Kelvin Abrokwa-Johnson

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RELG 213

Response Paper 2

One of the most interesting ideas I have come across in Hinduism is that we exist in the same realm as the gods. In Christianity, there exists something of a conflict between the emphasis on maintaining a close relationship with God and the continual reminder that God is an all mighty, all powerful entity that is only reachable through prayer (and perhaps in death). Christianity posits that we are made in the physical image of God but it emphasizes that we are flawed and God is perfect in every way. He does not exist in a reality that we can perceive or fathom but he affects ours in every way. This construction of God allows for carte blanche in the doctrine, as incongruities can easily be written as the will of God that we humans are unable to fathom. In contrast, the Hindu people and gods exist on something of a continuum, on which ordinary people, through rebirth, may achieve the status of a god, and gods may fall so low as to become ants.

I really enjoy studying Hinduism because it acknowledges the uncertainties of life. In Hinduism, even the gods do not have all of the answers. Death himself, speaking on death, says “as to this even the gods of old had doubts for its too hard to understand, it’s a subtle doctrine…” (Katha Upanishad 1.21). In the Hindu scriptures we have read and discussed, the authors embrace the fact that not all the answers to life are known. In admitting this, the text is often very profound because it presents the ideas that some things cannot be known by anyone, god or man. Even the gods are unable to escape the universe and its cycles of death and rebirth and therefore the strongest force of all is not one that is conscious (in the traditional sense) or by design. Again, this is in contrast with the Christian tradition, in which God is the most total and absolute force.

Thus far, I have found the poetry of the Hindu texts to be absolutely captivating (I actually look forward to doing my readings for class this semester!). The structure of the text itself often mirrors the ideas that it expresses. The metaphors used to express lofty, often ethereal, ideas work on several levels. On the surface, they are a simplification of grand ideas that are digestible (and often entertaining) to the layman. But on a deeper level, the structure of the narrative, including setup, the main ideas, and, especially, repetition, mirror the message. Furthermore, the emphasis on the power of the sound of words themselves (not just their meaning) indicates

In chapter 6 of the *Chandogya Upanishad*, Aruni gives several lessons and repeats the phrase “*tat tvan asi, Svetaketu*” after each one: “that’s how you are, Svetaketu”. One of the ideas that stood out to me in that chapter