn says, “In the beginning there was neither Being nor non-Being. That One breathed calmly, self-sustained”. But it had within it the latent power out of which the universe, including the gods, emerged. The point to be noted here is the conception of the ultimate entity as dynamic or self-evolving, and as requiring no outside power

to guide and shape it. It is a hymn of Being. It is an invocation to the Being that transcends all the other beings of knowledge. It provides an experiential insight into the making of that Being. It does not deal with the beginning of the cosmos or with its evolution. It is a profound union of the unconditioned condition of all other conditions, namely, Being. It expresses a luminous awareness that Being is beyond being (existent = *sat* = *ens*) and non-being (non-existent = *asat* = *non-ens*). Being is beyond being and non-being while being in them, while being their only ground.

4.3. THE UPANISADS

Though the Upanisads do not work out a logically coherent system of metaphysics, they give us a few fundamental doctrines which are truly metaphysical, especially the concept *Brahman*. *Brahman* is the ultimate cause of the universe. In the *Chandogya Upanisad*, it is described as '*Tajjalan*.' *Tajjalan* means that (*tat*) from which the world arises (*ja*), into which it returns (*la*), and by which it is supported and it lives (*an*). In the *Taittiriya Upanisad*, *Brahman* is described as that from which all beings are born, by which they live, and into which they are reabsorbed. From *Brahman* arises or evolves ether, from ether air, from air fire, from fire water, and from water earth. But the real theory of evolution is given in the doctrine of the five sheaths (*koshas*) in the same *Upanisad*. The lowest level is that of matter (*annamaya*). Matter is unconscious and cannot account for life. *Brahman* cannot rest content with matter. The inorganic matter must be transformed into organic life. Hence the second state of evolution is life (*pranamaya*). This vegetative life must lead to the animal life. But life is fulfilled only when consciousness is evolved. Hence the third state of life emerges: mind (*manomaya*). This state of instinctive consciousness is shared by lower animals with humans. The subject-object duality is absent here. The instinctive consciousness will be fulfilled only when a higher principle has been evolved where consciousness becomes self-consciousness or rationality. Hence the fourth state of evolution is self-conscious reason (*vijnanamaya*). This metaphysical plane is the sole monopoly of human beings. The fifth and the highest level of evolution is the state of bliss (*anandamaya*), the divine plane. Thus, *Brahman* transcends all, and yet underlies all as their background. The lower is transformed in the higher. *Brahman* is the immanent inner controller of all (*antaryamin*) and the self of all (*sarva-bhutantaratma*). As all spokes are contained in the axle and the wheel, so all beings are contained in *Brahman*.

4.4. THE BHAGAVAD GITA

The metaphysical synthesis of the *Gita* came as an answer to a crisis caused by the *Upanisads* that minimized the significance of action. In the *Gita*, Krsna puts forth a convincing vision of life where a human can follow one's *dharma*, perform actions, and yet escape rebirth and attain liberation. Krsna's task is to show Arjuna his duty and at the same time show him the path to *moksa*. For Krsna, if a person were to act without attachment to its fruit (*niskama karma*), his actions would not have karmic consequences. In other words, one's *karma* depends on the way one acts, the 'way of action' or *karmamarga*. This is followed by the 'way of knowledge' (*jnanamarga*), and finally the 'way of devotion' (*bhaktimarga*) to *Brahman* or God. Thus, the *Gita* is essentially theistic in its teaching. *Brahman* is personal; he is called both *Brahman* and God. The world, including *atman*, is part of *Brahman*. However, *Brahman* is always transcendent. He is invisible as he is shrouded by *Maya*. He is also both unmanifest and manifest, one and many, undivided and divided. In other words, he is both transcendent and immanent, transient and intransient as *atman*.

The period of classical Indian metaphysics is represented by the great metaphysical systems. But these systems are not entirely innovative as they have drawn their views from the earlier teachings. They are either *astika* (orthodox) if they accept the authority of the *Vedas*, or *nastika* (unorthodox) if they do not. The unorthodox schools include Buddhism, Jainism, and Carvaka. There are six orthodox schools: *Nyaya*, *Vaishesika*, *Samkhya*, *Yoga*, *Mimamsa*, and *Vedanta*.

4.5. METAPHYSICAL SYSTEMS

Nyaya

The whole metaphysics of Nyaya is given by Gautama, under the category of the knowable. Knowable means what ought to be known for the sake of knowing the truth about the world, for the sake of salvation. The knowable is what ought to be known through the exact measurement of epistemological instruments. The soul is a substance possessing mental attributes such as desire, aversion, pleasure, pain, and intelligence. It exists by itself and supports mental qualities. Consciousness is an adventitious quality of the soul. Knowledge arises in the soul when it comes in contact with the world of objects through the mind.

Vaisesika

The *Vaisesika* school is more concerned with metaphysics; it wants to know about the underlying structure and reality of our experience. It undertakes a process of analysis, starting with the basic substances of earth, water, fire, air, and their particular qualities of taste, colour, touch, and smell. It argues that everything is divisible into smaller and smaller parts, and ultimately one comes to that something which is theoretically indivisible, called *paramanu*, with which everything is composed of. This philosophy takes experience as the starting point of knowledge; all that we can know comes through the senses. Whatever is experienced can be analyzed into *padartha* (category) which has existence, can be known and articulated. There are seven of these: substance, quality, action, class character, individual character, inseparability, and non-existence. All of them are seen as 'real'. Thus, what is experienced has an underlying substance, beyond particular characteristics and relations with other things. But those characteristics and relations are as real as the substance of that which displays them. They are all part of the phenomena of the world as we experience it.

Samkhya

Samkhya is claimed to be the oldest of the Indian metaphysical systems since there are references to it – especially the two key concepts of *Samkhya* thought: *prakrti* and *purusa* (representing matter and consciousness)—in the *svetashvatara Upanisad* and the *Mahabharata*; so the elements of *Samkhya* must at least be as old as those works. *Samkhya* is a dualism of spirit and matter, *Purusa* and *Prakrti*. Matter is the primeval stuff (prime matter) or material which constitutes everything from inorganic matter to mind, all of which constantly goes through change. Even our mind and reason are subject to change. The world of change or transformation is one, not many. By itself it is completely unconscious; whereas *purusa* is pure consciousness. *Purusa* comes in contact with *prakrti* and throws the reflection of its consciousness on *prakrti*. Although *prakrti* is one, *purusas* are infinite in number. Hence, there are an infinite number of reflections in the same *prakrti*. As soon as the reflections are encountered, *prakrti* begins to evolve the world. Since *prakrti* is the same, the objective world it evolves for all the *purusas* is the same. The communication among *purusas* is made possible through the identity of *prakrti*. All aspects of

physical existence belong to *prakrti*. It is the first cause and all-pervading principle of the entire physical universe in all its concrete and abstract forms.

Yoga

Yoga offers a set of disciplines that lead to liberation. Its origins are ancient, but Patanjali wrote the *Yoga Sutras*, the oldest of the *Yoga* texts. Although *Yoga* follows the metaphysics of *Sankhya* there is one significant difference from the *Sankhya*, as it includes the idea of a personal God – *ishvara*, besides its stress on moments of transformation, and integration of reason and action.

Mimamsa (Purva Mimamsa)

The *Purva Mimamsa* metaphysics is the metaphysics of ethical action. It is pluralistic and its central interest lies in showing the efficacy of ethical action. It substitutes ethical action for God himself. The efficacy of ethical action is a force that creates the forms of the world, but not its being. It is the controller and organizer of the world. Yet, plurality is a real fact. The world is created by action and is meant for action. Human life is characterized by action. Even if a human wants to get rid of action, he can do so only through action. *Dharma* is the central problem for *Mimamsa*. *Dharma* is that which supports the universe. It holds the plurality together without allowing a falling apart of the manifold. It is the good which impels a human to action. It brings forth the desired fruit of action. If the *dharma* is ethically right, its fruit produces enjoyment; if it is ethically wrong, its fruit produces suffering and we call it *adharma*.

4.6. VEDANTA

The term *Vedanta* itself means ‘end or purpose of the *Vedas*’, and it is primarily concerned with *Brahman*, the Absolute Being described in the *Upanisads*. It is also concerned to produce a consistent interpretation of the *Vedas*. The earliest existing work of this school is the *Vedantasutra* of Badarayana (C. 500-250 B.C.E.) who tried to systematize the different philosophical tendencies in the *Upanisads*. Later scholars like samkara, Ramanuja and Madhva wrote commentaries on Badarayana’s *Sutras* giving different interpretations. The central issue treated by them is the relation between *Brahman*, the individual soul and the world.

Sankara (c. 788-820 C.E.)

Sankara’s *Brahmasutrabhasya* is one of the most important works on Indian metaphysics. In it he comments on the *Upanisads*, the *Gita*, and the *Brahmasutra*. The entire philosophy of Sankara can be summed up in the following statement: *Brahma satyam, jagad mithya, jivo brahmaiva naparah* (Brahman is real, the world is false, the self is not different from Brahman). He claims that the ordinary world as we perceive it is in fact *maya*. The only fundamental reality is *Brahman*. This approach is termed *advaita* which means ‘one-without-a-second’ or ‘non-dualism’ – there are not two realities, but only one.

BRAHMAN: Sankara accepts the reality of *Brahman* based on the *Upanisads*. *Brahman* is described in different ways by the *Upanisads*, and the descriptions can ultimately be churned into three constitutive characteristics: Being (*sat*), Consciousness (*cit*), and Bliss (*ananda*). The world of forms appears as being because the Being of *Brahman* or Being that is *Brahman* shines through the world. ‘He is all-pervasive, the indwelling Self of all, the regulator of all actions, the

support of all beings, the witness, consciousness, non-dual, and without qualities'. Being is consciousness itself. Consciousness accompanies one's cognitions. Through my subjective consciousness and the objective world, the same Being shines. The ultimate Being that is consciousness is *Brahman* itself. Brahman is the highest transcendental truth in which all subject-object distinction is obliterated. Brahman is devoid of all distinctions, without qualities (*nirguna*). Apart from *nirguna Brahman*, there is *saguna Brahman* (Brahman with qualities). The knowledge of *Nirguna Brahman* alone is the highest and liberating knowledge. *Brahman* is both higher (*parabrahman*) and lower (*aparabrahman*). The lower *Brahman* is not ultimately real. It is the same higher *Brahman* (the only real) facing the world of objectivity. However, the lower *Brahman* is not overwhelmed and overpowered by *Maya*, just as a witness who witnesses people fighting is not overpowered by what one witnesses. This lower *Brahman* is *ishvara* (God) with qualities (*saguna*); whereas the higher *Brahman* is one without qualities (*nirguna*). While *Brahman* is known to us as beyond itself, *ishvara* is only a thought-product.

BADHA: Central to Sankara's teaching is the concept of *badha*, which means 'sublation.' Sublation is the mental process of correcting and rectifying the errors of judgment. In this process one disvalues a previously held view or content of consciousness on account of its being contradicted by a new experience. Sublation not only requires rejection of an object, but also that such rejection must occur in light of a new judgment to which belief is attached and which replaces initial judgment. By using this criterion of sublation, Sankara discusses three orders of existence in his commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*: absolute existence, empirical existence, and illusory existence. *Absolute existence* is that principle which cannot be sublated by any other experience. Sublation presupposes a dualism between the experiencer and the experienced. It involves plurality of objects because sublation juxtaposes one object or content of consciousness and judges the first to be of lesser value. The experience of reality is non-dual, and therefore no other object or content of consciousness can replace it. Brahman is the only reality, which sublates everything while remaining unsublatable by any other experience whatsoever. *Empirical or Phenomenal Existence* is the objective universe, the world of experience, governed by cause and effect. It persists till the direct knowledge of Brahman is attained. As it is not ultimately real, it is sublated with the experience of Brahman. *Illusory Existence* is the false appearance of something. An illusory existence – characterized by illusions, hallucinations, dreams, and wrong perceptions – fails to fulfill the functions for everyday empirical truth. For instance, the illusion of a mirage comes to an end when a person, in the wake of a new experience, realizes that it was not real. The illusory existences are sublated by the ordinary empirical standpoint. Thus, it can be said that Sankara upholds a synoptic-experiential theory of truth. Firstly, it means that truth is determined synoptically, or from the totality of experience, in such a way that it includes both a coherence and a consistency theory. Secondly, what is experienced is true until some other experience disvalues it (e.g., the world is real for a perceiver till one experiences that it was a false experience, like one who takes a rope to be a snake until the person realizes that it was an illusory experience). Dreams or illusions are sublated by waking experiences, which in turn are sublated by the experience of Brahman (reality). Consequently, what is not 'real' is not always 'unreal.' Real means real forever or eternal, and thus Brahman is the only reality. Unreal means unreal forever, and unreal objects cannot become an object of our experience; e.g., a square circle, son of a virgin woman. In order for an object to be sublutable, it must become an object of our experience, and accordingly, unreal is that which cannot be sublated by any other experience. There is only one reality, Brahman, and no experience can sublute the Brahman-experience.

Ramanuja (1017 – 1137 C.E.)

The *Vishistadvaita* tradition of Ramanuja affirmed the objective realities of the material world (*acit*), individual souls (*cit*) and God (*ishvara*). Ramanuja taught the way of devotion, and held a theistic view of reality. Devotion leads a person to see oneself as dependent on God. For Samkara, the absolute is impersonal; whereas for Ramanuja, it is personal – *ishvara*. Ramanuja's metaphysics is the metaphysics of the non-dualism of the qualified *Brahman* (*Vishistadvaita*). *Brahman* is non-dual yet qualified by the world and the individual spirits. *Brahman* is the unity of the differences constituting the world of differences - an identity in difference (*bhedabheda*). Ramanuja finds justification for his doctrine of identity in difference in some Upanishadic passages like the *svetashvatara Upanisad* that declares the Absolute as constituted. Thus, for Ramanuja, Brahman is an organic unity, unity-in-diversity. The most original aspect of Ramanuja's metaphysics is the rejection of the principle that to be real means to be independent. Although soul and matter are substances, in relation to God they become his attributes, his body, and he is their soul. Just as qualities cannot exist apart from the substances in which they subsist, similarly matter and souls are parts of Brahman and they cannot exist apart from Brahman.

Madhva (1197-1276)

Madhva is a dualist because he believes that the differences and distinctions are real. He is a *bhedavadin* who asserts that there are real distinctions between God and souls, one soul and another, God and matter, and one object and another. The differences are eternal and they do not disappear even in a deluge (*pralaya*). Individual souls and matter are dependent as they cannot exist apart from *Brahman*. God (*ishvara*) is the efficient but not the material cause of the universe. The individual souls are atomic in size and infinite in number. Souls possess limited power, knowledge, and bliss as they are observed by *karma* caused by ignorance. Their actions, knowledge, ignorance, bondage, and deliverance are caused by God in accordance with their *Karma*. The soul possesses two aspects: the essential and unchanging, and the external and changing. The latter consists of the physical body, senses, mind, the subtle body, and the perishable *samskaras*. Its native qualities of infinite knowledge and bliss remain latent as long as the soul is under ignorance. They become manifest progressively as the soul attains greater and clearer knowledge.

4.7. BUDDHISM

Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 BCE), later to be called the '*Buddha*' (meaning 'the fully awakened one'), is described as having lived a life of princely luxury and then given it up to follow the path of enlightenment. His quest was to find the cause of suffering and the means of overcoming it. His teaching was more practical than theoretical. He propounded a theory of impermanence and momentariness. Reality is a continuous flux. The experience of permanence is an illusion. Only becoming is real. Just as the self is a stream of consciousness, so the world is a number of accidents ever changing and being renewed at every moment. He proposed the doctrines of *anatmata* and *anicca*. They avoid the tyranny of eternalism and nihilism. By avoiding the extremes of being and non-being, he emphasised the concept of becoming: "There is neither being nor non-being but becoming". Everything has in it the possibility of becoming what it has not yet been. All things are made of one essence, yet they are many according to the forms they assume under different impressions. There is no soul. He also advocated the doctrine

of Dependent Organization (*pratityasamutpada*) which states that complex things developed out of the combinations of several factors. For example, a flame is not a separate unit but a visible resultant of several items such as wick, oil, and fire working in a set pattern. Thus everything depends on every other thing. Nothing has an existence in itself. Nothing is self-created and sustaining. A thing is what it is because of its relation to other things. All is *svabhavashunya* (devoid of one's nature). Causality is nothing but the co-existence and co-ordination of innumerable, momentary existences.

Although Buddha was not for metaphysics, his followers became divided on the grounds of metaphysics. The principal schools are four: *Vaibhasika*, *Sautrantika*, *Yogacara*, and *Madhyamika*. The first two belong to *Hinayana*, and the other two are *Mahayana* schools.

4.8. JAINISM

Jain tradition claims that there has been a succession of twenty-four teachers, over a very long period of time. They are known as the 'ford-makers' (*tirthamkaras*) since they help their followers to cross over the stream of this world to a place of security and salvation. Of the ford-makers, only the last is recognized as a historical person and is known as Vardhamana Mahavira (c.540-468 BCE). Jainism is a heterodox system which rejects the authority of the *Vedas* and denies the existence of God. It divides reality into two fundamental, independent, and exclusive categories of soul (*jiva*) and matter (*ajiva*). The Jaina metaphysics is a metaphysics of substance. Everything is a substance including motion, rest, space, and action. Substance is that which has characteristics. Characteristics are of two kinds: essential characteristics (*gunas*) and changing modes (*paryayas*). Substance is divided into the extended and the unextended. Only time is the unextended substance. Extended substance is divided into the animate and the inanimate. The animate is the soul or spirit (*jiva, atman*). The soul is of two kinds: the liberated and the bound. The bound is again of two kinds: the moving and the non-moving. The non-moving are plants which have only the sense of touch. The moving are of four kinds: five-sensed beings like humans, four-sensed beings like bees, three-sensed beings like ants, and two-sensed beings like worms.

4.9. SAIVISM

Siva or Rudra as the Supreme Reality is central to Saivism. Saivism is divided into *Vira Saivism* and *Saiva Sidhanta*. *Vira Saivism* is also known as *Lingayata* or *Satsthala*. Saivism is also divided on the basis of region: Southern Saivism (*Saiva Sidhanta*) and Northern Saivism (Kashmir Saivism or *Pratyabhijna*). **Saiva Sidhanta** speaks of three eternal entities: *pati* (God), *pashu* (soul), and *pasha* (bond). Siva is the Supreme Reality (*pati*) who possesses the eight attributes: self-existence, essential purity, intuitive wisdom, infinite intelligence, freedom from all bonds, infinite grace or love, omnipotence, and infinite bliss. Siva is the first cause, his *sakti* the instrumental cause, and *maya* the material cause of this world. Siva also performs the five functions: creation, preservation, destruction, obscuration, and liberation of souls. The individual souls are called *pashu*. For like *pashu* or cattle they are bound by the rope of *avidya* to this world. The soul is really an all-pervading, eternal, conscious agent and enjoyer. The bound souls mistake themselves as limited in will, thought, and action; their original nature is restored to them in liberation. The fetters which bind the souls are called *pasha*. They are threefold: *avidya*,

karma and *maya*. **Kashmir Saivism** accepts the basic principle that pure consciousness is the spiritual substance of the universe. However, it differs from the *Samkhya* and the *Vedanta* systems. The *Samkhya* system postulates two independent realities—*purusa* and *prakrti*—and thus constructs a dualism. The *Vedanta* system postulates a single ultimate reality, *Brahman*, supported by the principle of *maya* which is neither real nor unreal (a conception counter to logic). Kashmir Saivism attempts to solve the problem by constructing a pure monism which postulates a single reality with two aspects: the transcendent and the immanent. The former is beyond all manifestations and the latter pervades the whole universe. Both are real as the effect cannot be different from its cause. Consequently, Kashmir Saivism reconciles the dualism of the *Samkhya* with the monism of the *Vedanta*.

4.10. SIKHISM: GURU NANAK (1469-1539)

Nanak's metaphysical ideas are crystallized in numerous songs, hymns, and oral discourses called the *Gurbani*, literally meaning the 'guru's word'. These include *Majh Ki Var*, *Patti*, *Dakhni Onkar*, *Sidh Gosht*, and *Var Malhar*. Nanak argues that there is only one God, the true creator and the omnipotent master. He is *Nirankar* or formless, infinite, and immortal. Hence, he cannot be reincarnated and should not be conceived in the shape of an idol. He cannot also assume human form since the human body is subject to decay. Since there is only one God, the best way to achieve communion with him is through the *Guru*, who is the spiritual teacher, prophet, enlightener, and a human representative of God. Nanak regarded himself as a *guru* through whom God chose to speak.

4.11. CONTEMPORARY INDIAN METAPHYSICS

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)

Vivekananda is an idealist as he believes the ultimate reality to be spiritual. Reality is one absolute *Brahman*. Real as a 'whole' implies that there must be parts. But absolute is perfect unity, and therefore the distinction between parts and whole completely vanishes. The absolute *Brahman* is also beyond space, time, and causation, and thus changeless. The changeless absolute is indeterminate without any attribute. However, the absolute can be described as *sat-chit-ananda*. Love is the essential core of *ananda* (bliss). Metaphysically speaking, reality is absolute *Brahman*, and the same reality viewed from the religious point of view is God, who is all-pervasive, present everywhere and in everything.

Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938)

Thought has a deeper aspect as it can reach the immanent Infinite to whose unfolding movement all the finite concepts belong. It is not necessary to transcend thought to experience reality; instead of deriving thought and intellect from intuition, intuition can be derived from thought. The whole is a kind of "preserved Tablet" (in the words of the Koran), which holds together all the undetermined possibility as a present reality, revealing in time all of them in serial succession. Reality is pure duration and consciousness reveals it to us in intuition which is the deeper aspect of thought. The self has two aspects: the external and the internal. The external enters into relation with the things of space. The internal is the 'apperceptive reached I moments' of profound meditation. In the process of the internal ego, all states of consciousness melt into one another. The unity of ego is like a seed out of which a variety of forms germinate.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

Tagore is a non-dualist, but not like Samkara. The absolute in its perfection, living away from all that happens in the world, is of no interest to Human. The absolute is a creative person who acts and creates, whom we can love and be loved. Love is more important than knowledge. In knowledge, the distinctions are either kept separate or completely dissolved in a rare unity. But in love, the lover and the beloved are distinguished, yet united. Love retains both unity and difference. Love is the consummation of knowledge. True knowledge is a knowledge of things that retains the distinctions and yet grasps them in their unity.

M. K. GANDHI (1869-1948)

Gandhi's metaphysics is strictly theistic. He identifies reality with Truth which is God Himself. God is described as Truth as God alone is real. God is truth and truth is God. This is not a logical abstract truth, but the spiritual and metaphysical. Truth is the law that supports humans and the universe; God is both the law and the law-giver. God is love itself. For, God is affectional and affective by nature. Truth prevails over one's falsity and falsehood in every conflict between two sides. One should hold fast to truth. Then one will be supported by truth. Falsity leads to non-existence. As truth, God and love are the same, and one should stick to love. One should follow the path of non-violence. The opposite of love is violence.

KRISHNACHANDRA BHATTACHARYA (1875-1949)

The Absolute is completely indefinite as it is neither objective nor subjective. As it is indefinite, it transcends both the subjective and the objective. The subjective and the objective are never free from contents that are definite. The Absolute can be conceived in a triple way: Absolute of knowing, absolute of willing and absolute of feeling. *Absolute of Knowing*: It is not a content of knowing since content is freed from any reference to knowing. It is completely unrelated to knowing; it cannot be known. *Absolute of Willing*: It is absolute freedom. It is the negation of being. Consciousness here has been freed from the content and in this sense absolute is contentless. *Absolute of Feeling*: Reflection is aware of the demand for the unity of the content felt and its feeling, but does not understand it. Such a unity—free from the duality of content and consciousness—is the Absolute of feeling.

SRI AUROBINDO (1872-1950)

Aurobindo is a non-dualist (advaitic), but different from that of samkara. *Maya* is the real power of *Brahman*, part and parcel of consciousness. It is the creative power of *Brahman* who descends through it to the world of matter. There is nothing that is not permeated by *Brahman* and thus everything is real. The conscious is permeated by the unconscious and vice versa. Both the conscious and the unconscious are powers of *Brahman*. *Brahman* is pure existence and it is the very nature of the power of *Brahman* to manifest itself as the world of finite objects and selves. The universe is the power of *Brahman* manifesting itself. In the process of evolution all beings constantly return to *Brahman*. This return to the primordial power of Being results in the evolution of the spirit into higher forms of consciousness. For Aurobindo, unlike Darwin, all beings are the evolutes of the spirit. Every being has something in common with every other being. The ordinary distinction between the lower (plant) and the higher (animal) is not an essential distinction but only one of degree. The lower is constantly struggling to evolve into the higher, and the higher is always reflected in the lower. The universe is a constant evolutionary

play between the lower and the higher, and the summit of evolution is the attainment of *saccidananda*.

There are nine stages of the descent and ascent of the Absolute or Supreme Spirit into matter and from matter: existence, consciousness, bliss, supermind, overmind, mind, psyche, life, and matter. The stages from mind to matter belong to the empirical world. The stages from supermind are supernals and divine. The overmind is the mediator between mind and supermind through the veil of *maya* that separates the two. The overmind corresponds to the witness-consciousness of *Vedanta*. The first three levels beginning with existence constitute *Brahman* which is *sacchidananda*. *Maya* stays between the mind and the supermind, and *maya* and the overmind belong to each other.

S. RADHAKRISHNAN (1888-1975)

The metaphysics of Radhakrishnan is advaitic (non-dualistic) like that of Samkara. From the standpoint of our thought the world is distinct from *Brahman*. But from the standpoint of intuition the world and *Brahman* are identical. This identity is a dynamic identity as the phenomenal world of finite objects and selves is the dynamic manifestation of the power of *Brahman*. *Brahman* is eternally active, and selves and objects are its activity. The power (*maya*) by which *Brahman* manifests itself as the world is *Brahman* itself.

JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI (1895-1986)

He is an anti-traditionist. He opposes all tradition, dogmas, and creeds. Truth is a pathless land; every human should try the spiritual quest by oneself. Nothing can be an absolute guide. Schools and dogmas encourage exclusiveness and intensify our egoism based on illusion. In real truth there is no division between the I and the Thou. True knowledge lies in catching reality in its living process which is life itself, God-self. It is we ourselves. It is ignorance to worship reality other than we. Reality is non-dual. When we are fully conscious of ourselves we realize our oneness with it. The separate I or ego is an illusion. It is called self-consciousness, but we do not have complete self-consciousness. It is a beginningless illusion. But can have an end. It ceases as soon as we realize our concern with eternal life. Evolution naturally leads human to the realization of one's oneness with eternal life. Evolution is towards the realization of self-consciousness which cannot be stopped with the human's ego. The forces of evolution will bring about salvation. But it is not clear whether Krishnamurti believes in the automatic salvation of all of us through evolution, whether we want it or not.

RICHARD DE SMETH (1916-1997)

In working out his thesis, *The Theological Method of Sankara*, De Smet found that Sankara, on account of his belief in *Sruti*, was forced to propose the view that there is only one Reality. While presenting the views of Sankara, the usual interpretation by the scholars of Sankara has been that the rest of reality is only *maya*. But De Smet presented a new interpretation of Sankara, according to which there is only one Reality in the sense that there is only one first cause of being (the total cause), and the rest cannot be called being in the same sense. For De Smet, the truth *Advaita Vedanta* distills from the *Upanisads* is that Brahman is the highest Lord and highest *atman* of all the beings of the universe since it is their total cause. In the richness of its fullness, it exceeds all that we are or can wish to attain because it is Reality-Knowledge-Infinite and therefore absolute Bliss. Its effects can add nothing to its infinity. The effects exist through its causal presence within them.

They are inseparable from it and cannot be counted apart from it. As to their reality, they are neither Being nor non-being in the supreme sense of those terms. Hence, their connection with Brahman is not duality but non-duality (*advaita*), which is not the same as monism. Similar conceptions mark the progress of Christian thought from the Greek and Latin Fathers to the medieval and modern theologians.

RAIMON PANIKKAR (1918-2010)

The focal point of Panikkar's metaphysical thought, which provides the key to understand all his writings, is the principle of radical relativity of the entire reality. Relativity is distinct from relativism. Relativism is generally contrasted with dogmatism and identified with indifferentism and perspectivism in regard to the perception of truth. Radical relativity, instead, conveys the ontological nature of the whole reality which is a web of relationships. Nothing can be understood without reference to its being-in-relation to the rest of reality. This approach affirms at once both the oneness and manyness of reality, and strikes at the root of all dualism and dichotomy. In other words, every being bears in itself the stamp of the divine, the human, and the cosmic. To signify this inseparable relation, Panikkar coins a jarring new term – *cosmotheandric* – in which *cosmos* (universe), *theos* (God), and *aner* (human) are not simply three dimensions of a whole, but all the three are present in every single being. The principle of radical relativity can be seen in the deeper law that governs it. Panikkar calls it '*ontonomy*.' Ontonomy is neither *heteronomy* nor *autonomy*. For heteronomy indicates the state of being governed from without, implying a tilt towards the pole of *theos*. On the other hand, *autonomy* refers to the state in which beings are self-ruled without relatedness to other beings. This frees the reality from the pole of *theos* and orients it towards the cosmic and the human. Both heteronomy and autonomy cause polarization, whereas ontonomy is that state of conscience which overcomes both individualism of autonomy as well as monolithism of heteronomy, as ontonomy is the realization of the *nomos* – the law of being. The same vision of unity leads Panikkar to also link time and eternity, expressed in another neologism of his – *tempiternity* (unity of time and eternity). Tempiternity is the indissoluble unity of all reality, which bears in itself some dimension of transcendence as well as some dimension of temporality. This holistic and integrated vision of reality calls for a corresponding language which is more adequate than the usual language of *logos*. Logos is a partial language that tends to drive a wedge between being and consciousness, subject and object. It is in this context of the inadequacy of the language of the logos that Panikkar underlines the importance of symbols and *mythos*. In Panikkar's view, myth belongs neither to the subjective pole nor to the objective pole. It is the authentic language of faith. It brings together the spoken, the spoken to, the spoken with, and the spoken of, comprehending within its purview also the logical. The language of symbol and myth open the door to pluralism which is the concomitant of the radical relatedness of all reality. Pluralism underlies and unites both unrelated plurality and monolithic unity. Pluralism affirms that in the actual polarities of human existence, not in uniformity, we find our real being.

Check Your Progress

Note: Use the space provided for your Answers.

- 1) Explain briefly the Vedic and Upanishadic conception of Metaphysics.

2) How does the metaphysics of the orthodox systems differ from that of the heterodox systems?

4.12. LET US SUM UP

The *Vedas* are seen as the fertile ground of Indian metaphysics. The Rigvedic hymn where the unlimited Being appears is the *Nasadiya-sukta*, which is a clear and profound expression of the ancient Indian metaphysical pursuit continued in the *Upanisads*' teaching, that ultimate reality is everlasting, infinite, immeasurable and all-pervading unity. The *Gita* offers a synthesis of many existing teachings within an overall framework of the ultimate self or reality that is indestructible and eternal. This self is also the knowable. The whole metaphysics of Gautama is given by him under the category of the knowable. Knowable means what ought to be known for the sake of knowing the truth about Being, through the exact measurement of epistemological instruments used for distinguishing or dividing things. Similarly, *Vaishesika* argues that everything is divisible into smaller and even smaller parts, and ultimately one comes to that something which is theoretically indivisible, called *paramanu*, with which everything is composed of. *Samkhya*, a dualism of *purusa* and *prakrti*, considers matter as the primeval stuff (prime matter) or material which constitutes everything from inorganic matter to mind, all of which constantly goes through change. *Yoga* philosophy accepts the metaphysical views of the *Samkhya* despite the stress of the former on discipline, practice, or action. The *Purva Mimamsa* metaphysics is also the metaphysics of action. It is pluralistic and its central interest lies in showing the efficacy of ethical action. It substitutes ethical action for God Himself – a concern of the Vedantic thinkers too. Although Vedanta attempted to create a single consistent metaphysical vision out of the material in the *Upanisads*, there are inevitably some differences of view. One problem concerns the extent to which *Brahman* can be said to be an agent. After all, if he transforms himself into the things of the world, then he takes a direct role in their coming into being. On the other hand, Vedanta (like other Indian metaphysical systems) includes the idea of *karma* – that everything is the result of good or bad actions already performed. Does that mean that some things are caused by *karma* and others by the direct transforming action of *Brahman*? These issues are discussed by various Vedantic thinkers like Samkara, Ramanuja, and Madhva, whose thinking is diametrically opposed to that of the Charvakas for whom consciousness is simply the result of the coming together of the elements that form the person. It is concomitant to the Buddhists' theory of impermanence and momentariness. Reality is a continuous flux. The experience of permanence is an illusion. Only becoming is real. Jainism divides the reality into independent and exclusive categories of soul (*jiva*) and matter (*ajiva*). In the same way, Saiva Sidhanta speaks of metaphysical entities: *pati* (God), *pashu* (soul), and *pasha* (bond). In contemporary Indian metaphysics too, many of these issues concerning the absolute dominate. There is a

persistent tendency to either accept, reject, or reinterpret the Vedantic conception of the Absolute.

4.13. FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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