

Philosophy 302: Term Paper Assignment
Spring 2013

Due Monday, April 15, 2013 (before 11:50pm)

(This due date overrides the original due date on the tentative schedule on the calendar on the course syllabus.)

For this assignment, you will provide a response to the following question:

How acceptable is the Vedantin view of how God is known?

NOTE: This assignment will be submitted online through Turnitin on the course **iLearn page**. Follow the Turnitin link and follow instructions.

Please save document in Word format and title file using your last and first name as follows:

502_last name_first name.doc or .docx

Assignment Clarified and Important Guidelines

Before writing your paper, please read the following instructions carefully. Before submitting your paper, go down this list and check off each after you have confirmed that your paper meets the requirement. If you find that there are parts you are not checking off, your paper is missing something that should be addressed before submitting it.

- (1) *Question Clarified.* You must take a position on the extent to which the Vedantin view of knowing God is rationally acceptable. Be prepared to explain (and defend) what in general makes a viewpoint rationally acceptable and how the Vedantin view of knowing God fits/does not fit this criterion. (Note: The term “God” in this context is being used in the broad sense to include both the monistic view of a single non-personal transcendent reality and the more theistic idea of a personal Supreme Being, but you may obviously select just one of these God conceptions for your paper.)

- (2) *Need for Quotations.* Support for your answer should involve the use of relevant quotes from the text(s) and, where necessary, references to particular passages of the text that clarify or support your argument. Do not go overboard with quotations. Select quotes that are most relevant to your argument, and just provide references to other passages that provide additional support to your argument.
- (3) *Thesis Statement.* Be sure to have a clear thesis statement. This is your response to the assignment prompt, e.g., "In this paper I will argue that *Shankara's Vedantin view of how God is known is rationally acceptable,*" "I will argue that *Shankara's Vedantin conception of knowing God is rationally unacceptable,*" or "I will argue that *although Ramanuja's Vedantin view of how God is known is plausible, it is ultimately not rationally acceptable since it has a significant defect.*"

It should be clear that you take any number of positions in response to the assignment prompt. You may also select Shankara or Ramanuja or – if your points apply to each – the viewpoints shared by Shankara and Ramanuja.

- (4) *Body of Paper.* Be sure that you use the body of the paper to clarify and provide clear support for your thesis statement.

Some suggestions for organizing the body of your paper and argument:

(A) Make sure that you accurately expound the Vedantin view of knowing God in the first part of your paper, ideally the first paragraph(s) after the introduction. The rest of your paper will be devoted to the argument about the acceptability of the viewpoint you have described. One part of the argument should explicitly address the criterion or criteria (if more than one) you intend to use to evaluate the acceptability of the Vedantin viewpoint, e.g., internal coherence, fit with empirical knowledge or metaphysical intuitions, and openness to different modes of testability. The second part of the argument will involve an application of your criteria to the Vedantin viewpoint.

For example, perhaps you believe that rationally acceptable viewpoints must exhibit some minimal degree of coherence. State this and illustrate it from paradigmatic cases where beliefs are clearly unacceptable because they lack this quality. You might then show that the Vedantin viewpoint you've selected fails to exhibit coherence and is therefore rationally unacceptable. Finally, a very strong paper typically anticipates objections to the position argued and answers it. If you do this, make sure that it's clear you have raised an objection someone else (not you) might raise to your argument, and make sure you answer the objection. This is usually placed in the final paragraph(s) of the body of your paper, before the conclusion.

(B) Have you used quotes and references to the text at the appropriate points to back up your claims from the text?

(C) Does each paragraph have a clearly stated main point? Avoid extremely long paragraphs, or paragraphs in which too many ideas are discussed.

(D) Does the body of your paper make your argument clear? Here's a way to determine this. First, limit your argument to no more than three supporting reasons. Second, make sure that each paragraph makes a point that is clearly connected to one of your supporting reasons. This is sometimes most effectively carried out by using each paragraph (between introduction and conclusion) to develop one of your supporting reasons.

(5) *Introductory Paragraph and Conclusion.* These should be short, that is, no more than a few sentences. State your thesis in the introduction. Summarize your argument (thesis and supporting reasons) in the conclusion. Do not add additional points when you summarize your argument.

(6) *Technical Requirements for the Paper.* Do not neglect!

(A) Your paper must be a minimum of 1,600 words, double-spaced, and **you must include a word count**, preferably at the end of your paper. You may go over the word limit, but do not go over 1,800 words.

- (B) Use a standard font such as Times Roman.
 - (C) Title your paper: Knowing God according to Vedanta.
 - (D) **Do not use any sources in addition to the course texts.** However, you may use notes, handouts, or power points from the course. Be sure to provide citations from any materials that are not your own.
 - (E) For all quotations from the text, provide references by page number or chapter/verse.
 - (F) Make sure your paper conforms to MLA format, including the requirement for a “works cited” page. If your paper fails to conform to MLA guidelines, your paper may be docked up to a whole letter grade. See the following for MLA guidelines: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>
- (7) If you want comments about an intended thesis statement and/or argument, feel free to contact me or Spencer (well in advance of the assignment due date) for assistance. Do not send paper drafts or attachments. Include your material in the body of an email message. Emails received the weekend before the paper due date are not likely to get a response in time for revisions to be made. Plan ahead and get to work on this as soon as possible.

Professor Sudduth