

GOD, SELF, AND IDENTITY: A COMPARATIVE EXAMINATION OF EASTERN AND  
WESTERN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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Bachelor of Arts

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By

Matthew McGreenera

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APPROVED:

Dr. Harris Bechtol, Ph.D.  
Director

Dr. Kimberly Bell, Ph.D.  
Dean, Elliott T. Bowers Honors College

## **DEDICATION**

To Patrick and Kathleen McGrenera,  
for the opportunity.

I love you Mom and Dad.

## ABSTRACT

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This project is intended to prove that Eastern philosophy can be used along with Western philosophy to further what seems to be the limitation of human comprehension. The paper will focus on Hinduism in comparison with three Western philosophers: GWF Hegel, Baruch Spinoza, and John Locke. This paper will be a unique take on the philosophy of religion through a comparative philosophy approach. The paper will explore three main topics: God, Self and Identity. It will do so through a case study on each topic.

The case studies are to be seen as evidence that this form of comparative philosophy can be beneficial in progressing philosophy. The case studies are not intended to be separate from one another. While they can exist alone as evidence of the conclusion, they are intended to be read in sequence as there is a clear connection that exists between them. This paper is not intended to be a complete analysis of religion. Rather, it is intended to show the relationship between Western and Eastern philosophy through the philosophy of religion and a comparison of Abrahamic religion with Hinduism.

**KEY WORDS:** Comparative philosophy, Eastern philosophy, John Locke, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Baruch Spinoza, Hinduism, Philosophy of religion, God, Self, Identity.

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Lastly, the administration and amazing faculty of Sam Houston State University. I would like to thank Dr. Harris Bechtol for his amazing devotion to my education and my project. I would like to thank the Honors College for providing me with the opportunity to further my education through this project. To everyone who has contributed to my education and my thesis in any capacity, thank you. You're unwavering support has not gone unnoticed.

## PREFACE

I first became interested in the philosophy of religion through Dr. Harris Bechtol's course taught on the philosophy of religion. As a member of the Honors College, I was given the opportunity to take a seminar revolving around Islamophobia and Eastern religion. However, I noticed that my education within philosophy was taught entirely through Western ideology and all but ignored Eastern philosophy. I found this exclusion of essentially half of the world's philosophy problematic. Dr. Bechtol was a clear choice for my thesis director. His knowledge of philosophy of religion and dedication to the project was essential in my completion of the thesis. Through a conversation with Dr. Bechtol, we determined together that the best way to take the project was to introduce a series of case studies to serve as examples of the benefits of comparative philosophy. As a result, the project consists of three case studies revolving around the philosophy of religion which show the power of comparison.

## DISCLAIMER

*I would like to propose a disclaimer prior to the beginning of this project. I will be attempting to be completely transparent throughout this paper. This being said, I will begin by explaining some biases I may have when writing on this topic and the lense by which I will be approaching this comparative. All of my education in philosophy and education in general has come from Western institutions revolving around Western ideologies. I will be attempting to leave this behind for this paper and view both philosophies as an outsider looking in. I will be approaching this paper as an opportunity to find common ground between the two contrasting areas of thought while recognizing the potentially problematic separation between them.*

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

#### The Problem

Western and Eastern philosophy have disputed and argued in virtually every aspect of thought since the inception of Western thinking. Philosophy of religion is no exception to this. I will be comparing Eastern thought, through Hinduism, and Western thought, through Christianity. While the two religions obviously differ heavily in teachings and spiritual beliefs, the philosophy behind and around them is what I will be taking a look at. I will be focusing on the philosophy from those associated with each religion. Hegel, Spinoza, and Locke from the West and Śankara from the East. Philosophies of the Western and Eastern world seem to be out of touch with virtually no communication between the two massively important perceptions of human intellect. In the context of philosophy of religion, the separation of the two has the potential to be extremely problematic and harmful towards the progression of human understanding about religion and how it fits into our society and lives. The benefits of bringing these two already thought through philosophies together into conversation is immense. Each has many things to offer the other in relation to possibly progressing ideas further with new types of thinking and different ways of approaching philosophical problems. We as humanity have a common problem of becoming stuck within our own philosophical thought. We become so involved with our own premises and conclusions that we are often unable to look unbiasedly at the thoughts of others who may or may not contradict our own. Taking an outside approach to problems from a different area of thought has the potential to change human intellect as a whole. As for religion, a conversation between Christianity and Hinduism has not been fully hashed out.

In this essay, I will attempt to bring the two into conversation through an analysis of each approach to philosophy of religion. Eastern philosophy of religion (specifically Hinduism) contrasts its Western counterpart heavily in that it is acutely metaphysical revolving around the idea of Brahman and Atman and a journey of the inner self towards consciousness of itself. This paper will be concerned with the relation of Hinduism's Brahman and Atman and how this ties in to the assertion of the self-god. The problematic exclusion of Eastern philosophy and religion from Western thought is arguably responsible for many of the philosophical problems we have become stuck on. Allowing Western and Eastern philosophy to work together puts more people into the philosophical thought pool. The more people we have thinking about something the more likely we will discover something progressive and useful. Furthermore, this collaboration increases the diversity of people thinking on these philosophical concepts. This diversity allows the problems to be approached in different ways from people of different environments. This exclusion, commonly justified by a perceived incompatibility, is completely unnecessary and does more harm than good.

We must make a distinction of what "Eastern" means. In his paper titled *Classical Eastern Philosophy* James Fieser asserts, "At the time that ancient Greek philosophy was blossoming, on the other side of the world a different set of philosophical traditions emerged within the Eastern Asian regions of India and China".<sup>1</sup> These philosophical traditions from the regions listed by Fieser will be what I refer to as Eastern. Furthermore, Hinduism itself will be used as a representation for Eastern thought.<sup>2</sup> Hinduism is the best candidate for representing Eastern philosophy as virtually everything developed from it. Hinduism will be used to represent

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<sup>1</sup> Fieser, J., 2020. 4: *Classical Eastern Philosophy. A. INTRODUCTION*

<sup>2</sup> This is not to suggest that all Eastern philosophy/religion is Hinduism. Rather Hinduism is the best place to start in analyzing Eastern thought.

Eastern philosophy in the same way we commonly use Greek philosophy to represent the whole of Western philosophy. Fieser continues, “The best place to begin examining Eastern Philosophy is by looking at Hinduism. Hindu texts are among the oldest in the East, and their concepts directly or indirectly influenced the philosophy of other Eastern philosophical traditions.”<sup>3</sup> This influence is the most important reason for using Hinduism to establish a connection between the Eastern and Western philosophical traditions.

Our<sup>4</sup> lack of understanding of Eastern philosophy has led us to accept that there simply is nothing to be gained from an understanding of this way of thought. The internal nature of Eastern philosophy has seemingly caused it to be understood as barbaric and ironically “too abstract” for any productive progression to be gained. There are most definitely benefits to be gained from understanding (and even attempting to understand) Eastern philosophy and religion. Eastern philosophy (specifically Hindu philosophy) can be used to further our understanding of what we deem as “Western concepts.” Furthermore, a better understanding of Western philosophy can lead us to realize the similarities it shares with “foreign” Eastern philosophy. Through this, we can break down the idea of Eastern vs Western concepts and simply be left with philosophical concepts that can be expanded in harmony through both Eastern and Western lenses. The idea of the “Self-God” in Hinduism is a good place to begin a comparison and search for benefits to be gained in understanding. Through an evaluation of God, the Self, and Identity we can come to better understand both Hinduism and Western philosophy through comparing the two.

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<sup>3</sup> Fieser, J., 2020. *4: Classical Eastern Philosophy. B. HINDU PHILOSOPHY*

<sup>4</sup> Referring to the school of Western philosophy.

## Hinduism

Hinduism began over 4,000 years ago and comprises nearly 900 million devoted followers, making it the world's oldest religion as well as the third largest. Centralized in India, Hinduism differs from almost all the world's other religions in that it is composed of many different traditions and followers lacking a single founder. Historically, Hinduism began around 1500 B.C. near modern day Pakistan. However, Hindu people argue that their religion is timeless, having been around since the origin of existence even marking the beginning of existence in itself. Despite this controversy, it is commonly agreed upon that Hinduism seems to be a blend of Indo-Aryan people and the native Indus people. This blending of culture leads to a very open religion, lacking a central founder, with extensive tradition and a seemingly unconnected combination of beliefs.

Hinduism continues to oppose other dominating world religions in that it does not follow one or two sacred texts but rather follows the text of the Vedas. The Vedas are a combination of texts rather than one singular text and were composed during the Vedic period between 1500 B.C. and 500 B.C. The text is written similar to that of the Bible, containing collections of stories which attempt to teach some sort of lesson or moral that pertains to the teachings of the religion. The Vedas include many texts pertaining to the beliefs of the religion. Despite this, Hinduism also recognized various other important texts such as *The Upanishads* and *The Bhagavad Gita*.

Hindu people worship multiple deities (Vishnu, Devi) each pertaining to a different aspect of human life. This being said, Hinduism is not polytheistic. Hinduism recognizes the worship of one single God while simultaneously not denying the existence of other Gods. Because of this, Hinduism is widely accepted, allowing for many to be united under this religion

and way of thought. Going much deeper than a spiritual religion, Hinduism encompasses every aspect of life often being referred to as a way of living in addition to a religion. Being Hindu is not as simple as a baptism and prayer. Being Hindu is a way of life that encourages ways to act in every aspect of human life. Every second of life must be utilized towards self-discovery and the becoming of Brahman within oneself.

Hindu beliefs widely support this idea. Hinduism revolves around doctrines of both samsara and karma. Samsara states that life is a cycle stressing reincarnation and a seemingly endless cycle of life and death that is only escaped by the recognition and realization of one's true self. Karma is the universal law of cause and effect which rules over all. Hindus reach for dharma defined as a code of living which heavily encourages good conduct and a code of morality. This comes from the Hindu principle that your human actions have a direct effect on your present and future. In addition to these doctrines, Hindu people recognize the Brahman and Atman which becomes one of the biggest parts of the religion in leading those within it through the ways that they should live.

### **Christianity**

Christianity is the world's biggest religion with 2 billion devout followers. Christianity began in the first century AD after the death of Jesus. Jesus died as a Jew in Judea giving rise to what is now the world's biggest religion. Early Christians faced persecution in the Roman empire; however, with the overwhelming spread of the religion, it quickly became the state religion.

Christians hold the Bible as holy scripture and take their teachings from it. Christianity is based on the belief in God the Father, Jesus Christ (the son of God), and the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, Christianity stresses the belief in hell or heaven after death. The Church is a holy place within Christianity and considered a place where one can go to speak to God, pray, confess, etc. The teachings of Jesus are brought through the Bible and into the Church where it is consumed by the masses. Arguably the most important belief of Christianity is that of the second coming of Christ. It is believed that Christ will return once again and save those who follow him leaving those who do not believe behind. For Christians, Jesus is the Messiah (the savior of the world), and they strive to live in a way that Jesus would approve of.

### **Christianity vs Hinduism (Historically)**

Before looking at the differences between these two religions philosophically, it is important to realize just how different the two are in origin. Hinduism began nearly 2,000 years earlier. This is extremely significant when taking into account the progression of society and human intellect that takes place over the course of 2,000 years. Most significantly, the two religions are based in two different parts of the world. Hinduism is a largely Eastern religion while Christianity is a largely Western religion. The Western and Eastern world heavily differ culturally speaking, which likely gave rise to some of the differences between the two religions. These two religions are rarely in conversation leading to a further distinction between the two. A conceptual understanding of Hinduism is rarely found in followers of Christianity, and it can be assumed the same is true for the understanding of Christianity in Hindu followers.

While both Christianity and Hinduism are considered religions, they seem to define religion itself differently. Christianity stresses prayer, worship, attendance to church, more than simply living in a way which God would approve of. This may or may not be Christianity's intention; however, this is how it is largely (mis)interpreted today. Hinduism stresses a complete

lifestyle suggesting that every aspect of life, every decision made should be based on that of religion. In addition, Hinduism seems to be much more accepting as a whole than Christianity. Hinduism allows for variation within followers as long as their intentions match that of the religion. Christianity clearly outlines the way one must act, and if one doesn't they are violating this. For example, not going to Church is seen as a negative action under Christianity. In Hinduism, this would simply be seen as a trade off for one to continue their life living in a way which the religion supports. While it is clear that the two religions heavily differ in origin and teaching styles, it may be seen that the overall purpose of the two is quite similar. Furthermore, the concept of "God" between the two religions, as explored in what follows, may be seen to be almost identical.

## **Chapters**

There are most definitely benefits to be gained from understanding (or at least attempting to understand) Eastern philosophy and religion. Eastern philosophy (specifically Hindu philosophy) can be used to further our understanding of what we deem as "Western concepts." Furthermore, a better understanding of Western philosophy can lead us to realize the similarities it shares with "foreign" Eastern philosophy. Through this, we can break down the idea of Eastern vs Western concepts and simply be left with philosophical concepts that can be expanded in harmony through both Eastern and Western lenses. The idea of the "Self-God" in Hinduism is a good place to begin a comparison<sup>5</sup> and search for benefits to be gained in understanding. Through an evaluation of God, the Self, and Identity we can come to better understand both Hinduism and Western philosophy through comparing the two.

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<sup>5</sup> God is a concept found in virtually every philosophy. Furthermore, God often becomes a central concept in all other areas of philosophy.



The chapters that follow are to be looked at as case studies. Each chapter (God, Self, Identity) shows a specific circumstance in which a comparison between Hinduism and Western philosophy takes place. These studies show that this comparative type of philosophy between East and West is possible. Furthermore, these studies show that this type of philosophy is beneficial. Chapter II, God, will initially set up the philosophies of both Hinduism and Hegel in relation to God. This chapter concludes with a realization that God for Hegel and God for Hinduism are quite similar. Chapter II shows that similarities are present in Eastern and Western philosophy and lays the foundation for furthering our understanding through comparison. Chapter III, Self, will take Hinduism and Spinoza and compare the two. Chapter III will look at not only the ideas of God, but the idea of Self and how perhaps the two are the same thing. Furthermore, Chapter III will address some problems that arise through Hinduism's assertion of the "Self-God" and how we can potentially gain some insight into these through an understanding of Spinoza's God. Chapter IV will take what has been established in the two previous chapters and build off it addressing the problem of continuation of personal identity. By comparing what Locke has done within Western philosophy to what Hinduism suggests to us, potential solutions to this problem arise through the juxtaposition. The following chapters will show that comparisons are not only possible in philosophy but useful. A failure to utilize and interpret these comparisons is simply a disservice to humanity and the work of philosophy as a whole.

## CHAPTER II

### God

#### God

In comparing two philosophies (especially two that differ so significantly in origin) God seems to be the best place to start. All fields of philosophy deal with God in some capacity. Whether it's ethics and divine command theory or theological aesthetics, God is the center of philosophy. The idea of God plays this central role in many philosophies within both the Eastern and Western world. Because of this, it is often one of the first things looked at to distinguish between Eastern and Western philosophy. However, when approaching the idea of God from Hinduism and Hegel's philosophy, we come to a destination full of similarities rather than differences. These similarities are what will eventually allow us to use the two philosophers to further our overall understanding of the concept of God. This idea of God is the first step of the comparison as the self and identity rely on an understanding of God.

#### **Brahman and Atman**

The Hindu religion makes a distinction between Brahman and Atman (in a similar way to Descartes' dualism). However, in contrast to Western dualism, Brahman/Atman are both eternal. Atman is humanly and housed within the body, the part of the divine which we have in us. Brahman is much more transcendent and refers to the divine directly, the overruling essence of humanity. Brahman is the combination of all Atman and the true reality which all strive to understand and comprehend. The sacred text of *The Upanishads* lays out the idea of Brahman and explains the way in which it should be thought of by the Hindu people. The idea of Brahman seems to be limited by the language which limits our communication and explanation. For

example, *The Upanishads* reads, “The description of Brahman: ‘Not this, not this’ (*Neti, Neti*); for there is no other and more appropriate description than this ‘Not this.’ Now the designation of Brahman: ‘The Truth of truth.’ The vital breath is truth and It (Brahman) is the truth of that.”<sup>6</sup>

The repetition of the phrase ‘Not this, not this’ further supports the idea that Brahman is something that cannot be limited by our method of communication. Something which is more than us, which we can’t simply reduce to a definition or word which encompasses the true meaning of what Brahman is. This being said, the Hindu religion refers to Brahman as just that, Brahman. However, it strives to not reduce Brahman itself to this word and reiterates the fact that this word is only a meager way to discuss the idea which is all and does not encompass what really is. While giving this unspeakable “being” the name Brahman, Hinduism employs a form of theological negation as a tool to speak or think of Brahman. Through this, the Hindu people evaluate what Brahman is not in an attempt to determine what Brahman is.

Additionally, *The Upanishads* goes on to state that Brahman is the “truth of that.”<sup>7</sup> That which is the truth itself. It is being argued here that Brahman is the truth of the truth. The most sincere and genuine thing which encompasses a truth unable to be grasped by unenlightened humans. The unenlightened humans, as *The Upanishads* calls them, are those who have not yet become aware of the Brahman that is within them.

*The Upanishads* stresses the importance of truth defining it as the “vital breath.” Truth is vital for humans and their Atman to continue to progress. Furthermore, Brahman is the most true truth of this already genuine truth. This truth is a concept which cannot be grasped by us as we are unable to look through the divine lense Brahman is occupying. This then becomes an aspect

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<sup>6</sup> Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.3.6

<sup>7</sup> Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.1.20

of faith. Being confident in the humanly truth you have come to know, and trusting that Brahman is the truth above that truth. Therefore, there are things which are true to us, but Brahman reaches a new degree of truth. The truest truth which encompasses and becomes the truth of all other truth we encounter. Hinduism seems to give these two truths two different names, defining them both as truth, but one as the truth of the other.

*The Upanishads* recognizes two different aspects of Brahman. First being Nirguna Brahman, the one which is unlimited, completely divine and supreme to all. The second (which by nature is what I will speak of) is Saguna Brahman, which is qualified solely by the conditions which are limiting it. While Brahman cannot be limited by our language, it is important to attempt to speak of it and realize the distinction is shared with Atman (or the possible lack of distinction). However, we must recognize that when speaking of Brahman we are speaking of the Saguna Brahman which we are limited by our own apparatus of thought. If Brahman is the divine, which we are not, and Atman is the divine within us, which we are, there is a clear difference between the two concepts. However, Brahman and Atman are very closely tied together. Because of this, many see the two as one in the same giving rise to the metaphysical argument that we are perhaps Brahman (or at least that Brahman and Atman are the same). This idea is proposed in a quote by Shankara in which he states, “Brahman is the only truth, the world is unreal, and there is ultimately no difference between Brahman and Atman, individual self.”<sup>8</sup> If there is no difference between Brahman and Atman, then we must assume that each individual is within themselves the divine while simultaneously containing the divine.

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<sup>8</sup> Sankara, *Vivekachudamani*

As we examine the key differences between Brahman and Atman, we are able to come to a point where we realize that the two are perhaps one in the same as Sankara states in the quote previously. When looking at how Brahman and Atman differ, it is vital that we keep in mind the end result of the two being brought together into one. In conclusion of the previous paragraphs, Atman is the part of Brahman which lies within us. It is something which is not specific to humans, yet rather is a part of all life. Not only is this something which we are inherently equipped with, but it is something which we cannot escape. Brahman is “something” which can only be evaluated through theological negation. The all divine universal “God of the cosmos.” While these contrasting qualities are an obvious difference between the two, it is imperative that the two be seen as the same thing.

How can Brahman and Atman be different while the same? While remembering that Brahman is an inherently metaphysical concept that does not allow for human comprehension, we are able to realize that while not seemingly possible in our intellectual minds, this concept could be possible under the understanding that the concept is one of abstract fundamentals. In the simplest terms, Atman is the individual soul and Brahman is the world soul. Under this interpretation, all comes from this Brahman (the essence of all). So, if we are under the assumption that Atman is given rise by Brahman, and Brahman is broken into Atman, Brahman is Atman.

### **The “Self-God”**

The distinction between Brahman and Atman is the foundation for the assertion of the Self-God. This assertion that we are God has many connotations which we must evaluate before we can accept that we are God. In addition, it is important to note that within the notion of the

Self-God we are literally God. This is very metaphysical and not in any way metaphorical. Rather, it implies that we are indisputably God. This assertion is not only religious in that it suggests the divinity within us, but is extremely philosophical as it questions how we are related to what is (Brahman). “Brahman is Consciousness;”<sup>9</sup> “The Soul is Brahman;”<sup>10</sup> “You are Brahman (That thou art);”<sup>11</sup> “I am Brahman.”<sup>12</sup> These principles all lead to the same fundamental property of *The Upanishads*, each individual, every person, is (in the most literal sense) Brahman (God). Evidence of this Self-God is also found in the Hindu sacred text *The Bhagavad Gita*. A famous section of this text goes as follows, “Those who distinguish between the slayer and the slain are ignorant of them both. No one slays, and no one is slain. No one is born, and no one dies. No one who once existed, ceases to exist. They are unborn, perpetual, eternal and ancient, and are not slain when their bodies are slaughtered. If we understand a person to be indestructible, perpetual, unborn, undiminishing, how can that person slay, or be slain?”<sup>13</sup> As the deity Krishna comforts others on the terror of death, it becomes obvious that humans are seen as immortal, divine. This idea of life not being born, being “perpetual” further supports the concept that “I am Brahman” and/or “You are Brahman”. So, while we are the encompassment of the “offspring” of Brahman (which is named Atman), we are equally Brahman itself. It’s important to note here that while we are Brahman itself, this doesn’t mean each individual is aware of this. The “Self-God” argues Hinduism is a journey of becoming aware that you are Brahman. We are born Brahman, but not necessarily aware that we are Brahman.

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<sup>9</sup> Aitareya Upanishad 3.1.3

<sup>10</sup> Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.5

<sup>11</sup> Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7

<sup>12</sup> Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.10

<sup>13</sup> The Bhagavad Gita, Section 2

This Hindu Self-God has several implications which are important to note and analyze. Firstly, the idea that we are something which we cannot think or speak of because of the way we limit it. This idea is very complex however it is explained in the Hindu religion. While we are Brahman, we are unable to comprehend Brahman. We are Brahman, yet this is our true identity and not something we as humans are inherently aware of. Brahman uses Atman (seemingly the Brahman which we are aware of) as a tool that lends itself to us in an attempt to become conscious of itself. Since we are Brahman, the process of Brahman becoming conscious of itself, this process of progression of the God, is simply the progression of an individual. The process of an individual becoming aware of their true identity, their reality, Brahman.

In addition to this, the question of how well we can know ourselves comes up through the idea of the self-god. We are Brahman (through Atman), yet Brahman is incomprehensible. This would lead one to believe oneself is equally incomprehensible. Hinduism approaches this in an interesting way. Rather than giving the Hindu people ways to know themselves, Hinduism simply urges it's followers to accept the fact that they cannot know. For the Hindu people, this is done through faith or trusting of Brahman (yourself) despite the fact that you cannot know about it. Meditation and spiritual exploration are ways in which the Hindu people come about accepting the unknowable nature of themselves.

Hinduism also runs into a challenge in the area of morals. If each person is Brahman (God) how could any person act immorally? It is important to note that while each person is Brahman, this does not necessarily mean that each person is aware of the Brahman that they are. Because of this, those who are unaware that they are Brahman have the potential to act immoral. This happens when the humanly portion of an individual comes into disagreement with the

divine godly portion. In this sense, Brahman acts almost as a consciousness. Just because somebody is Brahman, this doesn't mean they will always act in accordance with themselves. Hinduism recognizes five "Yamas" which outline the ethics of the religion. These are as follows: Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truth, non-falsehood), Asteya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (celibacy if unmarried and non-cheating on one's partner if married), and Aparigraha (non-possessiveness). To come into harmony with the Brahman that one is, one must act ethically Hinduism argues.

### **God In Christianity (Traditionally)**

God is arguably the driving factor of Christianity, but for many a definition or description of God seems impossible to come by. God is said to be an eternal being who is the sole creator and preserver of all things. God is both transcendent and immanent. This is a very interesting concept because through this, God is suggested to be both independent of the world (entirely removed from) yet still completely involved in the world. This is the first suggestion that God is above what we as humans can conceptualize. We find it impossible for something to be most involved and independent of, yet God is. This lack of understanding of God is what drives the Christian faith.

God "himself" seems to be up to interpretation to some extent. Theologians define God in many different ways. Some argue God is simply the highest, divine part of ourselves. Therefore, God is a part of each person and God is the highest part. The best part of yourself, the most divine, perfect, part of you, is God. Many others would argue against this for the opinion that God is a source. God is the source of all; therefore, he is the source of every human. However, I would suggest that these two interpretations are quite similar. If God made you then there is a



part of you which is God or at least derived from God which would be nature be the most pure, true part of yourself. Others argue God and humans are one. God cannot be without human and human cannot be without God. Therefore, God is one with human existence. While these countless interpretations have very different natures, they all have one thing in common. God and human are very closely related, possibly to the point where the two are the same thing, unable to be broken apart. I would argue these countless interpretations are attempts at an impossible task. The pure nature of God is that he is not to be known which makes the faith and trust within God so strong. God is not to be known, and the inconclusiveness of what God is is evidence for this.

### **Hegel on God**

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was a German philosopher living from 1770 to 1831 in the decades following Kant. Hegel's work was largely based in logic, politics, society, and of course theology. Hegel's logic has been all but disproven with the progression in understanding of logic. However, his work in the other fields, especially theology is still very much so significant. Hegel's work often incorporates the use of 3's, and his work in Christianity is no exception to this.

Hegel begins his work with an examination of the trinity. Hegel argues that it begins with the father (a being in the sky) which is then emptied into the son, becoming the son. The son is then emptied into the spirit and becomes the spirit. However, when the father becomes the son, the father is not lost. The son brings the father with it. Therefore, when the spirit is reached, it is solely the spirit. However, it has both the father and the son within it. An example of a tree is often used to further describe this series of sublation. A tree begins as an acorn, and the acorn has

the potential of the tree in it. The acorn is the tree. However, it has simply not been actualized. When the tree comes to be, the acorn is still there; it has just been actualized to the existence of the tree. Hegel argues that this same series takes place with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Hegel has an interesting view of religion. He believes religion is simply a stepping stone between art and philosophy. Not to say that Hegel does not feel religion is significant. He just does not see it as the end goal. He believes that art leads to religion which will at some point lead to philosophy. Hegel suggests God has been sublated to the spirit and now suggests that God is no longer as we commonly believe him. Similar to Neitchezes death of God,<sup>14</sup> Hegel argues that God as an actual being has died and sublated “himself”, emptied “himself” to us. This relationship between God and us is the same as that of the acorn and the tree. God had the potential for us and once actualized became us. Now we are simply an actualization of God. Therefore, we have God within us.

To completely understand what Hegel is attempting to say about God we must remove ourselves from previous (biblical) assertions of God. For Hegel, God as a being (as described in the Bible) is no longer. As previously mentioned, God has sublated “himself” to us. However, this leaves out an important part of Hegel's examination of God. Community. In his lectures of 1827 on the philosophy of religion, Hegel begins his explanation of community in relation to God, “In the subsisting community the church is, by and large, the institution whereby [its] subjects come to the truth, appropriate the truth to themselves, so that the Holy Spirit becomes real.”<sup>15</sup> This assertion seems to imply that God is not real without the involvement of the Church

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<sup>14</sup> Fredrick Neitcheze, *The Gay Science*

<sup>15</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Lectures of 1827*

itself. However, Hegel continues, “it is the means whereby they as subjects are the active expression of the Spirit.”<sup>16</sup> Considering Hegel’s words that we (as subjects) are the “active expression” we now come to the conclusion that there is something of which we are actively expressing. These two statements initially seem to contradict each other. If we are an active expression there must be something passive we are expressing. However, Hegel argues previously that the Holy Spirit only becomes real through the church (whose subjects actively express it). While Hegel fails to explicitly comment on this apparent contradiction, it is quite simply solved when taking into account what Hegel is meaning by “Holy Spirit becomes real.” Hegel is arguing that God (or the Holy Spirit) becomes real to us, the subjects, through the church.

Hegel’s idea of God is extremely complex, but can be simply explained through the importance he places on community. To God’s subjects, God is nothing without the Church itself. Let’s imagine there is no community around God, no Church, no communal worship. I believe Hegel would argue at this point that God is now nothing to us. Lacking any community to express “himself” through, God would “die” once again.<sup>17</sup>

### **Hegel in Comparison with Hinduism’s “Self-God”**

Hegel’s philosophy of God and the Hindu philosophy of the “Self-God” now seem to be extremely similar. However, there are some key differences which cannot be ignored. Firstly, for Hegel this is metaphysical and for the Hindu religion it is quite literal. Secondly, Hegel does not believe each one of us is God. Rather, he believes us a whole is God.

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<sup>16</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Lectures of 1827*

<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that God would not exist in some capacity. Rather, God would lack existence in our humanly finite world. God would die in relation to humanity.

In the Hindu “Self-God” each individual is literally God. Each individual has God within them. Atman is each individual, and once the Atman within one becomes realized one will become Brahman. Each individual becomes God completely. This is not completely the case for Hegel. While yes he believes we literally are God, he is being quite metaphysical here. Not to say that we are not God, but rather there is some deeper purpose to what he is saying. For Hegel this is simply a stepping stone to philosophy, and he is using us being God as a way to portray this. Hinduism asserts this belief much more literally, while Hegel seems to be using it as a device in his philosophical reasoning.

Secondly, Hegel is not arguing that each individual is God. Hegel is arguing that society as a whole is God. We are all that is left of God. The society around God has now become God. Therefore, the prayer to God, the worship of God, is the only thing that is God anymore. Because of this, we as a community around God have now become what God is. It is important to note that Hegel is suggesting that the only thing left of God is the community, not that God is solely us. God was once a being however that God has emptied himself and sublated several times to the point where “he” has now become simply the community which is around him. This is to suggest that the only thing keeping God alive is us. Without the society which speaks of God and is brought together by God, there is no longer God. Hinduism is not saying this. Rather Hinduism is saying that each individual is God. Society as a whole is God as well. However, this is no more God than one individual is God. This difference cannot be ignored. While very similar, the two understandings of humans as God are not the same.

Lastly and arguably most important, there is a difference in how the two philosophies arrive at this idea of pantheism. As stated earlier, Hegel is arguing that the community is all that

is left of God. God was once more, but now is only us (being the community revolving around God). Hinduism has no such assertion that the current God is any less than “he” once was. Furthermore, Hinduism seems to reject in many ways that this is even possible. This rejection is essential when comparing the two ideas of God. Hinduism already is asserting that each person is entirely God. This is not to say, however, that God would lack to exist if there were no people. Hinduism seems to escape this by suggesting that God is not only each person, but everything else that is. If humanity at some point failed to exist, God would be whatever is. In addition, if everything seemingly ceased to exist, God would become solely God himself.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Implications of Comparing Hegel’s God to Hinduism’s God**

While the God Hegel is putting forth does not seem to purpose any immediate problems, there is something extremely vulnerable about the God Hegel describes. God could no longer exist if the community around God dissolves. Perhaps this is not a problem for Hegel as he largely states that the purpose of God is for the community. However, when taking into consideration this absolute infinite notion of God, we run into a problem. Something infinite cannot stop existing. Perhaps Hinduism provides a solution to this problem. The God in Hinduism is much less vulnerable to changes within our finite world. God can be expressed through anything that is (even if there is nothing as previously discussed). Because of this, a finite world lacking any community or even any individuals at all would not implicitly mean that it is a world lacking God. The similarities between Hegel’s God and Hinduism’s God allow for a comparison between the two that can answer potential problems that result from one or the other.

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<sup>18</sup> God being only himself (because nothing is) rather than everything that is does not mean God is any less in Hinduism. Everything is entirely God, including God himself. This completeness of God would simply be found in less places.

This is extremely interesting when considering that Hegel uses Hinduism to further support what God is. Early in his lectures on the philosophy of religion, Hegel examines the God of the Eastern world. Hegel repeatedly refers to Hinduism as “the religion of abstract unity.”<sup>19</sup> While not significant in itself, the explanation he gives of the religion of abstract unity certainly contributes to what he later argues God is. Hegel states in reference to Hinduism that, “One is God, the absolute power.”<sup>20</sup> Hegel uses Hinduism early in his lectures to present the idea of pantheism. He has already shown that this pantheistic way of religion works in the Eastern school of thought. Through his analysis of Hinduism, he is able to further his argument of God. Hegel’s God is based on a foundational understanding of Hinduism’s God. Unfortunately, Hegel’s examination and use of Hinduism stops here.

It seems that after establishing this foundation Hegel sees no further use of the religion in establishing his argument. This is extremely unfortunate when considering what could have come out of comparing that Hinduism he has already analyzed to his final conclusion of what God is. If Hegel were to analyze what he deems as God through the lens of Hinduism perhaps he would have come to a more resilient definition of God. While Hegel goes further than most in merely seeing the potential use of Hinduism and Eastern philosophy as a whole, he fails to use it where it is most beneficial. Rather than only using it to further his argument and build a foundation, Hegel would have been better off building his own foundation through his Western environment. After this foundation and philosophy is built, and only then, should Eastern philosophy be used to compare and evaluate one's own findings. This lack of comparison after his philosophy has been established is what greatly hinders Hegel’s philosophy. While any use of

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<sup>19</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Lectures of 1827*

<sup>20</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Lectures of 1827*

Eastern philosophy should be considered a victory, we must be careful to use it in the right way so that we feel the potential benefits of doing so.

### CHAPTER III

#### SELF

##### Self

Analyzing philosophies through the use of comparison has the potential to further our understanding of each individual philosophy by studying the other. Spinoza's philosophy of God can be further understood by understanding Hinduism's assertion of the "Self-God." Furthermore, this understanding of the "Self-God" and Spinoza's God has the potential to help understand the existential difficulty of becoming a self that arises with the assertion of the "Self-God" and an understanding of Spinoza's God.

##### Spinoza and Atheism

Baruch Spinoza was raised Jewish within Amsterdam. However, he quickly began to question his Jewish faith very early in his philosophical career developing his own ideas in regards to the Torah. He became, what was considered by many, an atheist.<sup>21</sup> This harmful assertion of Spinoza as an atheist began with the work of Pierre Bayle statement, "Spinoza, Benedictus de, a jew by birth, and afterwards a deserter from Judaism, and lastly an atheist, was from Amsterdam. He was a systematic atheist..."<sup>22</sup> This assertion is extremely damaging to what Spinoza is attempting to do. A man who is an atheist (not believing in God) would likely have no

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<sup>21</sup> Spinoza was often shunned by the Jewish society for being what they considered, an atheist. He challenged some of the values of the Torah suggesting differences and was shunned because of this.

<sup>22</sup> Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*, trans. Richard H. Popkin

argument for what God is. This is why we must first establish that Spinoza was not, at least by some definitions, an atheist.

We must first establish what we are talking about when we call someone an atheist. Is an atheist someone who 1) denies the existence of theism, or someone who 2) rejects the assertion that something should or can be called God. By the first definition Spinoza is most certainly an atheist. However, he would reject the assertion of the second definition. Because of this, Spinoza, I believe, still has some merit to talk on what God is. Spinoza himself rejects the claim of Bayle and many others, “The opinion of me held by the common people, who constantly accuse me of atheism. I am driven to avert this accusation, too, as far as I can.”<sup>23</sup> Spinoza is likely aware that being an atheist would completely invalidate anything he says on the topic of God. He rejects this at all costs. By doing so, he seems to have gained the respect (in relation to not being an atheist) of the previous philosopher I discussed, Hegel. Hegel responds to the accusations of Spinoza being an atheist arguing that Spinoza’s views “were more acosmism than atheism.”<sup>24</sup> This is very interesting that Hegel would respond and defend Spinoza. This is likely because in many ways, their philosophies regarding God are similar and Hegel would have been regarded as an atheist if he was surrounded by those who Spinoza was surrounded by. This being said, Spinoza is not an atheist, he is a pantheist. The “paradigmatic pantheist.”<sup>25</sup> Because of this, Spinoza is completely valid in his thoughts on God. Furthermore, his work on the philosophy of God is arguably more impacted when compared to Hinduism because of its pantheistic nature.

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<sup>23</sup> Spinoza, *The Letters*, Letter 30, p. 186

<sup>24</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic*, p. 97

<sup>25</sup> Merold Westphal, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence*, Chapter 2, p. 41



## Spinoza's Self Through God

Spinoza argued that God is not the God known to the Old Testament. God is not a being, God doesn't hear/respond to prayers, God doesn't work miracles. Rather, God is the embodiment and existence of all things. Resisting claims of being an atheist, Spinoza writes, "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can exist or be conceived without God."<sup>26</sup> In *The Ethics*, Spinoza largely bases his work on pantheism, starting several definitions and axioms used as proof for his propositions leading him to a pantheistic view of God. Spinoza's pantheistic view is in turn rooted by his monistic view of substance in contrast with Descartes' dualism. Hinduism shares this pantheistic view through the assertion of "The Self-God" in *The Upanishads*. While the two philosophies differ slightly, they are quite similar in their assertions of an individual as God. By analyzing these two philosophies through comparison, we are able to further our understanding of one by comprehension of the other.

Spinoza's pantheistic argument begins with his view of substance. He rejects Descartes' assertion that the mind and body are two separate things<sup>27</sup> arguing Descartes was unable to solve the problem of the mind-body interaction because his argument that mind and body are separate is fundamentally flawed, "One substance can't be produced by another substance."<sup>28</sup> Spinoza defines substance as "that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, that the conception of which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has to be formed."<sup>29</sup> Spinoza's view of God begins with his view of substance. This rejection to Descartes along with his belief that a substance can't produce another is what leads Spinoza to conclude

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<sup>26</sup> Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Book 1 Prop. 15.

<sup>27</sup> Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Meditation 6.

<sup>28</sup> Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Book 1 Prop. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Book 1 Def. 3.

that substance is one. For Spinoza, this one substance has two aspects. He builds off Descartes' definitions<sup>30</sup> suggesting that these two aspects are *res extensa* (extension) and *res cogitans* (thought). Substance is then divided out into attributes. Substance must have at least one attribute. Furthermore, "In the universe there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute."<sup>31</sup> If there were to be two substances they must be distinguished either by differences in attributes or affections. Because substance is prior to its affection, and a difference in attributes would suggest there cannot be multiple substances of the same attribute, Spinoza deduces that substance must be one and infinite. He continues, explaining that two infinite substances would contradict each other,<sup>32</sup> which means that substance must be one. An infinite substance then has the ability for infinite attributes which are individuated into modes. Furthermore, these modes would be infinite within the infinite attributes because the infinite nature would allow for an infinite number of modes similar to how an infinite amount of numbers allows for an infinite sequence of numbers. As further evidence for the monistic nature of substance itself, Spinoza begins to suggest in the first proposition of the first section in which he states, "Substance is by nature prior to its affections."<sup>33</sup> The second and third proposition state that substances with different attributes have nothing in common, and substances which have nothing in common cannot be caused by each other because they cannot be understood through each other. Lastly, Spinoza argues that distinct substances are distinguished by different attributes and differences in the affects. One way two substances could be distinct is by a difference in affects. Spinoza then concludes, "In the universe there cannot be two or more

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<sup>30</sup> Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation 6.

<sup>31</sup> Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Book 1 Prop. 5.

<sup>32</sup> If two substances were to be infinite one would include the other because it's infinite, thereby making them the same thing.

<sup>33</sup> Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Book 1 Prop. 1.

substances of the same nature or attribute.”<sup>34</sup> His proof for this lies in the propositions explained prior<sup>35</sup> in which he argues substances are distinguished by a difference in attributes. A difference in attributes would suggest no same attribute substance and a difference in affections would contradict the fact that the substance comes prior to affections. Therefore, substance for Spinoza is undeniably one. After establishing that substance must be singular, Spinoza suggests what this singular substance could be.

Spinoza states that God is this singular substance and that existence is essential to substance arguing that God as substance must exist. He accomplishes this through a series of propositions. Proposition 11 states, “God, or substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exist.”<sup>36</sup> His first proof for this argues God’s essence must involve existence; therefore, he must exist. Understanding of this assertion is essential to the suggestion that we are a part of God. Spinoza suggests that we conceive that God does not exist (*reductio ad absurdum*).<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the essence of God himself would not involve existence (as existence belongs to nature<sup>38</sup>). Spinoza suggests that this is impossible because existence and substance must exist together because existence is an essential property of substance. Because substance is through existence, God must exist. His second proof suggests that God exists solely because there is nothing, external or internal, which would permit him from existing. In another proof, he argues that God exists because existence is power. If God (or something infinite) did not exist this would make finite entities more powerful (because of the lack of infinite beings), which is absurd due to the finite properties of a finite being. Humanity

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<sup>34</sup> Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Book 1 Prop. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Book 1 Prop. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Book 1 Prop. 11.

<sup>37</sup> Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Book 1 Prop. 8 Scholium 2.

<sup>38</sup> Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Book 1 Prop. 7.

cannot have the power of infinite God because humanity is, by nature, not infinite. It is also important to note that Spinoza describes God *a priori*, meaning what we clearly know to belong to the nature of God also belongs to God. Therefore, God must exist. Substance for Spinoza is one. That one is further defined as God which is existence. For Spinoza's argument a clarification of what God means must be made.

Spinoza defines God as "an absolutely infinite being, that is, a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence."<sup>39</sup> God is not what is commonly known by followers of the Abrahamic religions. Rather, God is existence, and must exist.<sup>40</sup> Spinoza argues that any interpretation of God as a human being is simply a production of our imagination. Simply an attempt to make God more accessible by relating "him" to us. In contrast, God is indistinguishable from existence. God encompasses everything tangible and intangible, everything that is and can be. God, in Spinoza's *Ethics*, is existence rather than a prayer answering man/being. Furthermore, Spinoza suggests prayer is no more than an optimistic way of attempting to change the way the universe works because God is not a person and cannot listen to prayer.<sup>41</sup> Building upon Stoic philosophy, Spinoza argues the Biblical relationship with God is completely fallacious.<sup>42</sup> Rather than prayer and worship, we ought to discover the ways in which the universe works, not through spirituality, but through observation and thought. Furthermore, we must not try to change these aspects of the universe; rather, we ought to accept them. The study of God for Spinoza is not theology and study of spiritual text. Rather, it is the

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<sup>39</sup> Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Book 1 Def 6.

<sup>40</sup> Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Book 1 Prop. 11 Proof 1.

<sup>41</sup> Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Book 1 Def 6.

<sup>42</sup> Stoic philosophy argues, similarly to Spinoza, that God is not a transcendent being. Simply put, God for Stoics is the divine element of nature.

study of science and the way it works solely because the universe itself is God. Because God is everything that exists, each individual, while existing, must be a part of God.

It is important to note that Spinoza is not suggesting every person is God. Rather, he is suggesting that every person is a piece of God, a part of the whole.<sup>43</sup> This relationship of self to God is essential in Spinoza's philosophy. This part of the whole relationship is what makes Spinoza's philosophy of God so applicable to a comparison with Hinduism. There is a simple analogy that can make this idea much more clear. A bike is the whole combination of pieces (the pedals, the wheels, the seat). However, we would not call the seat the bike because this is simply a part of the bike. This is similar to the relationship of self and God within Spinoza. The individual is a part of the bike (God), yet it would be incorrect to address this part as the bike itself (God).

One of the major questions asked about Spinoza's philosophy concerns consciousness of God, the awareness and responsiveness that he feels God has. If God is the universe, science would argue God has no consciousness because scientifically the universe does not possess the physical parts necessary to have experiences and be a conscious entity.<sup>44</sup> However, God is not only the universe and nature, rather he is everything within it. Therefore, God is the embodiment of consciousness which must mean God has consciousness (or at least a higher degree of awareness) within. Each individual is a piece of God. However, an individual themselves is not solely God. God is the combination of everything which exists, everything that is.

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<sup>43</sup> Each person is a part of existence. Since God is existence, each person is a piece of God.

<sup>44</sup> The integrated information theory is a way of accessing whether or not an entity has consciousness. For an entity to be considered conscious under this theory it must have the physical ability to experience. Spinoza's God is not a physical entity (at least not in the same way humanity is); therefore, God cannot physically experience.

Yovel does an excellent job at summing up what God is for Spinoza: “[God is not] a unique and separate person existing outside the world. [Rather] the universe itself insofar as it could be grasped as a single whole.”<sup>45</sup> It is difficult to understand this God that Spinoza is proposing because, as Yovel argues, the universe cannot be comprehended as a single whole in our minds. The infinite nature of the universe itself seems to prevent us from thinking about it in this way. Westphal provides a useful assertion in understanding this stating that, “They [the laws of nature] are not the product of God’s creative act; they themselves are God.”<sup>46</sup> Traditionally in the Abrahamic religions, God is known as the creator of all.<sup>47</sup> Westphal provides a great way of removing this preconception and allowing us to think similar to the way Spinoza was. God is not the Creator; rather, the created is God.

### **The Self in Hinduism**

While the pantheism present in Hinduism has some significant differences, there are similarities that suggest a similar concept found in two seemingly opposing religions and areas of thought. Hinduism breaks God down into two terms: Brahman and Atman. Atman is part of God which is expressed or known, in part, by an individual. Atman is humanly, the individual self which must be examined to be known. It is important to note that while Atman is humanly, it is still eternal and infinite (the part of a human which lives on forever through God, because it is God). Brahman is unknowable and limited by the fundamental limitations of language. *The Upanishads* attempt to define it by, “‘Not this, not this’ (*Neti, Neti*); for there is no other and more appropriate description than this ‘Not this.’ Now the designation of Brahman: ‘The Truth

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<sup>45</sup> Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Merold Westphal, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence*, p. 49.

<sup>47</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Genesis 1

of truth.’ The vital breath is truth and It (Brahman) is the truth of that.”<sup>48</sup> This “definition” of Brahm defines it using a theological negation suggesting that the only thing Brahman is, is not anything. *The Upanishads* do this not to reduce Brahman to a word itself, suggesting Brahm is above what we can conceptualize. This distinction seems to say that God is two. One being a piece of us (Atman) and two being the all devine unknowable (Brahman). However, the *Bhagavad Gita* makes an interesting claim suggesting, “Brahman is the only truth, the world is unreal, and there is ultimately no difference between Brahman and Atman, individual self.”<sup>49</sup> Brahman and Atman are the same thing; however, they are in different forms. There is no difference in Brahman and Atman at the divine level, but because of the limitations of the human mind, we are forced to perceive only Atman in hopes of becoming aware of the Brahman that it is. This suggests that perhaps we are not only Atman, but Brahman as well (or at least that Brahman is Atman). If Brahman is Atman, and we are Atman, we must then conclude that each individual is the divine (Brahman) while simultaneously containing the divine (Atman). Spinoza’s assertion of individuals as God is strikingly similar to Hinduism’s claim that we are Atman and Brahman.

*The Chandogya Upanishad* argues for a distinction between two identities which we each have. We first have the identity on the outside (physical identity) and the internal (true identity). This physical identity is dynamic and ever changing through the process of reincarnation. However, the internal, true identity is the one which is God.<sup>50</sup> *The Upanishads* is summarized by the four principles (the Mahavakyas) which incorporates all the teachings of the various Upanishads. The four principles are as follows: “Brahman is Consciousness,” “The soul is

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<sup>48</sup> Adi Shankaracharya, *Brihadaranyaka Upanishads*, 2.3.6.

<sup>49</sup> Sage Vyasa, *Bhagavad Gita*, 142.

<sup>50</sup> It’s important to note that we are not born aware of this true identity, we must come to realize it.

Brahman,” “You are Brahman (That thou art),” and “I am Brahman.”<sup>51</sup> There is an important distinction to make here in relation to Spinoza’s work. Spinoza would argue that there is no difference in the soul/consciousness. As seen above, Hinduism separates the two, arguing that the soul is what possesses consciousness. These principles all lead to the same fundamental property of *The Upanishads*, each individual, every person, is Brahman (God).<sup>52</sup>

### **Implications of Comparison between Spinoza and Hinduism**

While Spinoza suggests that God has a consciousness which is greater than our own, Hinduism suggests that God “himself” is literally consciousness. This distinction may not seem important. However, us possessing a different degree of consciousness than God limits our ability to be God. We cannot completely be something if we have a difference. In Hinduism, this problem does not arise because awareness itself is God and, thus, is each person. There is a very important reason for why the two philosophies differ here. Spinoza argues that we are each a part of God, together forming God. Hinduism is arguing that each individual is totally and completely God. In addition, God is totally and completely each person. Each person is all of God, and every person together is equally all of God. It is important to note another distinction between the two. While Spinoza’s work seems to be very metaphysical, interpreted as a philosophy, not a religion. The idea of the “Self-God” in Hinduism is not viewed by the Hindu people as a philosophy but rather an all encompassing way of life. One is said to be born as God, while perhaps not aware of it. Through Hinduism one can become aware of the God that they are. In Spinoza’s philosophy, we are also able to learn (or become aware of) the infinite modes. This being said, for Spinoza,

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<sup>51</sup> Tandy school of the Samaveda, *Chandogya Upanishads*, 6.8.7.

<sup>52</sup> This assertion made in *The Upanishads* is not meant to be metaphorical in any sense. For Hinduism in *The Upanishads* each person is literally God.



becoming aware and learning of the infinite modes does not then allow one to possess the infinite modes.

Spinoza's philosophy seems to suggest that becoming aware of the infinite modes is the most we can do. After reaching this awareness our journey of understanding the infinite is complete. There is a clear distinction here between Spinoza and the philosophies of Hinduism. In Spinoza's philosophy, one is not born God. While they may be born (and come to exist) as something that could be considered a piece of God, they are not God "himself." Becoming aware that there are infinite modes is not to say one is becoming aware that they are the infinite modes. Hinduism seems to suggest that through following the teachings of the Vedas<sup>53</sup> one can become aware that they are, themselves God. Furthermore, in Hinduism the self is not becoming God. The self is becoming aware that they are, and have always been, God. This idea that something can be unknown about one's self and still be essential to the philosophy of the "Self-God." Hinduism seems to take Spinoza's philosophy one step further. Rather than simply becoming aware that there are infinite modes, one can become aware that they are the infinite modes (Brahman/Atman). Furthermore, Hinduism argues that one, whether aware or not, has always been and will always be God. These differences are important when attempting to understand Spinoza's philosophy through Hinduism.<sup>54</sup>

Hinduism taking the idea a step further than Spinoza creates some potential problems, specifically existential problems about knowing ourselves. In Spinoza's philosophy, we are a finite mode of an infinite substance. However, in Hinduism we are becoming aware that we are Atman. If Atman is Brahman and Brahman is ultimately unknowable, then through this coming

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<sup>53</sup> Hindu Scripture

<sup>54</sup> It's important to note that everything said here can be applied to understanding Hinduism through Spinoza's philosophy. I am simply using Hinduism for understanding Spinoza as an example.

of awareness we begin to learn and understand that we are unknowable. This problem does not arise to the same extent in Spinoza's philosophy. We can know ourselves completely as a part, as a finite mode of an infinite substance. We cannot know the whole that we are a part of, but this is not our sole identity in Spinoza's philosophy. Looking at these two philosophies and seeing how a similar problem differs gives us the ability to search for a solution in two different places, then attempt to apply it to the other. Additionally, understanding how the Eastern school of thought presents the idea of a "Self-God" provides another viewpoint to Spinoza's philosophy. Unlike Western philosophies which are constantly presenting objections, taking an Eastern philosophy and applying it to a Western one presents new opportunities. Rather than each objecting the other, we are able to view Hinduism's philosophy through an understanding of Spinoza's philosophy and vice versa. Not only do these comparisons present potential solutions to problems, but they further our understanding of philosophy (in this case God) by introducing the ability to compare.

It is important to note the differences between these philosophies. Yet, it is arguably more important to note the similarities between them. *The Upanishads* was written in India in 800 BCE. Spinoza's *Ethics* was written in 1675 in Amsterdam. Thousands of years and thousands of miles apart, two people came to similar conclusions about humans' relationship to God. While not identical in any means, the similarities of these two philosophies can communicate a lot about how opposing philosophies may not be as different as first thought. This is intended as an example of how two philosophies from different areas of thought can be brought together and interpreted side by side. While modern philosophy has begun to compare the Western and Eastern philosophies, we are far from where we need to be. Looking at philosophy as a strictly

Western (or strictly Eastern) tradition is extremely problematic. Doing this forces one to miss out on an entire progression of thought while denying one the chance to further understanding through comparison. The benefits of viewing a philosophical problem from a different light are countless. Through using this comparative form of philosophy, we are able to progress thought past the limits that the Western/Eastern divide has created.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Identity**

#### **Identity**

The ideas found in Chapter III reflect the connection between the self to God and how this comparison between Spinoza and Hinduism serves as an example of how comparative philosophy can be used. Associating the self with God (or calling the self god in Hinduism's case) raises some questions about personal identity itself. When suggesting that the self is God, we come to question the dynamicity of identity and the self. For example, what constitutes a continuation of personal identity? What makes the self the same as it previously was or the same as what it will become? The continuation of personal identity is not thoroughly solved in Western philosophy. However, comparing what Western philosophy fails to do with what Hinduism has done by defining the self as God can yield some potential solutions. John Locke, arguably the most influential in relation to personal identity and Western philosophy, failed to gain any progress within the continuation of personal identity. As many continue to respond to Locke, his theories become less and less valid. No sound explanation has been given for the continuation of

personal identity from Western philosophy. However, when comparing this with Hinduism we may be left with some insight into the problem as we consider that the individual is God.

### **Locke on Religion**

Speaking on Christainity Locke states:

When I had gone through the whole, and saw what a plain, simple, reasonable thing Christainity was, suited to all conditions and capacities; and in the morality of it now, with divine authority, established into a legible law, so far surpassing all that philosophy and human reason had attained to, or could possible make effectual to all degrees of mankind; I was flattered to think it might be of some use in the world.<sup>55</sup>

John Locke was a proud follower of Socinian Christology. It's important to note that while his religious views did play a role in his philosophy, he largely kept them separate (at least in the case of identity). His views on God were quite traditional to that of Christianity. While Hinduism has the ability to assert the "Self-God," Locke's Christainity based solely on the Bible does not allow for this. Locke's views of God are consistent with the Bible. He felt very strongly about the power of the Bible stating, "The Bible is one of the greatest blessings bestowed by God on the children of men. It has God for its Author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture for its matter. It is all pure, all sincere; nothing too much; nothing wanting."<sup>56</sup> Because Locke holds the Bible to be so concrete, he is unable to evaluate God from a Hinduistic perspective. For Locke, God is biblical and we are his followers and children. We are not God. We come from God, but we are not God.

While Locke's religious beliefs may have kept him from reaching a Hinduistic understanding of God, this is not to say that he rejected this understanding. On the contrary, he encouraged religious tolerance of all kinds. Locke was ahead of his time when stating,

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<sup>55</sup> John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, pg. 15

<sup>56</sup> John Locke, attributed, *A dictionary of Thoughts*

“Everyone is orthodox to himself...”<sup>57</sup> This is important because despite Locke’s beliefs that contradict a Hinduistic understanding of God, he allows it. Rather than rejecting it as not valid because it does not fit with his religion he accepts it as the belief of others. This idea is essential to comparative philosophy between the East and West and something that we still struggle with in our modern world. A comparative dialogue is not possible without the initial toleration of something to compare to. While Locke’s toleration is promising it is important to note that even this comes from his understanding of God through the Bible. He writes, “The toleration of those that differ from others in matters of religion is so agreeable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the genuine reason of mankind, that it seems monstrous for men to be so blind as not to perceive the necessity and advantage of it in so clear a light.”<sup>58</sup> While the advantage Locke speaks of is widely understood to be political, I would argue Locke is very aware of the philosophical advantage that can be gained from discourse. The influence of Locke’s toleration can be seen slightly through his writings.

While Locke never gets to a definition of God that fits with Hinduism or even with Hegel or Spinoza, he does get further than many did. He writes, “A king is a mortal god on earth, unto whom the living God hath lent his own name as a great honour; but withal told him, he should die like a man, lest he should be proud, and flatter himself that God hath with his name imparted unto him his nature also.”<sup>59</sup> Locke is in no way stating here that people are God. This seems to be more of a metaphorical statement for Locke than it would be in the context of Hinduism.

Furthermore, there are some significant differences. Firstly, Locke is referring to a king, a single

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<sup>57</sup> John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, pg. 14

<sup>58</sup> John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, pg. 18

<sup>59</sup> John Locke, “Of a King”, *The Conduct of the Understanding: Essays, Morals, Economical, and Political*, pg. 143

person or small group of people. He is not referring to humanity as a whole. If this were to be read through the lense of Hinduism we would quickly realize the significant difference of who is being "lent God's name." Secondly, and arguably more significant, Locke argues that the king shall die like a man. This is seemingly contradictory. God is eternal and immortal within both Hinduism and Christainity. Yet, Locke is suggesting that the king who "is God" will die a man. This is further evidence that Locke's statement is metaphorical. He is not arguing that the king is literally God. If he were, he would of course not die a man and furthermore not die at all. Rather, the king is simply using God's name. There is a significant difference between being called something and truly being that thing. Simply calling the king God does not make the king God. What would make the king God is his attributes that he shares with God (which would be identical if the king were God). Of course, the king dies a man thus they do not share the attribute of immortality. Locke does not feel that humanity is God or that any individual human is God, something that heavily differs from Hinduism.

Before discussing identity within Locke and Hinduism it is important to understand the difference in connection the two share with religion. Locke's philosophy of identity, while inevitably influenced by his understanding of religion is not religious. There is no mention of God within his explanation of identity. In contrast, Hinduism's explanation of identity is God. It is important to understand that Hinduism is tying in religion and identity. God and identity are not detachable (as will be explained later). For Locke, God and identity are not even brought into the same conversation. They are two completely different things that he discusses in two different ways in two different areas.

## Locke on Identity

Defining a standard for the continuation of personal identity is a fundamental question of both Eastern and Western philosophy. Since the conception of identity, the question of by what virtue we are the same person now that we were days/weeks/years ago has gone widely unanswered. Traditionally in the west, there have been two widely followed solutions to this problem. The first being that the sameness of soul (defined by Descartes) defines identical persons and secondly that the sameness of body defines identical persons. Both of these solutions run into detrimental objections that invalidate them. John Locke attempts to solve this problem by suggesting that it is neither sameness of soul nor body, but rather sameness/continuation of consciousness which creates personal identity. However, this solution will never become universally accepted as it fundamentally contradicts itself and is thus not sustainable. Hinduism's pantheistic approach to identity could allow for a sound solution to the problem to arise through the form of a continuation of one as Brahman/Atman.

The first two assertions of personal identity suggest that we are fundamentally either soul or body. Furthermore, they suggest that for our personal identity to be legitimate we must maintain either the same soul or body. The words "soul" and "body" are intended to be understood through Descartes' definitions. Descartes defined the body quite simply as something which is an extension of one which occupies space. The body for Descartes was the literal matter of a person. The arms, legs, brain, etc. The physical substance itself. He defines the soul, building off of Aristotle's notion, as the piece of us which allows for self-animation and the ability to interact with our world in a more complex way than simply occupying space. Descartes' assertion of *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) led him to assert that the soul

was responsible for thinking and is joined to the body through the pineal gland (a theory that has since been disproven). Locke rejects both of these suggesting through various examples that they are inherently flawed. The soul cannot be the defining part of identity because someone who loses their ability to think (a traumatic brain injury) does not become a new person. While their behavior and demeanor changes, they are still the same person. Locke rejects that the body is the part which identity is dependent on by putting forth an example, “Cut off a hand...there being no question about the same person, through the limbs which but now were a part of it are cut off” (Locke 401). As Locke shows here, the body cannot be the answer as the body, our occupancy of space, can change without the changing of our identity. In conclusion, the sameness of our body and soul are not necessary for the sameness of our identity.

Locke takes a new approach to this problem suggesting that the answer is consciousness. Locke attempts to explain what he means by the sameness of consciousness through an analogy to plant identity or what he deems “Identity of vegetables.” Locke is attempting to navigate around the ship of Theseus paradox. The ship of Theseus paradox is a metaphysical thought experiment which questions whether an object remains fundamentally the same when pieces of that object are replaced. For example, if a ship has a sail replaced, we can most likely agree it’s still the same ship. However, if the ship then needs to have it’s hull and masts replaced, we now begin to question whether the ship is the same as it previously was. He is aware that a plant will not possess the same pieces of matter throughout its life. A plant will “exhale” carbon dioxide losing part of itself. In addition, a plant may lose a leaf in the wind or gain a new part of itself. Locke argues against the ship of Theseus paradox suggesting that even if there is not any part of a plant that is identical to it’s past plant parts, it is still fundamentally the same plant. Mass, he



says, is not fundamentally necessary, nor sufficient, for the continuation of plant identity. He suggests that the structure of the plant defines its identity<sup>60</sup> by saying that “this organization being at any one instant in any one collection of matter, is in that particular concrete distinguished from all others” (Locke 398). For example, the only concrete thing that makes a rose and an oak tree differ is the structure or “organization” of the plant. For a plant to exist is for an organization of matter to match that of the plants. He now relates this to humans suggesting that for a person to exist is for something to have consciousness.

Locke comes to the conclusion that a person's identity is dependent on their consciousness. He comes to this conclusion by the analogy stated above. The organization of matter is to plant identity as consciousness is to human identity. He goes on to suggest that for a person to maintain their identity, consciousness must be maintained. He states, “If these perceptions, with their consciousness, always remained present in the mind, by means of which the same thinking thing would be always consciously present, and, as would be thought, evidently the same to itself” (Locke 400). Locke is suggesting that personal identity exists solely through the continuity of consciousness. Regardless of how the being which encompasses the consciousness may change, if, and only if, the consciousness continues, then so does personal identity. For Locke, a person is fundamentally their consciousness. Consciousness itself is closely related to memory for Locke, “For as far as any intelligent being can repeat the idea of any past action with the same consciousness it had of it at first, and with the same consciousness it has of any present action, so far it is the same personal self” (Locke 400). For example, a young adult is only the same person as he was fifteen years ago (as a child) because he can

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<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, this concept known to biologists as the body-form of the plant is similar to the idea Locke rejects of the body constituting identity.

remember being that child through the same consciousness. The continuity of identity is solely dependent on the recollection of one's previous self. Furthermore, Locke argues, "For it is by the consciousness it has of its present thoughts and actions that it is self to itself now, and so will be the same self, as far as the same consciousness can extend to actions past or to come" (Locke 400). Locke is arguing that the sameness of personal identity is due to the memory we have of our previous self. One's self is its same previous self due to its memory of the actions of its previous self. However, these memories are not simply memories of an event. Rather, they are memories due to the continuation of consciousness. Memories of yourself prior to the present.

### **Rejection of Locke's Claim**

While this solution seems tempting it runs into some fatal flaws that deem it unuseable. One of the most detrimental flaws is that of the brave officer developed by Thomas Reid. His objection is built upon Locke's assertion that consciousness (memory) is essential for personal identity. His objection is as follows. Three time periods (1,2,3) with three people (A,B,C). Each person is seemingly the same officer at different stages in his life deemed by the three time periods. For simplicity the people will be a child (A), an adult or young officer (B), and an elderly man or retired officer (C). Person B has memories of himself as person A through the same consciousness. Similarly Person C has memories of Person B as himself. However, person C lacks any memory of person A because he has developed memory loss or has blocked out his childhood due to trauma he received for example. Because person B remembers his consciousness and himself as person A,  $A=B$ . In the same way, person  $B=C$ . Through a simple algebraic postulate (the transitive property of equality) and simple deductive reasoning we can conclude that  $A=C$  (because  $A=B$  and  $B=C$ ). However, person C has no memory of person A and

therefore, by Lock's standard, is fundamentally not the same person. This being said, Locke's "solution" is structurally fallacious as the basic composition of his argument thoroughly contradicts itself. While Locke's argument does provide insight into the problem of personal identity, it cannot be viewed as the solution because of this.

There are many proposed solutions to the problem of personal identity. Locke arguably improves on his predecessors solutions of the sameness of body/soul. However, Locke's approach has its own problems. Locke's proposal doesn't fall to the same criticism as his predecessor's. For example, an amputee does not raise any problem for Locke's idea of identity. However, it does have some significant problems within it. Locke's solution is plagued by a fundamental contradiction within his argument. Because of this, it is not the ideal way to conceptualize an understanding of personal identity. Locke's inability to solve the problem of personal identity is likely (at least partially) a result of the Western understanding of identity and the self and is further evidence for this problematic understanding apparent in Western philosophy. Approaching this problem through Hinduism suggests a different outcome that could be promising in solving the problem.

### **Hinduism on Identity**

Hinduism's pantheistic approach to religion suggests a solution to this problem of personal identity. In Hinduism, God is the only thing. Everything that is, is God. This concept is seen throughout *The Upanishads* in several places, "There is not that second thing..."<sup>61</sup> One's personal identity in Hinduism simply is God. There is no distinction between body, mind, soul, consciousness, everything is God. Therefore, regardless of which metric is used to measure

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<sup>61</sup> Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.23

identity, God is identity. Because of this assertion, the problem of continuation simply doesn't arise. Within Hinduism, God is eternal. God cannot be altered in the same way as the body, memory, mind etc. Whereas someone could simply forget an aspect of their past and raise questions about their identity through this, one cannot cease to be God. In addition, God cannot be pieced out in the same way the body can be. Whereas someone could lose an arm and be physically different, one cannot lose a piece of the God that they are. This concept is further argued in *The Chandogya Upanishad*, "There is only one, which is without a second."<sup>62</sup> Under the assertion that God is all there is, we come to an interesting solution regarding continuation of personal identity.

The idea that the body or mind could be what constitutes identity is quickly rejected in Hinduism. The Self, body, and mind are to be seen as all different parts of one total system. *The Katha Upanishad* reflects this idea, "Know the Self to be the master of the chariot, and the body to be the chariot. Know the intellect to be the charioteer, and the mind to be the reins."<sup>63</sup> While each aspect can be seen as the self, body, intellect, and mind, they can also be known as God. Furthermore, the whole system itself can be referred to as Brahman (God). Thinking about the problem of identity through this example leaves us some interesting results. Perhaps one does not need the mind (or self or body) to maintain an identity. For example, if there is a being whose body ceases to exist, the mind and self are still the same; they just lack the chariot. The same thing happens if the mind ceases to exist. The master of the chariot and the chariot itself are still the same. There are simply no more reins to control the chariot. Western philosophy struggles to find something that constitutes identity in life. Hinduism seems to assert that it has not only

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<sup>62</sup> Chandogya Upanishad 4.2.1

<sup>63</sup> Katha Upanishad 1.3.3

found something that constitutes identity within life, but something that constitutes eternal identity. This is found in *The Upanishads* stating, “Being left by the living self this body surely dies, but the living self does not die.”<sup>64</sup> The living self that the Upanishads refer to can be seen as Atman. However, because Atman is Brahman and Brahman lives on, identity is not changed in any way by death. Admittedly, the idea of living on after death is found in Western philosophy and religion. However, a convincing explanation of how identity would continue along with life after death is not found in Western philosophy.

The key to Hinduism’s ability to solve this problem lies in the self being God. God (Brahman) is eternal and because of this identity is eternal. There is an example that is helpful in demonstrating this. If a person wakes up one day remembering and acting as they did the day before, we would certainly say they are the same person. However, even if someone wakes up acting differently or lacking memory of the day before, we would likely still assert that they are the same person. If a soldier is deployed and comes back tragically missing a limb, they are no doubt the same person they were before. The one thing that holds up to this criticism as constituting identity is the self as God. If one wakes up and they are Brahman (whether or not they are aware of it), they are still the same person they were the day before. Throughout one’s life and even after one’s life, they are always Brahman. This constant is very helpful in solving the problem. Hinduism allows for one's identity to be God. Perhaps if Brahman theoretically failed to exist at some point, the continuation of identity would then be broken. This being said, Hinduism doesn’t allow for Brahman to cease to exist and thus, “My self is eternal.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Chandogya Upanishad 6.11.3

<sup>65</sup> The Bhagavad Gita, Section 2, pg. 6

### **Benefits of Comparison between Locke and Hinduism**

Because Hinduism asserts that the self is eternal, the continuation of personal identity is solved in a foolproof way. If one is Brahman, and one was Brahman, they are still the same person, the same self, that they were. Because one will always be Brahman, one will always be the same person. Western philosophy (with some exceptions) does not allow for a solution like this to arise. With the exception of perhaps Spinoza and Augustine, Western philosophers do not allow for the self and God to be intertwined in such a way.

Spinoza's philosophy would allow us to approach the solution Hinduism reaches but not fully. As explained in the previous chapter, Spinoza would assert that we are a piece of God. However this does not allow us to reach the same conclusion on identity. There is a significant difference in asserting that we are partially God and that we are entirely God. If we are only a piece of God, this piece can be lost. God, being eternal, would live on lacking this individual. However, the identity of that person would be lost with the piece of God. Furthermore, Hinduism seems to allow for someone's identity to be God without that person being aware. In Spinoza's philosophy, it seems much more difficult to assert that someone is partially God even if they do not acknowledge this. Because of these reasons, Spinoza's philosophy doesn't completely hold up to the conclusion found by Hinduism. An argument could be made that Augustine approaches this conclusion as he states, "You [God] were more inward to me than my most inward part and higher than my highest."<sup>66</sup> While this would suggest that someone is more God than they are themselves it does not go as far as to say that someone is God. Augustine encounters the same problems that Spinoza does. He is asserting that God is closer to someone's identity, but is not

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<sup>66</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.6.11

asserting that God is someone's identity. Because of this, identity is still susceptible to mortality and physical alterations.

This is problematic when solving the continuation of identity because nothing appears as constant throughout life. Furthermore, nothing appears as constant after life, something Hinduism is able to do. This Eastern solution to a historically Western problem is evidence that we can gain from comparison of the two philosophies. We are able to understand identity in a way that is currently not possible if only studying and reading Western philosophers. It is essential that these comparisons continue to take place to further the philosophical understanding of seemingly "unsolvable" problems.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY**

#### **Connection of Case Studies**

The case studies above are just three examples of the infinite ways we can use comparative philosophy. However, it is important to note that these are not just isolated examples. These studies are connected with one another. Comparative philosophy is not used only in isolated concepts as shown above. Rather, it is used in the way we practice philosophy. The connection that exists between the case studies mentioned is evidence that comparative philosophy goes far beyond simply progressing understanding of specific issues.

Chapter II compares Hegel's philosophy to that of Hinduism's "Self-God." This chapter is focused on God and the definition of God. Chapter III takes the definition of God established in Hinduism and compares it to Spinoza's God. However, Chapter III introduces the idea of Self

and questions how it is related to the definition of God. The comparison in Chapter III is only made possible by first establishing that there is a comparison to be had. The work done in relation to the self is dependent on definitions of God that are compatible with each other. Likewise, Chapter IV depends on the idea of the self and God to introduce the question of identity. While these case studies may initially be seen as unconnected, they certainly rely upon each other to further the discussion.

### **Purpose**

Conversation between Eastern and Western philosophy is virtually nonexistent. One views the other as incorrect or not valid because it does not come from the same roots and that is the end of dialogue between the two. This is extremely problematic for the progression of philosophical thought. Western philosophy is missing out on half of the world's comprehension because it simply does not view it as valid.

A lack of understanding between the two areas of philosophy has not only slowed the progression of philosophy as a whole but has caused increased conflict between the two areas of the world. The way which the Eastern world thinks (through meditation and looking inside oneself) is seen as almost barbaric to the Western world, which has put the two at a debate that has already begun to turn violent. The Western world simply does not understand Eastern philosophy (and vice versa) and therefore does not understand the people or concepts. Without this understanding we begin to fear the other due only to the nature of not understanding.

Bringing Western and Eastern philosophy into conversation has countless benefits not only to the field of philosophy but human society as a whole. Understanding will lead to an acceptance which will drastically decrease conflict and fear. Phobia of Eastern religions will



diminish and thought will progress at a rate never seen before. Cross examining Western thinkers with Eastern thinkers has the potential to uncover things that humans have never conceptualized. It is no secret that life is different in the two areas of the world. These contrasting environments no doubt lead to a different way of thinking. These different ways of thinking can be nothing but beneficial once they are understood.

### **Conclusion**

Hinduism and Christianity have drastically different origins and were founded in completely different ways at completely different times. The two religions have seemingly conflicted beliefs that would lead one to reject any influence from the other. However, Hegel's philosophy, Spinoza's philosophy, Locke's philosophy, and the Hindu "Self-God" are just three examples of how similar these two religions are, and furthermore these two philosophies are. Philosophy/religion is not about being correct. It is about progressing intellect and increasing comprehension of seemingly incomprehensible concepts. For this to be developed, we must bring together what we believe to be contrasting thoughts so we can see that, truly, they are not contrasting at all.

There is work to be done here. The uses of comparative philosophy are endless. We must not allow bias of other areas of thought to prevent us from using them. This paper is to serve as evidence that despite inherent bias that we have, progress is possible. This paper is proof that there are benefits to be gained from comparing Eastern and Western philosophy. Eliminating dialogue and conversation between the two areas of philosophy is detrimental. Doing this isolates thought. We must continue to keep an open mind and allow ourselves to progress philosophy.

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## *CURRICULUM VITAE*

***Matthew McGreenera***

***Phone: (936) 522 6293***

***26 Weeping Spruce ct.***

***Mtm065@shsu.edu***

***The Woodlands, TX 77384***

### ***Education***

*BA Sam Houston State University, Philosophy December 2020*

*Minors: German and General Business*

*Graduated Summa Cum Laude*

*Graduated with Highest Honors*

*Graduated with Academic Distinction in Philosophy*

*Cum. GPA: 3.89 // SHSU GPA: 3.93 // Major GPA: 4.00*

*\*GPA's and honors are projections*

*XX Lone Star Community College*

*Credits Transferred to Sam Houston State University*

*Lone Star CyFair National Society of Leadership and Success Nominee*

### ***Honors and Awards***

*Elliot T. Bowers Honors College Graduate 2020*

*Graduate of the Sam Houston State Honors College*

*Academic Distinction 2020*

*Graduated with Academic Distinction in Philosophy*

*Merit Scholar* 2019  
 Received merit scholarship through Sam Houston State Honors College

*Houstonfest German Scholarship* 2018  
 Scholarship awarded for performance in German

***Work Experience***

*Dorstener Wire Tech, Inventory Control and Machinist* 2016 to 2020  
 19994 Hickory Twig Way, Spring, TX 77388 // (281) 651 6226  
 Responsibilities: Operate machinery and accurately organize and record  
 outgoing and incoming inventory.

Supervisor: Hugo Pena,

***Community Service***

*Hughes and Friends Nonprofit, Co-Manager* 2015 to Present  
 Benefits Two Scholarship Endowments  
 Responsibilities: Assist and coordinate fundraising events.

Reference: John Hughes

***School Involvement***

*Pre-Law Society, Member* 2019 to 2020  
 Group of Like-Minded Pre-Law Students

*Diversity Reader, Ambassador* 2018

*How Does it Feel to be A Problem? Being Young and Arab in America*

*Moustafa Bayoumi*

*Honors Student Advisory Council (HSAC), Member* 2018 to 2020

*Council Designed to Assist and Mentor Honors Students*

*Sam Houston State Hockey Club Team, Officer* 2018 to 2020

*Officer and Assistant Captain of the Nationally Ranked*

*Inline Hockey Team*

*Chi Alpha, Member* 2018 to 2019

*Christian Student Organization*

*German Conversation and Culture Club (GCCC), Member* 2018 to 2020

*Organized Events to Spread German Culture and Language*

*Student Alumni Association (SAA)* 2018 to 2019

*Focused on Preserving Important Traditions on Campus*

### ***Languages***

*English: Native Language*

*German: Intermediate Listener, Intermediate Speaker, Intermediate Reading and Writing*

