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III. The Nondualistic Intrinsic Nature of Brahman-God

1. Introduction

Transcending space (desha), time (kala), and causation (nimitta) the Indian Nirguna Brahman and Christian Essence of God (Divine Substance) are nondual-undivided (Simple) without form or division, Self-existent (Aseity) not receiving existence from or being caused by another entity, infinite without parts, timelessly eternal, and immutable. They are unknowable transcending space, time, causation, the primary categories of finite existence, and all forms of knowledge; and are independent of all other beings and entities including the universe. These characteristics are free of all imperfections and limitations. In the traditional classification system, these intrinsic characteristics are described as being absolute and not relative (Nirguna Brahman in-Itself), immanent (indwelling), intransitive (characteristics remain within Nirguna Brahman), and incommunicable (not shared with other entities).

These characteristics are sometimes described by negation (*neti neti, via negativa*), since they are not found in the phenomenal world. Nonduality and undivided (simple) denotes an absence of any form of division, aseity means not receiving existence from or being caused by another entity, infinity is without

limits, eternity implies timelessness, and immutability signifies not being subject to change. Following this approach Nirguna Brahman is defined as nameless, formless, spaceless, timeless (eternal), causeless, partless (simple), changeless (immutable), beginningless, birthless, endless, deathless (immortal), and limitless (infinite); or nontemporal (eternal), nondivided (simple), nonchanging (immutable), and nonfinite (infinite). Swami Vivekananda makes the distinction between existence and Existence-Itself and between qualities (attributes) and essence. “The Purusha [Atman] does not love, it is love itself. It does not exist, it is existence itself. The Soul [Atman] does not know, It is knowledge itself. It is a mistake to say the Soul loves, exists, or knows. Love, existence, and knowledge are not the qualities of the Purusha, but its essence. When they get reflected upon something, you may call them the qualities of that something. They are not the qualities but the essence of the Purusha, the great Atman, the Infinite Being, without birth or death, established in its own glory.”¹

There are two levels of predication for each of the Divine characteristics. First is to ascribe particular characteristics to Brahman-God. More demanding is to attempt to prove that it is logically impossible for Brahman-God not to have this characteristic. Is it impossible for intrinsic Brahman-God not to be metaphysically nondual-undivided, Self-existent, infinite without parts, timelessly eternal, or immutable? Is this absolutely necessary, not contingent, and something that cannot be different?

Since It is beyond and transcends duality, in the Ultimate State Nirguna Brahman-Atman-Essence of God is unknowable In-Itself, being that It has no qualities (attributes), or relationship with any human ideas or words. It has been described from the negative standpoint: the Indian ‘Neti, Neti’ (not this, not this) and the Western Apophatic (*Via Negativa*) method. The intrinsic characteristics of Nirguna Brahman-Atman-Essence of God are describable from the positive and affirmative standpoint: the Indian Anvaya and the Western Cataphatic (or Kataphatic) (*Via Positiva*) method. This is the Penultimate State, i.e., comprehended from the standpoint and perspective of the understanding of the human intellect (*sub specie intellectus*, buddhi) and from the phenomenal world (vyavaharika). For example, Nirguna Brahman is explained analogously as existence, consciousness, and bliss.

Nirguna means “without qualities or attributes,” yet in this qualified sense from our temporal standpoint Nirguna Brahman-Essence of God can be described. We think of Nirguna Brahman-Essence of God as always existing in the past, present, and future implying the nature of both existence and eternity (or Existence-Itself and Eternity-Itself). In this manner the Penultimate State points the way to Nirguna Brahman-Essence of God. Another example, Nirguna Brahman is ontologically prior to (transcends) causality and therefore cannot be explained in terms of cause and effect. But, from our standpoint Nirguna Brahman is the foundational cause, the ontological first cause of the universe. Why, because without Nirguna Brahman there would be no universe. Nirguna Brahman transcends all relations (apophatic), yet we can explain how we are related to It (cataphatic). Both Shankara and Vivekananda describe that we can advance from this plane of existence to the Nondual realm meaning that they are in some ways connected with each other. Since our ideas of these characteristics are derived from the things of the world, they only indirectly describe Nirguna Brahman. The Ultimate state of perfect understanding from the standpoint (sub specie) of Nirguna Brahman can only be attained through nirvikalpa samadhi.

Shankara’s two tier ontology describes the essential nature of Nirguna Brahman from the Absolute (Svarupa-laksana) and Positive (*Via Positiva*) standpoint as being Sat (Existence), Chit (Unchanging and homogeneous Consciousness), and Ananda (Unchanging and homogeneous Bliss). From the relative (Tatastha-laksana) standpoint, relational characteristics such as Brahman being the source and support of the phenomenal world, are superimposed on the non-relational, essential nature of nondual Nirguna Brahman. This is necessary to gain some understanding of the nature of Brahman.²

Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) explained the difference between God as He is and our conception of Him. “These relations have no real existence in God, and yet are predicated of Him, it follows that they are attributed to Him solely in accordance with our manner of understanding ... For all other things, such as wisdom and will, express His essence; the aforesaid relations by no means do so really, but only as regards our way of understanding. Nevertheless, our understanding is not fallacious. For, from the very fact that our intellect understands that the relations of the Divine effects are terminated in God Himself, it predicates certain things of Him relatively; so also do we understand and express the knowable relatively, from the fact that

knowledge is referred to it.... it is not prejudicial to God's Simplicity if many relations are predicated of Him, although they do not signify His essence; because those relations are consequent upon our way of understanding. For nothing prevents our intellect from understanding many things, and being referred in many ways to that which is in Itself simple [undivided], so as to consider that simple reality under a manifold relationship.”³ Aquinas mentions a "relation of reason" (relatio rationis) that is not objectively real in God, but is attributed to Him by the human intellect.⁴

Vedanta teaches that Sat (Existence-Itself)-Chit (Consciousness-Itself)-Ananda (Bliss-Itself), all three are on an equal level. Nirguna Brahman “is,” not “has” existence, consciousness, and bliss. For Aquinas they form a hierarchy. He indicated that, “The intellect first apprehends Being Itself [Sat]; secondly, it apprehends that it understands Being [Chit]; and thirdly, it apprehends that it desires Being [Ananda].”⁵ To explain the sequence, an entity can exist without consciousness or bliss, but they must exist for them to occur. Consciousness can be without bliss, but not bliss without consciousness. Existence is dichotomous (exists or does not exist), while consciousness and bliss at least on the human level are continuous with degrees.

Applying Baruch (or Benedict) Spinoza’s (1632-77) terminology, “Sub specie aeternitatis” (“from the perspective of the eternal”) Nirguna Brahman is real and “Sub specie temporis” (“from the perspective of the temporal”) the phenomenal world that is involved in time is real. This compares to the Sanskrit Paramarthika-drsti (from the Absolute point of view) and Vyavaharika-drsti (from the pluralistic universe point of view).⁶

2. Divine Simplicity (Undifferentiated, Partless, Undivided/Akhanda, Niravayava, Nirvishesa, Niskala)

Indian: “He who is in the fire, and he who is here in the heart and he who is yonder in the sun-he is one. He who knows this goes to the oneness of the One” (Mait. Up. 6:17). “Indivisible, infinite, the Adorable One” (Svet Up.* p. 203).

Old and New Testament: “Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is One” (Dt. 6:4; Mk. 12:29).

The characteristic of simplicity (akhanda, niskala, niravayava, nirvishesa) means that Brahman-God is One without composition; an undivided, undifferentiated, indivisible, and partless unity. Each of Its characteristics is identical with Brahman-God. It is without physical, metaphysical, or logical composition and cannot be anything that can be subdivided into smaller groupings. Nirguna Brahman-Essence of God has neither material parts, nor metaphysical parts like form and matter, substance and accidents, essence and existence, or potency and act.⁷ The other intrinsic characteristics follow from the Undivided=Nondual Simplicity of Brahman-God that allows It to transcend: causation, space, time, conceptualization, plurality, and imperfection. These six cannot exist in an undifferentiated world without composition. It is uncaused (Aseity) because being undifferentiated there is no division into cause and effect and nothing else exists that can cause It. Infinity is due to the fact that is a partless existence without spatial limitations. Being timelessly Eternal and Immutable occur because of the lack of temporal divisions into units of time. The Hindus describe the highest Reality as Advaita (Nondual) and the Christians use the word Simple meaning undivided. What is undivided must be nondual. Nirguna Brahman-Essence of God has neither material parts, nor metaphysical parts like form and matter, substance and accidents, essence and existence, or potency and act.

Without conceptual differentiation, Brahman-God is Ineffable. Human reason cannot function without the division into various ideas. It must be One in number since there cannot be duality or plurality in an undifferentiated existence. There is nothing to prevent It from being Perfect or to limit It. Being Omnipresent It is both Transcendent and Immanent in relation to the phenomenal world.

From the nondualistic standpoint, Shankara (c. 688/788-720/820) comprehended that Nirguna “Brahman is without parts or attributes. It is subtle, absolute, taintless, one without a second. In Brahman there is no diversity whatsoever. Brahman is indefinable, beyond the range of mind and speech, one without a second.”⁸ Without internal differentiations (nirvishesa) or external relations, It is undifferentiated and undivided existing as a noncomposite nondual unity.⁹ “Brahman becomes subject to all kinds of [phenomenal] actions like transformation, on account of the differences of aspects, constituted by name and form, which remain either differentiated or nondifferentiated, which cannot be determined either as real or unreal, and which are imagined through ignorance. In

Its real aspect Brahman remains unchanged [immutable] and beyond all phenomenal actions. And since the differences of name and form, brought about by ignorance, are ushered into being through mere speech, the partlessness of Brahman is not violated.”¹⁰ Demonstrating the versatility of their mind, Shankara presents the views of an “opponent” to his ideas in his *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* and so does Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica* under the heading of “Objections.”

Swami Vivekananda emphasized that Nirguna Brahman-Atman is partless, without composition or extension, timeless, not a compound of matter and energy, or an effect of something else (aseity), and therefore is indestructible and not subject to death (timelessly eternal). “Everything that is a compound can be seen or imagined. That which we cannot imagine or perceive, which we cannot bind together, is not force or matter, cause or effect, and cannot be a compound. The domain of compounds is only so far as our mental universe, our thought universe extends. Beyond this it does not hold good; it is as far as law reigns, and if there is anything beyond law, it cannot be a compound at all. The Self [Atman] of man being beyond the law of causation, is not a compound.”¹¹ “The Soul [Atman] is not a compound; It is the only eternal simple in the universe, and as such, It cannot be born, It cannot die; It is immortal, indestructible, the ever-living essence of intelligence.”¹² “Infinity cannot be divided, it always remains infinite. If it could be divided, each part would be infinite. And there cannot be two infinities. Suppose there were, one would limit the other, and both would be finite. Infinity can only be one, undivided. Thus the conclusion will be reached that the infinite is one and not many, and that one Infinite Soul [Atman] is reflecting Itself through thousands and thousands of mirrors, appearing as so many different souls. It is the same Infinite Soul, which is the background of the universe, that we call God. The same Infinite Soul also is the background of the human mind which we call the human soul.”¹³ “There is but one Infinite Being in the universe, and that Being appears as you and I; but this appearance of divisions is after all a delusion. He has not been divided, but only appears to be divided. This apparent division is caused by looking at Him through the network of time, space, and causation. When I look at God through the network of time, space, and causation, I see Him as the material world.... and that Being we are. I am That, and you are That. Not parts of It, but the whole of It.”¹⁴

Historically the doctrine of Divine simplicity (nonduality of God) was strongly advocated by leading Greek philosophers like Aristotle and Plotinus; Philo of Alexandria; Church Fathers like Augustine (who was a Neoplatonist before becoming a Christian) and Dionysius; foremost Medieval Christian (Anselm, Thomas Aquinas), Jewish (Moses Maimonides), and Muslim (Avicenna) thinkers; and many others. Simplicity emphasizes the absolute transcendence of God in relation to the phenomenal world.

Plotinus (c. 205-70) tells us, “Since, then, the simple nature of the Good [One] appeared to us as also primal (for all that is not primal is not simple) ... the nature of what is called the One is the same (for this is not some other thing first and then one) ... And we call it [the One] the First in the sense that it is simplest, and the Self-Sufficient, because it is not composed of a number of parts; for if it were, it would be dependent upon the things of which it was composed; and we say that it is not in something else, because everything which is in something else also comes from something else. If, then, it is not from something else or in something else or any kind of compound, it is necessary that there should be nothing above it. So we must not go after other first principles but put this first ... No one could find any principle simpler than the principle of all things which we have said to be as above described, or transcending it.” “The One, which is simple and has in it no diverse variety, or any sort of doubleness.” “It has no perception of itself and is not even conscious of itself and does not even know itself” [because it is not an object].... If anything is the simplest of all, it will not possess thought of itself: for if it is to possess it, it will possess it by being multiple. It is not therefore thought, nor is there any thinking about it.... We say what it is not, but we do not say what it is: so that we speak about it from what comes after it.... but is more and greater than anything said about him, because he is higher than speech and thought and awareness; He gives us these, but he is not these Himself.” “There must be something simple before all things, and this must be other than all the things which come after it, existing by itself, not mixed with the things which derive from it if it is not to be simple, outside all coincidences and composition, it could not be a first principle.”¹⁵

Concerning Divine simplicity Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) the Italian Catholic friar (monk) in the Dominican Order wrote, “For there is neither composition or quantitative parts in God, since He is not a body [incorporeal]; nor composition of

form and matter; nor does His nature differ from His suppositum [individual substance]; neither is there in Him composition of genus [samanya] and differences, nor of subject and accident. Therefore, it is clear that God is in no way composite, but is altogether simple. Secondly, because every composite is posterior to its component parts, and is dependent on them; but God is the first being, as has been shown above. Thirdly, because every composite has a cause, for things in themselves diverse cannot unite unless something causes them to unite. But God is uncaused [aseity/svasiddha], as has been shown above, since He is the first efficient cause. Fourthly, because in every composite there must be potentiality [anabhivyakta] and actuality [abhivyakta] (this does not apply to God) for either one of the parts actualizes another, or at least all the parts are as it were in potency with respect to the whole.”¹⁶ “Every composite, furthermore, is potentially dissoluble.... This does not befit God, since He is through Himself the Necessary Being.” “Prior to all multitude we must find unity. But there is multitude in every composite. Therefore, that which is before all things, namely, God, must be free from all composition.”¹⁷ “In God intellect [knower-subject], the thing understood [known-object], and the act of understanding [knowing-combines subject and object] are one and the same.”¹⁸ “In God, power, essence, will, intellect, wisdom, and justice are one and the same.”¹⁹ “Power is predicated of God not as something really distinct from His knowledge and will, but as differing from them logically; inasmuch (namely) as power implies the notion of a principle putting into execution what the will commands and what knowledge directs.”²⁰ “God however as considered in Himself, is altogether one and simple, yet our intellect knows Him according to diverse conceptions because it cannot see Him as He is in Himself.”²¹ Simple means undivided, which is similar to the Indian nondual.

Thomas Aquinas does not teach the nonduality of the world, being that he accepts the existence of a real objective pluralistic universe created by a Simple God. Yet he does advocate the Monistic Nonduality of God (Christian Nondualism) as being as changeless and metaphysically simple, as undivided oneness, without composition, having no internal relations; not separated into quantitative or qualitative, dual or pluralistic components. For Advaitists, Nirguna Brahman is without qualities, attributes, or properties, but for the Aquinas God is Ekaguna or Aikyaguna (all qualities, attributes, or properties are reducible to one). For him Ekaguna God is omniscient, yet Its understanding is a nonpropositional,

noninferential, timelessly undifferentiated intuition that we as humans cannot comprehend. The world as we perceive it is not unreal, but there is an analogous relationship between our perception and the Reality (Analogical Predication). From our standpoint, there is a duality between God who is nondual and the things of the world that are not. For a Simple God there is no analogy since this requires two and in God there is only Oneness. Aquinas differs from Shankara whose Nondualism forms a system of interconnected ideas. Aquinas explains the Nondual nature of God as a partially isolated idea that is not fully integrated with his other religious philosophical ideas. Also, for Aquinas only God is Simple (undivided = nondual) and not humans. God's existence and essence (nature, attributes) are one and the same thing, so He is His power, knowledge, and goodness. They are not something separate from Him that He added to His nature. Aquinas was more than a nondualist, for example his Analogical Predication is dualistic since an analogy requires two members that differ in some ways.

We ask how can a Simple (undivided) God create and interact with a separate complex universe? How can a creation exist that is outside of an infinite Simple God? Does this mean God is internally undivided and in the act of creation become externally divided which appears to be paradoxical? Does creating a universe that previously did not exist involve a change which an Immutable God cannot do? How can an undivided (Simple) God create a complex non-Simple universe from nothing? God could not use ideas to accomplish this task since they are complex and involve extension in subtle space. In Indian thought the universe is created not by the nondual changeless Nirguna Brahman (Essence of God) but by complex and changing Saguna Brahman (Manifestation of God).

In addition, the Christian philosopher Aquinas explains the Nonduality of God from the transcendent, external, objective, ontological perspective. He like Aristotle and unlike the Indians is not much concerned with the Nonduality of God from the internal, subjective, psychological standpoint. Consequently, Aquinas has little to say about God as the Essential Self (Atman), the witness-self (Saksin), or the indwelling inner guide and ruler (Antaryamin). As Vivekananda stated, "The study of the Greeks was the outer Infinite, while that of the Aryans was the inner Infinite; one studied the macrocosm, and the other the microcosm. Each had its distinct part to play in the civilization of the world."²²

To make Vedantic Nondualism and Christian Nondualism more compatible we must include the ideas of Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1328) the German mystic. While for Aquinas only God is Simple (undivided), he did not have the idea that humans are also. This was realized by Meister Eckhart who in his profound mystical experiences stresses the identity of his higher Self and God (Thou Art That). As recorded in Ch. II. The Atman, Section 2. Eckhart's ideas approach that of the Atman when he stated, "When I stood in my first cause, there I had no God and was cause of myself.... I was pure being ... for my Essential Being is above God ... in God's own Being, where God is raised above all being and all distinctions ... I discover that I and God are one." "The Ground of God and the Ground of the Soul are one and the same." "... in the oneness of the Divine Essence. There she is no more called soul, but is called Immeasurable Being." "The knower and the known are one." "There is something in the soul which is above the soul, Divine, simple, an absolute nothing ... simple ground." "God by his grace would bring me into the Essence; that Essence which is above God and above distinction." "Every creature has a twofold being,' a virtual existence (*esse virtuale*) and a formal existence (*esse formale*). The former is its mode of existence in its original cause, the Divine Word, as an idea (*rationes*) in the Mind of God." The pre-existent Virtual being, the real nature of the soul is uncreated and one with God's being. Since Eckhart was a mystic and Aquinas a philosopher the relationship between their teachings is not easy to discern. One reason for their differences is that Aquinas employed an epistemology of philosophical reasoning and Eckhart an epistemology of religious experience. Shankara and Vivekananda used both approaches.

The idea is to reduce complex theories such as the Indian Nonduality and the Christian Simplicity (Undividedness) down to their essential constituents. If the constituents are alike then we can compare the two theories in terms of their similarities and differences. This methodological procedure is used many times in this book.

The philosopher William James (1842-1910) an admirer of Swami Vivekananda whom he met and conversed with explains simplicity and its implications. God "is simple metaphysically also, that is to say, His nature and His existence cannot be distinct, as they are in finite substances which share their formal natures with one another, and are individual only in their material aspect. Since God is one and only, His *essentia* [essence] and His *esse* [existence] must be

given at one stroke. This excludes from His being all those distinctions, so familiar in the world of finite things, between potentiality and actuality, substance and accidents, being and activity, existence and attributes. We can talk, it is true, of God's powers, acts, and attributes, but these discriminations are only 'virtual,' and made from the human point of view. In God all these points of view fall into an absolute identity of being.... Furthermore, He is immense, boundless [infinite, ananta]; for could He be outlined in space, He; would be composite, and this would contradict His indivisibility. He is therefore omnipresent, indivisibly there, at every point of space. He is similarly wholly present at every point of time—in, other words eternal.”²³

A strong ideological system is one where one characteristic logically proceeds from another. Its internal order necessarily follows from its first principles and basic presuppositions, from which further principles may be generated or deduced.²⁴ Above Shankara implies that simplicity (nonduality) is related to immutability; Vivekananda to aseity, infinity, timeless eternity, and indestructibility; Aquinas to aseity and incorporeality; and James to infinity, omnipresence, and being eternal.

Some make the mistake of assuming because two thinkers belong to different: religions, geographic areas such as Europe or Asia, professions such as or a theologian, philosopher, or scientists, or lived many centuries apart that their ideas cannot be compared. They might be writing about the same subject though their vocabulary differs. In many cases for centuries the leading religions have been studying similar topics. For example, there are similarities between the ideas of Shankara and Thomas Aquinas and Shankara and Immanuel Kant.

Comments on Divine Simplicity

In-Itself (What It is, not what It does) Nirguna Brahman has no qualities or attributes. It is beyond every form of duality, including space, time, causality, thought, and words, being “totally other” from the dualistic (pluralistic) world of the senses and intellect. Viewed from the standpoint of the human intellect, It can be conceived of having five intrinsic characteristics of: simplicity (nonduality), aseity (Self-Existent), infinity without parts, timeless eternity, and immutability. The attributes are relatively but not absolutely distinct in the sense there is no difference between one of these five characteristics and the other four. From the

relative standpoint these attributes are distinct though they are internally connected. At this ontological level Brahman-God does not possess the extrinsic attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence (Becoming, What Brahman-God does). This is because there is nothing separate from Brahman-God to be present at, to have power over, to know, or be good toward. These extrinsic attributes require the existence of gross or subtle space, time, and causality.

Many modern Western philosophers write that God is immutable, yet in the *Bible* God speaks and does change. Believing in the unity of God, they ask the question, how can God at the same time be both infinite and finite, simple and a Trinity, partless with parts, and formless with form? How can God be timeless, and yet act in time, know temporal events, and have a personality?²⁵ For example, Alvin Plantinga who deserves credit for honestly bringing these issues out for discussion writes, “If God is identical with each of his properties, then each of his properties is identical with each of his properties, so that God has but one property. This seems flatly incompatible with the obvious fact that God has several properties; he has both power and mercifulness, say, neither of which is identical with the other.” He also challenges other aspects of Aquinas’ philosophy, asking if God is timeless and not in a state of potentiality, how can He create something in the future that presently does not exist? How can God be a person if He is unchangeable, not composite, and has no will or knowledge.²⁶

In the West it is the Classical Theists (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Philo of Alexandria, Plotinus, Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Avicenna (Muslim), Anselm, Maimonides (Jewish), Averroes (Muslim), Aquinas, Leibniz) who support a Simple (Undivided=Nondual) God who is immutable, timeless, and impassible. They are opposed by the Theistic Personalists who favor a dualistic Personal God based largely on Biblical teachings. In recent times the latter group has received the support of Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne, and William Lane Craig. A simple God is outside of space and time having neither material or metaphysical parts and is not a composite of form and matter, substance and accidents, or essence and existence. God is identical to His existence, nature, and attributes²⁷ and they are identical to each other. Since there are no divisions there is only one thing, not two different entities that differ from each other.

This is not a problem for a Vedantists who accept Brahman (God) as having

two aspects, Nirguna (without qualities) and Saguna (with qualities). Nirguna Brahman the Essence of God is timeless, is not a person, has no properties, and does not create the universe. It is Saguna Brahman the Manifestation of God that is not simple, changes, has many attributes, and creates the universe. The Classical Theists are describing the Essence of God (comparable to Nirguna Brahman) and the Theistic Personalists as the Manifestation of God (comparable to Saguna Brahman). Plantinga, Swinburne, and Craig take an either/or approach rather than the correct both/and perspective. While Saguna Brahman has accidental (i.e. contingent) properties, Nirguna Brahman has none. Power and knowledge are separate for Saguna Brahman and identical for Nirguna Brahman. Conceptually the dual nature of God has been worked out by Sri Ramakrishna's (1836-86) Vijnana Philosophy that accepts the plentitude of the infinite Brahman-God, which is brilliantly explained by Ayon Maharaj.²⁸ To give only a portion of Ramakrishna's statements on the subject, "The vijnanis accept both God with form and the Formless, both the Personal God and the Impersonal.... But to tell you the truth, He who is formless is also endowed with form. To His bhaktas [loving devotees of God] He reveals Himself as having a form. It is like a great ocean, an infinite expanse of water, without any trace of shore. Here and there some of the water has been frozen. Intense cold has turned it into ice. Just so, under the cooling influence, so to speak, of the bhaktas love, the Infinite appears to take a form. Again, the ice melts when the sun rises; it becomes water as before. Just so, one who follows the path of knowledge—the path of discrimination—does not see the form of God any more. To him everything is formless. The ice melts into formless water with the rise of the Sun of Knowledge. But mark this: form and formlessness belong to one and the same Reality."²⁹ He compares the formless and God with form as a substance-attribute relation: "fire and its power to burn," "milk and its whiteness," "water and its wetness," and "the lustre of the gem."³⁰

Expanding on the Vijnana Philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna, one aspect of Brahman-God could be timeless, spaceless, changeless, simple, infinite without finite parts, and unknowable to the human intellect and another within time and space, changing, complex, infinite with finite parts, and knowable. Since they are two different aspects of a single infinite Reality, a contradiction might not be involved.

The exclusive-inclusive-pluralistic model is generally used when comparing one religion with the others. This model can also be used in comparing ideas. For example, exclusivists believe that Brahman-God is either changeless or changing, formless or with form, Nirguna without attributes or Saguna with attributes. In each of these three cases a pluralist like Sri Ramakrishna teaches that Brahman-God is both. An inclusivist accepts both but believes one is superior to the other (a hierarchy), or more basic-fundamental, or ontologically prior, or epistemologically prior to the other. For example, Plotinus taught that the Nous (Saguna Brahman) is an emanation of the ontologically prior One (Nirguna Brahman).

Simplicity (nonduality) is the fundamental attribute that is necessary for the other four. For example, It is internally metaphysically simple (intra-nondual) without spatial, temporal, or conceptual parts or divisions. Spatial simplicity implies that Brahman-God is incorporeal without a body composed of parts. While a simple being is incorporeal, it is not always the case that an incorporeal entity is simple. For example, thought is considered to be incorporeal yet it has conceptual divisions and is not simple. Being spatially simple means It is indestructible and eternal since it cannot disintegrate into parts. Temporal simplicity implies both timeless eternity and immutability. Being temporally simple means that Brahman-God cannot be divided into temporal units that are required for change to occur. Without moments of time, there can be neither physical change nor conceptual change, in substance, quality, quantity, relation, or activity. Without temporal parts, It possesses no unactualized potentiality. Just as Brahman-God has no bodily parts and cannot change spatially, since It is wholly present everywhere; so too It has no temporal parts and cannot change temporarily, since It is wholly present everywhen. In addition, Brahman-God is eternally timeless since there are no units of time, and being substantially simple (not composed of parts) It cannot be corruptible or disintegrate and become noneternal. If space (infinity), time (eternity and immutability) and causation (aseity) exist at this level, they are without parts or division (simplicity). These five intrinsic attributes are sometimes described “by negation” (neti, neti), since they are not found in the phenomenal world. A photograph is an example of spatial extension, history of temporal extension, and a logical or mathematical proposition of conceptual extension. Nirguna Brahman-Atman is a partless cause, while Saguna Brahman the Personal Brahman-God is a cause with parts.

While internal simplicity means it has no parts (internal-nondual), external simplicity (external-nondual) indicates that Brahman-God is unlimited and not a part of or separate from something else. It is all-encompassing (infinite), not an object separate from other objects. This characteristic implies aseity since there is nothing separate from Brahman-God to cause or influence It. If power or knowledge were separate from Brahman-God then they would have to exist before It could possess these qualities. Simplicity also implies infinity because It has no dimensions and there is nothing outside of Brahman-God to limit It and immutability being fully realized there is no reason to change. Since there is nothing internally or externally imperfect to influence Brahman-God, It always remains perfect.

As Being-Itself there is no metaphysical distinction between Brahman-God's substance and attributes. All things in It are one and undivided without multiplicity and identical with the Divine Essence.

For the Neo-Platonist Plotinus' there are three ontological levels of divinity. The One (Nirguna Brahman) emanates (to flow from, radiates) *ex deo* (out of God) the less perfect Nous, which in turn emanates the less perfect World Soul. Highest is the One comparable to Nirguna Brahman, next Nous the Divine Intellect to Ishvara (or Para-Ishvara), and finally the World Soul to Mahat (Hiranyagarbha), of which the universe is a fragment. According to this idea, there is a higher transcendent internal and a lower immanent external aspect or mode of Saguna Brahman. The higher aspect (Para-Ishvara=Nous) is part of the Divine world (Brahmaloka) being independent of the universe. The lower aspect (Mahat=World Soul) creates the phenomenal world.³¹

Transcendental intrinsic attributes (What Brahman-God is) manifest as their opposite in the phenomenal world. Unconditioned simplicity, aseity, partless infinity, timeless eternity, and immutability become respectively conditioned contingency through complexity, causation, finite space, eternity within time, and change. The American Vedantic astronomer John Dobson (1915-2014) taught in the creation process: the undivided (simple) becomes at the physical level gravity (that pulls things together) and the psychological feeling of love; the infinite becomes electricity (seeking infinite expansion) and the desire for freedom; and the immutable becomes inertia (that resists change) and the longing for peace. Dobson emphasized Advaitic apparitional causation, but this process might occur through an actual transformation.³²

Brahman-God is perfect, anything lesser is a limited manifestation, projection, or a creation of It. For example, the most sacred religious scriptures and human languages are only approximations of the transcendental Divine scriptures and language. This is because they are filtered through the limited human intellect. Nirguna Brahman as the Absolute is infinite without any limitations, perfect, transcending all finitude, which makes it unknowable to the human mind. It is free from any conditions or restrictions, and independent from everything else. The Absolute is not accessible by human perception, experience, or comprehension. Brahman-God cannot be known because knowledge has parts and is dual in the sense that one type of knowledge differs from another. Because It has no parts It does not have a gross or subtle body.

By “Analogical Predication” Thomas Aquinas meant, “no name is predicated univocally [precisely in the same sense or meaning] of God and of creatures,” nor are they applied equivocally [having different meanings] since then” nothing at all could be known or demonstrated about God.” Hence, “these names are said of God and creatures in an analogous sense.”³³ Analogical predication implies that God is essentially different from humans and nature, yet they are comparable in some respects (analogous) and not completely different. According to Aquinas’ “analogy of being,” humans to some degree resemble God their cause. With more adequate understanding the descriptive term is predicated primarily to God and only secondarily to creatures, because it manifests more perfectly in God and only in a limited way in creatures. In the act of creation, God the cause communicates Himself to some to extent to the effect. In this way the creation resembles the Creator as an analogue of God. Thus, the relation between God and His creation is a similarity-dissimilarity relation.³⁴ Aquinas’ Analogical Predication applies to the extrinsic Omni-attributes since they are communicable (shared by humans to a limited degree). It yields only limited indirect understanding of intrinsic attributes such as simplicity, aseity, partless infinity, timeless eternity, and immutability if they are incommunicable (not shared by other entities). The reason for Analogical Predication is that there must be some similarity between God the cause and His effects the creation. He states, “Effects which fall short of their causes do not agree with them in name and nature. Yet, some likeness must be found between them, since it belongs to the nature of action that an agent produces its like, since each thing acts according as it is in act. The form of an effect, therefore, is

certainly found in some measure in a transcending cause, but according to another mode and in another way.” “Now the forms of the things that God has made do not measure up to a specific likeness of that Divine power: for the things which God has made receive in a divided and particular limited way that which in Him is found in a simple and universal unlimited way.”³⁵ We agree there is an analogical relationship between humans and Saguna Brahman, but not with Nirguna Brahman. The Avatara-Divine Incarnation expressing itself through the religious scriptures supports the idea that there is an analogous relationship between the human intellect and Brahman-God, so we can have some understanding of Its nature. By contrast, John Duns Scotus (1266-1308) held that properties such as goodness and power are univocally applied to God and humans. The difference is that God differs from us in degree. God’s attributes are not entirely *sui generis* (of its own kind), but are partially related to human characteristics.

Brahman-God is knowledge, power, goodness, etc. since they are neither separate nor distinct from It. There can be nothing independent of Brahman-God that determines Its nature. We participate in these virtues to various degrees or proportions but never to the full extent. A person may be truthful and knowledgeable, but Brahman-God is Truth-Itself and Knowledge-Itself. There is no difference between Its essence (nature) and existence, between what It is and how It is. As self-existent Brahman-God is Its own being with an essence and existence that are one and the same. It causes other things to occur, but nothing acts on or causes It. All perfections belong to Brahman-God according to Its simple existence.³⁶

Madhva (1199/1238-1278/1317) commented, “Even though the ananda [bliss], jnana [knowledge], etc. that constitute the nature of Brahman are trans-empirical, they are designated by words in ordinary empirical usage, just to give us an idea of their nature, however faint and inadequate it may be, even as one might say that Indra, the lord of heaven, is like a King. Since there is no other way for our limited understanding to know the Infinite, we have to use terms and concepts of empirical understanding.”³⁷ Rupa Goswami (1489-1564) mentioned if Brahman were indescribable by speech, the scriptures that describe Brahman would have no meaning.³⁸ In Vedanta laksana is the implied, indicated, or signified meaning of a word. This differs from vacyārtha its literal meaning. The Nondualist Dharmaraja (fl. 1615) defined quasi-inclusive implication (bhagalaksana), which involves partial

elimination as when one part of the meaning of a word is discarded and another part is specified. For example, as explained by Vidyaranya (fl. 1350) in the *Upanishadic* statement “Thou art That,” we negate the limited empirical self and affirm the immutable consciousness of the higher Self.³⁹

A Simple Deity cannot have any sort of complexity involving composition, for wholes composed of parts are dependent upon their parts for what they are. It cannot have subject-attribute complexity since if the two are separate the subject could acquire or lose the attribute. If a Deity exemplified properties distinct from itself, then it would depend on those properties for determining what it is. Conversely, a human depends on various properties to define who they are.⁴⁰

Can a metaphysically simple Brahman-God perform free will activity? Since will and a choice made between two different entities involve plurality one would answer no. Yet if God exists in a timeless realm that is simple and can determine events in a world of time that is complex as Aquinas thought, then a simple Brahman-God makes free decisions but certainly not in the way humans do. Whether this is possible requires a great deal of thought.

Recapitulating, Nirguna Brahman-Essence of God (Divine Substance) is absolutely Simple physically therefore spatially infinite, temporally therefore immutable, and conceptually One without parts or division, being:

Shankara- a) an undifferentiated and an undivided Nondual unity.
b) beyond (transcending) name and form that create the appearance of differentiation.

Baladeva Vidyabhusana- a) undifferentiated in terms of Essence and Personality.

Vivekananda- a) without composition or extension, not a compound of matter and energy and therefore is indestructible.

b) beyond our mental universe and the law of causation.

c) infinite and indivisible. If it could be divided, each part would be infinite and there cannot be two infinities.

d) the background of the universe only apparently divided when looked at through the network of time, space, and causation.

Aquinas- a) without composition or quantitative parts because His nature does not differ from His substance or His essence [what He is] from His being [that He is].

b) without composition of genus and differences, nor of subject and accident.

c) independent and prior to all things unlike component parts.

d) uncaused unlike a composite whose unity is caused.

e) not in a state of potentiality like a composite in potency with respect to the whole.

f) a unity prior to all multiplicity found in every composite.

g) a unity where the knower, known, and knowing is one and the same.

James- a) a unity whereby His nature [essence] and his existence, potentiality and actuality, substance and accidents, being and becoming (activity), and existence and attributes are not distinct.

Attribute-Attribute (Quality-Quality, Property-Property) Identity

The traditional doctrine of simplicity teaches all of Brahman-God's essential attributes are identical with each other, e.g., immutability with infinity, goodness with omnipresence. Conceptual Simplicity means that there is no difference between one of its attributes and another. There is no conceptual space that differentiates one idea from another. Since this aspect of simplicity is denied by common sense, many contemporary Western religious writers reject this idea. They wonder why this idea was not challenged in the past, and assume traditional writers held different premises and had a different way of thinking than we do now. Rejection of this idea is a mistake because the attribute of simplicity occurs at an ontological level of Being where there are no conceptual divisions or plurality. Attributes of simplicity, aseity, infinity, timeless eternity, and immutability are indistinguishable at this level. Power, knowledge, goodness, etc. differ at the level of the human intellect, but not in the Simple realm that is ontologically higher and transcend the intellect. These attributes are one in the simple nondual realm, but manifest differently at the empirical level of existence. At the higher ontological level Brahman-God is timeless (temporal simplicity), but this is obviously not the case in the phenomenal world. Simplicity occurs at an ontological level that

precedes objectification and externalism. In the realm of nondual simplicity there are no objects, even Brahman-God is not an object (as commonly thought) and nothing is external to anything else.

Simplicity is a Divine attribute that is incommunicable (not shared with humans). This ontological stage precedes the human intellect and senses that require division, and therefore are not logically compatible with simplicity. At the next level simplicity becomes complexity. Aquinas gives us an example of where the human intellect is not compatible with the higher Reality. “Creatures are really related to God Himself; whereas in God there is no real relation to creatures, but a relation only in idea.”⁴¹ The “relation only in idea” is the human intellects attempt to understand an event that is not “real” at a higher ontological level. Also according to Aquinas, God exists in a timeless realm that is simple and determines events in a world of time that is complex. In this case God’s attributes would be identical in the former realm and separate in the latter.

If at the ontological level of simplicity, unity, and oneness there is no difference between one Divine attribute and another, then there is also no difference between one thing and another. The highest ontological level of simplicity is a state of oneness, where there is no difference between Divine attributes and anything else. All forms of knowledge like religion, philosophy, physical, behavioral, and social sciences, etc. would be indistinguishable. In this state, everything is identical with everything else in an undifferentiated unity.

Only at the next ontological level in the descending series of stages, through a process of conceptual division do these differentiations come into existence. In conceptual space through the *principium individuationis* [principle of individuation], the Divine attributes become separate entities, each with a different mental form. Operating within the boundaries of spiritual and physical space and time, Brahman-God becomes omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent interacting with other entities. If Brahman-God is metaphysically simple, Its nature is not caused by anything else (aseity) and therefore Its attributes are necessary, they are essential properties that cannot be lost or different from what they are.

Brahman-God as a Necessary Being has two components. Historically the emphasis has been placed on It having necessary existence (thatness). But It also has a necessary nature (whatness), meaning that Brahman-God could not differ from what It is. Due to Its perfection It must be omniscient, omnipotent, and

omnipresent necessarily. It cannot be otherwise. These necessary characteristics of Brahman-God have always existed and cannot cease to exist, unlike accidents (properties that are not essential to a thing's nature) or contingent properties (dependent on something else, possible). For humans there is only one kind of existence (Thatness, Haecceity), while there are many varieties of essences (Whatness, Quiddity).

Brahman-God has Its attributes essentially because It is identical with Its attributes that are not caused by another source.⁴² At our level, the Divine Intellect now has conceptual divisions and the various areas of knowledge become distinguishable. Not only is religion separate from other areas of study, religion subdivides into particular religions. As Vivekananda stated, "There never was my religion or yours, my national religion or your national religion; there never existed many religions, there is only the one. One Infinite religion existed through all eternity and will ever exist, and this religion is expressing itself in various countries in various ways."⁴³

At a lower ontological level the eternal transcendental attributes of Brahman-God as archetypes transform into ectypes that are the phenomenal world. The ectypes are imperfect copies of the perfect Divine originals (which includes the Omni-attributes) to various degrees. Through a descending process of division and fragmentation, at each lower ontological level there is less and less structural organization until a state of chaos is finally reached. Fortunately, all of the ontological levels-realms always exist at every moment of time, during the past, present, and future; unlike chronological events that began or ceased x number of years ago. For this reason a very advanced yogi mystic can make contact with these higher realms at this very moment. It is like our gross physical body and subtle mental body though differing in nature, exist at the same time. Though our particular universe has a beginning, the phenomenal world as a whole is pre- and post-eternal.

At the highest ontological level of Divine Simplicity all is one. Power, knowledge, goodness, etc. are an undifferentiated unity. What follows is the process of creation by division of the whole into parts (particularization the reverse of holistic). Power, knowledge, etc. become differentiated. Within the realm of knowledge, it subdivides into the various disciplines that include religion,

philosophy, the science, etc. At a lower ontological level the one religion subdivides into many faiths.⁴⁴

Taw hid is the Arabic word for the unification and oneness of God. Allah (God) is unique, there is nothing like him. He is beyond time; not a body, a substance, nor an accident, conditioned or determined; possessing no creaturely attributes, not perceivable by the senses or comprehended by the human intellect. Allah is omniscient, omnipotent, but not like anything created. He brought the world into existence without any pre-established materials or auxiliary assistance. Shea theologians teach that, the attributes and names of Allah have no independent existence apart from the Being and Essence of Allah. Since Allah is beyond the range of human vision and their senses, He speaks to humanity through the prophets.⁴⁵

3. Self-Existence (Aseity, Sat, Svasiddha)

Indian: “From Himself he [Brahman] brought forth Himself. Hence, he is known as the Self-Existent” (Tait. Up.* 2:7, p. 85). “He [God] reflected and saw nothing else but His self. He first said: ‘I am He’” (Br. Up. 1:4.1). “Brahman is ... independent of any cause but Itself” (BG* 8:3, p. 94).

Old Testament: “God said to Moses; ‘I am who I am’ [or ‘I am what I am’]. And he said, ‘Say this to the people of Israel, I am has sent me to you’” (Ex. 3:14). New Testament: “The Father has life in Himself” (Jn. 5:26).

Aseity (from Latin a "from" and se "self, *aseitas*) means that Brahman-God is Self-Existent (Sk. Svasiddha) and cannot be caused by another. Brahman-God is the first Being, and no attribute or quality exists prior to It for It to participate in. If It participated in an attribute, it would be a supplementary quality added to Its infinite nature. Conversely, finite living beings exist only in as far as they participate in Brahman-God's Being.

In the words of the Advaita (Nondualistic) Vedantic seer-philosopher Shankara (c. 688/788-720/820), “Brahman fills everything—beginningless, endless, immeasurable, unchanging, one without a second. In Brahman there is no diversity whatsoever. Brahman is pure existence, pure consciousness, eternal bliss, beyond

action, one without a second.... Brahman is reality Itself; established in Its own glory; pure, absolute consciousness, having no equal, one without a second"⁴⁶ "Nor can Brahman be derived from a particular form of Existence, as that goes against common experience; for particulars are seen to emerge from the general, as pot etc. from clay, but not the general from the particulars. Nor can Brahman come out of non-existence, for non-existence is without any substance."⁴⁷ Hence, for Shankara, Brahman is Self-Existent (Self-Subsistent), of Its own nature conceived through Itself and consequently exists eternally. Brahman relies on nothing to preserve Its existence. Given that Brahman is infinite and one without a second, there is nothing outside of It that could be Its cause. As absolute Existence-Itself (Sat), Brahman is not an attribute or action or a combination of material elements. It exists by necessity (Necessary Existence), as the ultimate uncaused, unconditioned, indeterminate, immutable, indestructible, formless, partless, substratum (ashraya) of the finite world. All things are rooted in Brahman receiving their existence from It, while It is rooted in-Itself.⁴⁸ If Brahman is Self-caused (Causa Sui) in a non-temporal sense, since obviously Brahman cannot exist prior to Itself to create Itself.

Swami Vivekananda comprehended, "Behind the body, behind even the mind, there is the Self-Existent One. He dies not, nor is He born. The Self-Existent One is omnipresent, because He has no form. That which has no form or shape, that which is not limited by space or time, cannot live in a certain place. How can it? It is everywhere, omnipresent, equally present through all of us."⁴⁹ He identified the "I am" with the eternal and immutable Brahman-Atman (Immanent Self). The universal "I am," which is the Eternal Subject is identical in all people. In Brahman and through Brahman we exist and see and know everything. "He dies not. The same voice, 'I am, I am,' is eternal, unchangeable.... He resides in every soul, and eternally declares, 'I am He, I am He.'"⁵⁰ The most universal and highest of all concepts is that of existence. All animate and inanimate entities are subsumed under the broader concept of existence. "Particulars are to be referred to the general, the general to the more general, and everything at last to the universal, the last concept that we have, the most universal—that of existence. Existence is the most universal concept." Brahman is Existence-Itself (Sat), and existence is the ultimate and most supreme generalization we can form.⁵¹

A monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Abhedananda (1866-1939) formulated that, “The existence, which is in the chair, is also in the table. Take away the name and form of the table and take away the name and form of the chair, the existence, in these two objects, is the same.... In the midst of all changes, the only thing that does not change, is existence. Try to understand it. That existence is truth, and it is the reality. The existence is called in Sanskrit ‘Sat’ i.e., that which is. It can never change. It may appear through name and form, but, in reality, it is beyond time and space. It is unchangeable. It is the Absolute or absolute existence. I have already described it as the ocean of Reality. It is the eternal substance, and, in it, everything exists. Out of it, everything comes, and everything goes back into it at the time of dissolution, says the *Upanishads*. It is called in Sanskrit the Brahman. The Brahman is the absolute reality as well as the absolute existence of the universe. This Brahman is one without a second.” Everything changes except Existence-Itself (Sat) (similar to Being-Itself), and proceeds from It and eventually will return to It.⁵²

In the Western perspective emphasis is placed on God as First Cause. As Anselm (1033-1109) the Archbishop of Canterbury put it, “So it follows that all other goods are good through something other than what they are and that this other alone is good through Itself. But no good which is good through another is equal to or greater than that good which is good through Itself. Hence, only that good which alone is good through Itself is supremely good ... Since, then, all existing things exist through one thing, without doubt this one thing exists through Itself.... whatever exists through another is less than that which alone exists through Itself and through which all other things exist.... this must be supremely good, supremely great, the highest of all existing things.”⁵³ Both Augustine and Anselm defend Divine aseity on the grounds that dependency on another is always an imperfection, and hence must be excluded from our conception of God.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) indicated, “God alone is actual being [exists] through His own essence [what God is, quiddity, His properties], while other beings are actual beings [exist] through participation, since God alone is actual being identical with His essence. Therefore, the being of every existing thing is His proper effect. And so, everything that brings something into actual being does so because it acts through God’s power.”⁵⁴ “Since in God there is no potentiality as shown

above, it follows that in Him essence does not differ from being [existence, That God is]. Therefore His essence is His being. Third, just as that which has fire, but is not itself fire, is on fire by participation, so that which has being, but is not being, is a being by participation. But God is His own essence, as was shown above. If, therefore, He is not His own Being, he will not be essential, but participated, being [i.e., receiving his being-existence from another]. He will not therefore be first being—which is absurd. Therefore, God is His own being, and not merely His own essence.”⁵⁵ “Every created thing has its being through another; otherwise it would not be caused.... since every form and act is in potentiality before it acquires being. Therefore, it belongs to God alone to be his own being, just as it pertains to Him only to be the first agent. Moreover, Being Itself belongs to the first agent according to His proper nature, for God’s being is His substance ... Whereas in Exodus (3:14) the proper name of God is stated to be ‘He who is,’ because it is proper to him alone that His substance is not other than his being.”⁵⁶ God is not a contingent entity that comes into existence by participating in something else, which would make His existence only possible and not necessary. Nothing can be added to or subtracted from the Divine Essence or Substance.⁵⁷ If there was no Necessary Being, then over infinite time everything would die, and there would be nothing left to begin to exist again or to cause something else to exist. Thus, existence belongs to other things by participation, but for God essentially. The first uncaused cause of all that exists is absolutely simple (nondual) and immutable.

Aquinas informs us that, “God is His essence, quiddity [whatness], or nature.... nothing can in any way be the cause of God, since as we have shown, He is the first being. God is, therefore, His essence.” “His essence or quiddity is not something other than His being [existence]. For it was shown above that there is some being that must be through itself, and this is God.... for if it depends on another, it is no longer a Necessary Being [which God is].... Each thing is through its own being. Hence, that which is not its own being is not through itself a Necessary Being. But God is through Himself a Necessary Being. He is therefore, His own being.... A thing whose essence is not its being [existence], consequently, is not through its essence but by participating in something, namely, being [existence] itself [God]. But that which is through participation in something cannot be the first being, because prior to it is the being in which it participates in order to be.” “That no accident is found in God. It follows necessarily from the

truth that nothing can come to God beyond His essence, nor can there be anything in Him in an accidental way.”⁵⁸

Following the German Catholic Benedikt Gocke’s analysis all of Aquinas’ five proofs for the existence of God are based on the following logical structure: an experimental bases (e.g., motion, efficient causation, possibility, degrees of gradation, and governance of non-intelligent being in the world); a conceptual bases (e.g., they have a maximum); and finally they reach the ultimate ground the First Cause, which we call God.⁵⁹ Each of the five proofs starts from a fact of empirical experience and leads to the existence of a self-subsistent Being that is their ultimate cause. The chain of causality cannot proceed to infinity and must terminate with God, the Self-Existent uncaused First Cause of all phenomenal existence.

Spinoza wrote, “That which cannot be conceived through anything else must be conceived through itself” (Axiom II).

As Alfred E. Taylor (1869-1945) explains it, “The unending regress from conditioned to conditions, however, naturally suggests the thought that the process of explanation would be completed if we could find something ultimate, Itself unconditioned but the condition of everything else. Thus we arrive at the notion of a being which 'exists necessarily' and contains in Itself the explanation of everything else, the one and only being which is not contingent (i.e. a consequence of something other than Itself). Next, it occurs to us that, if there is such a 'necessarily existing' being, it must, as the condition of everything else, contain in Itself all that is truly real or positive; what is real in all limited and finite things must come to them from It. Thus we identify the *ens necessarium* [Necessary Being] with the *ens realissimum* [Ultimate Reality]. Finally, since we ourselves, who are among the things dependent on this being, are intelligent moral persons, we 'personify' this being, and thus we arrive at the conception of God as the Supreme Being and source of the world.” Hence being the product of one God, the world must be a single interrelated system dependent on a Necessary Being (God). The world is a unity-in plurality where a change of state in one thing is conditioned by the changes of state in the rest. On the other hand, a contingent (possible) being is one that exists but might not have existed.⁶⁰

Something is necessary if it is not possible to be otherwise. It can refer to Brahman-God's existence or to Its nature (the Omni- characteristics). The various types include:

- a) Definitional necessity: on a two-dimensional surface a triangle must have three sides.
- b) Logical necessity: if Socrates is a man, and all men are mortal, then Socrates must be mortal.
- c) Physical (Nomological) necessity: based on the laws of physics. But this only applies to our universe, since the laws of physics may be different in another universe.
- d) Metaphysical necessity: Examples include the existence of Brahman-God based on the Cosmological and the Design Theories.⁶¹

Summarizing, Brahman-God is Self-Existent, being:

- Shankara- a) unlimited in all respects having neither a beginning nor end.
- b) the totality that cannot be derived from a particular form of existence.
- c) conceived through Itself.
- d) infinite and thus there is nothing outside of It that could be Its cause.
- e) absolute Existence-Itself (Sat), not an attribute or action or a combination of material elements.
- d) uncaused, unconditioned, indeterminate, existing by necessity [Necessary Existence].
- e) the substratum of the finite world immutable, indestructible, formless, and partless.
- f) rooted in-Itself, since all things are rooted in it receiving their existence from It.

Vivekananda- a) immutable and therefore uncaused.

- b) Existence-Itself and existence is the most universal and highest of all concept, the ultimate generalization we can form.

Abhedananda- a) the vertical ontological first cause, the eternal substance, and in It everything exists.

- b) Remove the name and form of all objects and what is left, the changeless, timeless, and spaceless Existence-Itself (Sat) (similar to Being-Itself).
- c) The temporal first cause since everything proceeds from It and eventually returns to It.

- Aquinas-
- a) One since the predicate is the same as the subject, because in Him essence does not differ from being [existence].
 - b) an actual being through His own essence [what God is], while contingent entities are actual beings through participation receiving their being from another.
 - (c) Necessary Being because everything has a cause and Brahman-God is the temporal first cause that did not receive existence from something else. In order for a contingent being to come into existence something must precede it as its cause.
 - d) the Divine Essence or Substance, the vertical ontological first cause since no attribute or quality exists prior to Him to participate in.

- Bradley-
- a) The unconditioned first cause that conditions everything else.
 - b) Necessarily existing being that contains in Itself the explanation of everything else.

Discussion on Aseity

From one standpoint, unconditioned Self-Existence is the initial intrinsic and essential variable, since from a logical standpoint existence is primary, given that an entity must first exist before it can possess any of the other attributes. Conversely, an entity need not have any of the other attributes in order to exist. Existence is a necessary but not a sufficient factor for the other Divine attributes. More religious literature has been devoted to proving the existence of Brahman-God, than to any of Its other attributes. Emphasis here is on the dichotomous “that” of existing, and not the “what” of existence that describes the entities nature. Existence like substance and thought are primary entities. You cannot have an empirical quantity, quality, relation, or form without a substance; nor reasoning, perception, willing, or feeling without thought.

A necessary truth is one whose negation implies a contradiction. An analytic statement such as a law of logic or mathematics (e.g., all men are mortal, Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates is mortal) is certainly a necessary truth. Necessity that cannot possibly be otherwise is found in the laws of logic (e.g., a syllogism based on deductive reasoning), language definitions (e.g., all bachelors must be unmarried), and the laws of mathematics (e.g., Euclid's Theorems).

But can an existential statement such as Brahman-God (or anything else) exists be a necessary truth proven by reason alone? The Doctrine of Aseity teaches that Brahman-God is uncreated and not caused by another entity. Brahman-God's attribute of aseity is based on Its self-sufficiency and independence of everything else, Its sovereignty and control over all things, and the dependence of all else on Its creative and sustaining activity. It is self-sufficient, "*a se*" meaning It is of, through, and from Itself, completely independent of everything else. It exists before there is anything else and therefore depends on nothing except Itself, being independent and not dependent.⁶²

Thus Brahman-God is: a) Self-Existent, unconditioned, causally depending on nothing else for its existence, independent of and unqualified by any other reality; b) Necessarily Existent, "that which cannot not exist" and so Its non-existence is a self-contradictory logical impossibility. Conversely, contingent being might or might not exist. If it does it is brought from potential existing into actual existence by way of a cause that is external to its nature; and c) Primordially Existent, everything else is causally dependent on It. By definition Brahman-God is the Supreme Being, so if something else caused It, that entity would be the Supreme Being and First Cause.

Within the phenomenal world Necessary Existents include: abstract entities like a quantity, quality, relation, and substance that every object has; and numbers, properties, and propositions. They cannot not exist. Their specific manifestations are contingent and not necessary at all. For example, an orange tree might have a quantity of none or fifty oranges depending on the circumstances.

As Swami Vivekananda stated, "In asking what caused the Absolute [Nirguna Brahman], what an error we are making! To ask this question we have to suppose that the Absolute also is bound by something, that It is dependent on something; and in making this supposition, we drag the Absolute down to the level of the universe. For in the Absolute there is neither time, space, nor causation; It is all one. That which exists by itself alone cannot have any cause. That which is free cannot have any cause; else it would not be free, but bound. That which has relativity cannot be free.... Freedom means independence of anything outside, and that means that nothing outside itself could work upon it as a cause."⁶³ Therefore, because Brahman-God has the attribute of aseity, it has complete freedom and is undetermined in every respect.

Brahman-God provides the ontological foundation as the sustaining cause of the created world. It is sovereign over all things, meaning that everything depends on It. Brahman-God depends on nothing else for Its existence and is not dependent on or conditioned by the world in any way. It is immune to external influences, not being made to be what or how It is by anything other than Itself. Saguna Brahman-Personal God is Self-Existent, except for the fact that It cannot exist without Nirguna Brahman that ontologically precedes It as Its foundational cause.

The Absolute Transpersonal Brahman-God is also the immanent Self (Atman), the ground and substratum (or background) of the finite world subsisting as Being-Existence Itself. Whatever exists (for example a chair) can disintegrate into nonexistence, but Brahman-God is Existence-Itself that can never come to an end.

We explain the existence of anything by examining its causes. But how can we explain the existence of a Self-Existent non-caused Necessary Being like Brahman-God? Consequently, It has no beginning (pre-eternal) nor end (post-eternal).

The Cosmological (First Cause) Theory for the Existence of Brahman-God⁶⁴

The first step proceeds from this world to the existence of a First Cause or Necessary Being that accounts for the existence of the world. It is the source of everything. The second step is to explain why a First Cause has the properties associated with Brahman-God. This explanation denies the possibility of an infinite regress of events in a causal series. The chain of causation must instead terminate in an uncaused First Cause. The series of causes comes to an end in a Self-Existent First Cause that does not depend on anything else for Its existence. It is Foundational since everything else is causally dependent on It. Being uncaused It is a Necessary Existent that cannot not exist nor cease to exist. A Necessary Being is neither subject to generation nor corruption and can never undergo a substantial change. The reason for its existence lies within its own nature. Conversely, a possible being is material and capable of receiving new forms. This entity is transitory, susceptible to substantial change, and derives its existence from another entity.⁶⁵

The First Cause can be viewed as chronological as having begun x number of years ago. Or It can be understood as ontological, as present at this very moment sustaining the existence of the universe. Judeo-Christians often emphasize the

temporal creation, God as the chronological First Cause creating the universe x number of years ago. Physicists do this also when they consider how the universe came into existence in the past from a Big Bang.⁶⁶ The physical sciences accept chronological causation over time, but do they accept an ongoing non-chronological higher order force that maintains the physical order?

Divine causation is linear beginning with Brahman-God. But if the universe had no beginning in time (pre-eternal), then there would be no chronological First Cause. In addition, is the chronological causation within nature linear, or circular in which case there is no First Cause? The Cosmological explanation assumes a linear process that has a beginning. But a circular process like a circular line has no beginning. Circular causation would proceed as follows: a cause b that causes c ... y causes z that causes a and so on and not require a temporal uncaused source.

Possibly the Pythagoreans, and definitely the Greek Stoics, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), and Vivekananda held to Eternal Recurrence that due to a limited (finite) number of possible events, over infinite time all events exactly repeat themselves in a circular fashion. This implies there are an infinite unending number of temporal cycles. Each cycle lasts an aeon since there are so many possibilities. Vivekananda pointed out, "Nature is like the chain of the Ferris Wheel, endless and infinite, and these little carriages are the bodies or forms in which fresh batches of souls are riding, going up higher and higher until they become perfect and come out of the wheel. But the wheel goes on." "There are endless series of manifestations, like "merry-go-round", in which the souls ride, so to speak. The series are eternal; individual souls get out, but the events repeat themselves eternally."⁶⁷

Consequently, there is no absolute First Cause in nature. Even the Big Bang had a preceding cause. Every tangible empirical entity has a cause and can have a causal influence on something else. The universe is composed of contingent entities that begin and cease to exist and whose existence is dependent on something else. So the First Cause must be a non-contingent Necessary Being that transcends nature.

In India the Naiyayika School rejected a regress of infinite causes and considered Brahman (God) to be an uncaused cause outside of the series. One of their philosophers Udayana (10th century) taught the world is an effect since it consists of component parts and it must have a creator. Brahman (God) is an

intelligent being “possessed of that combination of volition, desire to act, and knowledge of the proper means which set in motion all other causes, but is Itself set in motion by none.”⁶⁸

Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) and Samuel Clarke (1675-1729) realized there was a possibility of an infinite regress of causes with no first member in the universe, but there must be a sufficient reason for the existence of such a series of causes. There must be an Independent Being that does not owe Its existence to something else. This requires an explanation of the causal activity of a transcendent God outside the series. If the contingent chain is infinitely long, then a non-contingent Necessary Being brings about the chain in its entirety. The First Cause creates the entire chain of causality, yet precedes its first member and is not a part of the series.⁶⁹

According to the cosmological theory there is some higher order Self-existent non-temporal prior cause independent of the series. Brahman-God is the ongoing vertical ontological First Cause of the universe. Without It sustaining the universe at every moment of time, it would instantly become a state of nothingness.

The First Cause cannot be acted upon by any other entity. As humans we participate in power, knowledge (reason), and goodness that are separate from us and we are a part of space and time. But the First Cause must either be identical with them or their cause, lest they determine Its actions and prevent It from being the only source of all existence. For Saguna Brahman the Personal Brahman-God, power, knowledge, goodness, etc. are part of Its nature, not separate from It and It is partially (analogically) knowable to us.

All of Brahman-God's basic attributes are included in the First Cause and hence It possesses these attributes necessarily. Brahman-God is the omnipotent origin, the unconditioned Being from whom all else derives its existence.⁷⁰ The First Cause is also the first intellect and the first will, the source of all knowledge and power.

Another version of the cosmological theory was developed by Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), “That which does not exist begins to exist only through something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence, which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is

necessary. But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes. Therefore we cannot but admit the existence of some Being having of Itself Its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God [Necessary Being].”⁷¹ For Aquinas the first uncaused cause of all that exists is absolutely simple (undivided) and immutable.

Is there more than one First Cause? According to polytheism more than one Deity could be the cause of existence. But can there be more than one uncaused cause (Necessary Being)?

The cosmological (first cause) and the teleological (design, order, and purpose in the universe) deal with Its extrinsic nature, “what Brahman-God does” in relation to the creation. The intrinsic nature concerns “what Brahman-God is.” Each extrinsic proof is an *a posteriori* (Latin: following after) inductive explanation that begins with observed facts in the world (e.g. causal events and design in the world) and from there infers back to the Divine Being as their cause.⁷² Both are partial proofs in that they are coherent, logically consistent, comprehensive, and integrated into a system of beliefs; but not full proofs since there are other non-theistic explanations for causation and design. They provide a general conceptual model with explanatory power concerning the existence the First Cause. The mystical proof for the existence of a Divine Being is also *a posteriori*, in the sense that it is based on religious experience rather than pure theoretical *a priori* reasoning.

Objects, events, or propositions issue from uncaused Saguna Brahman (Personal Brahman-God) in a finite causal sequence where It produces “a” that produces “b” that produces “c,” etc. This process occurs chronologically over time, while what is produced by uncaused Nirguna Brahman occurs all at once and not in succession. Both Saguna and Nirguna Brahman are distinct from what they cause. A cause can be external or internal.

Brahman-God is the metaphysical ground [or background as Vivekananda stated] source, an ontologically independent existence that provides the ultimate basis for all subsequent dependent entities. It is the foundation for all objects and ideas. As the First Cause It has no beginning in time and is the eternal ground of

the universe from which all else proceeds. At this and every moment in time there must be an ultimate ontological source, a Self-existent uncaused Being, else there would be an infinite series of ontological descents.

For an Indian Vedantist Nirguna Brahman-Atman is the First Cause, the background-substratum and substantial source of the phenomenal universe. Because of It we exist with a life-force that can form rational concepts, and perceive objects; have a sense of self-identity, of freedom, and love; unconsciously seek It, are motivated for self-development and evolutionary development, have eternal life, and It is the source of all motion and activity. For more details on this subject see: Ch. II, Section 3. The Impact of Nirguna Brahman-Atman on the Phenomenal World.⁷³

The Second Cause is Saguna Brahman as Mahat the Universal Mind of which we are a part. It transformed into Akasha [Matter] and Prana resulting in the creation of the universe. For a fuller understanding of this see: Ch. VIII, Section 3. Vivekananda's System of Physics.

Following Swami Abhedananda's (1866-1939) conception, "A painter first idealizes in his mind a design of something, and then projects the mental design in the material form. Similarly, God thinks of the manifold world in His Cosmic Mind and then gives them the material form.... He projects the images of the manifold world outside from within." Thoughts in the Divine Mind not only create physical objects, but also bring into being abstract entities such as the principles of reason, laws of logic and mathematics, numbers, values such as goodness, etc.⁷⁴

Another proof is that in the world we witness various degrees and gradations of any virtue and a maximum limit, the most perfect is Brahman-God. Shankara designated, "For as in the series of beings which descend from man to a blade of grass a successive diminution of knowledge, power, and so on, is observed—although they all have the common attribute of being animated—so the ascending series from man up to Hiranyagarbha [Brahman-God as the Universal Mind], a gradually increasing manifestation of knowledge, power, etc., takes place."⁷⁵

The First Cause Theory (Cosmological) deals with the existence of Brahman-God and not with Its nature, unless you believe It could not exist unless It has a specific nature. First Cause seems to imply the nature of omnipotence unless It is not involved in secondary causation. Does it imply the nature of omniscience, and omnipresence?

The Indian Ontological-Cosmological Theory for the Existence of Brahman-God

That Nirguna Brahman-Atman is the ontological First Cause is strongly supported in the *Upanishads* by the statements, “He is never seen, but is the Seer [Pure Intelligence]; He is never heard, but is the Hearer; He is never thought of, but is the Thinker [Inner Controller]; He is never known, but is the Knower. There is no other seer than He, there is no other hearer than He, there is no other thinker than He, there is no other knower than He” (Br. Up. 3:7.23; cf. 3:4.2). “It [Atman] is the Ear of the ear, the Mind of the mind, the Speech of the speech, the Life of the life and the Eye of the eye” (Kena Up. 1:2; cf. Br. Up. 4:4.18). According to Swami Nikhilananda’s commentary on the *Kena Upanishads* (1:2), Atman is “the luminous, all-pervading, and eternal Intelligence.” The mind is “animated by the intelligence of the Atman.” The Atman is responsible for the life force and the power to reveal objects to the eye.⁷⁶

Shankara explains, “That Reality [Atman] is the knower in all states of consciousness-- waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep ... That Reality sees everything by Its own light. No one sees it. It gives intelligence to the mind and the intellect, but no one gives it light. That Reality pervades the universe, but no one penetrates It. It alone shines. The universe shines with Its reflected light. Because of Its presence, the body, senses, mind and intellect apply themselves to their respective functions, as though obeying Its command. Its nature is eternal consciousness.” The First Cause is the Self-Existent Brahman-Atman, the Pure Subject that illuminates all external and internal objects. Whatever we know is known in and through It. This Self-luminous consciousness shines with Its own light pervading all cognition and perception, revealing objects, but is Itself never known as an object.⁷⁷ “This is the meaning of the following passage, ‘You cannot see that which is the witness of vision,’ i.e. which pervades by its eternal vision the act of our ordinary vision. This latter, which is an act, is affected by the objects seen, and reveals only colour (form), but not the inner Self that pervades it. Therefore you cannot see that inner Self which is the witness of vision.”⁷⁸

Sometimes the Indian Vedantists use the term the Seer-Itself, the Hearer-Itself, the Thinker-Itself, and the Knower-Itself, each implying a nonduality between the object and the subject. The Indian version of the cosmological theory is unique,

in that it takes causation back one ontological step prior to an objective Divine Mind or Personal God. This is the higher-order foundational reality from which all else proceeds. For Christians the supreme reality is God, but for the Vedantists it is both Nirguna Brahman and Atman our true Self. The highest reality is pure subject, the Internal Ruler, Witness Self (Saksin) that can never be an object. These conclusions were arrived at by the ancient rishis (sages) in their spiritual experiences and confirmed by sages of a later date.

Swami Vivekananda discerned, “He is the eye of our eyes, the life of our life, the mind of our mind, the souls of our soul.” “From the lowest amoeba to the highest angel, He resides in every soul, and eternally declares, ‘I am He, I am He.’”⁷⁹ “He is the Witness, the Eternal Witness of all knowledge. Whatever we know we have to know in and through Him. He is the Essence of our own Self. He is the Essence of this ego, this I and we cannot know anything excepting in and through that I. Therefore you have to know everything in and through the Brahman.... He is the Essence of our souls; we cannot project Him outside ourselves. Here is one of the profoundest passages in Vedanta: ‘He that is the Essence of your soul, He is the Truth, He is the Self, thou art That, O Shvetaketu.’ This is what is meant by ‘Thou art God’.... He is the Eternal Subject of everything. I am the subject of this chair; I see the chair; so God is the Eternal Subject of my soul. How can you objectify Him, the Essence of your souls, the Reality of everything?”⁸⁰ “He whom you are worshipping as unknown and are seeking for, throughout the universe, has been with you all the time. You are living through Him, and He is the Eternal Witness of the universe.”⁸¹

The Eternal Subject is a Seer, the Hearer, the Thinker, and the Knower, all characteristics we generally associate with a person, yet is not an object. Is It Seer-Hearer-Thinker-Knower-Itself? At a very high level of existence can a Personal God be an Eternal Subject without being an object? In the ontological creation process objectification (becoming an object) comes at a later and lower level. The Eternal Subject (Atman) is the source of all existence including our awareness. As Shankara wrote, “That reality [Atman] sees everything by Its own light. No one sees it. It gives intelligence to the mind and the intellect, but no one gives it light.... The universe shines with its reflected light. That reality pervades the universe, but no one penetrates it. It alone shines. It is consciousness itself.”⁸² “The eye and the other organs receive their powers of vision and so forth only by being

inspired by the energy of Brahman; by themselves, divested of the light of the Atman that is Pure Intelligence, they are like wood or clods of earth.”⁸³ “Whatever is perceived is perceived through the light that is Brahman, but Brahman is not perceived through any other light. It being by nature self-effulgent.”⁸⁴ Kaumudi taught that the Witness Self is a form of Ishvara the Personal Brahman-God who is aware of the jiva’s activities, but does not react to them.⁸⁵

Nirguna Brahman is Existence-Itself (Sat) and ontologically (not chronologically) precedes Saguna Brahman. If Nirguna Brahman ontologically precedes cause-effect relations, It must produce results in a non-causal manner. Self-existence applies to Nirguna Brahman-Atman since It cannot change (immutable); is a Pure Subject that is not objectified, the seer that is never seen; and is the root source of sentiency and awareness in other things. It is the eternal, immutable, self-subsisting, necessary existence that illumines all things.

The statements stated above taken from the *Brihadaranyaka* and *Kena Upanishads* can also be interpreted as an ontological proof. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) disagreed with Paul Deussen’s (1845-1919) statement “that the Indians were never ensnared in an ontological proof.”⁸⁶ This differs from Anselm’s (1033-1109) ontological proof, that God is “that which nothing greater can be thought” and must exist. The *Upanishads* teaches that there must be a Seer, Hearer, Thinker, and Knower responsible for those functions in us. Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) asked, “Why is there something rather than nothing? The sufficient reason ... is found in a substance which ... is a Necessary Being [God] bearing the reason for Its existence within Itself.”⁸⁷

An ontological proof is a philosophical explanation for the existence of Brahman-God using ontology, which is the study of the nature, origin, and sequence of being, becoming, existing, or reality.⁸⁸ The Indian version of the ontological proof for the existence of Brahman-Atman is based on reason and on ontology, i.e., the nature of being or existing. Meaning it involves premises that are *a priori* (that proceed from theoretical deduction rather than from *a posteriori* physical observation or experience), necessary (that the Reality necessarily exists and Its nonexistence is impossible), and analytic (by virtue of the meaning of the words or concepts used to express it, so that its denial would be a self-contradiction). It is a conceptual explanation, whose premises refer to the possession of certain kinds of concepts or ideas. The ultimate goal of the ontological, cosmological, and

teleological theories is to demonstrate that the nonexistence of Brahman-God represents a logical contradiction. Can we prove through reason alone that Brahman-God and/or the Atman exist necessarily?

Ontological proofs often start with an *a priori* theory about Brahman-Atman's existence that is immediately inferable from a clear and distinct idea of an Absolute Being or Reality that precedes everything else, e.g., “He is never thought of, but is the Thinker” and “the Mind of the mind” stated in the *Upanisadic* statements given above. As Vivekananda indicated, “He is the Eternal Subject of everything. I am the subject of this chair; I see the chair; so God is the Eternal Subject of my soul. How can you objectify Him, the Essence of your souls, the Reality of everything?”⁸⁹ The Eternal Subject (Atman) objectifies and externalizes becoming the universe.

The terms *a priori* (Latin; “from former”) refers to knowledge that is known by means of reasoning and not arrived at through empirical experience; while *a posteriori* (Latin; “from later”) knowledge is due to and justified by empirical observation or experience. *A priori* comprehension includes definitions (e.g., all bachelors are unmarried), logical propositions ($a > b$, $b > c$, therefore $a > c$), and mathematical laws ($2 + 2 = 4$). The findings of the physical, social, and psychological sciences are based on *a posteriori* procedures. The *a priori-a posteriori* distinction began with Immanuel Kant’s, *Critique of Pure Reason*. This is an epistemological distinction that differs from the dichotomies of necessary and contingent truths (metaphysical), analytic and synthetic propositions (linguistic), and innate and acquired knowledge (also epistemological).⁹⁰

Brahman-Atman is necessary and perfect and not influenced by anything else, unlike contingent entities and effects that receive their subsistence from It. As a necessary existent, It cannot not exist or cease to exist, since Its non-existence is a logical impossibility. Brahman-Atman exists necessarily since It is uncaused, existing in a realm that ontologically precedes causation. It is changeless and causation cannot exist without change. It does not exist as an object but is Existence-Itself. It ontologically precedes objectification which is a later stage in the creation process. To think of It as only a person is to limit It. It is not a contingent entity that exists, but might not have.⁹¹ Brahman-Atman is simple (undifferentiated, partless), a se (Self-existent), infinite without parts, timelessly eternal, and immutable.

The Thinker, the Mind of the Mind is also referred to as Pure Consciousness. According to one philosophical model, on the subjective side Pure Consciousness

appears as (Advaita Vedanta), transforms into (Vishistadvaita), objectifies (subject becomes an object) or externalizes (Kashmir Shaivism) into the Divine Mind (Ishvara, Neoplatonic Nous). Next, It in turn becomes the Universal Mind (Mahat, Hiranyagarbha, Neoplatonic World-Soul), which fragmentizes as individual minds. On the objective side, the Universal Body (Virat) fragmentizes into individual bodies. This is based on the idea that Saguna Brahman has an intrinsic nature (Ishvara or Para Ishvara, Nous) that operates independent of the universe and an extrinsic nature (Mahat, World-Soul) that is the totality of the universe. The intrinsic nature would include life in the Brahmaloaka-Kingdom of Heaven that is not cognizant of the physical universe. For Neoplatonism World-Soul (Mahat) is an emanation of Nous (Para Ishvara) which is an emanation of the One (Nirguna Brahman).

Vivekananda states, “Now a changing something can never be understood, without the idea of something unchanging ... our inability to understand a changeable without an unchangeable, forces us to postulate one as the background of all the changeable”⁹² If someone could verify this to be the case they would have a strong Ontological Theory for the existence of Nirguna Brahman.

On the YouTube Swami Sarvapriyananda the Head of the Vedanta Society in New York (West side) identifies the Seer [Pure Intelligence], Hearer, and Thinker mentioned in the Kena Upanishads with Pure Consciousness (Atman), which is our real Self. It is eternal, never changing, and always a subject and never an object. This Consciousness is independent of and not a part of or produced by the physical body or mind. The “eye of the eye” is something different from the physical eye, causing it to see objects. Consciousness illumines the senses and the mind enabling them to function.⁹³ It is self-illuminating, not requiring anything for its support, and not a reflective self-consciousness.

4. Infinity (Ananta)

Indian: “Atman is infinite and all-pervading” (Svet. Up. 1:9; cf. 5:1; Chan. Up. 7:25). “Brahman which is Reality, Knowledge, and Infinity” (Tait. Up. 2:1.3). “Of my [Lord Krishna] Divine attributes ... There is no limit to My extent” (BG 10:19). “There is no limit to my Divine manifestations, nor can they be numbered” (BG* 10:40, p. 117). Lord Krishna refers to both a spatial and a numerical infinity.

Old Testament: “Heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee” (1 Kings 8:27; cf. 2 Chron. 2:6; Ps. 139:7-10; Jer. 23:24). New Testament: “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth” (Acts 17:24).

Are space, time, divisibility, dimensions, ideas, power, forms, or numbers infinite or finite?

Swami Vivekananda intuited, “The Self-Existent One [Brahman-Atman] is omnipresent, because He has no form. That which has no form or shape that which is not limited by space or time, cannot live in a certain place. How can it be? It is everywhere, omnipresent, equally present through all of us.... Now, we know that the universal Soul is infinite. How can infinity have parts? How can it be broken up, divided? It may be very poetic to say that I am a spark of the Infinite, but it is absurd to the thinking mind. What is meant by dividing Infinity? Is it something material that you can part or separate it into pieces? Infinite can never be divided. If that were possible, it would be no more Infinite. What is the conclusion then? The answer is, that Soul which is the universal is you; you are not a part but the whole of It.”⁹⁴ “The infinite cannot be two. If the soul be infinite, there can be only one Soul [Atman], and all ideas of various souls—you having one soul, and I having another and so forth—are not real. The Real Man, therefore, is one and infinite, the omnipresent Spirit. And the apparent man is only a limitation of that Real Man.... The Real Man, the Spirit, being beyond cause and effect, not bound by time and space, must, therefore, be free.” “But there is the real existence in and through everything; and that reality, as it were, is caught in the meshes of time, space, and causation. There is the Real Man, the infinite, the beginningless, the endless, the ever blessed, the ever free. He has been caught in the meshes of time, space, and causation. So has everything in this world. The reality of everything is the same infinite.”⁹⁵ “That infinite pleasure is not to be got through the senses, or, in other words, the senses are too limited, and the body is too limited, to express the Infinite.” “The Infinite must be sought in that alone which is infinite, and the only thing infinite about us is that which is within us, our own soul [Atman]. Neither the body, nor the mind, nor even our thoughts, nor the world we see around us, are infinite.” “This pursuit of the Infinite, this struggle to grasp the Infinite, this effort to get beyond the limitations of the senses—out of matter, as it were—and to

evolve the spiritual man—this striving day and night to make the Infinite one with our being--this struggle itself is the grandest and most glorious that man can make.”⁹⁶

Concerning the partless infinite Plotinus (c. 205-70) realized, “For by being one it is not measured and does not come within range of number. It is therefore not limited in relation to itself or to anything else: since if it was it would be two. It has no shape, then, because it has not parts, and no form.”⁹⁷

From Thomas Aquinas’ (1225-74) perspective, God is not limited in quantity or magnitude, in view of the fact that He is simple without any composition of parts and is incorporeal. The basic reasons for God’s infinity are: “Everything that according to its nature is finite is determined to the nature of some genus. God, however is not in any genus.” “Every act inhering in another is terminated by that in which it inheres ... But God is act in no way existing in another, for neither is He a form in matter, as we have proved, nor does His being inhere in some form or nature, since he is His own being.” Nor does He acquire His existence from, or participate in anything else that would limit Him. “If, then, the being of some thing is finite, that being must be limited by something other that is somehow its cause. But there can be no cause of the Divine Being, for God is a Necessary Being through Himself.”⁹⁸

A former President of the Calvin Theological Seminary, Louis Berkhof (1873-1957) explained, “The infinity of God must be conceived as intensive rather than extensive, and should not be confused with boundless extension, as if God were spread out through the entire universe, one part here and another there, for God has no body and therefore no extension. Neither should it be regarded as a merely negative concept, though it is perfectly true that we cannot form a positive idea of it.” God’s infinity includes three attributes. First, is His absolute perfection that is qualitative, referring to unlimited power, holiness, knowledge, love, and righteousness. Second, “The infinity of God in relation to time is called His eternity.... Eternity in the strict sense of the word is ascribed to that which transcends all temporal limitations.” Third is His immensity, which is the “perfection of the Divine Being by which He transcends all spatial limitations, and yet is present in every point of space with His whole Being.”⁹⁹

An American professor of philosophy at St. Louis University, Leo Sweeney, S.J. (1918-2001) wrote, “A form or act that is without matter and potency [like God] is also without their determination and limitation and is, thereby, both infinite and perfect. Infinity thus becomes a perfection entirely constant with fullness of being. God is perfect Being because He is subsistent Pure Act. He is infinite Being as free from the limiting determination of matter and potency [unrealized potential].”¹⁰⁰

Following the logic of Benedikt Gocke and Christian Tapp the categorematic approach involves defining the Infinite extra attribute of Brahman-God. It is described in Positive Theology (Sk. Anvaya, *Via Positiva*) as the ultimate source or goal of everything, possessing total superabundance and the fullness of being. A positive qualitative concept of Divine Infinity in which Brahman-God exemplifies, in the unity of Its being, is the ultimate source of everything, a single qualitatively positive infinite entity without contradiction. From the standpoint of Negative Theology (Sk. Neti Neti, *Via Negativa*) Brahman-God is incomprehensible, uncircumscribable, lacking every finite concept or act, boundless, having no terminus, without opposition, and beyond nonbeing or negation.¹⁰¹ Negative theology attempts to describe the transcendent by negating what is finite and relative. For example, infinite is defined as “not finite” and eternity as “not temporal.”

According to the syncategorematic approach the Infinite applies to one or more Divine attributes of Brahman-God. It is spatially, temporally, and conceptually boundless, unlimited, and lacking finitude. If it is used to refer to a quantity, it can denote an extension or an intension. An extension is the size of the class of objects having the respective property or the degree to which an object has that property. An Infinite extension can either be understood to be an infinite continuum or to be an infinite extension of discrete units. That a property F is infinite according to its extensional quantity means either that there are infinitely many Fs (an infinite multitude) or that there is an infinite continuum of F (an infinite magnitude). For example, one might take Divine omniscience to entail infinite knowledge, in the sense that Brahman-God knows infinitely many true propositions. Or one might take Divine omnipotence to entail infinite power, in the sense that what Brahman-God can do has no limits in space or time.¹⁰²

Whereas the extensional account is concerned with infinitely many Fs or infinitely much of F, this account of syncategorematic intentional infinity is concerned with the degree to which a property is realized in an object. The classical example is "infinite whiteness." Mary is infinitely wise does not denote that Mary's wisdom extends to infinitely many or infinitely large entities, but means that the degree of her wisdom is unlimited. Or intension can be used to express the mode of givenness of a particular attribute. For example, some philosophers take Brahman-God's omnipresence to presuppose presence in a mode quite different from the presence of physical objects in space, which can be said to be present at a location by being contained by it. "Presence" applies to Brahman-God in a sense that requires ignoring the element of limitation by containment. To explain a property F in an infinite mode indicates to possess this property irrespective of any limitations of the exemplifying entity (as in the case of presence). In summary, the syncategorematic approach involves: "exemplify a property the extension of which consists of infinitely many discrete units" (parts), or a "property the extension of which is an infinite continuum," or "exemplify a property to an infinite degree", or "the mode of givenness of this property is infinite or archetypal."¹⁰³

In sum, Brahman-God is infinite, being:

- Vivekananda- a) without shape or form and therefore spatially unlimited.
- b) omnipresent.
- c) not limited by time, space, and causation or the five senses.
- d) beginningless and endless.
- Aquinas- a) not limited by quantity or magnitude and without composition of parts.
- b) not in any genus.
- c) not existent in another, and without form or matter.
- d) unparticipating in anything else that would limit it.
- e) uncaused and thus not limited by something else that is its cause.
- Berkhof- a) qualitatively unlimited in power, holiness, knowledge, love, and righteousness.
- b) quantitatively beyond all temporal and spatial limitations.
- Sweeney- a) free from matter and potency.

The Intrinsic Infinite Without Finite Parts

Nirguna Brahman is infinite without spatial, temporal, or conceptual parts and limitations. From the standpoint of the human intellect its other characteristics include simplicity (nonduality), aseity (uncaused), timeless eternity, and immutability. It is unbound, limitless, undetermined, and unqualified. Being partless and formless; and spaceless, timeless, and uncaused; It has no external or internal limitations. The Atman being partless is fully present in every person.

Beyond the human intellect It is “totally other;” ineffable, incomprehensible, unknowable, and indescribable. From this standpoint even existence-consciousness-bliss do not apply to It. Finite concepts and objects of our experience cannot be extended to It. Every word in the dictionary has a limited definition; thus the meaning of each word can describe only the finite, signifying this and not that. It is not perceivable because It has neither form nor duration. Only entities that have some kind of limit can be intellectually grasped.

Having no parts it is not a collection, extension, or constructible from the finite. Preceding all composition It is not formed by the addition of parts. Without boundaries of any kind, neither beginning nor ending, It cannot be measured.¹⁰⁴ It is not only without parts but also is not a part of something else.

It is present everywhere and in all things, is all-extensive so nothing can exist apart from or outside of It, and It is not a part of anything else. There is no spatial, temporal, or conceptual room for anything infinite or finite to be separate or distinct from It. There can only be one infinite without parts.

Others believe the infinite and finite can both exist, but in different realms. In this sense It is the infinite ground or background of existence, which differs from a cause that transforms into an effect. It is prior to and qualitatively distinct from the finite, yet is necessary for all finite entities to exist and function. Conversely, the finite is limited to the realm of space, time, causation, and the various conceptual categories of the human intellect.

Nirguna Brahman being Infinite without parts is not limited by the finite ideas and feelings of the human intellect, while Saguna Brahman is their maximum perfection as brought out in the Omni- properties like omnipotence and omniscience.

The Extrinsic Infinite with Finite Parts

Vivekananda relates, “God is a circle with circumference nowhere [therefore infinite] and centre everywhere. Every point in that circle is living, conscious, active, and equally working.”¹⁰⁵ In other words, God is infinite, yet omnipresently active in each part. Infinite Brahman exists in every atom.

Just as there is an eternity within time and a timeless eternity, so there is an infinity with and without spatial, temporal, and conceptual parts. They share the same name of “infinity” because of what Ludwig Wittgenstein called a family resemblance. The Intrinsic Infinite applies to what Brahman-God is and the Extrinsic Infinite with what Brahman-God does.

The creation of the universe by Brahman-God is considered by most people to contain a finite (not an infinite) series of causes. For Brahman-God to continually maintain the universe also involves a finite number of causal steps.

A Panentheist might offer this challenge to the Dualist-Theists who believes the physical universe is outside of Brahman-God. How could Brahman-God be infinite if It does not contain the entire universe? If the finite universe were conceived as external to the infinite Brahman-God, then the infinite ceases to be infinite, for It would be limited by something outside of Itself.

F. H. Bradley (1846-1924) of Oxford University provides us with a philosophy where the omniscient infinite Absolute is composed of a unity of transmuted finite aspects. The contradictory appearances are transmuted into a coherent whole. He writes, "The Absolute is its appearances, it really is all and every one of them.... Reality is not the sum of things. It is the unity in which all things, coming together, are transmuted, in which they are changed all alike, though not changed equally." "There is nothing in the Absolute which is barely contingent or merely accessory. Every element however subordinate, is preserved in that relative whole in which its character is taken up and merged." "The various aspects of experience imply one another, and that all point to a unity which comprehends and perfects them.... it is an experience of which, as such we have no direct knowledge. We never have, or are, a state which is the perfect unity of all aspects; and we must admit that in their special nature they remain inexplicable."¹⁰⁶

Infinite Brahman-God manifests as Avataras (Divine Incarnations) that are finite in nature. Ramakrishna stated, “Many are the names of God and infinite forms

through which He may be approached.”¹⁰⁷ Each form of God is a part of His/Her infinite forms.

Is the Universe Infinite or Finite?

For modern physics this is a difficult question to answer. Today physicists conclude, “Because we cannot observe space beyond the edge of the observable universe, we can’t know directly whether the universe is infinite or not. Modern measurements, including those from the Cosmic Background Explorer (COBE), Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy Probe (WMAP), and Planck maps of the CMB, suggest that the universe is infinite in extent, but it’s still an ongoing debate.”¹⁰⁸

On the side of finitude Swami Vivekananda stated, “There is no such thing as motion in a straight line. Every motion is in a circle.... A straight line, infinitely projected, must end in a circle.”¹⁰⁹ This idea is borne out by the following discoveries. According to Albert Einstein (1879-1955) General Theory of Relativity (1915-16) our space-time universe is curved and not linear. Mass bends space around it. Hence, the space-time universe is curved (later estimated to have a finite radius of 46.5 billion light years) and not linear. A curved universe is finite but unbounded. If all existence is curved, is there a maximum empirical length or amount of time in the universe? Yet Vivekananda also stated, “Here is nature which is infinite, but changeful. The whole of nature is without beginning and end, but within it are multifarious changes.”¹¹⁰

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Vivekananda held to the Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence that due to a limited number of possible events, over a vast amount of time all events exactly repeat themselves in a circular fashion. The order of sequence varies from one cycle to the next, but over a long enough time period (an aeon) two cycles would have the exact same sequence of events. Meaning that not only is space curved (Albert Einstein) but so is time. Vivekananda pointed out like people on a Ferris Wheel, though the same event repeats itself in each cosmic cycle the people vary. It is kind of like a play where everything is the same except for a different cast of actors. This implies there are an infinite unending number of temporal cycles each of limited time. It is immutable only in the sense that its nature and attributes remain eternally the same.

Concerning infinitely small, according to the Max Planck (1899) the smallest unit of length that could possibly be measured is Planck length approximately 1.61×10^{-35} meters and Planck time approximately 5.39×10^{-44} seconds.¹¹¹ The Planck length is not necessarily the smallest possible unit of space. Planck time is the time it would take to move through the Planck length at the speed of light. There is the theoretical idea of “atomless gunk” where it is possible that matter is indefinitely divisible and so there is no minimum sized particle. If we possessed a sense or had an instrument that could perceive subatomic entities, we would have a better understanding of these matters. Obviously, conceptually there is a potential infinite amount of length and time, potential in that we can never reach the infinite end point by progressing through the series.¹¹² Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) believed that anything that is spatially extended, like a material atom must have spatial parts and is infinitely divisible.¹¹³ If there is no smallest unit, this would mean the universe would be created by elementary particles that could be further divided into even smaller entities. We build a building out of bricks that can be divided into smaller entities. But, can a universe be constructed out of particles that can be divided into smaller units with no minimum size? Another finite entity is the maximum speed that of light. Yet at the quantum level correlated changes occur faster than the speed of light, though in that realm one thing might not act on another. If there is a smallest size in gross matter does this mean there is a smallest size in subtle matter and does this mean there is a smallest size of units of thought?

If we favor an infinite universe with parts, we can think of the limited finite entity as a part of the unlimited all-encompassing infinite. Finite space and time; and all entities, structures, and processes are within the infinite.

While there can be only one infinite without parts, there may be many with parts. It is possible that there are separate infinite universes of gross matter, subtle matter, spiritual worlds, and infinite time. In this case, we would have four separate infinities, which within their own domain that do not limit each other, given that each belongs to a different order of being. Infinite location, power, knowledge, perfection, volition, space, time, numbers, forms, etc. do not limit each other because they are different dimensions of reality. Saguna Brahman-Personal God's parts cohere together in an essential unity, such as omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, etc. These attributes are conceptually limited since each covers only

an aspect of the Divine Being. Their infinitude does not limit each other because each represents a different dimension of reality. For example, infinite knowledge does not limit infinite power.

The actual infinite exists as a collection of an unlimited number of parts. It is the completion of a process that builds the infinite from the finite. An example is the mathematical set theory developed by the German mathematician Georg Cantor (1845-1918).¹¹⁴ We can theoretically think of this infinity but cannot empirically visualize it. Cantor mentioned the infinite set of all even positive integers is only half the size of the infinite set of all integers (even and odd) altogether, yet they are equal in size in the sense that both sets are infinite.¹¹⁵

According to Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) an “actual infinite” exists wholly at some point in time. The “potential infinite” cannot be completed since it is an unending process with no conceivable upper limit. It is an extension of the finite that is never completed such as attempting to count to the highest integer. It exists only potentially by addition of new units or moments of time, or by the division of the parts in magnitude.¹¹⁶ Dividing an entity is a “potential infinite” if the smallest unit is never reached such as attempting to reach the smallest number.

An eternal universe is an example of an infinite with temporal parts. If the past is beginningless and the universe is pre-eternal this would be an actual one-sided infinite, and if post-eternal this would be a potential infinite since it still is adding on new years. If there were an infinite number of days in the past then each new day would add to the infinite. If there is no time when the universe did not exist, its existence is necessary not contingent. If the universe had a starting point, so that new events are being added on, we would have a potential infinite that increased through time. The Christian idea of a soul that has a beginning and no end in time is an example of a potential infinite.

Perfect Being (*ens realissimum*) has all positive powers and qualities to the highest possible degree. Omnipresence is infinite only if existence is infinite. If omnipotence or omniscience have an upper limit (maximum) then these attributes are finite and if they have no upper limit they are infinite. The power to create and maintain the universe is finite if the universe is finite, and infinite, unbound, and limitless if the universe is infinite.

Existence might be ontologically infinite, but it is epistemologically finite when limited (made finite) by the human intellect and senses. Physical entities are limited

because they are received in matter. The actual world as we experience it is not infinitely continuous, but discrete. We do not perceive the world as an infinite number of spatial points or temporal instants. It might be infinitely divisible in theory or as an abstract possibility. Our personal experiences require limitation of some sort.

For more on this subject see: *Sri Ramakrishna and Western Thought*, Ch. II. The Nature of Brahman-God, Section 5. Infinity (Ananta) of Brahman-God.

5. Eternity (Anadi, Avyaya, Nitya, Shasvata)¹¹⁷

Indian: “He [Atman] is eternal, without beginning, without end” (Kat. Up.* 1:3.15, p. 30; cf. 1:2.18; 2:2.13; Man. Up. 3:2; Svet. Up. 6:13; BG 2:16). “Know this Atman unborn, undying, never ceasing, never beginning, deathless, birthless, unchanging forever” (BG* 2:20, p. 41; cf. 2:21, 24; Br. Up. 4:4.25; 4:5.14-15; Ch. Up. 3:17.6). “Beyond this unmanifested there is yet another Unmanifested Eternal Being, who does not perish when all beings perish” (BG 8:20). “I [Krishna] am unborn and eternal by nature” (BG 4:6; cf. 4:1, 4-5; 10:3; 11:38; 13:12). “That eternal form of mine which is not manifest to the senses” (BG* 9:4, p. 101).

Old Testament: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God” (Ps. 90:2). “They will perish, but thou dost endure; they will all wear out like a garment.... but thou art the same, and thy years have no end” (Ps. 102:26-27).

New Testament: “Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made” (Jn. 17:5; cf. 17:24; Eph. 1:4; 3:21; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16; Jude 25). “He [Jesus Christ] is before all things” (Col. 1:17; cf. Jn. 1:1; 6:62; 8:58; Rev. 1:8, 17; 21:6; 22:13). “The Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning ... they will perish, but thou remainest ... But thou art the same, and thy years will never end” (Heb. 1:10-12). “But the word of the Lord abides forever” (1 Pet. 1:25).

Shankara (c. 688/788-720/820) realized that the Atman is eternal being both birthless and deathless. “Immortal because It is undecaying. That which is born and decays also dies; but because It is indestructible on account of it being birthless and undecaying, therefore, It is undying.”¹¹⁸ It is not subject to decay or a

transformation of any kind because it is changeless and partless. Possessing infinite power, nothing can bring about its destruction. “He [the Self] is unchangeable. He is constant and not subject to the changes of condition known as decline. Having no parts, he does not diminish in His own substance. As devoid of qualities, he does not diminish by loss of a quality.”¹¹⁹

It was stated by Vivekananda (1863-1902) that, “The Self [Atman] of man being beyond the law of causation, is not a compound. It is ever free and is the Ruler of everything that is within law. It will never die, because death means going back to the component parts, and that which was never a compound can never die.... If this glass is broken into pieces, the materials will disintegrate, and that will be the destruction of the glass. Disintegration of particles is what we mean by destruction. It naturally follows that nothing that is not composed of particles can be destroyed, can ever be disintegrated. The soul is not composed of any materials. It is unity indivisible. Therefore it must be indestructible. For the same reasons it must also be without any beginning.”¹²⁰ “You cannot establish the immortality of the soul [Atman], unless you grant that it is by its nature free, or in other words, that it cannot be acted upon by anything outside. For death is an effect produced by some outside cause.... But if it be true that the soul is free, it naturally follows that nothing can affect it, and it can never die. Freedom, immortality, blessedness, all depend upon the soul being beyond the law of causation, beyond this Maya.”¹²¹

The Swami continues, “If the existence of the soul [Atman] is drawn from the argument that it is self-luminous, that knowledge, existence, blessedness are its essence, it naturally follows that this soul cannot have been created. A self-luminous existence, independent of any other existence, could never have been the outcome of anything. It always existed; there was never a time when it did not exist, because if the soul did not exist, where was time? Time is in the soul; it is when the soul reflects its powers on the mind and the mind thinks, that time comes. When there was no soul, certainly there was no thought, and without thought, there was no time. How can the soul, therefore, be said to be existing in time, when time itself exists in the soul? It has neither birth nor death, but it is passing through all these various stages.”¹²²

Plotinus (c. 205-70) describes the Nous as, “always the selfsame without extension or interval; seeing all this one sees eternity in seeing a life that abides in the same, and always has the all present to it, not now this, and then again that, but all things at once, and not now some things, and then again others, but a partless completion... it is something which abides in the same, in itself and does not change at all but is always in the present.” Nous “staying at the summit of the intelligible, rules over it ...he irradiates forever, abiding unchanged over the intelligible.”¹²³

Augustine (354-430) writes, "For He [God] does not pass from this to that by transition of thought, but beholds all things with absolute unchangeableness; so that of those things which emerge in time, the future, indeed, are not yet, and the present are now, and the past no longer are; but all of these are by Him comprehended in His stable and eternal presence." On this suggestion, then, an Eternal Being, in addition to being timeless, has a certain unusual perspective, a perspective from which all things are present at once.¹²⁴

Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) formulated, “Eternity is simultaneously whole. But, time has a before and after. Therefore, time and eternity are not the same thing.... Eternity is the proper measure of being, so time is the proper measure of movement.”¹²⁵ “In a thing lacking movement, and which is always the same, there is no before and after.... In the apprehension of the uniformity of what is absolutely outside of movement consists the nature of eternity.... Whatever is wholly immutable can have no succession, so it has no beginning, and no end.... Eternity itself has no succession, being simultaneously whole.... As God is supremely immutable, it supremely belongs to Him to be eternal. Nor is He eternal only, but He is His own eternity.”¹²⁶ “Everything that begins to be or ceases to be does so through motion or change.... God is absolutely immutable; He is eternal lacking all beginning or end.... God, as has been proved, is absolutely without motion, and is consequently not measured by time. There is, therefore, no before and after in Him.... if it were true that there was a time when He existed after not existing, then He must have been brought up by someone from non-being to being.”¹²⁷ God is timeless because he is changeless, and time is the measure of change. When Aquinas writes, “He is His own eternity” he means God and eternity are not two separate things, implying that God is Nondual. God, therefore, is without beginning and end, having His whole being at once.

Summarizing the German Lutheran Scholastics viewpoint of the 17th century, Robert D. Preus (1924-95) writes, “The decrees of God are nothing else than God willing something from eternity, and in this sense are identical with the Divine Essence Itself. Therefore no essential change takes place in God as He makes His decrees toward us.... Eternity in God is understood as the unending duration or continuance of the Divine Essence, a duration which is indivisible and independent, excluding all succession of time, all imperfection and change. For God there is no before or after; no past, present, or future; but all exists at once (*tota simul*) in an eternal now.”¹²⁸

In brief, Brahman-God is eternal, being:

Shankara- a) birthless and indestructible.

Vivekananda- a) beyond the law of causation and not acted upon by anything external.

b) not a compound that can cease to be.

c) uncreated by anything else.

Augustine and Aquinas- a) immutable without succession, and therefore cannot begin or cease to be.

The Timeless Intrinsic Brahman-God

The idea of timeless eternal God outside the stream of temporal becoming was developed in the West by Plato, Philo of Alexandria, Plotinus, and Boethius and held by leading Catholics religious philosophers like Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas and by Protestants Luther and Calvin. They teach that the Supreme Being always exists in the changeless, timeless, transtemporal eternal now (*nunc eternum*) that excludes any temporal relations. For Brahman-God there is no past, present, or future, and no before and after, everything is simultaneously present.¹²⁹ It is not limited by temporal extension (duration, e.g., a period of time with parts and stages) or temporal location (e.g., before, now, after). If a timeless Brahman-God is omniscient, Its knowing would be an undivided single instantaneous event without temporal parts. In recent times this concept has been challenged by a number of religious philosophers as contradicting other Divine attributes.

An omniscient Brahman-God exists in the “eternal now,” an unextended timeless instant covering every possible thought. There is only one undifferentiated

event without division into time intervals. A timeless Brahman-God is supported by the following ideas.

1) If Brahman-God is the creator of time It must be timeless and exist outside of time. Creating time means causing events to change.

2) The Roman philosopher Boethius (477-524) realized a temporal Being would be imperfect in that its past is to a large extent lost, and its future has not yet arrived. In a changing existence there is always a sense of loss of the good things of the past, the present is temporary, and the future is uncertain. We enjoy things only for a short time and then they eventually pass away.¹³⁰ It changes either by coming to have an experience it previously lacked, or by losing an experience It previously had. On the other hand, an atemporal Brahman-God is complete, nothing is lost and there is nothing to gain.

3) A timelessly eternal Divinity provides the background for and explanation of the doctrine of the Brahman-God's total immutability. It is undivided without physical, temporal, or conceptual parts and therefore is immutable. If It underwent a process of change It would have a complex changing nature. Existence in time is a necessary precondition of change, but if there is no time It cannot undergo change.

4) How can a temporal Brahman-God have foreknowledge of future events that are freely performed by humans? Possibly there is no problem for a Divine Being that exists in the eternal present, since knowledge of all events are simultaneously present to It in single act of awareness.

5) A temporal Brahman-God that exists over a period of time would be subject to temporal change. Awareness of time does not exist unless some change occurs.

6) Some philosophers believe any change in Brahman-God implies an imperfection, a moving away from perfection.¹³¹ A counter argument is that knowing it is 12 am and a minute later that it is 12:01 does not involve a loss of perfection. A dualist-theist does not believe a Brahman-God that changes is imperfect.

Can an atemporal Brahman-God work within the world of time? The following solutions have been provided. 1) There is no reason to believe that direct awareness of the world of change requires a changing temporal understanding. To think that a Brahman-God beyond time cannot not know of the events within time and produce immediate effects is like thinking that a Brahman-God outside of space cannot know the location of physical objects and produce immediate effects.¹³² It is

an immaterial (non-spatial) and eternal (non-temporal) Being independent of all material entities. Writers use spatial metaphors to explain Brahman-God's timeless eternal nature by saying It is outside, beyond, or above time.

How are eternal nontemporal and temporal events interrelated? According to the solution provided by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann they are ET-simultaneous (Eternal-Temporal). For example, two separate temporal events are simultaneous with timeless eternity, without being simultaneous with each other. Timeless eternity is simultaneous with temporal existence in the sense of the former existing at every moment of the latter. Each and every event within time is present all at once in the timeless realm. An atemporal Brahman-God could will timelessly that some event occurs at a particular time in the temporal realm. It could be timelessly aware of a prayer being offered, willing ET-simultaneously that the answer to that prayer occurs at a later time. Since the whole of timeless eternity is ET-simultaneous with each temporal event when it occurs, an atemporal omniscient knower will know of all temporal events occurring at a particular time as well as their spatial location.¹³³ A timeless Brahman-God has duration of succession from our standpoint (*sub specie temporis*) but not from Its standpoint (*sub specie aeternitatis*) since It is atemporal.

From the fact that a timeless Brahman-God brought about a temporal event that occurred in 2010, it does not follow that the act of bringing it about occurred at that time or that it was produced within the realm of time. We might think of an author who writes a novel concerning events that come into existence at various times in the future.

If Ultimate Reality is timeless, does this mean that time is unreal, an illusion, or an appearance since only Its view is the correct one? For Thomas Aquinas and other Christians time (and space and causation) are real because they are the creation of God. A nonspatial and nontemporal Simple (Nondual?) God creates a real spatial and temporal world.

Objections to a Timeless God Creating a Temporal Universe

In the West, the Medieval Classical Theists whose thinking was metaphysical and abstract described transcendent God as timeless changeless, and simple. Conversely, Biblical teachings support a changing God who lives in a world of time.

Many modern thinkers who tend to be more empirical have challenged the concept of a timeless God in the following ways.

1) How can a Brahman-God who is absolutely timeless and changeless, create, sustain, and bring about changes in the universe? Contact between a timeless eternity and the realm of time is not easy to comprehend, since they are two radically different modes of existence that cannot be brought together into a single frame of reference. To be omnipotent a timeless immutable Being would have to create temporal causal events without Itself being temporal or changing. Actions and thoughts are not possible without time for them to transpire. A Brahman-God that is immutable and impassible will never be emotionally affected by anything that happens in the universe.

2) Whatever consciously brings about changes in the states of things in time or space must have an awareness of what it is like to be in time and space. Its thought must constantly change to be aware of the ongoing change in the temporal world. Can one have an understanding of time and the sequence of events (e.g., the lecture will begin in an hour) or that one event occurred before or after another without being temporal?¹³⁴ Can a timeless and immutable Brahman-God possess time-indexed knowledge such as it is now 12:30 and a minute later it is 12:31 without having a change in thought? Can It understand temporal location (e.g., today is the 10th of May) and duration (e.g., the storm lasted seven days)?¹³⁵

3) Are immutability and timeless eternity compatible with Divine omniscience? Can a timeless (and spaceless) Brahman-God be directly aware and have perfect knowledge (omniscience) of temporal beings and changing events without being temporal (and spatial) Itself? How can a timeless Brahman-God differentiate between one worldly event or idea and another if It is simple without temporal, spatial, or conceptual divisions? A timeless Being has no past or future and therefore unlike a person how can It remember the past, anticipate a future event, reflect, analyze something, respond, intend to do something, or act with a purpose?¹³⁶ All human thoughts and willing require time. If there is such a thing as timeless thought or action, its nature is totally inconceivable to us. Granted an infinite and eternal Brahman-God is not subject to human limitations. It would require a level of understanding that has nothing to do with human reason. We cannot understand what it is like to be a timeless Being since this is not part of our possible experience.

4) A timeless Brahman-God cannot become temporal since this process involves a change that requires time. There is no time for It to change into anything different from what It already is. Being immutable It cannot change and become mutable or cease to exist.

5) If Brahman-God is only simple, timeless, and immutable then after passing away, for the liberated-saved soul to make contact with the Divine it would have to have these three characteristics. In that case there would be no difference between Brahman-God and the liberated-saved soul.

6) The Brahman-God of the dualistic-theistic religions (such as the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Bible*) is mutable. These religious scriptures describe the Supreme Being as a Person who is immortal, everlasting, without beginning or end, existing forever over an endless duration of infinite time and who incarnates into the world.¹³⁷ Being active within world history It responds to the needs of people and aids in the progress of humanity. Brahman-God undergoes changes in understanding, will, feelings, and in Its effect on others. How could a timeless Being care for people, and redeem them over time without changing? Most people pray to a changing Brahman-God that will respond to their prayers, not to a timeless immutable Being. Dualists-theists hope after they pass away that they will live with Brahman-God in a Divine world that changes and not in an eternal timeless realm where they become immutable. They expect to remain as persons who can interact with Brahman-God and others. Can a timeless atemporal Brahman-God have an omniscient understanding of all events for all times, answer prayer, reveal Itself in human experience, and perform all the acts religions ascribe to It?¹³⁸

A timeless Brahman-God has no past and thus cannot remember or forget anything, and has no future and consequently cannot anticipate, hope for, or foreknow any event. It cannot change or create anything that formerly did not exist, thus a timeless Brahman-God cannot create time.

Christian philosophers and theologians have endless debates on whether God is eternal apart from or within time, immutable or mutable, simple or complex, infinite with or without parts, etc. From Augustine through Aquinas, the major thinkers taught that God was timelessly eternal. Now, the dominant view among Western religious philosophers is that God is eternal within time.

According to Vedanta Brahman-God has two eternal aspects, Nirguna Brahman is timeless eternal, changeless, simple, and infinite without parts and Saguna

Brahman is eternal within the realm of time changing, complex, and infinite with finite parts. Being partless Nirguna Brahman is timeless and not subject to change. Saguna Brahman is composed of indestructible spiritual substance and not physical akasha (physical matter) and prana (energy). Both have no temporal limits of a beginning or end. But, Saguna unlike Nirguna has temporal limits, boundaries of a real past, present, and future. It can enter into physical time, act and respond, while existing in a higher realm. There is a mental life, a succession of thoughts in the Divine Mind. From a Christian standpoint the simple, immutable, intrinsic aspect is the Essence of God and the complex, mutable, extrinsic aspect is the Personal Manifestation of God. These two aspects are ontologically related since they always co-exist. They are not chronologically related, Nirguna Brahman did not become Saguna Brahman at one point in time. According to Shankara and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) the Highest Reality is timeless, spaceless, and causeless meaning It is beyond all laws including the laws of reason and logic making It unknowable to the human intellect.

Vedanta provides the solutions to these six problems listed above that confront the Western writers. The Indian response to criticism #1 and #2 is that it is the temporally existing, changing, and passible Saguna Brahman-Ishvara-Personal God (Manifestation of Brahman-God) that creates the universe and responds to prayers, not the timeless Nirguna Brahman (Essence (Svarupa) of Brahman-God). The universe is created by the extrinsic (What It does) Saguna Brahman-God that exists in time and not the intrinsic (What It is) timeless Nirguna Brahman-God. Similarly for Plotinus (205-70), it is the World Soul and not the timeless One (Hen) that creates the universe. The response to criticism #3 is that it is the temporal and complex Saguna Brahman that is omniscient. To #4, Saguna Brahman has always existed. To #5, a liberated person can make contact with Saguna Brahman. To #6, it is Saguna Brahman that is immortal and omniscient, undergoes change, incarnates as an Avatara (Divine Incarnation), and responds to the needs of people.

The Sempiternal (Always Existing) Extrinsic Brahman-God Within Time

Just as there is infinity without and with finite parts, so also there is eternity without and with temporal parts. An important distinction is to be pre-eternal (a parte ante) and beginningless, or to have a beginning and be post-eternal (a parte

post) and endless. An everlasting entity might or might not have a beginning, but it has no end. Perpetuity (aevum) involves a temporal beginning without an end. Most Christians teach the soul originated at conception but will live on forever. They believe the universe had a beginning, but differ as to whether it has an end or not. Indian liberation (Moksha) also has a beginning and no end.

Advaita Vedantists have different ideas as to when the jiva (individual soul) appeared to enter into the realm of maya, but they believe eventually the liberated jiva will transcend time. If the universe is pre-eternal in the past, then it took an infinite amount of time to reach the present moment. Some Western writer's object stating you cannot transverse the infinite, yet at the same time they realize that God has always existed in an infinite past. If we start right now and attempt to count back the actual infinite number of years of a pre-eternal Brahman-God we will never reach the end point since It has no beginning. Because we cannot transverse an infinite does not mean it is nonexistent. For example, there is an infinite number of possible numbers, but since they cannot be traversed by counting all of them, this does not mean they do not exist.

Possibly a universe has always existed in the realm of time from the infinite past, but not necessarily the space-time continuum we live in. Even if our universe becomes nonexistent there are other universes that are active. This space-time continuum we live in exists cyclically in either subtle form (before the Big Bang) or now in manifested form. Brahman-God is both chronologically prior in time to the universe and prior in the ontological ordering of things.

A temporal Brahman-God can create different space-time systems (universes) with multiple time series that are not spatially or temporally related to one another. Brahman-God relates Itself to each of these systems, so that It will exist simultaneously with each event in each system as it occurs. A multi-temporal Brahman-God is located in each system though they have no causal influence on each other. Being omnipresent It is present in every space and time and not confined to a limited area or moment.¹³⁹ A world that is infinite in both time and space is an infinite with finite parts.

According to Albert Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity (1905) events that are currently present for an observer in one reference frame, may be future for an observer in another reference frame. No perspective is privileged, and thus, there is

no absolute now or simultaneity in the universe.¹⁴⁰ Yet, an omnipresent Brahman-God exists at every reference frame.

Another idea is that Brahman-God is omnitemporal; simultaneously occupying every moment in time, in what are for us is the past, present, and future. Being omnipresent in space and omnitemporal in time allows It to be omniscient and omnipotent. It has full understanding of all spatial and temporal indexicals, of where and when a thing is taking place. Brahman-God pervades every point in space and time but is not a spatial-temporal physical object. It always exists in spiritual space and time. Space and time are accompanied by causation; meaning by laws including those of reason such as a cause must precede its effect. Is part of an omnitemporal Brahman-God in one place and part in another or is all of It fully present in all places?

We all experience the common sense A-theory of time where there is a past, present, and future that is tensed and dynamic. An alternative possibility is the B-theory of time developed in 1908 by John M. E. McTaggart (1866-1925) a British Hegelian philosopher at Cambridge “that the past, present, and future are equally real, and that time is tenseless: temporal becoming is not an objective feature of reality.” We can think of a universe where the past, present, and future already exists somewhere in the physical realm; spread out like a road seen from a high mountain. What we consider to be the present time (when) depends where we are located in this block universe (where). Past, present, and future events are spread out spatially not temporally. Just as spatial objects presently exist no matter how far they are located away from us, so do the past and future. McTaggart might not agree with this, but our awareness of these events is temporal since at different moments of time we are located at different positions in event-space. As in Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity there is no unique present, the when depends on where you are located in space. People in different frames of reference can have different ideas whether a given pair of events occurred at the same time or at different times.¹⁴¹ If the future already exists this does not mean we should not make an effort to achieve a desired goal. The fact that we are exerting ourself to attain a goal means it is more likely in the already existent future that we did attain that goal. When time seems to progress we are spatially moving in either the external world or the conceptual world of our mind.

Vivekananda has another idea when he writes, “The idea is that existence never comes out of non-existence. The past and future, though not existing in a manifested form, yet exist in a fine form.”¹⁴² It is not that the future already exists somewhere at this physical level, but it presently exists in a more subtle realm. What we consider to be the present exists for us at the gross physical level. The future exists not on the gross physical plane, but in seed form in the subtle world. Does this mean that the past, present, and future always exist at the unconscious atomic and/or quantum level? Does the present continue to exist when it becomes the past, residing at the unconscious level?

Four possibilities for a temporal Brahman-God having infallible foreknowledge of future events are: a) It is omnitemporal in time, existing simultaneously in the past, present, and future unlike humans that live in the “temporal now.” b) It exists in the present but can quickly navigate to any point in the past or future. c) It is the first cause of all events. So It has perfect understanding of the objects and events It will bring about through Its omnipotence in the future. This might occur at both the macro and micro quantum level. d) It has perfect understanding of the original conditions and of the laws of cause and effect. For example, an astronomer knows the location of the planet Mars a week from now.

Some believe that the sovereignty of a temporal Brahman-God is restricted and not perfectly free, since Its experience and actions are under the control of and subject to the limitations of the laws of causation. If Brahman-God is altered by something other than Itself then It is not omnipotent. It would be less powerful than the laws of causation the initiator of the change. Brahman-God should be the source of and the controller of all that is other than Itself including causation. Causation is not an independent power that limits Brahman-God, but is a necessary property of Brahman-God that in the creative process It manifests in the physical world.

Others believe Brahman-God created or transformed into entities that change, causing time to exist. It can enter into this world that is always under Its control. Time is an eternal aspect of Brahman-God’s nature and not an independent reality. For a Qualified Nondualist like Ramanuja (c. 1017-1137) the creative process occurs through a transformation of Brahman-God. There is only one Self-existent reality and all other beings are Its dependent parts. Brahman-God has direct control over and knowledge of every spatial event. From a Dualist standpoint as a result of

the creative process time, space, and causation are separate from Brahman-God, but always under Its control. In both cases, Brahman-God is never subservient to or dependent on time, space, or causation.

Another idea is that Brahman-God and timelessness are not separate entities, but It is Timelessness-Itself, Knowledge-Itself, and Power-Itself. It is not in time and space; they are in It.

A temporal Brahman-God is immutable in the limited sense of eternally retaining Its essential nature. Even if Its knowledge and action are subject to change, It is still unchanging in character and temperament.¹⁴³ It is eternal because It is imperishable.

It is also possible that Brahman-God has two aspects, one is timeless and the other is within time.

6. Immutability (Aksara, Avikari, Kutastha, Nirvikara)

Indian: “Thou [Nirguna Brahman] art the changeless Reality” (Ch. Up.* 3:17.6, p. 103; cf. BG 4:13; 7:24). “To the ignorant the Self [Atman] appears to move-yet it moves not” (Is. Up.* 5, pp. 3-4). “That to which all this is pervaded know to be imperishable. None can cause the destruction of that which is immutable” (BG 2:17). “I [Sri Krishna] neither act nor change” (BG 4:13). “My supreme Nature, immutable and transcendent” (BG 7:24; cf. 7:13; 9:13; 14:27).

Old Testament: “For I the Lord do not change” (Mal. 3:6). New Testament: “Coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (Jam. 1:17). “But thou art the same, and thy years will never end” (Heb. 1:12). “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

From the standpoint of Nirguna Brahman-Atman, Shankara (c. 688/788-720/820) explains to us the nature and characteristics of the immutable Supreme Being. “This is the Atman, the Supreme Being, the ancient. It never ceases to experience infinite joy. It is always the same. It is consciousness itself.... It neither acts nor is subject to the slightest change. The Atman is birthless and deathless. It neither grows nor decays. It is unchangeable, eternal.”¹⁴⁴ As the permanent foundational subject of consciousness, the immutable Atman “maintains our

unbroken awareness of identity.” Like Kant’s unity of apperception, It unifies the multifarious ideas and disperse data of perception, synthesizing them into a meaningful and coherent pattern. Without such a ground, our experiences would be a series of unconnected subjective states. Cognitive and perceptual events are apprehended through the pure light of the changeless Atman whose essential nature is self-luminous, comparable to a lamp that illumines an object.¹⁴⁵

Vivekananda concluded an immutable (kutastha) Brahman-God cannot be affected by the changes that occur in nature. Nirguna Brahman cannot change because, “Everything mutable is a compound, and everything compound must undergo that change which is called destruction,” returning to the causal state of existence. There are no outer or internal forces that can bring about a change in the Absolute.¹⁴⁶ “There must be an identity which does not change—something which is to man what the banks are to the river—the banks which do not change and without whose immobility we would not be conscious of the constantly moving stream. Behind the body, behind the mind, there must be something, viz. the soul [Atman], which unifies the man” into a coherent and meaningful whole.¹⁴⁷ “The whole universe, comprising all nature and an infinite number of souls, is, as it were, the infinite body of God. He is interpenetrating the whole of it. He alone is unchangeable, but nature changes.”¹⁴⁸ “The universe as a whole is immovable, because motion is a relative term. I move with regard to the chair, which does not move. There must be at least two to make motion. If this whole universe is taken as a unit there is no motion; with regard to what should it move? Thus the Absolute is unchangeable and immovable, and all the movements and changes are only in the phenomenal world, the limited.”¹⁴⁹

In the West, Plotinus (c. 205-70) of Alexandria, Egypt and Rome employed the following reasoning, Being is “always in exactly the same state, neither coming to be nor perishing nor having any space or place or base, nor going out from anywhere nor entering into anything, but remaining in Itself ... Now if this is real Being and remains the same and does not depart from Itself and there is no coming-to-be about It and, as was said, It is not in place, it is necessary for It, being in this state, to be always with Itself, and not to stand away from Itself; one part of It cannot be here and another there, nor can anything come out of It; [for if it did] It would already be in different places, and, in general, would be in something and

not on Its own or unaffected; for It would be affected if It was in something else.”¹⁵⁰

Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) fathomed that God “this first being must be pure act, without the admixture of any potentiality, for the reason that, absolutely, potentiality is posterior to act. Now everything which is in any way changed, is in some way in potentiality. Hence, it is evident that it is impossible for God to change in any way. Secondly, because everything which is moved remains in part as it was, and in part passes away, as what is moved, as what is moved from whiteness to blackness remains the same as to substances; and thus in everything which is moved there is some kind of composition to be found. But it has been shown above that in God there is no composition.... Thirdly, because everything which is moved acquires something by its movement, and attains to what it had not attained previously. But, since God is infinite, comprehending in Himself all the plenitude of the perfection of all being, He cannot acquire anything new, nor extend Himself to anything whereto He was not extended previously.”¹⁵¹ In God’s knowing there is no cognitive temporal sequence, no before or after, not the slightest change in His consciousness, everything is known in the present. From all eternity God is infinite in the fullness of His own intrinsic being and perfection. God cannot acquire from an external source any new perfection that He did not previously have.¹⁵²

Lutheran and Reformed (Calvinistic) Scholastic theologians (primarily 16-17th centuries) theorized, “Immutability of *esse* [existence] indicates immortality or incorruptibly of God; immutability of attributes or accidents indicates the changelessness of Divine perfections; immutability of locus, or place, refers to the omnipresence of God that fills all things; and immutability of will refers to the Divine constancy in all that has been decreed and promised.... But in the effective principle, God, there is no change or mutation since God eternally and immutably wills to produce the creation. The change that occurs in creation is external to God.”¹⁵³

In summary, immutability is logically linked to: being eternal and indestructible by Shankara; aseity, uncompounded, being indestructible, and infinite by Vivekananda; imperishable and aseity by Plotinus; uncompounded, aseity, infinity, and perfection by Aquinas; and incorruptibly, perfection, omnipresence, and constancy by the Scholastics.

Nirguna and Saguna Brahman

It is obvious that the Extrinsic Personal Brahman-God described in the religious scriptures of the world is mutable, involved in many activities in creating and upholding this world. It is the Intrinsic Brahman-God that is immutable. Not making this distinction between the two aspects of Brahman-God has in the West, led to endless controversies in the religious philosophical literature on this subject. This is a Category Error of not realizing that simplicity, timelessness, and immutability belong to the Intrinsic nature of Brahman-God and complexity, time, and mutability to the Extrinsic aspect.

Traditional Christian philosophers like Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas teach that God is immutable, timelessly eternal, and simple without differentiation. Aquinas moves beyond Augustine's and Anselm's in his greater clarity and depth due in part to the available scholastic methods, terms, and concepts. The Christian philosophers ask how can a changeless God create the world and act within it? How can an internally and externally immutable God continually create a universe that changes at each moment?

Conversely, the theologians relying on *Biblical* revelation define God as mutable, eternal within time, passible, and complex. Most *Biblical* authors did not think in terms of Greek philosophical concepts. Being immutable certainly does not sound like the loving God of the *Bible* or any other religion. The Avatar-Divine Incarnation is certainly involved in change. Does not God love us and respond to our prayers? Immutability denies the anthropomorphic character of God found in the religious scriptures of the world.¹⁵⁴

Consequently, Western religious philosophers and theologians of the last two centuries are more critical of these apparent contradictions than the Scholastics of the Middle Ages were, and have brought them to light. Taking an “either/or” elimination approach many have renounced the idea that God is simple, immutable, etc. Modern writers tend to favor the *Biblical* interpretation (that God is mutable, passible, complex, etc.) over that of the philosophers. They commit the False Dilemma Fallacy thinking there are two mutually exclusive outcomes and only one is possible.

The idea that Brahman-God is both simple and composite, immutable (aksara, avikari, kutastha, nirvikara); and mutable, impassible and passible is not a

theological problem for Vedanta. Indian religious philosophy provides the synthetically grand unified theory that integrates the conflicting views of the Western analytical thinkers. By accepting the distinction between Nirguna Brahman (comparable to the Christian Essence of God, Being-Itself, Divine Substance, Godhead) and Saguna Brahman (comparable to the Christian monotheistic Personal God), Vedantists avoid the paradoxes confronting Western thinkers. Not accepting the Nirguna-Saguna distinction has led the Christian thinkers into many unsolvable paradoxes. It is Nirguna Brahman the Essence of God that is immutable and impassible, while the Manifestations of God (e.g., Personal God, Divine Incarnation) are active, subject to change, and loving. Nirguna Brahman-Atman that transcends time and all forms of phenomenality is absolutely immutable and impassible. Ishvara the Personal God is subject to change and is passible being concerned with the activities of humans. The former is infinite without parts and eternal being beyond space and time, while the latter is infinite with finite parts and eternal within space and time. They represent two ontological levels of Being and Existence. At one level Brahman-God is metaphysically simple, infinite, timeless, and immutable, and at another level It is complex, finite, temporal, and mutable.

A nondual-immutable Brahman-God upholds the temporal universe as its foundation, ground, and background. Without It the universe would not exist. But it is not likely that an immutable Brahman-God can create a new universe or directly bring about specified changes in the phenomenal world that occur within the realm of time. For Indians it is the mutable Saguna Brahman (the Personal God) and not the immutable Nirguna Brahman (Essence of God) that creates, maintains, and destroys the universe. Saguna Brahman is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, but not Nirguna Brahman since It transcends power, knowledge, and presence.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) did not understand the Nirguna-Saguna distinction and consequently in spite of his philosophical genius made a mistake in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). He thought that God and the Divine world (noumena) transcend space, time, and all thought categories of human understanding including words, and are therefore completely unknowable to the human intellect. This idea denies the spiritual understanding coming from mystical experience and from all scriptural revelation of any religion concerning Brahman-God. Kant (unlike Shankara) did not realize that the limitation of human knowledge

applies only to Nirguna Brahman (Essence of God) and not to Saguna Brahman (Manifestation of God), the Personal God who dwells in spiritual space and time. For this reason Jesus spoke with the Father in Heaven who has a will, knowledge, perception, and expresses forgiveness of sins. But you cannot converse with the Essence of God that is beyond will, knowledge, perception, and all forms of communication. Jesus could have conversed with the Father in Heaven in Aramaic or using a Divine language. Consequently, Kant substituted ethics for metaphysics advancing a moral interpretation of religion and Christ. As a result the Neo-Kantian theologians understood religion as a science of values based on ethical norms.

More on Immutability

An immutable Brahman-God knows the entire past, present, and future because It is omnipresent in time. What for us is past and future is in the present for It. It is like viewing a photo that has everything on it. Being omniscient It sees everything (all events in time) at one instance without changing.

To say that Brahman-God is immutable means It does not change, and more stringently that it is not possible for It to change. It certainly cannot undergo a substantial change (e.g., cease from being omniscient), in which case It would stop being what It is and become something else. Yet, an immutable entity can be involved in a Cambridge relational change where something else changes without It changing. For example, without changing God became the Lord of Israel after (and not before) the country was formed. Divine immutability has been attributed to God by Western thinkers including Plato, Aristotle, Philo, Boethius, Augustine, Anselm, Maimonides, and Aquinas. Rene Descartes (1596-1650) and others taught that God creates by a single immutable will for all eternity everything that occurs in the universe. These events can be willed as necessary and eternal or as contingent and temporary. He is active but not in a sequential fashion.¹⁵⁵ Think of a fiction author who writes in the present a sequence of events that will necessarily occur in a later part of the novel.

We might ask, is it possible for a timeless immutable Brahman-God to bring about changes in other things? Can an immutable Being will other events, have knowledge of Itself and mutable things, and have complex relations with Its creation? If this is possible Its method of activity and knowing are not known to us.

Knowledge as we understand it requires a complex intellect composed of many different ideas and volition that implies a mutable movement from potentiality to actuality.

Because our actions have been willed for all eternity, this does not mean we should not act to change things. Aquinas writes, “For we pray, not that we may change the Divine disposition, but that we may impetrate that which God has disposed to be fulfilled by our prayers.”¹⁵⁶ Human acts are true causes, and therefore certain actions are performed not to change the Divine providence, but to obtain certain results in a manner determined by Brahman-God that includes our personal effort.¹⁵⁷

It has been proposed by Plato (427-327 B.C.) and others that the immutability of Brahman-God is due to Its absolute perfection. Any change in It would imply an imperfection, a moving away from perfection. A change means either It gets worse, or It gets better which is impossible since Brahman-God is already absolutely perfect and cannot be improved upon. It cannot lose what It once had nor can It gain what It did not previously have.¹⁵⁸ Here the assumption is made that there can be only one form of perfection, if there were two or more they would be identical. If there were two different forms of perfection, each would lack what the other had. Critics might retort that if Brahman-God has a perfect understanding of the world and if the world changed so would Its perfect understanding.

A second reason for immutability is the aseity of Brahman-God, which is purely Self-determined so It cannot be influenced to change by anything other than Itself.¹⁵⁹ Contra to this explanation, Brahman-God might be intrinsically mutable if It changed due to something within Its own nature. A third reason is based on Brahman-God's absolute metaphysical simplicity. That which is simple (nondual) is spatially, temporally, and conceptually undivided. Fourthly, as infinite It cannot acquire anything new that It does not already possess. A thing that changes never actually has all the attributes it possibly can have. An immutable Brahman-God's entire character and nature are always present and so It always is all It can be. A Perfect Being has no unactualized potentialities. Fifthly, when Brahman-God that is intrinsically beyond time created the universe, It created time itself. Only things that exist in time can change.¹⁶⁰

A moderate definition of Divine immutability can be applied to Saguna Brahman-Ishvara-Personal God. It is immutable in that Its basic nature, attributes, character, and perfection always remain omnipresent, omnipotence, omniscient, and omnibenevolent (What It is). In this sense It remains the same throughout all time in the eternal past, present, and everlasting future. But this does not apply to Its purposeful activities that change in the Brahmaloaka-Kingdom of Heaven, in dealing with the world, and with the life of the Avatara-Divine Incarnation (What It does).

There are no accidents in Brahman-God, meaning all of Its properties are essential to It; every property It has, It could not possibly have lacked. These properties inhere in Brahman-God and cannot be lost by a change or destruction of that perfect Reality, and are not capable of increase or decrease or change for the better or the worse. If It produces changeable entities, It does so without any change in Its basic nature.¹⁶¹

Even though the basic principles of logic and mathematics are immutable, nevertheless they exist in a mutable world and are known by mutable minds.

In summary, Nirguna Brahman-Essence of God (Divine Substance) is Immutable, being:

- Shankara- (a) never involved in action.
- b) a necessary characteristic required for humans to maintain an awareness of self-identity and to synthesize their ideas and perceptions into a coherent pattern.
- Vivekananda- a) not subject to outer or internal forces working on it.
- b) a necessary characteristic in order for the humans self to be aware of change and to be unified into a meaningful whole.
- c) One, while everything change with regards to something else.
- Aquinas- a) pure act without any potentiality to change.
- b) without composition that could change.
- c) infinite and not acquiring anything new.
- d) God is perfect, fully realized and cannot attain a new or additional perfection.

Lutheran-Immutability of existence, attributes or accidents indicates the changelessness of Divine perfections; immutability of locus, or place, location, and will.

7. Perfection (Siddha)

Indian: “The Self [Atman] is everywhere ... without scar of imperfection” (Is. Up.* 8, p. 4). “There exists nothing higher than I am” (BG 7:7; cf. 6:45,* p. 87; 8:13,* p. 96; 13:2,* p. 132).

Old Testament: “This God—his way is perfect” (2 Sam. 22:31; cf. Ps. 18:30). “The law of the Lord is perfect” (Ps. 19:7). New Testament: “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt. 5:48).

The Indian Viewpoint on Perfection

Shankara designated the proof from degrees, “For as in the series of beings which descend from man to a blade of grass a successive diminution of knowledge, power, and so on, is observed—although they all have the common attribute of being animated—so the ascending series from man up to Hiranyagarbha [Brahman-God as the Universal Mind], a gradually increasing manifestation of knowledge, power, etc., takes place.” In this hierarchal manifestation, “God is endowed with super-eminent upadhis [attributes, limiting adjuncts] by virtue of which he becomes the Lord and Ruler of the individual souls endowed with upadhis of a lower kind.” Perfection is an attribute of Brahman-God who is free from every form of limitation.¹⁶² We add, all things participate in this perfection in various degrees and ways.

The founder of Vishistadvaita (Qualified Nondualism) Ramanuja (1017-1137) emphasized, “The highest Brahman is essentially free from all imperfection whatsoever, comprises within itself all auspicious qualities.”¹⁶³ “The Brahman is concentrated goodness, abhorrent of all imperfection, diverse from all things other than Himself. He is all-knowing, the realizer of all of His wishes, fulfilled in His desires, limitless and sovereign joy.”¹⁶⁴ “The comparison of the highest Self [Atman] to the reflected sun and the rest is meant only to deny of the Self that it participates in the imperfections—such as increase, decrease, and the like—which attach to the earth and the other beings within which the Self abides.... just as the sun, although seen [reflected] in sheets of water of unequal extent, is not touched by their increase and decrease; thus the highest Self [Atman], although abiding within variously-shaped beings, whether non-sentient like earth or sentient, remains

untouched by their various imperfections ... for as the nature of the highest is essentially antagonistic to all imperfection.”¹⁶⁵

In the ancient commentary on the *Yoga Aphorisms* (I, 24) it states, “The Lord’s pre-eminence is altogether without anything equal to its excelling it. For ... it cannot be excelled by any other pre-eminence, since whatever might seem to excel it would itself turn out to be that very pre-eminence. Therefore that is the Lord wherein we reach this uppermost limit of pre-eminence.”¹⁶⁶

Sri Ramakrishna transmitted spiritual energy to Swami Vivekananda and he “was astounded to find that really there was nothing in the universe but God.... everything I saw appeared to be Brahman ... This state of things continued for some days.”¹⁶⁷ He realized that properly seen the world is perfect.

Vivekananda expressed the idea that, “Nor is the Soul [Atman] bound by the conditions of matter. In its very essence it is free, unbounded, holy, pure, and perfect.” “When a Soul becomes perfect and absolute, it must become one with Brahman, and it would only realize the Lord as the perfection, the reality, of its own nature and existence, the existence absolute, knowledge absolute, and bliss absolute.”¹⁶⁸ “The Self [Purusha, Atman] of man is beyond all these, beyond nature. It is effulgent, pure, and perfect.” “I am the Infinite, only I am not conscious of it now; but I am struggling to get this consciousness of the Infinite, and perfection will be reached when full consciousness of this Infinite comes.” “All knowledge is within us. All perfection is there already in the Soul. But this perfection has been covered up by nature; layer after layer of nature is covering this purity of the Soul [Atman]. What have we to do? Really we do not develop our Souls at all. What can develop the perfect? We simply take the veil off; and the Soul manifests itself in its pristine purity, its natural, innate freedom.”¹⁶⁹ “What can be a higher end than God? God Himself is the highest goal of man; see Him, enjoy Him. We can never conceive anything higher, because God is perfection.”¹⁷⁰

The Western Perspective on Perfection

In light of Anselm’s (1033-1109) Ontological Argument, God is “the being than which none greater can be conceived.” Existence is implicit in the idea of perfection. Anything being the greatest and lacking existence, is less than the greatest that has existence. If the greatest possible being exists in the mind It

must also exist in reality. This line of thinking follows an *a priori* approach based on theoretical deduction rather than empirical evidence. Opponent's state there is no being whose non-existence [a truth of fact] implies a logical contradiction [a truth of reasoning]. According to Immanuel Kant existence is not a property but is the necessary precondition for the instantiation of properties. Existence and non-existence is a dichotomy without degrees like a property.¹⁷¹ We can say that existence is an "is" and a property is a "what." Can it be proven that a Perfect Being must exist by necessity?

Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) professed there is a "gradation to be found in things. Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble, and the like. But more and less are predicted of different things according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum, as a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest; so that there is something which is truest, something best, something noblest."¹⁷² God the highest Being is absolutely perfect through His essence, while all other things are made better to the degree that they participate in His perfection. "Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus, as fire, which is the maximum of heat, is the cause of all hot things, as is said in the same book [by Aristotle]. Therefore there must be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God."¹⁷³ "Whatever perfection exists in an effect must be found in the producing cause ... Since therefore God is the first producing cause of things, the perfections of all things must pre-exist in God in a more eminent way." "God is Being-Itself, of Itself-subsistent. Consequently, He must contain within Himself the whole perfection of being. For it is clear that if some hot thing has not the whole perfection of heat, this is because heat is not participated in its full perfection; but if this heat were self-subsisting, nothing of the virtue of heat would be wanting in it.... God is Essential Being, whereas other things are beings by participation."¹⁷⁴ "He is not directed to anything else as to an end, but is Himself the last end of all things."¹⁷⁵ "It does not belong to the First Agent, Who is agent only, to act for the acquisition of some end: He intends only to communicate His perfection, which is His goodness; while every creature intends to acquire its own perfection; which is the likeness of the Divine perfection and goodness. Therefore the Divine goodness is the end of all things."¹⁷⁶ The Divine Being does not manifest His perfection in the

production of His created effects that are always less than Himself. “All beings other than God are not their own being, but are beings by participation. Therefore, it must be that all things which are diversified by the diverse participation of being, so as to be more or less perfect, are caused by the First Being, who possesses being most perfectly. Hence, Plato said that unity must come before multitude; and Aristotle said that whatever is greatest in being and greatest in truth is the cause of every being.”¹⁷⁷

In this regard for Paul Tillich degrees of perfection do not imply the reality of the highest or greatest being, in the sense that God is a being (the highest) among other beings. They imply the unconditioned, Being-Itself, the source and ground of existence [comparable to Nirguna Brahman]. “If you want to say that something has a higher or lower degree of participation in the idea of the good or the true, then the idea itself must be presupposed.... The good itself, or the unconditionally good—being or beauty—is the idea which is always presupposed. This means that in everything finite or relative, there is implied the relation to an unconditioned, an absolute. Conditionedness and relativity imply and presuppose something absolute and unconditioned.... Reality by its very nature is finite, pointing to the infinite to which the finite belongs and from which it is separated.”¹⁷⁸

In summary, Brahman-God is Perfect, being:

Shankara- a) there is a gradual ascending series of knowledge, power, etc. from humans up to the highest Being.

Ramanuja- a) free from all imperfection whatsoever, possessing all of the highest qualities.

b) untouched by all imperfections, as the sun is not affected by the things it reflects upon.

Vivekananda- a) beyond nature, not bound by the conditions of matter.

b) hidden behind the veil of nature that must be removed.

Anselm- a) It is supremely good through Itself, while all other things are good through something else.

Aquinas- a) gradation implies something which is the maximum.

b) the highest Being is perfect through His essence, while all other things are better to the degree they participate in His perfection.

c) the maximum in any genus and the cause of everything in that genus.

d) the cause of all effects, and therefore possessing the entity to a higher degree.

- e) He is Being-Itself that contains within Himself the whole perfection of being.
- f) He is Essential Being, whereas other things are beings by participation.

The Perfection of the Intrinsic Essence of Brahman-God

The goal is to create a logical system concerning the Divine attributes of Brahman-God. It should be comprehensive in covering as many properties as possible; interrelated in that following a logical sequence one attribute implies another; properly grouped according to similar characteristics (e.g., the Omni-attributes go together); and logically consistent so that one quality does not contradict another. Is there a primary attribute that implies the others? Following the tenets of Perfect Being Theory, the fundamental and most comprehensive attribute is Perfection, since the others follow deductively from it. Every major religion of the world teaches there is a Perfect Being and/or state of existence. The Intrinsic nature of Transcendent Brahman-God is divisionless-undivided (simplicity, nondual), causeless-uncaused (aseity), finiteless-unfinite (infinite), timeless-untimed (eternal), and changeless-unchanged (immutable). These are the characteristics of a maximally Perfect Being. It is not bound by the limitations of division, causation, finitude, time, or change that result in some imperfection. Nor is It limited by being situated only at one point in space (location), a moment in time (the now), or part of the process of causation (law).

It is Self-existent (Aseity) and Self-caused (Causa Sui) ontologically, but not chronologically since It would have to exist prior to Itself to create Itself. Being Immutable It cannot lose Its perfection, which is timelessly eternal. Concerning "What Brahman-God is" there is only one form of perfection, and any change would be to a less perfect state. If there were two absolutely perfect states, they would be identical and therefore indiscernible. Being Infinite It lacks nothing. Nor is there anything outside or prior to It (including space, time, causation, and law) upon which Its existence depends that could limit Its perfection. It is perfect through Its own Essence, while all other things are valued to the degree they participate in It.

The highest Being must be Perfection-Itself else It would receive Its perfection from something else and be subservient to It. As Being-Itself It contains within Itself the whole perfection of being. There is not something separate added to Its nature (Aquinas). Perfection-Itself like Being-Itself, Power-itself, Knowledge-Itself, and

Goodness-Itself imply that Brahman-God is identical with (not part of) these characteristics. By contrast, humans are not identical with them, but participate (Vivekananda used the term borrow) in them too varying degrees. It is not in a state of potentiality, but Its perfection is always fully realized. Finite existence points to the existence of an Infinite that is absolute and unconditioned, from which it is separated.

Eventually, we will go beyond nature and realize that Perfection is our true Self the Atman (Vivekananda). As humans we participate in happiness and in goodness, etc., but we do not participate in the Atman or Its virtues, but are identical with It.

The Perfection of the Extrinsic Manifested Brahman-God

If Personal Brahman-God is perfect then it follows concerning presence, power, knowledge, goodness, and bliss, It must necessarily be omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, and omniblissful. These Divine attributes exist necessarily and are essential components of Brahman-God. They are extrinsic when they are manifested in Brahman-God's relation with the phenomenal world. By necessity Brahman-God a Perfect Being must possess all of the Omni-traits eternally, and there is no way It could not have them or lose them. They are eternal, without beginning nor acquired from another source. Being perfect in every way is different from being perfect in only some ways. All perfection is within Brahman-God and It is within all perfection. As omnipresent Brahman-God is wholly present and has perfect power and knowledge in every location. Brahman-God is free from the imperfections of the world, as the sun is not affected by the things it reflects upon (Ramanuja). Brahman-God is the perfect background and ground (substratum) of phenomenal existence that depends on nothing and interpenetrates the universe. The entire universe is pervaded by Brahman-God, the inner ruler that abides within all perfection and does so to maintain it.

Ontologically Brahman-God precedes all existence as the first cause, the source of all perfection. Brahman-God is the first uncaused universal cause, under which all secondary causes are included and subject to It as their creator, preserver, and destroyer. Not bound by any law It is the source of everything. All laws and forces in the world exist only because Brahman-God's establishes and

maintains them. Brahman-God is the creator of and entirely present in each Omni-form of perfection as the universal cause and knower of all things. In addition, all perfections are ordered to Brahman-God the final cause, the supreme good, which is their end. In a sense preservation is an ongoing creation of something new.

There are varying manifestations, degrees, and gradations of perfection, and for each there must be a highest, maximum, and perfect limit (Omni), which are attributes of Brahman-God (Shankara, Aquinas). Following the Degrees of Perfection thesis, the existence of Brahman-God is demonstrated *a posteriori*, if we infer from the existence of greater and lesser goods that we experience, to the existence of a perfect good, which is the cause of all lesser degrees of righteousness.¹⁷⁹ The hierarchal series is finite (not infinite) if there is an upper limit to the fully perfected state.

All of existence is a fragment of the Perfect Universal Mind and Body, under Its control and absolutely dependent on It (Vivekananda). The sum total of all perfection is Brahman-God the Totality of all existence that is moving the universe. The Whole possesses an attribute in unmixed purity and perfection, and through participation the parts manifest it in a diminished and imperfect way.

The universe is a transformation according to Vishistadvaita (Qualified Nondualists) or a creation according to Dvaita (Theistic Dualists) of that Perfection in a lesser form. In the creative process the perfect becomes imperfect, the first the secondary, unity becomes diversity, totality the part, and the original the copy or reflection to varying degrees.

8. One in Number (Monotheism, Advayata)

Indian: “They have called him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni ... The One Being sages call by many names” (RV* 1:164.46; cf. 10:21.1; 129.2). “Thou art Lord of men, without an equal; of all the world thou [Indra] art the only Sovran” (RV 6:36.4). “He is the sole, the simple One, the One alone. In him these Deities become simple and One” (AV 13:4.21-21). “How many gods are there, Yajnavalkya? One” (Br. Up. 3:9.1; BG 9:23). “From me all emerge, in me all exist, and to me all return. I am Brahman-One without a second” (Kai. Up.* 19, p. 210). “The Supreme Lord of lords, the Supreme Deity of deities, the Ruler of rulers”

(Svet. Up. 6:7). At least five of the twelve major *Upanishads* mention that Brahman is “One without a second.”

Old Testament: “I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God” (Is. 45:5). New Testament: “There is no God but one” (1 Cor. 8:4). “For there is one God” (1 Tim. 2:5).

Two Nyaya-Vaishesika theologian’s Jayanta Bhatta (840-900) and Shridhara (fl. 990) emphasized that one omnipotent Brahman (God) is sufficient for the purpose of creating the cosmos. The principle of parsimony demands one God not many. A plurality of polytheistic gods who are not omnipotent and omniscient, would not be capable of creating and maintaining the universe. If they are omniscient and omnipotent, one Brahman is adequate to the task of creation and the others are redundant. If many deities created the world, they would have conflicting wills and purposes and could not produce and maintain a world that is unified, orderly, and harmonious.¹⁸⁰

A proof of monotheism is that can be only one maximally perfect Brahman-God. If there were two Brahman-God’s they would be identical in every possible way since there is only one form of Perfection. If there were two differing forms of perfection one would have something the other did not have. If they were both omnipresent they would occupy the same area. They both could not be infinite since one would override the other. We would have what Leibnitz referred to as an Identity of Indiscernibles.

There are different aspects of Brahman-God. Hinduism is Polytarian (See Chapter X. Avatara-Divine Incarnation, Section 1A) and Christianity is Trinitarian. To some extent, there is a division of labour since each aspect fulfils at least one function the others do not fulfil. For example, Brahma as Creator, Vishnu as Preserver, and Shiva as Destroyer. A counter idea is that each aspect is identical, but our way of viewing them differs. For example, the same Divine Being is viewed and interpreted as Father or as Mother.

Vivekananda expounded the idea that, “The idea of the Advaitists [Nondualists] is to generalize the whole universe into one—that something which is really the whole of the universe. And they claim this whole universe is one, that it is one Being manifesting Itself in all of these forms.”¹⁸¹ “There cannot be two infinities. Suppose there were, one would limit the other, and both would be finite.

Infinity can only be one, undivided.”¹⁸² “We find that searching through the mind we at last come to that Oneness, that Universal One, the Internal Soul of everything, the Essence and Reality of everything, the Ever-Free, the Ever-blissful, the Ever-Existing. Through material science we come to the same Oneness. Science today is telling us that all things are but the manifestation of one energy which is the sum total of everything which exists.”¹⁸³

Multiplicity is a phenomenal distinction Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan pointed out, and not a characteristic of the Absolute Noumenal realm. There is only one Noumenal reality for the reason that it is without attributes, parts, or distinctions and is independent of space and time. “If there is not the slightest difference between one Purusha [Soul] and another, since they are free from all variety, then there is nothing to lead us to assume a plurality of Purushas. Multiplicity without distinction is impossible.”¹⁸⁴

The heterodox Christian Modalist Sabellius (fl. 230) held that, “The same is the Father, the same is the Son, the same is the Holy Spirit. They are three names, for the same reality. Do we have one or three Gods?” They are not independent beings. Paul Tillich mentions, “There is no transcendent, heavenly Trinity.... When Sabellius says that the same God is essentially in the Father, Son, and the Spirit, that there are only differences of faces, appearances, or manifestations, he is saying that they are all homoousios. That is, they all have the same Essence, the same Divine power of being. They are not three beings, but they have the same power of being in three manifestations.”¹⁸⁵

For Thomas Aquinas, “Absolutely infinite being cannot be twofold, for being that is absolutely infinite comprises every perfection of being; hence, if infinity were present in two things, in no respect would they be found to differ.”¹⁸⁶ “If there were two perfect gods, “nothing will be given in which to distinguish the perfect beings from one another.... All things are sufficiently fulfilled by reduction to one principle. There is, therefore, no need to posit many principles.”¹⁸⁷ “Whenever in different things some one thing common to all is found, it must be that these different things receive that one thing from some one cause, as different bodies that are not receive their heat from fire.... There must, therefore, be one principle of being from which all things in whatever way of existing have their being.”¹⁸⁸

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that God is three Persons but only one substance; they differ from one another only by relational attributes and not by intrinsic essential properties that are identical among the three Persons. The Father, Son, and Spirit have one common Essence, which is in no way divided, but subsists in the three Hypostases [Persons]. Each Person expresses not a part of God's nature, but the fullness of the Ousia [Essence]; each Person differs from the others only in one relational property that is of the Hypostasis, not of the Divine Ousia. If all this is true, then it follows that God can properly be described as metaphysically simple. From a Hindu standpoint the Essence of God is Nirguna Brahman and the Persons are comparable to Saguna Brahman.

Briefly, Brahman-God is one in number, being:

Jayanta Bhatta and Shridhara- a) omnipotent and omniscient, and therefore sufficient for creating the cosmos.

b) that many deities would have conflicting wills and purposes in creating and maintaining a world which is unified, orderly and harmonious.

Vivekananda- a) the whole universe is one, since one Being is manifesting Itself in all of these forms.

b) there cannot be two infinities, one would limit the other, and both would be finite.

c) at the highest level is that Universal One, the Essence of everything,.

d) that according to modern science all things are but the manifestation of one energy the sum total of everything that exists.

Radhakrishnan- a) that multiplicity without distinction is impossible, and the Absolute Noumenal reality is without attributes, parts or distinctions and is independent of space and time.

Sabellius- a) the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit have the same Essence, the same power of being in three manifestations.

Aquinas- a) if infinity were present in two things, they would not differ.

b) if there were two perfect gods they would be indistinguishable.

c) that all things are fulfilled by reduction to one principle.

d) if in different entities there is one thing in common, it comes from one cause, as different things that are hot receive their heat from fire.

Tillich- a) that the Divine ground transcends all differentiations.

9. Transcendence (Alaukika, Vishvatiga, Vishottirna)

Indian: “Brahman is beginningless, transcendent” (BG* 13:12, p. 135; cf. 7:24).

Old Testament: “God is in heaven, and you upon earth” (Eccl. 5:2). “It is he who sits above the circle of the earth” (Is. 40:22). New Testament: Give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Mt 5:16). “Our Father who art in heaven” (Mt. 6:9).

Vivekananda stated, “The Advaitists believe something more. They believe in a still higher phase of this Personal God, which is personal-impersonal. No adjective can illustrate where there is no qualification ... in the *Upanishads* themselves you find they penetrate even further, and say, nothing can be predicated of It except Neti, Neti, ‘Not this, Not this.’”¹⁸⁹ “When we say ‘Sachchidananda’ (Existence-Knowledge-Bliss), we are merely indicating the shores of an indescribable Beyond. Not even can we say ‘is’ about It, for that too is relative. Any imagination, any concept is in vain. Neti, neti (‘Not this, not this’) is all that can be said, for even to think is to limit and so to lose.”¹⁹⁰ “He who is beyond the senses, beyond all touch, beyond all form, beyond all taste, the Unchangeable, the Infinite, beyond even intelligence, the Indestructible—knowing Him alone, we are safe from the jaws of death.”¹⁹¹ “Brahman transcends both the individual and collective aspects, the Jiva [individual soul] and Ishvara [Personal Brahman-God.... The Advaitins on the contrary maintain that Jivas and the universe have been merely superimposed on Brahman. But in reality there has been no modification in Brahman. The Advaitin says that the universe consists only of name and form. It endures only so long as there are name and form. When through meditation and other practices name and form are dissolved, then only the transcendent Brahman remains.”¹⁹²

In Thomas Aquinas’ words, “Genus is prior in meaning to what it contains. But nothing is prior to God either really or in meaning. Therefore, God is not in any genus.”¹⁹³ The Supreme Reality transcends all genera and is not subsumed under a genus, since He is Being-Itself and His essence and existence are not separate. “As the creature proceeds from God in diversity of nature, God is outside the order of the whole creation, nor does any relation to the creature arise from His nature; for

He does not produce the creature by necessity of His nature, but by His intellect and will, as was above explained. Therefore, there is no real relation in God to the creatures whereas in creatures there is a real relation to God; because creatures are contained under the Divine order, and their very nature entails dependence on God.”¹⁹⁴ God is metaphysically simple without accidents, and His substance is not related to anything external since then God would depend in some ways on creatures for His existence.¹⁹⁵

More recently Paul Tillich took the position that “mystical monotheism transcends all realms of being and value, and their Divine representatives, in favor of the Divine Ground and abyss from which they come and in which they disappear. All conflicts between the gods, between the Divine and the demonic, between gods and things, are overcome in the ultimate which transcends all of them. The element of ultimacy swallows the element of concreteness. The ontological structure, with its polarities which are applied to the gods in all forms of polytheism, has no validity for the transcendent One, the principle of mystical monotheism.... The power of being in its completeness and the entire sum of meanings and values are seen without differentiation and conflict in the ground of being and meaning, in the source of all values.”¹⁹⁶

Succinctly, Brahman-God as Transcendent, is:

Vivekananda- indescribable beyond the Personal God, all concepts, intelligence, name and form.

Aquinas- a) Being-Itself is not subsumed under a genus.

b) outside the order of the whole creation independent of all things.

Tillich- The Divine Ground from which all things arise and disappear.

Brahman-God’s transcendence means It is outside of space and time and has an exalted metaphysical status that is in all ways qualitatively superior to the created objects of the universe.

In Advaita Vedanta the transcendent Reality is Nirguna Brahman (Brahman without attributes) an eternal state beyond the name and the forms of space, time, and causality. In Dvaita Vedanta (Dualistic, Theistic) transcendent Saguna Brahman is a Personal Deity with form. For Theist throughout the world, Brahman-God transcends the physical universe (world, cosmos) that It has brought into existence. The phrase “Brahman-God is outside or beyond space” involves two

spatial terms (outside, beyond). Another view is that contingency, differentiation, time, finitude, and change are transcended by a necessary, simple, timeless, infinite without parts, and immutable Brahman-God.

It is both ontologically and temporally prior to Its effects. Due to Its aseity, Brahman-God is not dependent or conditioned by what It creates. It is separate from the material universe, existing beyond all physical laws. Brahman-God is an independent Being neither a product of or identical with the cosmos that it surpasses in every possible way. There is a difference between being beyond our limited knowledge and beyond all conceivable knowledge. Divine transcendence implies that Brahman-God differs considerably from this world, in being non-physical, omnipresent, independent, and maximally creative. Proofs offered for the existence of Brahman-God show that the universe is structured in such a way that it points beyond itself to the transcendental Being of a higher order of reality. Brahman-God as a spiritual Being has the power to enter into physical space and time. If Brahman-God were physically spatial It would be known by science rather than by religious philosophy. At all times the world is dependent on the continuously creative transcendent Brahman-God. The transcendent realm is outside, beyond, and apart from the material existence; of a higher order superior to earthly things in quality, power, and knowledge.

It works through the events of human history and though concealed reveals Itself to some extent in the world. The transcendent realm is accessible to humans through contemplative religious experience where the spiritual aspirant attains some awareness of the sacred. A transcendent a state of being is reached that to some extent has overcome the limitations of physical existence.¹⁹⁷

The doctrine of Divine impassibility states that nothing external or internal can affect the emotional feelings of Brahman-God. It is affected only by Itself. In its more extreme form it asserts that it is not possible for It to be otherwise. An intrinsic Brahman-God must be impassible because It is: simple (undivided=nondual) not separate from anything else, a se (aseity) existing by Its own essence independent of any other being so nothing external can affect It, infinite so that It cannot be limited in any way, timelessly eternal, and immutable. An immutable Being is impassible unless It is always affected by the same event in an unchanging way. If It is mutable It might or might not be impassible.

For more on this subject see: *Sri Ramakrishna and Western Thought*, Ch. II. The Nature of Brahman-God, Section 6. Transcendence (Alaukika, Vishvatiga) of Brahman-God.

10. Immanence (Antaryamin)

Indian: “You cannot see the seer of seeing; you cannot hear the hearer of hearing; you cannot think of the thinker of thinking; you cannot know the knower of knowing. This is your Self [Atman] that is within all” (Br. Up. 3:4.2). “That Imperishable, is never seen but is the Seer; It is never heard, but is the Hearer; It is never thought of, but is the Thinker; it is never known but is the Knower” (Br. Up. 3:8.11).

New Testament: “For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you” (Lk. 17:21, KJ).

Shankara taught Brahman abides in-Itself, as the foundational, substrative, and substantial cause of the world, the one self-sufficient background essence (immutable foundational cause) from which all else proceeds. It is the formless, partless, infinite, indeterminate, unconditioned background of the finite world. As the Pure Subject that pervades all cognition and perception, It reveals objects, but is Itself never comprehended as an object. “Brahman exists (1) as the Inner Self, (2) as the source of all activity of the senses and the like, (3) as the source whence arises our consciousness of existence with reference to all duality which is imaginary, (4) as Ishvara or the Lord of the universe. First of all, here the Lord [Krishna] proves, by way of inference, the existence of Brahman as the inner Self-consciousness: there must be some self-conscious principle behind insentient principles in activity, such as the physical body; for we invariably find self-consciousness lying behind all insentient objects in activity, such as a carriage in motion.”¹⁹⁸

Swami Vivekananda discerned concerning the immanence of God, “There must be an identity which does not change—something which is to man what the banks are to the river—the banks which do not change and without whose immobility we would not be conscious of the constantly moving stream. Behind the body, behind the mind, there must be something, viz. the soul [Atman], which unifies the man”

into a coherent and meaningful whole (from a newspaper report).¹⁹⁹ “The universe as a whole is immovable, because motion is a relative term. I move with regard to the chair, which does not move. There must be at least two to make motion. If this whole universe is taken as a unit there is no motion; with regard to what should it move? Thus the Absolute is unchangeable and immovable, and all the movements and changes are only in the phenomenal world, the limited.”²⁰⁰ We are aware of change and movement because the ground or background of existence that exists at a deeper ontological level is changeless and immovable. “You have that conception in the *New Testament*. It is that idea, God immanent in the universe, the very essence, the heart, the soul of things. He manifests Himself, as it were, in this universe. You and I are little bits, little points, little channels, little expressions, all living inside of that infinite ocean of Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss. The difference between man and man, between angels and man, between man and animals, between animals and plants, between plants and stones is not in kind, because everyone from the highest angel to the lowest particle of matter is but an expression of that one infinite ocean, and the difference is only in degree.”²⁰¹ See the first section of Ch. V, Section 1. It is the Immutable Background-Substratum-Ground (Foundational Cause) of All Existence.

Vivekananda is making the important point that Nirguna Brahman is not “wholly other.” It is the foundation of the universe and without It there would be no universe, which includes us. It is shining through the universe and maintaining its existence at every moment. The Internal Ruler is an immanent form of Brahman-God (Antaryamin). See: The Indian Cosmological-Ontological Explanation for the Existence of Brahman-God in Section 3 of this chapter.

Thomas Aquinas reasoned, “God causes this effect in things not only when they first begin to be, but as long as they are preserved in being, as light is caused in the air by the sun as long as the air remains illuminated? Therefore, as long as a thing has being, so long must God be present to it, according to its mode of being. But being is innermost in each thing and most fundamentally present within all things, since it is formal in respect of everything found in a thing, as was shown above. Hence it must be that God is in all things, and innermost.”²⁰² “He is in all things as giving them being, power, and operation; so He is in every place as giving it being and locative power.... God is in all things by His power, inasmuch as all

things are subject to His power; He is by His presence in all things, inasmuch as all things are bare and open to His eyes; He is in all things by His essence, inasmuch as he is present to all as the cause of their being.”²⁰³

According to the German-American Protestant theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965), “God is the cause of the entire structure of causes and effects, He is the substance underlying the whole process of becoming.... Since God is the Ground of Being, He is the ground of the structure of being. He is not subject to this structure; the structure is grounded in Him. He is this structure, and it is impossible to speak about Him except in terms of this structure. God must be approached cognitively through the structural elements of Being-Itself.... God as Being-Itself is the ground of the ontological structure of being without being subject to this structure Himself. He is the structure; that is, He has the power of determining the structure of everything that has being.”²⁰⁴

Summarizing, Brahman-God is Immanent, being:

- Shankara- a) the unconditioned foundational substrative cause and the self-sufficient background essence from which all-else proceeds.
 b) the pure subject that pervades all cognition and perception, revealing all objects, but Itself never comprehended as an object.
 c) the inner Self-consciousness, the source whence arises our consciousness of existence.
 d) as the Inner self-conscious principle behind insentient objects in activity.

- Vivekananda- a) that which unifies us into a coherent and meaningful whole.
 b) the changeless and immovable that makes us aware of change and movement.

- Aquinas- a) innermost in all things as the cause of there being, power, and operation.
 b) in all things having knowledge of their activity.

Tillich- a) Being-Itself the ground of the ontological structure of being, the substance underlying the whole process of becoming, without being subject to this structure Himself.

A metaphysical systems that posit an ultimate reality should show its double aspect as both transcendent and immanent. Omnipresent Brahman-God is both transcendent and immanent, being beyond and within the universe as the ground (or background) of existence. The transcendent Brahman-God is immanent in us.

Transcendent and immanent should not be thought of as mutually exclusive in opposition to each other, but as two different ways of equal value of viewing the same higher Reality. Both are wholly independent of the experience of objects in the world. Yet, all beings rely on them for their existence. They are not objective entities but the Being of all entities, the unconditioned ground of all possibilities and actualities that condition everything else.²⁰⁵ Immanence means that Brahman-God pervades the universe, not that It is identical with and indistinguishable from it (pantheism).

The transcendent Brahman-God becomes immanent in the Avatara-Divine Incarnation and in the Divine presence within human beings. It is "more present to us than we ourselves." Evolution is a result of immanence, where progressive events within the physical world are due to the internal nature of things from within rather than externally.²⁰⁶

That the highest Reality precedes phenomenal existence is a temporal term, while transcend and immanent are spatial terms. They differ in that transcendence implies the Reality is higher while immanence implies It is within. Jesus stated, "For indeed, the Kingdom of God is within you" (KJ, Lk. 17:21).

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- ¹ CW, I, p. 249.
² Grimes, pp. 182-85, 340-50, 359-60.
³ CG, II, 13-14; cf. ST, I, 13:2. For another translation see, Web: www.newadvent.org/summa/1.htm
⁴ W. Norris Clarke, S.J., "A New Look at the Immutability of God," in *God Knowable And Unknowable*, ed. Robert J. Roth, S.J. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1973), p. 44.
⁵ Aquinas I, 16.4.
⁶ Grimes, pp. 125, 246, 407.
⁷ Web: <http://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2010/09/classical-theism.html>
⁸ VC, p. 129, #468-69.
⁹ Radhakrishnan, II, pp. 534-35.
¹⁰ BSB, II.1.27.
¹¹ CW, II: 234.
¹² CW, I:234.
¹³ CW, II:431; cf. II:462.

¹⁴ CW, III:8. John Dobson, *Advaita Vedanta and Modern Science* (Chicago, Vivekananda Vedanta Society, 1983

¹⁵ II, 9.1, V, 2.1; V, 3.13-14; V, 4.1. Plotinus joined of a military expedition to Persia in 1843 desiring to study Persian and Indian philosophy. The emperor was assassinated by his troops and so they never made it to their destination (Web: plato.stanford.edu/entries/plotinus).

¹⁶ ST, I, 3.7. For another translation see, Web: www.newadvent.org/summa/1.htm

¹⁷ CG, I, 18.

¹⁸ ST, I, 18.4.

¹⁹ ST, I, 25.5.

²⁰ ST, I, 25.1.

²¹ ST, I, 13.12; For another translation see, Web: www.newadvent.org/summa/1.htm; G. Stavig, "Thomas Aquinas on the Nonduality of God," VK (Feb-March 2001), pp. 71-73, 112-14.

²² CW, III:434.

²³ William James, *The Variety of Religious Experience* (New York: Modern Library, 1902, 1929), pp. 430-31.

²⁴ A classic example is Spinoza's *Ethics*, which follows a logical geometrical order. To prove the interconnectedness of his system of ideas he begins with parts, definitions, axioms, most important propositions, notes and appendixes, and later adds on prefaces, corollaries, lemmas, and postulates.

²⁵ Peacocke 2, p. 128.

²⁶ Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee, WI; Marquette University Press, 1980), p. 47; Sennett (1998); cf. Web: iep.utm.edu/div-simp/ (See Secs. 4-5). This is a good overview article to learn about the Simplicity of God on the Internet. A shorter article is Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine_simplicity

²⁷ Web: edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2010/09/classical-theism.html;
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_theism Classical theism

²⁸ Ayon Maharaj, *Infinite Paths To Infinite Reality: Sri Ramakrishna and Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018) is an excellent source for Ramakrishna's Vijnana philosophy of religion, particularly pp. 27-50. For a shorter article version see, Web: <https://philpapers.org/archive/MAHRRP.pdf> and for Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Df1ilsosg4g&t=2s>

²⁹ GSR, pp. 802d, 370d; cf. 103h, 134f-35, 148d, 192b, 277g, 479g, 851c, 1012e. For more details see: Gopal Stavig, *Sri Ramakrishna and Western Thought*, Unpublished book, Chapter II, Sections 1, 4.

³⁰ GSR, pp. 134g, 277g, 287k.

³¹ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plotinus#Emanation_by_the_One. Possibly one might gain more insights into this process from Web: edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2010/01/plotinus-on-divine-simplicity-part-ii.html

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