

Phil 410/846: Introduction to Indian Philosophy

Possible Topics for Essay 1

September 25, 2014

1. In his introduction to the Sourcebook, Radhakrishnan writes, "The study of Indian philosophy is important historically, philosophically, and even politically." Expanding on this theme, compare Radhakrishnan's main points with Russell's "The value of philosophy" in Chapter 15 of his book entitled "Problems of Philosophy." Does the study of the Upanishads support either of the men's main arguments? Discuss.
2. In his introduction to the Sourcebook, Radhakrishnan writes, "Indian philosophy is characterized by the introspective attitude and the introspective approach to reality." What is the introspective attitude and approach? How do the Upanishads approach these questions? Do they confirm or contradict Radhakrishnan's statement? Discuss.
3. In his Yoga Sutras, Patanjali writes that there are four faculties of the mind that need to be strengthened and focussed. They are: thinking, feeling, willing and restraining. Does the Isa Upanishad address this thesis in any way? Substantiate your statements with detailed discussion.
4. Mahatma Gandhi writes that the Isa Upanishad influenced his philosophy of non-violence. What is the basis of this claim? Discuss in detail.
5. The Maitri Upanishad introduces the notion of "elemental self" (*bhutatman*) to distinguish it from the Self (*atman*). How are these notions different? How does this support the main thesis of the Upanishad?

6. In the Katha Upanishad, the imagery of the chariot appears. In Plato's Phaedrus, the chariot imagery is also used. What are the similarities and differences of this imagery in these different contexts? Discuss.
7. In both the Prasna and Kausitaki Upanishads, the concept of *prana* is introduced. Is this concept used in the same way in both of the Upanishads or is it different? Compare and contrast.
8. Several Upanishads attempt to discuss "levels of awareness". This theme appears in the Mandukya Upanishad and the Taittiriya Upanishad in its formulation of a "calculus of bliss." Discuss how these Upanishads delineate levels of awareness and compare how effective this delineation is with respect to an understanding of the nature of awareness.
9. Visual symbols are used in the Upanishads to support a philosophical idea. Discuss what symbols are used and if these symbols are effective?
10. Choose one of the following Upanishads: Prasna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Chandogya, Brhadaranyaka, Svetasvatara, Kausitaki, and Maitri. After reading the summary description in the Sourcebook, consult two to three translations of the Upanishad and discuss its main thesis. Some of the Upanishads, like Brhadaranyaka and Chandogya are quite long. You may have to select a chapter in these instead of taking the entire Upanishad for study.