

History of Indian Philosophy
Philosophy 300
Fall 2023
Term Paper Assignment
Due: Monday, December 11 (1:50 PM)

Write an 7-10 page paper on the following topic. An A paper will be well written, have a sound exposition of the philosophies, will include key quotes from the texts, and show some good reflection.

What is Enlightenment?

The highest goal of human life in all of Indian Philosophy, with the exception of Cārvāka materialism, is enlightenment. Yet the notion of enlightenment is understood in very different ways in the various *darśanas*, or visions, of Indian philosophy. Is enlightenment *mokṣa*, the final release or liberation from *saṃsāra*, the cycle of death and rebirth, as is taught in the various *darśanas* of Hinduism, or is it *nirvāṇa*, the extinguishment of suffering as emphasized in Buddhism? Is enlightenment some form of immortality, transcending this world of birth and death, or is it another way of being here in this world of birth and death? Is enlightenment a kind of personal immortality, or a union with the divine, or the absolute eternal essence of reality, *Brahman*, or an acceptance of impermanence? Write a reflection in which you compare and contrast at least two different conceptions of enlightenment. Which view would you most agree with and why would you take this view? What questions does this survey of Indian philosophies leave you pondering?

Some comparisons you may consider:

Compare the practice of yoga in the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali with *Yogācāra Buddhism*. What are the similarities and differences between the eightfold path of Buddhism and the eight limbs or methods (*sādhanās*) outlined in the *Yoga Sūtras*? Since both the eightfold path of Buddhism and the eight limbs of yoga in the *Yoga Sūtras* end in *samādhi*, is the goal of the practice of yoga the same or different?

Compare *Advaita Vedānta* with *Mahāyāna Buddhism*. What is the distinctive teaching of Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta? Explain the crucial distinction between *nirguṇa Brahman* and *saguṇa Brahman*. Explain the central teaching of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* and how Nāgārjuna explain this doctrine as following from the central doctrine of Buddhism and thus consistent with the middle path taught by the Buddha? What is the distinction Śaṅkara makes between two levels of reality and how does this compare with Nāgārjuna's distinction between two truths explained in chapter 24 of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*.

Compare the visions of the Sāṃkhya and Vedānta philosophies. Then explain the differences between the Vedānta philosophies of Śaṅkara, Rāmānujā, and Madhva. How do each understand the nature of reality and how does this view shape their understanding of the path to enlightenment?