

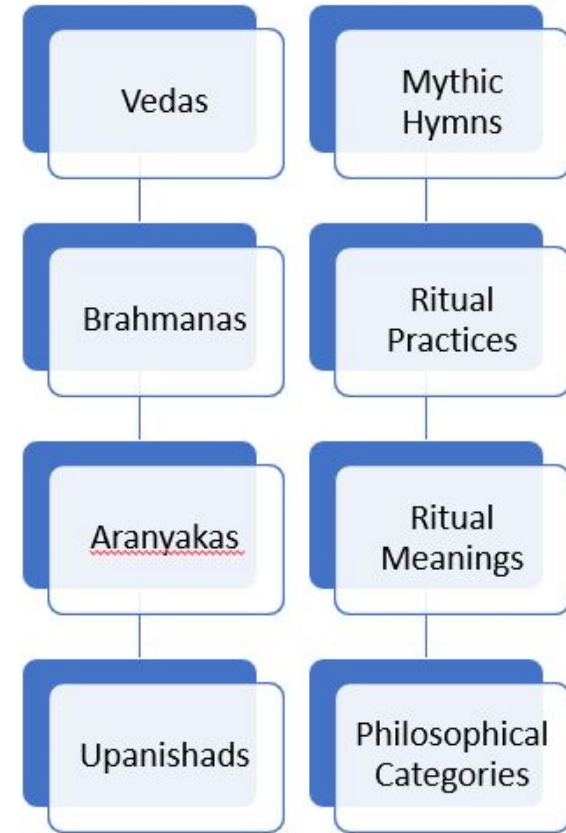
Hinduism 2 – Vedantic Philosophy

The Self: East and West

Revision

Vedas - 4 sets of texts, containing mostly mythic hymns and descriptions of rituals.
Rigveda, Samurveda, Jagurveda, Atharvaveda

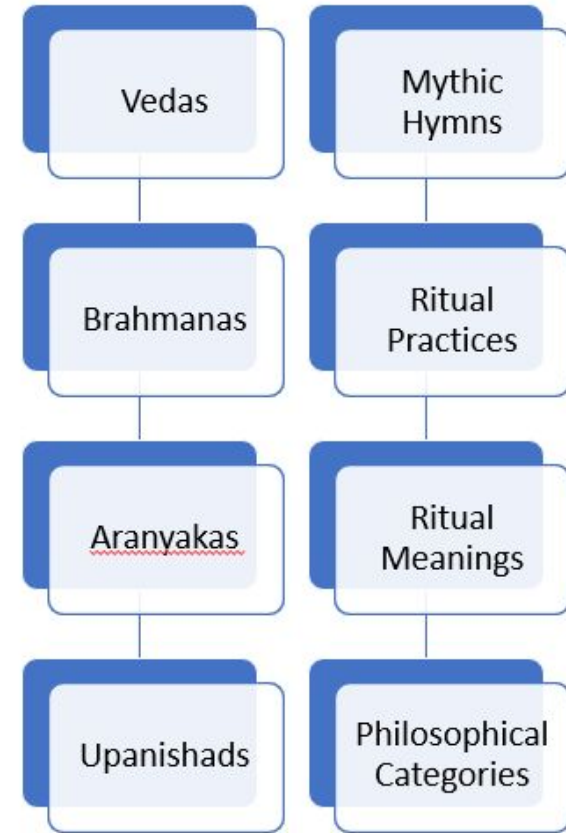
Brahmanas - commentaries on the vedic texts, containing detailed accounts of ritual practices, including specific instructions on form and practitioner



Revision

Aranyakas - commentaries on the vedic / brahmanas texts, attempting to uncover the meaning of the rituals described, e.g. what does the fire represent or mean?

Upanishads - commentaries on the vedic / brahmanas / aranyaka texts, attempting to provide a categorisation of the philosophical meaning of the rituals into a broader, more systematic schema, e.g. if the fire in one ritual and the fire in another ritual are the same?



Revision

Brahman

The eternal reality; Ontologically independent reality; Underlying reality; Timeless, unconditioned, unlimited substance; Sheer being without categorical determinants

Atman

The individualisation of the Universal nature into sentient beings; Immortal element; Inner guide; Soul / Spirit / Self



Dharma / Karma / Moksha



Dharma / Karma / Moksha

Dharma – one's ethical duty, which reflects one's place within the cosmic order

Karma – the system of consequence that arises from following one's Dharma correctly

Moksha – the liberation from the cycle of rebirth and the karmic cycle, Atman's return to Brahman

4 Varnas



4 Varnas

4 Varnas – social and cultural categorisations of society according to their place in the eternal order

Brahmins – priests

Kshatriyas – warriors

Vaishyas – merchants

Shudras – labourers

**Karmayoga,
Bhaktiyoga,
Jnanayoga, Rajayoga**



Karmayoga, Bhaktiyoga, Jnanayoga, Rajayoga

Yoga – a way of achieving moksha

Karma – good actions

Bhakti – direct worship of the
divine

Jnana – knowledge

Raja – self control

Atman / Brahman



Bartley - Foundations

Why do rituals require “inner meaning”?

Why do we think the Brahmins might have renounced the actual performance?

What are the critical differences in the function of the Vedic and Upanishadic texts here?

Why is “another giant” not an acceptable answer?

Also included under the heading ‘Veda’ are the ‘Āraṇyakas’ (‘Forest Books’) that speculate about the ‘inner’ meaning of the rituals. These are closely associated with what are called the Upaniṣads. The latter were composed by Brahmins who had probably renounced the actual performance of ritual. The view was that the mental re-enactment of the meaning of the ritual is just as effective as its overt performance. These compositions contain many reflective explorations of fundamental metaphysical questions and encompass a diversity of viewpoints. I treat them as a starting point because they mark a departure from purely mythological ways of thinking. For example, a hymn belonging to the Rig Veda explains the creation of the cosmos and the establishment of the caste-based social order as the consequences of the dismemberment of a primeval giant.¹ Broadly speaking, the Upaniṣad thinkers ask where the giant came from and realize that the answer ‘another giant’ is not the sort of explanation that they are looking for. That explanation would be one that answered the question, ‘why is there something rather than nothing?’

Bartley - Foundations

Why might the world be seen as tripartite in form?

What is section 2.1.20 attempting to do?

How might this be similar to other function processes in different traditions?

What does 2.4.5 remind us of in Western Philosophy?

“So I say, after death there is no perception” – why is this important?

1.6.1 and 3: This world is tripartite: name (*nāma*), perceptible forms (*rūpam*) and action (*karma*).... While this is a tripartite reality, it is one nature (*ātman*).

2.1.20: As a spider emits threads and as little sparks flash from fire, so do all the vital functions, all the worlds, all the gods and all basic elements arise from this primary state (*asmad-ātmanaḥ*).

2.4.5: One values a husband, not out of love for the husband: rather, it is out of love for the universal nature (*ātman*) that one values a husband. One values a wife, not out of love for the wife: rather it is out of love for the universal nature that one values a wife.... One values the whole world, not out of love for the world: rather it is out of love for the universal nature that one values the world.

2.4.12: When a lump of salt is thrown into water [of which it is a solidified form], it dissolves into the water and cannot be grasped at all. But from wherever one takes a sip, the salt is there. This Great Element (*mahad bhūtam*) is infinitely unconfined concentrated sentience (*viññānaghana*). It emerges from the basic elements and disappears after them. So I say, after death there is no perception [because there are neither individual subjects nor objects].⁶

Bartley -Foundations

What is the function of statements like “it is not this” in 4.2.4?

What do we think is meant by “the vital power consisting in perception”?

What would 4.4.6 suggest about the nature of desire, and liberation from it?

4.2.4: About this nature (*ātman*) one can only say, ‘it is not this’ or ‘it is not that’. It is incomprehensible for it cannot be grasped. It is undecaying, for it is not subject to decay.

4.3.7: What is *ātman* in humans?

It is the spirit (*puruṣa*), the vital power (*prāṇa*) consisting in perception (*vijñāna*), that which is the inner light within the heart.

4.4.6: The one who does not desire, who is without desires, who is free from desires, whose desires are fulfilled, whose only interest is in the universal nature, his vital functions do not cease. The *brahman* he is and to the *brahman* he goes.

Such a one is at peace, in control, unperturbed, patient and focused for he sees the soul in himself and he sees all things as the soul [Br.Up. 4.4.23].

Bartley - Foundations

What elements of philosophy does 6.1.4 remind you of?

6.2.1 onwards describe a cosmology of elements and a particular character of the Reality. What does this suggest about its nature?

6.1.4: It is like this: by means of one lump of clay, one understands [the substance or nature of] everything made of clay. The product is a singling out by speech, a naming, while the truth is just 'it is clay'.

6.2.1–3: In the beginning there was being (*sat*), one only and without a second.

There are some who say that only non-being (*asat*) was here originally and that existence arose from non-existence. But how is it possible that existence arose from non-existence?⁹ No: *sat* alone was here originally.

And *sat* thought to itself, 'Let me become many: let me multiply myself.'

It begat heat. The heat thought, 'Let me become many: let me multiply myself.' Heat begat water.... Water begat food.

6.3.2: The same divinity (*devatā*, meaning *sat*) thought, 'Let me create various entities (*nāma-rūpa*, lit. *names and perceptible forms*) by entering these three divinities (i.e. heat, water and food) by animating them (*jīvena-ātmanā*).

Bartley - Foundations

Whatever is the finest essence here, that is the nature of the whole world. That is what's real, that is the substrate (*ātman*), and that is what you are.

6.12: 'Bring me a fruit from the banyan tree.

Here it is, Sir

Cut it up

I've cut it, Sir

What do you see here?

Tiny pieces.

Cut one of them up

What do you see?

Nothing?

You cannot see the finest essence here, but it is because of that essence that this great Banyan tree stands.

That which is the finest essence is the nature shared by everything. That is what's real. That is the substrate (*ātman*) and that is what you are.'

Bartley - Foundations

What does 2.20 suggest about the nature of the atman and it's connection to our sense of self?

What does 2.22 suggest about the nature of the atman and it's connection to our sense of self?

What does section 3.3 suggest about mind / body dualism and where might you recognise this from?

2.20: More subtle than the subtlest, greater than the greatest is the soul (*ātman*) hidden in the heart of a living being. One who is free from desires and regrets sees the greatness of the soul by the grace of the creator.

2.22: When he knows this supreme and all-pervading nature (*ātman*) as bodiless within bodies, as constant in the midst of changes, the wise man ceases to grieve.

2.23: This soul cannot be comprehended by speech, by doctrine or by intelligence. Only the one he chooses can grasp him.

3.3: Know the soul (*ātman*) to be a passenger in a chariot and the body nothing more than a chariot. Know the intellect (*buddhi*) to be the charioteer and the mind (*manas*) to be the reins.

3.4: The senses are the horses and the perceptible objects their field. That which is linked to intellect, senses and mind, the wise call the experiencer.

Vedanta / Advaita Vedanta



Bartley - Vedanta

What do you think necessitates the development of 'vedanta' as a school of thought?

Smṛti, meaning 'what has been remembered', forms a distinct source of reflection, alongside śruti, 'what has been heard'. Why do we think these terms might be important?

Advaita - metaphysical monism

Viśiṣṭadvaita - unitary reality

Dvaita - metaphysical pluralism

The interpretation of the Upaniṣads

The word 'Vedānta' literally means 'the end of the Vedas', where end means the Upaniṣads. Vedānta is the systematic interpretation of the Upaniṣads (collectively termed '*śruti*' or 'what has been *heard*') either by direct commentary upon them or by elaborate explanations of the aphoristic summaries of their contents in the *Brahma-Sūtras*. The *Bhagavad Gītā* is also a key authority. With the Epics (the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*) and *Purāṇas*, the *Gītā* is included in the category of traditional authorities called *smṛti* or 'what has been remembered'. The latter has the function of elucidating and corroborating *śruti*.

There are three antagonistic traditions of thought: *Advaita Vedānta*, which is a metaphysical monism saying that fundamentally reality is featureless and tranquil consciousness; *Viśiṣṭadvaita Vedānta*, which proclaims the unity of a complex reality; and *Dvaita Vedānta*, which combines strict monotheism and a realistic metaphysical pluralism.

Bartley - Vedanta

Why would the discussion of ritual performance be key to early Vedantan thinkers?

What does “effect are emanations that do not differ essentially from their underlying or substrative causes” mean?

How does there being “some form of ontological nexus or parallelism of being” justify a) ritual practice and b) non-ritual non-practice?

Madhva - what is this position?

Whereas the theorists of ritual performance (*Pūrva-Mīmāṃsakas*) were concerned with and insisted upon the primary meaningfulness of Vedic action-commands (*vidhi*) bearing on ritual performance, Vedāntins focus upon the fact-asserting or descriptive texts (*arthavāda*) referring to already existent entities or states of affairs, rather than ‘things to be done’ (*kārya*). Both earlier and later Mīmāṃsā developed sophisticated techniques of textual exegesis and argued about whether ritual performance can be a path to salvation with or without intuitive insight into the true nature of reality (*jñāna*), devotion to God (*bhakti*) and divine grace (*prasāda*).

Most Vedāntins accept versions of the Sāṃkhya theory of *satkāryavāda* and say that effects are emanations that do not differ essentially from their underlying or substrative causes. It follows that there is some form of ontological nexus or parallelism of being (an *analogia entis*) between the world and the *brahman* that is its cause. *Madhva* is an exception here in that he denies that there is a real continuity of being between God and the world. He maintains (like the Śaiva Siddhāntins by whose outlook the Dvaita tradition is influenced) that God produces the cosmos out of eternally real Prime Matter that is distinct from him.

Vedanta Positions

Visistadvaita - unitary reality

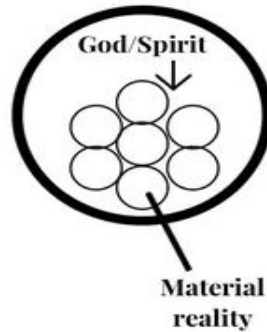
Advaita - metaphysical monism

Dvaita - metaphysical pluralism

Vedanta

Conscious essence is the efficient
cause for matter

Vishishtadvaita



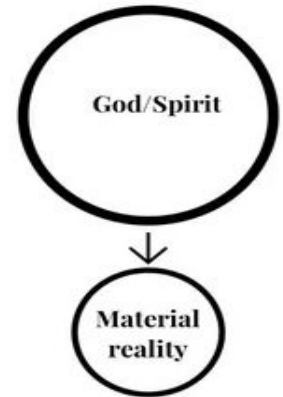
The individual soul is qualified,
but also a part of a whole.

Advaita



There is only one encompassing
soul. Individual souls are not
real.

Dvaita



Individual souls are real and
separate from God

Bartley - Vedanta

What is the critical experience for Advaitans, and how is this distinguished from the Real / real?

What does this mean for the notion of a Self?

Where does the Self arise from for Advaitans?

Advaitins say that the essential teaching of the Upaniṣads is that our experience of a differentiated world of conscious and non-conscious individual entities is really a gigantic misconception superimposed upon the undifferentiated and inactive *brahman* or Pure Being. That foundational reality is nothing other than the coincidence of Being and tranquil consciousness. Liberation is just the cessation of the ignorance or misconception (*avidyā*) that is responsible for our experiencing reality as fragmented and our misunderstanding ourselves as individual experiencers and agents. While religious activities, ritual and meditative, purify the mind and distract us from selfish pursuits, they cannot produce enlightenment and liberation from rebirth *directly*.

Bartley - Vedanta

How are individual entities limiting conditions on the Real?

What makes Advaita a 'gnostic' tradition and how is this related to other religious traditions?

How does this functionally relate to elements of religious practice, religious belief, or ethics?

For Advaitins, the focal teaching of the Upaniṣads is that one's true nature (*ātman*) is the same as undifferentiated pure being (the *brahman*), understood as tranquil consciousness undisturbed by differences. But reality and truth are obscured by ignorance: an ignorance that generates the illusions of individuality and differentiation. Individual entities are constructs, limiting conditions (*upādhi*) superimposed upon the foundational conscious reality. Liberation (*mokṣa*) from rebirth (*saṃsāra*) means an intuitive realization of the coincidence of featureless being and tranquil consciousness. Liberation is just the elimination of mistaken thinking in terms of differentiation and the immediate realization that one's true nature is nothing other than tranquil, transcendental consciousness. Advaita is a gnostic tradition: intuitive knowledge will set you free from bondage to a cosmos that is a function of beginningless ignorance. It is the repudiation of religion as a set of beliefs and practices, and as a path to a goal that can be attained by means of rituals or devotion to deities.

Bartley - Vedanta

Avidya is **not real** (because it vanishes when knowledge arises), but **not unreal either** (because the world of appearance seems to function).

Avidyā-śakti gives rise to the appearance of duality — the world, body, mind, and ego. It is the power that *makes the unreal seem real*.

It distorts true knowledge; under its influence, the self identifies with the body and mind rather than Brahman.

Liberation (*mokṣa*) comes when *vidyā* (true knowledge) destroys *avidyā*.

Experiential variety is attributed to an error-generating metaphysical power (*avidyā-śakti*). Its operation explains why there are experiences of matter and plurality when the truth is that reality is just pure consciousness. Neither the *avidyā-śakti* nor the world of experience that it produces is authentically real, nor are they non-existent. It is knowledge of the *brahman*, understood as the self-manifestation of transcendental pure consciousness that counteracts the *avidyā-śakti*, destroys misconceptions and leaves consciousness shining in its own radiance. For everyday purposes, the means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) operate successfully in the sphere where oblivion of the truth of non-duality prevails. But since Scripture (*śruti*) is such a means of pseudo-knowledge, how can it reveal the truth? We see the answer here. The truth is self-revealing and needs no *pramāṇa*. Scripture as a means of knowing does not produce anything: it simply destroys

misconceptions by conveying the falsity of the experience of duality. It does not need to tell us anything new.

Bartley - Vedanta

What is the key difference between Samkara and his advaitan position and the position of the Buddhist tradition?

Why does it matter whether there is a reality or not?

Śaṃkara and the Buddhists

Śaṃkara and his followers were sometimes described as 'closet Buddhists'. Buddhists and Advaitins agree that the sense of personal individuality is an illusion, which is created by the interactions between our modes of experiencing and the world. Moreover, like the Buddhists, Śaṃkara envisages the evaporation of personal individuality once enlightenment dawns, and blames suffering on ignorance. But the accusation is far from the truth. Śaṃkara's metaphysic is totally different from the Buddhist temporalism that rejects the very notion of enduring identities or substances in favour of successions of phases. Śaṃkara believes that 'behind' the array of changing phenomena, there is a single unconditioned reality: the static coincidence of pure being and consciousness. Relative to unconditioned Being (the *brahman*), the world that we experience is less than fully real – not the genuine article – but in the state of liberation (*mokṣa*), what is truly real is enjoyed by consciousness and as consciousness. In other words, the cosmos has a real cause (*sat-kāraṇa-vāda*), even if we must be agnostic about the ontological status of entities that 'cannot be determined as either real or unreal'. This is because every phenomenon is unreal when mistakenly considered as having its own subsistent, but real in so far as it participates in the general reality or the *brahman*.

Bartley - Vedanta

The distinction between Buddhist approaches to issues of reality and Advaitan approaches can be boiled down to whether there really is a Reality – for advaitans, there is really one Real, from which our (false) perception of reality arises.

For Buddhists, there is no really Real reality from which our souls are distinct, rather our consciousness of our Selves arises solely from matter.

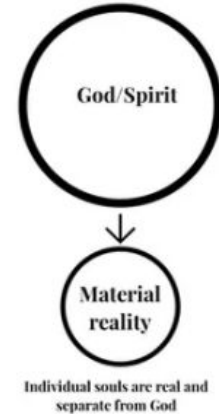
Nastika (heterodox) philosophies
(ie. Buddhism)



Advaita



Dvaita



End