SELF AND REALITY
Mimamsa and Vedanta Darshanas
KEY QUESTIONS:

- Vedantists were concerned that the Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, and Vaisheshika schools were departing from the original wisdom of the Vedas (hence, “Vedanta”) in maintaining that the material world is real and pluralistic (pluralistic realism/atomism.)

- The primary issue was to return to the original source and develop an epistemology and metaphysics which supported the claim that all is eternally Brahman.

- Further, they recognized the problem of reconciling two radically distinct kinds of substances – immaterial and material – into a unified whole – thus raising the question of the ultimate reality of prakriti self and world.

- Finally, the concern over knowledge of ultimate reality as opposed to studies of objective reality was raised.
MIMAMSA ANALYSIS OF KNOWLEDGE:

- How is it possible that the Vedas are true, if what is claimed goes beyond ordinary human knowledge?

- Three alternate approaches to defending the Vedas as true:
  - They originate from the divine – and as such must be taken on faith
  - They can be demonstrated as true in terms of their correspondence to reality
  - The truth is self-validating:
    - “(T)he truth of the knowledge is given with the knowledge itself….”
    - And, “belief in what is known arises with the knowledge itself and not as a result of verification by some other knowledge.” (p.119)

- Mimamsa elects the third approach supporting truth as a “self-certifying” process.
The Vedanta Darshana is divided into three different schools by how they address the issue of the relationship between persons, things and ultimate reality – Brahman.
I. ADVAITA - SHANKARA

Shankara focused on the vedic claim that “All is Brahman.” He interprets this to mean that the only thing that is real is Brahman and all else is unreal. He proposed a theory of radical non-dualism - only one real and absolute reality: Brahman who is both transcendent and immanent.

Individuated selves and the prakritic world is regarded as “appearance rather than reality and perceptions as illusion rather than knowledge.” (p.121)
SHANKARA’S REJECTION OF PLURALISM:

- To demonstrate the unsatisfactory nature of previous theories, Shankara rejects both the Sankhya and Vaisheshika metaphysics:
  - Samkhya held that the world was the result of the unconscious revolution of the three gunas which in turn gave us the "vehicle" enabling us to become liberated. Shankara denied that matter could be both unconscious and purposeful.
  - Vaisheshika’s picture of an atomistic universe is also equally untenable because how can unconscious atoms form to provide the orderly universe they claim and how could such atoms ever be created or destroyed as described in the Upanishads?
SHANKARA’S REJECTION OF CAUSALITY:

- *Satkaryavada* is rejected in that if the effect is contained within the cause then it is a process of coming to be of that which already was which Shankara maintains is ridiculous - hence no real material change has taken place.

- Some Sankhya have attempted to respond to this charge by describing the effect as unmanifest in its causes – i.e. only potential, becoming manifest/actual as a product of those causes combined. Shankara argued that this attempt is smuggling in *Asatkaryavada* under the guise of Satkaryavada, hence they have defeated themselves.

- *Asatkaryavada* is rejected because nothing can show the effect to be wholly different from its cause - in this he is referring to the material cause in that one may think of the effect as having always existed. Further, if the effect is something new then this is tantamount to saying that one could get something from anything or nothing – hence erode all notions of causality altogether.
SHANKARA’S ANSWER:

- The world is a dream...
- Illusion for Shankara then is the mistake of thinking the world of our senses/experiences is ultimately real. "The world is really the misperception and misconception of Brahman." (p.126)
- In a sense the experiential world exists - at least subjectively but objectively it does not - it is all Brahman - thus not changing and not material.
The relationship between the not-self and the self is purely illusory - it is seen only because of ignorance and once the self is fully realized this ignorance is cured. "Knowledge of Brahman is practical knowledge; it is a matter of direct and immediate personal experience. Since ultimately the universe is identical with the Self, realizing Brahman is a matter of being completely oneself, and experiencing one's ultimate reality."

(p.127)
II. VISHISHTADVAITA: RAMANUJA

Ramanuja objected to Shankara’s radical monism through a careful re-thinking of the very same claim Shankara cited. Ramanuja argues that if the Vedas meant what Shankara claims then it would simply have been written “Brahman is.” The fact that the claim, “All is Brahman,” begins with the inclusive “All” is significant. His argument is roughly as follows:

- **P1)** “All this is Brahman.” (Chandogya 3.14.1 – Koller p.121)
- **P2)** “All” implies a unity
- **P3)** A unity implies parts

- **C)** Brahman is a unity of parts – which include individual selves and the material world.
RAMANUJA’S QUALIFIED NONDUALISM

Instead of Shankara’s radical version, Ramanuja proposes a **Qualified Nondualism** – the theory that the world is composed of only one ultimate reality - Brahman - but that we understand that within the unity lies differences - or parts of the whole - not separate from but distinct within.

The experiential world is real and so is the immaterial world of the true self. Both are necessary to make any sense of unity and difference - one cannot have a unity without it being a unity of different parts - but difference must exist because otherwise one would then have neither unity nor identity.

Similarly the self must be real in order to realize the unity of reality - knower & the known. Consciousness is an attribute of self - thus knowledge is possible.
RAMANUJA’S QUALIFIED NONDUALISM

- Brahman is pictured as an organic entity - a being composed of parts - each of which contribute to the continued existence of the whole. The attributes of Brahman are part of what is ultimately Brahman - it is that ultimate substance of which all things are existentially dependent upon.
RAMANUJA’S QUALIFIED NONDUALISM

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III. DVAITA: MADHVA

- Madhva focuses on another vedic claim that knowledge is possible. (“Atman being known…everything is known.” Brihadaranyaka 4.5.6 – Koller p.121)
- In this, he reads the Vedas to mean objective knowledge. If this is so then there must be a clear distinction between the knowing subject and the known object else it would be subjective and not objective knowledge.
- In place of Ramanuja’s modified monism, he proposes a pluralistic vision of reality in which Brahman, individual selves and the material world all exist separately.
MADHVA’S DUALISM

- Knowledge is basically an understanding of how one thing is different from another - to make distinctions - thus if these differences were not real differences then there could be no real knowledge.

- The self must be different from Brahman because otherwise:
  - a) it would require the self to be both Brahman and not-Brahman - ie. in suffering we are not-B and upon liberation we become B.
  - b) it would make Atman realization impossible for knowledge requires both the Knower and the Known - self and Brahman
In setting up the eternal differences - that is that the material things, self and Brahman are all different substances then it is difficult to see why Brahman is even required - knowledge is possible because we have the material things as the known object and the self as the knower - what is the required role of Brahman? (see discussion of problem pp. 129-130)
MADHVA’S SOLUTION:

“…Madhva argues that while things and selves are substances, they are different kinds of substances than Brahman. Brahman alone is completely independent; other substances are real and exist separately, but ultimately depend on Brahman.” (p.130)
## VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY: A SUMMARY

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<th>Brahman</th>
<th>Individual Selves</th>
<th>Material World</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shankara</strong></td>
<td>Ultimate Reality</td>
<td>&lt;Purusha is real (but Not individuated) Prakriti is not real&gt;</td>
<td>Not real (only like a dream – subjectively Real)</td>
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<td><strong>Radical Non-Dualism</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Ramanuja</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Qualified Monism</strong></td>
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<td>An organic unity</td>
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<td><strong>Madhva</strong></td>
<td>Eternal Subject &gt;</td>
<td>Known object &amp; Knowing Subject&gt;</td>
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<td><strong>Pluralism</strong></td>
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<td>Each exist distinct</td>
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