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TYPES OF CAUSES IN ARISTOTLE AND SANKARA

by

BRANDIE MARTINEZ BEDARD

Under the Direction of Kathryn McClymond and Sandra Dwyer

ABSTRACT

This paper is a comparative project between a philosopher from the Western tradition, Aristotle, and a philosopher from the Eastern tradition, Sankara. These two philosophers have often been thought to oppose one another in their thoughts, but I will argue that they are similar in several aspects. I will explore connections between Aristotle and Sankara, primarily in their theories of causation. I will argue that a closer examination of both Aristotelian and Advaita Vedanta philosophy, of which Sankara is considered the most prominent thinker, will yield significant similarities that will give new insights into the thoughts of both Aristotle and Sankara.

INDEX WORDS: Comparative philosophy, Causation, Aristotle, Sankara, Advaita Vedanta, Indian philosophy

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I. Introduction

In this paper, I will attempt to give a clear analysis and comparison of two influential philosophers, one from the Western philosophical tradition, Aristotle, and one from the Eastern philosophical tradition, Sankara. This comparison will examine whether these two philosophers who have been thought to be radically different are in fact similar in their theories of causation. While I will focus on similarities between Aristotle and Sankara, I will also highlight the differences between their theories of causation. In comparing philosophers that have been thought to be on opposite sides of the spectrum, I hope to present a new way to compare the philosophies of Sankara and Aristotle.

The purpose of this paper is to do a comparison of Aristotle and Sankara focusing on their theories of causation in order to present a new way to view this feature of their philosophy and perhaps their philosophies as a whole. An important implication of this approach is that it demonstrates that comparisons which oversimplify philosophers and their thoughts or interpret Eastern philosophy using Western categories (or vice versa) lead to erroneous conclusions. I hope that by providing a fair and clear comparison of these two philosophers, Aristotle and Sankara, we can shed some new light on both philosophers and find something new and instructive from these wise men.

I have chosen to narrow the scope of the comparison in this paper to Aristotle's and Sankara's theories of causations for several reasons. First, any comparison of entire philosophical systems is problematic. This is perhaps best demonstrated by commonly made assumptions about Sankara and Plato, which we will be coming back to throughout the paper as a counterexample to a comparison of Aristotle and Sankara. Both Sankara

and Plato are categorized as idealists and are therefore seen as similar.[1] There are similarities between the two philosophies, but as we shall see below, when examined carefully there are also key differences, which only come to light when such commonly made comparisons are challenged. Thus we find that at least part of Sankara's work is much closer to that of Aristotle than to that of Plato.

In the first section of the paper I will provide the reader with a discussion of the field of comparative philosophy, including the standard methods in this field and the specific methods employed in this paper. In the second and third sections I will give background information for Aristotle and Sankara, discussing their lives, influences, and general philosophy. Since readers are most familiar with Aristotle and Western philosophy, there will be a more detailed discussion of Indian philosophy and Sankara. Sections four and five will provide detailed accounts of both Aristotle's and Sankara's theories of causation. Section six addresses a possible objection to the thesis of this paper that Sankara is not similar to Aristotle but is more similar to Plato. The final section will lay out similarities and differences between Aristotle's and Sankara's theories of causation.[2]

II. Introduction to Comparative Philosophy

Comparative philosophy is not a new phenomenon in philosophy.[3] The ancient and modern philosophers in both the West and the East often compared their work with

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[1] See Scharfstein *A Comparative History of World Philosophy.*

[2] The reader should note that there is a vast amount of literature and commentaries on both Sankara and Aristotle. In the scope of this paper it is impossible to give an analysis of all of the literature and so this paper should not be considered comprehensive.

[3] For a more complete history of comparative philosophy and comparative philosophy in respect to Indian philosophy see Wilheim Habfas's article *India and the Comparative Method.*

that of other philosophers. The Greek philosophers compared their work to those in Asia, and Muslim philosophers compared their philosophies with the Greeks as well as with Indian philosophers (Halbfass 1985). For example, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) was particularly interested in Indian and Buddhist philosophy because he felt that they had reached the same truths as he had (Halbfass 1985). In *The World as Will and Representation* Schopenhauer states, "If I wished to take the results of my philosophy as the standard of truth, I should have to concede to Buddhism pre-eminence over the others" (Schopenhauer 169). However, although comparative philosophy is not new to the study of philosophy, only recently has comparative philosophy even started to be considered a field of study of its own. Like any new field of study there are a number of problematic issues associated with it, such as the study of comparative philosophy itself, the practice of comparative philosophy, and the methods employed in the practice and study of comparative philosophy.

Several of the different methods employed in comparative philosophy are the East-West comparison method, the historical method, the philological method, the straight comparison method, the phenomenological method, the sociological and anthropological method, the total integration method, the theoretical method, the formal-evaluative method, the psychological method, and the sociological method (Liat 1953). It should be noted that several scholars have argued that there is not just one method that should be used, but several, and I tend to agree with this.[4] In some cases it is impossible not to use several methods, and in some cases it is perhaps necessary to use more than one method for a clear and fair comparison. For example, when comparing Eastern and

[4] See the sources listed in above footnote as well as Charles Moore *Keys to Comparative Philosophy.*

Western philosophies it is important to provide historical and cultural background information as well as to evaluate the content of the philosophical systems.

The East-West comparison is rarely used today, but was common. Hegel, for example, believed that all Eastern philosophy was reducible to Western philosophy. This method involves a straight comparison of an Eastern philosopher or tradition with a Western philosopher or tradition, without taking into consideration the culture, time, or other factors that may have influenced them. The East-West method simply isolates the philosophical system from its philosophic tradition, its culture, and its time period. After decontextualizing the philosophy the East-West method attempts a comparison of it, which by this time has lost some if not all of its meaning. This method is so controversial because there are often such fundamental differences between Eastern and Western philosophies that the only thing that this comparison can offer are characterizations that are “general, and sometimes rather vague, tendencies” (Moore 76). This method should never lead to dramatic conclusions and should be employed sparsely to avoid generalities. It should also be noted that similarities should not be the sole focus of comparative philosophy because the differences between systems are often just as illuminating as the similarities. As Raju states, “It is the duty of the comparative philosopher to observe and find out the significance of both similarities and differences in results as well as methods” (286). No one has offered a single method or set of methods that is accepted by all comparative philosophers, but as Charles Moore has suggested perhaps many methods should be used, and these methods need to be tailored to what the aim of the analysis is. In addition to the methodology, there are a number of points that comparative works must be clear on.

It is important to understand and be clear about the categories that the philosophers use, the terminology of a philosopher or philosophic tradition, and the consistency with which the categories and terminology are used. For example, some key conceptions of basic categories, like the mind, differ between Eastern and Western philosophy. Some of the Indian philosophical systems understand the mind or consciousness as a physical object, whereas some of the Western philosophical traditions tend to separate the mind from the physical body.[5] This example demonstrates that the categories differ from philosopher to philosopher. The terminology used by a philosopher can also lead to confusions within comparative work. These confusions often stem from translations of texts and can be alleviated by addressing the etymology of the key terms. For example, the Sankskrit term *darsana*, which generally refers to the Indian philosophical schools, is problematic to translate. *Darsana* does not have a direct translation into English and has been translated as either philosophy or theology. This is obviously an issue for the Western philosophical reader for whom "philosophy" and "theology" have radically different meanings.[6] In addition to the translation issue, each philosopher is limited by the language she uses and certain concepts, such as *karma*, that have a historical background that needs to be explained to the reader of comparative philosophy. Not being clear about these sorts of differences can lead to misunderstandings.

In light of these considerations, in this paper I will provide a comparative analysis of Sankara and Aristotle. I will evaluate the historical times surrounding these figures and their individual lives. In addition, I will provide the reader with a background to the

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[5] Although, there are an increasing number of materialists who believe that the mind or consciousness is a physical object.

[6] The etymology of the term *darsana* will be explored further in the Indian philosophy section.

philosophic systems of Sankara and Aristotle. In particular I will focus on their theories of causation. I will also employ a formal-evaluative method, pointing out the similarities between Aristotle's theory of causation and Sankara's theory of causation, as well as the differences in this aspect of their philosophy.

III. Historical Background to Aristotle and Western Philosophy

Aristotle is one of the founders of Western philosophy, and he has had a profound influence on philosophy in the West as a whole.[7] He was born around 384 B.C.E. in the Northern Ancient Greek peninsula of Chalcidice, present day Khalkidhiki in Greece. His father, Nicomachus, was the court physician to Amyntas II, king of Macedon and father of Phillip the Great, and Nicomachus died while Aristotle was still a child. Aristotle was raised by Pyroxenes of Atarneus and at the age of eighteen was sent to study at the Academy of Plato. He studied at the academy for twenty years, but it is questionable how much time Plato and Aristotle actually spent together. It has been speculated that Aristotle only knew Plato's philosophy second hand from the teachers at the Academy and it has also been speculated that he had direct contact with Plato. Either way Plato had a great influence on Aristotle's philosophy. Around 348 B.C.E., after the death of Plato, Aristotle left the academy and began to teach around Greece. Around 343 B.C.E he became the tutor to Alexander the Great, but this probably ended in 340 B.C.E. when Alexander was appointed regent for his father. After leaving the tutoring position for Alexander, Aristotle spent the next twelve years founding his own school, the Lyceum in Athens. The Lyceum was a comprehensive school where students studied every branch of

[7] The following information is summarized from the introduction of *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy website, and the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy website, henceforth cited parenthetically as Irwin and Falcon.

knowledge, but in 323 B.C.E. when Alexander died Aristotle came under suspicion from the Athenians. They charged him with impiety, which was similar to the charge brought against Socrates. Aristotle chose to flee from Athens lest, as he is alleged to have said, “Athenians sin twice against philosophy”, referring to the fact that the Athenians sentenced Socrates to death. Aristotle sought protection under Alexander’s viceroy Antipater in the Greek island of Euboea where he died in 322 B.C.E. Although his writings have greatly influenced Western Philosophy, it is debated whether the published works that we have now are lecture notes from his students at the Lyceum, Aristotle’s lecture notes, or simply records of his thoughts and research. No matter what the status of his published works, Aristotle has significantly altered science, philosophy, and thought in the Western world.

Aristotle is often credited with dividing philosophy into distinct branches that are supposed to help clarify the question being considered, as well as assist the philosopher in finding wisdom. These divisions in philosophy are still the main fields of study in modern Western philosophy and demonstrate what an important figure he is in the Western philosophic tradition. According to T.H. Irwin, Aristotle was not only the first to distinguish different branches within the study of philosophy, but also “the conception of intellectual inquiry as falling into distinct branches” (Irwin 1). Aristotle insisted that the standards and proofs used in the branches are also to be distinct. He was also careful to separate the philosophical enquiry of a particular discipline from the practice of the discipline. Aristotle’s work is so vast that it is not possible to discuss all of his inquiries, so the focus of this paper will be on what we would call metaphysics, what he himself called “first philosophy” or “theology” (the study of divine things). One of the most

important distinctions in Western philosophy that Aristotle made was outlining the distinct discipline of metaphysics. Aristotle defined metaphysics or first philosophy as a universal science that is concerned with "being *qua* being" (*Metaphysics* IV 1003a 18). This discipline informs us about the foundations and presuppositions of all the other disciplines. It is referred to as metaphysics today primarily because it goes beyond the concerns of physics.

Aristotle divides metaphysics itself into several areas, part of which concerns the foundations of inquiries into nature. This is where Aristotle lays out his doctrine of substance.[8] He believes that substances are the fundamental things that exist and that they support everything else. One of the main terms Aristotle used for substance is *hypokeimenon* which literally translates as "that which underlies." Since substance underlies all things that exist, changes and causality take place within substances. The logic is that since substances are the fundamental constituent for reality, what we view as change must be a change in the substances themselves and not a change in something else. When Aristotle discusses change, he seems to mean that causes tell us "the why" for a substance. They are types of explanations that help us to gain knowledge. This conception of cause is demonstrated by Aristotle's statement that, "Wisdom is knowledge about certain principles and causes" (*Metaphysics* I 982a 1). Further, Aristotle's main epistemological claim is that without understanding the cause of a thing we cannot truly claim to have knowledge of it. He states, "Knowledge is the object of our inquiry, and men do not think they know a thing till they have grasped the 'why' of it (which is to

[8] The discussion of primary and secondary substances in the *Categories* relates to the upcoming discussion of change. While the scope of this paper has excluded this topic, it is an important one and I encourage the reader to explore this topic in the *Categories.*

grasp its primary cause)" (*Physics* 194b 18). Aristotle's epistemic claim places a high importance on understanding causality.

IV. Historical Background to Sankara and Indian Philosophy

What is known about Sankara's life has been passed down orally and through a number of traditional biographies that are studied by students of Advaita Vedanta and other Vedanta sects. Although there is some controversy, most scholars date Sankara between 788 and 820 C.E. (Dasgupta V.1 429). The legends told in the biographies and oral stories are clouded by unlikely stories about him and often contradict each other. But they all agree that he was born in Kaladi in Kerala, India, and that his father died at a young age, leaving his mother to raise him by herself. According to most of the stories, Sankara excelled at his studies and desired to be a renunciate, a person who chooses not to be part of a social order, to refrain from owning anything, to travel from place to place to beg for their basic needs, and to seek final release from the cycle of death and rebirth. One of the famous stories told about Sankara was the moment when he became a renunciate. Sankara is said to have wanted to be a renunciate from a young age, but his mother was unwilling to let him because it would mean that he would have to leave her alone. One day while he was bathing or swimming in a river a crocodile took hold of his leg. Sankara shouted to his mother, who came running to the river side. At this point his mother realized that the only way to save him was to allow him to become a renunciate so that the gods would assist him. After this he is said to have left his home and gone in search of a *guru* (Flood 240).

Sankara searched for a worthy *guru* and soon found Govinda. Govinda was the student of Gaudapada, who wrote commentaries on the *Brahma-sutras* written by Badarayana (Dasgupta 422). Sankara's expositions on the commentaries of Gaudapada form the basis for the popularity of Vedantism and spurred several commentaries (Dasgupta 418). Gaudapada was the first to attempt to formulate the Upanishads into a systematic philosophy that held an absolutist or non-dual (*advaita)* creed. Although Gaudapada felt that the absolutist thesis was alluded to in Badarayana's writing, it is probably more accurate to call Badarayana a theist. Sankara states that Gaudapada was the one to draw out the absolutist theme from the Upanishads at the conclusion of his commentary on Gaudapada's *karika.* Sankara says, "He adores by falling at the feet of that great *guru* (teacher) the adored of his adored, who on finding all the people sinking in the ocean made dreadful by the crocodiles of rebirth, out of kindness for all people, by churning the great ocean of the Veda by his great churning rod of wisdom recovered what lay deep in the heart of the Veda, and is hardly attainable even by the immortal gods" (Dasgupta 422).

After a period of time with Govinda, Sankara left and traveled to Varanasi, where he engaged in great debates hoping to show the truth of the *advaita* creed and where he also gathered disciples. At some point he is said to have gone on a pilgrimage to the source of the Ganges, where he composed his major works. After his return to Varanasi, Sankara spent most of his time debating with the great thinkers of his time from different *darsanas* defending his interpretation that the Upanishads taught a universal truth. During his lifetime he not only composed his major commentaries and explanations

of the Upanishads, but he also established a monastic order that still exists today. Sankara died at the age of thirty-two in the Himalayas.

It is important to stress that there are several different writings attributed to Sankara that are not generally accepted by most scholars. For example, dozens of devotional hymns and philosophical texts are attributed to him. Many of these texts and hymns portray Sankara in radically different ways. The Sankara that most scholars refer to is the author of the commentaries on the *Brahma Sutra*, the *Brhadaranyaka*, and the *Taittiriya Upanishads* and the author of the independent work the "Thousand Teachings" (*Upandesasahari*) (Flood 240). He is also accepted as the major advocate of Vedanta philosophy (Dasgupta 429).

Sankara is probably the most well-known Indian philosopher, and he has greatly influenced Indian philosophy as a whole. Indian philosophy goes back to the earliest rituals and theories of how to achieve liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth (*samsara*). The methods most often employed were *yoga* and meditation, and they not only provided an understanding of the rituals and means to achieve liberation, but were also used as ways to understand Hindu metaphysical claims about the universe (Flood 224). The Sanskrit term that is generally translated as philosophy is *darsana*, although the term is also translated as "theology."[9] This demonstrates that the Hindu philosophy schools are not separate from the religious tradition. The term *darsana* comes from the Sanskrit root *drs*, "to see," and implies a vision of the world. The term *darsana* includes the six orthodox *darsanas*, the heterodox (*nastika)* views of Buddhism, Jainism, and materialism (Lokayata).

[9] Theology is also a translation for the word Aristotle used for metaphysics.

The fundamental text for most Hindus is the Veda, which is considered eternal and sacred and to contain all knowledge. The Veda is thought to have been heard (*sruti)* by the ancient sages. The Vedas are also considered uncreated and the source of the universe. From the perspective of a Hindu, the Veda is timeless revelation that gives all people the knowledge of the universe if they can interpret it correctly. From a scholarly perspective, the Veda was compiled over a long period of time and gives insight into different philosophical, religious, and social developments in India (Flood 35).[10] The six orthodox *darsanas* are Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, Vedanta, Nyaya, and Vaisesika.[11] The *darsanas* express their traditions through commentaries on fundamental Vedic texts and by analyzing Vedic knowledge, primarily through the use of logic (*nyaya).*

Although all of the orthodox *darsanas* hold distinctly different philosophical positions, there are a few key points on which most of the *darsanas* agree. For the most part they all assume the uncreated nature of the Veda and the truth of the revelation that it teaches. They accept that the Veda is an authoritative source of knowledge. The *darsanas* all see humanity's ultimate goal as liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth. They also assume some sort of transcendental reality beyond the understanding of the human consciousness, and they offer explanations and interpretation of this reality. The *darsanas* also offer detailed explanations and arguments to support their philosophical systems. The *darsanas* have a long tradition of teachers (*guri)* traveling all over India,

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[10] The Veda is separated into four categories: *Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka,* and *Upanisad.* All other literature is considered secondary revelation (*smrti)* and has human authorship. All of the *darsanas* assume the uncreated nature of the Vedas, but the primary texts for the *darsanas* are the *sutras,* which contain aphorisms from each of the systems. The *sutras* attempt to explain what may have been alluded to in the Veda or to explain what the Veda is really teaching. The *sutras* are further explained by several commentaries and are often unclear without reference to these commentaries. The commentaries in turn have their own expositions.

[11] Within the six orthodox *darsanas* are several sub-groups that have split off due to different interpretations of the wider systems they accept.

during which they would engage teachers of opposing *darsanas* in debates. The great masters of each of the *darsanas* sought each other out and had great debates for the purpose of defeating the masters of the opposing schools and securing students of their own (Dasgupta 406). This was done by criticizing the opposing schools, showing that their ideas were inconsistent and that their philosophical systems led to self-contradictions. The teachers did this by employing a method of "close dialectical reasoning, anticipating the answers of the opponent, asking him to define his statements, and ultimately proving that his theory was inconsistent, led to contradictions, and was opposed to the testimony of experience" (Dasgupta 407).[12]

Sankara is famous for traveling and engaging in these sorts of debates, where he was so convincing that many people began to follow him. He is most often associated with Advaita Vedanta, a subgroup of the Vedanta *darsana*. Advaita Vedanta is meta-theistic in nature in that it points to the basic underlying reality of all, which it asserts as unchangeable Brahman. This is the most well-known aspect of Advaita Vedanta philosophy but it is certainly not all of the philosophical system. Sankara provided arguments to support this meta-theistic thesis, which are analytic in nature and are often debated as to their meanings.

Sankara is thought of not as the founder of the Vedanta *darsana*, but as the most predominant thinker of that philosophical system. Vedanta philosophy claims to have knowledge of the true teachings of the Upanishads, the end of the Vedas, the fundamental text for Hindus. Vedic philosophy also claims that their philosophy is encapsulated in the Upanishads. The Vedic philosophy is further summarized and explained in the *Brahma-*

[12] This is similar to Aristotle's approach in his writings. He begins by looking at previous philosophers and their theories and criticizing them.

sutras of Badarayana. Vedanta is often translated as the *end* of the Vedas, which can be interpreted two ways. The *end* might be pointing to the fact that the Upanishads occur sequentially as the last section of the Vedas; the *end* also suggests that the Upanishads are the *purpose* of the Vedas.[13] The second interpretation makes the Upanishads an important text and helps to explain why Sankara is responding to this text. In fact, Sankara believed that the philosophic system he defended came from the Upanishads and that he was simply explaining and defending the system against other interpretations of the text that were incorrect.

Sankara wrote several commentaries on the Upanishads and the *Brahma-sutra*. Sankara viewed the Upanishads as an original source of knowledge and the *Brahma-sutra* as a condensed summary of them. Sankara never claims to be inventing a new system or coming up with an original thought; he always refers back to the Upanishads as a systematic philosophy that was further enunciated in the *Brahma-sutra* of Badarayana. Sankara's goal was to show that the *advaita* doctrine, that everything is an aspect of Brahman, is the true teachings of the Upanishads and constitutes a philosophic system that could not be refuted.[14] The *advaita* doctrine is demonstrated in the Upanishads in the passage that states, "All this is indeed nothing but Brahma" (*sarvam khalvidam brahma).* This belief was first alluded to by Badarayana and laid out further by Guadapada. If Sankara could show that the *advaita* thesis led to a whole philosophical system that was consistent and was taught in the Upanishads, then the *advaita* philosophy would be founded on the highest authority accepted by all Hindus, namely the *sruti* of the Veda.

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[13] This has an interesting correlation with Aristotle's final and formal causes, which will be explored in detail later in the paper.

[14] There is a dual nature to Brahman that is not included in the scope of this paper. For more information on the dual conception of Brahman see Dasgupta *A History of Indian Philosophy* volume one page 48.

Sankara's challenge was to show that the Mimamsa School, the leading *darsana* of the time, was inconsistent and self-contradictory. According to Sankara, the Mimamsists characterized the Vedas as only giving commands for correct ritual action and correct social action and not offering a philosophic system of any sort. They accepted the Veda as timeless revelation, but argued that it only offered people normative information, as opposed to exposing the truth of the universe. According to Sankara, the Mimamsists held that when the Upanishads speak of Brahman they are only telling Hindus how to worship him, not urging people to accept a comprehensive philosophy that leads to liberation. Sankara sought to prove that this interpretation was incorrect. He agreed that the Vedas gave prescriptive insights, but he thought that the Upanishads offered more than this. He argued that the *Samhitas* (the three sections of the Veda excluding the Upanishads) are distinct from the Upanishads and that each was written for a different class of people. According to Sankara, the Vedas gave commands for the ordinary people, telling them what correct ritual action was and how to live their lives so as to eventually achieve liberation. This idea is demonstrated in Sankara's *Thousand Teachings* where he states, "As [the Vedas] are devoted to one object [only], i.e., the knowledge [of Brahman], [the wise] know that they [consist of] one sentence" (Sankara 161). Sankara also thought that on another level the Upanishads taught universal truths that were intended for the wise and exposed a direct path to liberation. "The study of Vedantic texts, Sankara declares, aims to help attain knowledge of the absolute unity of the Self and so to free the individual self from the erroneous idea that causes all evil" (Scharfstein 373). This is the motivation of Sankara's philosophy: to demonstrate that the

Upanishads taught a universal truth about the absolute, unchangeable Brahman as the only truth of the universe.

The method Sankara used was textual comparison of the different Upanishads, reference to the contexts of the passages of the Upanishads, the writings of Badarayana, and the commentaries of Gaudapada. He also sought to demonstrate that his interpretations of the Upanishads amounted to a consistent philosophy. He therefore had to defend his system against any objections and show that any other interpretation of the Upanishads was inconsistent and incorrect (Dasgupta 431).[15]

Sankara is most often associated with Advaita Vedanta, one of the sub-groups of Vedanta. Advaita Vedanta is meta-theistic in nature in that it points to the basic underlying reality of all, which it claims is unchangeable Brahman. Sankara attempts to show that one can achieve *moksa* (liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth) by having correct knowledge. This correct knowledge is provided by the Upanishads and expounded by Sankara. It is the knowledge that *atman* (the true self) is identical to Brahman (the ultimate reality). In realizing this true identity we also come to know that the phenomenal world we experience is simply *maya* (illusion), and further that the idea that an individual is distinct is caused by this illusion. The view that the world is as it appears to us is simply spiritual ignorance (*avidya*) or illusion (*maya*) and is caused by people seeing what is not themselves as themselves, for there are no individuals, only Brahman. Sankara says, "I am neither an individual element nor all the elements; I am neither an individual sense organ nor all the sense organs, since they are [respectively] objects of knowledge and instruments of knowledge, as are the jar, etc. The Knower is

[15] Aristotle's method was also similar. In his writings he would first discuss the views of his predecessors, show that they were deficient, and then offer his beliefs as a better thesis.

different from these" (Sankara 144). Therefore, being able to distinguish what is not the self from the self brings a person to the correct knowledge that the self is ontologically identical to the absolute (Brahman), as the Upanishads teach. Once a person has achieved this correct knowledge he will be liberated from the never-ending cycle of death and rebirth (*moksa*).

Sankara supports the *advaita* thesis by pointing to the Upanishads. He states, "The Seeing of the Seer, unlike [that] of the eye, etc., is not interrupted, since [the *Sruti*] says, 'For there is no [cessation of the Seeing of] the Seer' (Brh. Up. IV, 3.23). Therefore, the Seer is always experiencer" (Sankara 143-144). This he argues means that the self is located in the intellect because the intellect, he believes, does not cease to exist like the body. Sankara infers from this that, "Everything located in the intellect is always seen by Me in every case [of cognition]. Therefore, I am the highest *Brahman*" (Sankara 118). *Moksa* is seen as an awakening to the truth and does not refer to any sort of reward such as going to heaven after death. In fact the Vedantists believe that once a person awakens to the truth, he becomes the truth himself and does not see the world of appearances because they see that everything is themselves. This absolute monism is clarified by the famous line in the *Svetaketu*, an important Vedanta text, which says "That you are" (*tat tvam asi)*.

The main thesis of Advaita Vedanta, as explained above, holds that the world of sensory experience is simply illusion and that in reality the individual is ontologically identical to the absolute, ultimate reality (Brahman). The school is referred to as *advaita* because of this thesis and *advaita* is translated as "non-dual." The Advaita Vedanta tradition is considered by most scholars as a school of absolute monism, meaning that it

allows only one substance into its ontology, Brahman. The absolute monist thesis can be restated as the idea that only one substance exists, namely Brahman, and that the appearance of a plurality of individual substances is simply illusion. In actuality these false appearances of individual substances are ontologically indistinguishable from the ultimate reality or one substance, Brahman.

The absolute monism thesis, as explained above, is counter-intuitive. Our sensory experience seems to indicate that there are a number of distinct objects separate from ourselves and they are not obviously, from our sensory experience, connected. In light of this, Sankara must show support for this thesis. Also, the absolute monism thesis has some odd consequences for Indian philosophy that must be explained. For example, there really is no distinction between cause and effect and there is also no need for a creator. Since Brahman is both the efficient and material cause of the world, there is no need to postulate a creator. All that is real is Brahman, and the individuals that are perceived are simply aspects of Brahman. The difficulty of understanding Brahman and the place that Brahman holds in the universe is attested to in the Upanishad passage that states, " How is the knower itself to be known?" (*Vijnataram arekena vijaniyat).* Again these consequences seem to go against sensory experience, and the absolute monism thesis seems not to be intuitively correct.

The first problem Sankara needs to address is the notion that Brahman is the efficient and material cause of the universe and that there is no need for a creator. But before he can do this he must offer some proof for the existence of Brahman. Why should Brahman be accepted into an individual's ontology? Sankara offers several reasons for the existence of Brahman. First, the world had to come from somewhere, and since the

Upanishads refer to everything as coming from Brahman this must be the origination of the world. Also, the world is orderly according to Sankara and so must have originated from some sort of intelligence; this is Brahman, as the Upanishads have stated.

Once the existence of Brahman seems plausible, Sankara must explain the apparent contradictory nature of Brahman as the material and efficient cause of the universe, while being devoid of any parts and diversity, and beyond all change. For how can Brahman be the cause of anything if there are no parts or diversity to Him? Sankara appeals to the Upanishads, which state that "all indeed is nothing but Brahma" (*sarvam khalvidam Brahma*).[16] Another line of reasoning that Sankara uses is that the universe could not have come into existence *ex nihilo,* something cannot come from nothing. In making this statement it must be clarified that this does not mean that Brahman is a creator god and it does not imply that Brahman is subject to change because according to Sankara, Brahman is not subject to change.

V. Aristotle's Theory of Causation

Aristotle's theory of causation includes four causes, which are based on the theory found in his logical treatise *Categories*. The categories lay out the figures of predication that correspond to different sorts of words (for example verbs, nouns, adjectives, etc.) and to different grammatical functions (for example, predicate and subject). Aristotle viewed language as a way to describe the world and the objects in them, so by examining language Aristotle believed that he could deduce the substances and their cause. Not only did Aristotle look at the linguistic terms of predication, but he also examined and

[16] But this still leaves the question of how to explain the apparent change in the world that is witnessed everyday; this question will be returned to later in the paper.

classified the different nonlinguistic terms that are often used in predication. The first category is that of "being" (*ουσια*) often translated as "substance." This is the most important category for Aristotle, that on which all the other categories depend. The other categories are non-substance categories and include things such as quality, quantity and relative. All of these categories also include universals and individuals. For example, the statement 'This Honda is a car' attributes a universal (car) to an individual substance (this particular Honda). As stated previously, this entire classification is deeply influenced by Aristotle's theory of change because it is by understanding the cause of a thing that we gain knowledge of the substance. Therefore his account of substance presupposes a coherent account of natural change because without a coherent account of change we cannot have knowledge of the substance in the first place.

The four different types of causes are the material, the efficient, the formal and the final cause. He argues that each substance has at least one cause, but a substance can also have any combination of the four causes (*Metaphysics* V 1013b 3). According to Aristotle, understanding the cause of each thing is necessary to have proper knowledge of the world around us. The different types of causes answer different sorts of why questions that help us achieve knowledge of the world (Irwin 1 A022SECT9). These causes have also been referred to as "becauses" by some latter philosophers.[17] As Evans puts it, "It is common knowledge that cause, as Aristotle uses the term, really signifies 'because'" (Evans 466). They provide explanations for the objects around us and the processes in the natural world. Aristotle's theory of causation is introduced in his *Physic*s (III 194b 16) and is further explained in his *Metaphysics* (V 1013a 24). Because of the

[17] See Hocutt *Aristotle's Four Becauses.*

great influence that Aristotle has had on Western philosophy there is a vast amount of commentaries on his works including his theory of the four causes. In the scope of this paper it is not possible to cover this vast amount of commentaries and interpretations. The explanations laid out below for Aristotle's theory of the four causes come directly from his works although some common interpretations are included.

The material cause is the constituent that a thing comes from. It describes the cause of the thing's existence and answers the question, "where did this thing come from?" (Falcon 2) The material cause is also the part of the object that undergoes change. It is basically what the thing is made of. The material cause helps to explain why an object is as it is. Aristotle states that the material cause is "that from which, as immanent material, a thing comes into being" (*Metaphysics* V 1013a 24). For example, the material cause of a bowl is silver and the silver is what changes to become the bowl. If the bowl is melted down to be changed into jewelry, it is the silver that undergoes the change. Another example is a soda bottle, the material cause of a soda bottle is the plastic it is made of and the plastic is also what undergoes change if the soda bottle is transformed into something else.

The formal cause defines what the object is by giving the form or essence of the thing. Aristotle further describes it as the pattern of a thing. It answers the question of "what (kind) the thing is" (Falcon 2). Aristotle describes the formal cause as "the form or pattern, i.e. the definition of the essence, and the classes which include this (e.g. the ratio 2:1 and number in general are causes of the octave), and the parts included in the definition" (*Metaphysics* V 1013a 27). The formal cause contains the potentiality for a thing to exist as well as the potentiality for it not to exist. For example, the formal cause

of our silver bowl is to be a tool of some sort for us, mostly likely a food container. To return to our second example, the formal cause of a soda bottle is to be a container to hold soda.[18]

The efficient cause is what produces and brings an object into existence. The efficient cause tells us "what causes the change to begin" in that thing (Irwin 1 A022SECT9). The efficient cause describes what the source of the change is. It has also been referred to as the "moving cause" (Politis 54). Aristotle states that the efficient cause is "that from which the change or resting from change first begins" (*Metaphysics* V 1013a 29). For example, the efficient cause of a bowl is the process of shaping the silver into a bowl. Again returning to our example of the soda bottle, the efficient cause of the bottle is the manufacturing of the bottle[19].

The final cause is given priority over all the other causes for Aristotle and is the purpose of the substance. It explains what the goal of the substance is. This is the most important cause for Aristotle because it describes what the final aim of a thing is. "What purpose was an object made for" and "what should that thing be striving to achieve?" (Irwin 1 A022SECT9) All of the other causes happen so that the substance can fulfill its final cause. In other words, the final cause has explanatory priority over all the other causes because it initiates them and is the reason for the other causes (Falcon 3). This is a teleological explanation since it involves the end of all of the causes and the processes that they invoke. Aristotle describes the final cause as "the sake for which a thing is" (*Metaphysics* V 1013a 33). Aristotle reasons that the need for this type of causation is to

[18] For a thing to be a substance it must be composed of matter or form. In other words, it must have a material cause and a formal cause.

[19] Many scholars have interpreted the efficient cause to mean the agent of change, in this case the machine operator or silversmith. Other scholars have argued that Aristotle meant to exclude the agent and only include the process.

account for the regularities in nature because any other type of explanation for the law-like nature of the natural world is incomplete if it does not make reference to the reason the object exists (Edel 71). The final cause can be either two things: it can be a condition that an object needs to exist or it can be something that helps the object flourish. For example, the final cause of a bowl is to be a good bowl and not to be defective in some way. For example, a good bowl will not break or melt.

Aristotle was clearly vague in his writings about the relationship between the four causes and so many interpretations of his theory can be found. Some of the more common interpretations include a reduction of the formal cause to the final cause, which can be found in the works of Evans and discussed in Stanford. Another common interpretation is to take a reading of the efficient cause as not including the individual involved in the process of producing an object (Sorabji 43). The formal cause and the final cause often coincide interestingly since often the formal cause includes the final cause (Anten 116-118). For example, the formal cause and the final cause of a triangle is to have three sides, since the form is three sided and in order to be good triangle it must have three sides. It is often difficult to determine the difference between the formal and the final cause, but Aristotle does make it clear that an object can have a formal cause without having a final cause. For example, the universal idea of “triangle” does not have a final cause since it does not have an end, nor does it have an efficient or material cause since it does not come into existence, but it does have a formal cause that states what the universal triangle is (i.e. its definition). There have also been interpretations that point out that the efficient cause is not the individual that produces an object, but it is the production of the object (Anten 37). It has been suggested that Aristotle leaves out the

individual and by doing so excludes the beliefs, desires and intentions of that individual (Wardy 315). There is room for the individual as a type of efficient cause, but when giving a general explanation of a thing the individual is not the efficient cause. Another interpretation of Aristotle's four causes conflates the efficient and final causes into the formal cause (Waterlow 65). A little less drastically, some have claimed that the final cause is the first efficient cause (Wardy 122).

Aristotle accused some of his predecessors of acknowledging the material and the efficient causes, but ignoring the formal and final cause.[20] The formal and final cause are needed in any explanation because explaining only the material and the efficient causes does not suffice as a good explanation of a substance since it does not explain why the object is as it is or more importantly why the world is as it is. The final and formal causes account for the regularities in nature. This gives explanatory priority to the final and formal causes, but it is important to remember that for Aristotle the material and efficient causes are necessary in order for there to be a final cause.

VI. Sankara's Theory of Causation

Sankara attempts to explain the endless cycle of what appears to be effects and causes and to uncover the root of these appearances. In doing this Sankara points out that any explanation of causation from the never-ending cycle of cause and effect will fail. All of the finite effects are simply illusion and are indiscriminate. Their basic nature is illogical and indefinite, for they will all cease to exist at some point in time. These lines of reasoning lead Sankara to conclude that the true cause is pure being (Brahman) because it cannot change and will never cease to exist. The cause of all of the infinite series of

[20] Indeed some think Plato conflated the formal and final cause in the idea of the Good in the *Republic*.

causes and effects is Brahman and the phenomena that seem to be the cause or the effect are simply illusion. This thesis is called *satkaryavada* or *satkaranavada* of the Vedantists (Dasgupta 468). “This appearance of the one cause the being, as the unreal many of the phenomena is what is called the *vivarttavada*” (Dasgupta 468).

Although the one cause is pure being, Brahman, Sankara does discuss other theories of causation that while being incomplete, do serve to help understand the world. In particular he discusses two types of material change in the elements of the world, *parinama* and *vivarta*. *Parinama* is a type of material change where the original cause is lost. The example given is that milk is the material cause for curds, but after the curds have been produced there is no retrieving the milk. *Vivarta* is a type of material change where the original material cause is not lost. For example, gold is the material cause of gold ornaments, but the gold is not lost because it can be retrieved by melting the ornament and returning it to its original state of goldness. These two types of material causes are simply convenient ways to explain the world around us and the apparent changes that we see since we are finite creatures. This is a helpful way to understand the world until we reach correct knowledge because Brahman is without qualities or traits (*nirguna*) and therefore cannot be described. The Upanishads state the idea that we cannot know Brahman by stating “*Vijnataram arekena vijaniyat?*” (How is the knower itself to be known?). We cannot understand Brahman by relating the idea to anything in the universe because Brahman is the universe. According to Sankara we must look at the substratum (*adhishthara),* literally translated as “that which lies underneath,” that is

Brahman.[21] For really "the effect is nothing but an apparent manifestation of the cause," according to Advaita philosophy (Deutsch 40).

To better understand the theory of causality in Sankara and Advaita Vedanta it is helpful to discuss the two levels of understanding in Advaita Vedanta philosophy. The first is *vyavaharika satya*, which is an understanding of phenomenal reality and the duality that is seen in the phenomenal world. The second is *paramartha satya*, which is the transcendental reality that is non-dual. This idea of dual understanding comes from the famous Upanishads passage *neti, neti* (not this, not this) and the passage "*Yatra tu duaitamiva bhavati"* (where there is duality, as it were). The importance of understanding is emphasized by Sankara when he says, "It is, therefore, reasonable that this universe is unreal. Existence-Knowledge only is real. Existing prior to everything, it is both the knower and the known. It is the forms only that are unreal" (Sankara 195). These passages and the conception of dual levels of understanding allow an individual to come to a conception of cause and effect on one level, while ultimately knowing that there is only one cause and no effect (i.e. the differences between the sensory and the conceptual experiences of the world). "Sankara emphasizes that from the phenomenal point of view the world is quite real. It is not illusion. It is a practical reality" (Sharma 139). The understanding of phenomenal reality and the causes and effects in it are integral to understand transcendental reality and Brahman because "the world may be seen as an effect of Brahman, which is Brahman itself in a different form" (Deutsch 38). Therefore, causality is important to understand beyond the absolute level.

These levels of understanding correspond with what Dasgupta refers to as the different "orders of reality" in Advaita Vedanta and can provide another possible view of

[21] "That which underlies" is also the translation for Aristotle's term for substance, *hypokeimon.*

causation for Sankara and Advaita Vedanta that reduces all causation to Brahman but does not eliminate it (Dasgupta 486 I). There are three orders to reality: the absolute (*paramarthika*), the everyday or practical (*vyavaharika*), and illusion (*pratibhasika*) (Dasgupta 468, 487 I). The goal of Sankara and Advaita Vedanta is to achieve an understanding of the absolute reality of the universe, and this corresponds to its well known thesis that "everything is Brahman." Brahman is in everything and is the efficient and material cause of the universe. Brahman is ultimately the cause of everything, and on this level of reality, that of the absolute, there is only one cause and in fact there is no effect. This one cause is Brahmin and is eternal; this is referred to as the *satkaranavada* of the Vedanta (Dasgupta 468 I). The idea that there is only one cause and no effect is a well known part of Sankara's philosophy. It is often thought of as the *only* part of reality and understanding that Sankara speaks of, a point with which I will disagree.

The second order of reality involves phenomenal reality (*vyavaharika)* and everyday experience. This level of reality involves our perceptions, which according to Sankara are not distinct from inference, and the absolute reality does not contradict this level of reality (Dasgupta 483 I). Sankara explains this by saying, "These effects themselves, we reply, are unreal indeed; but not so the consciousness which the dreaming person has of them. This consciousness is a real result; for it is not sublated by the waking consciousness" (Radhakrishnan 528). The fact that the absolute reality does not contradict phenomenal reality and is not distinct from inference demonstrates that phenomenal reality holds an important place in Sankara's philosophy and in understanding the universe. Another point that shows that phenomenal reality holds an important position in Sankara's philosophy is that it is distinguished from the illusionary

reality (*pratibhasika*). In addition to the above points, Brahman is without attributes or qualities, and in order to have an understanding of the absolute reality that is Brahman we must look at the substratum, that which lies underneath absolute reality and corresponds to phenomenal reality. To summarize, phenomenal reality does not contradict absolute reality, phenomenal reality is distinguished from illusionary reality, and Sankara emphasizes that phenomenal reality is key to understanding Brahman. These three points are important because they demonstrate that phenomenal reality has a place in the universe that is separate from illusion and that absolute reality and the understanding of it is not the only part of reality in Sankara's philosophy. Therefore causality is not simply an illusion, it is something more complex that has several layers to it. Although phenomenal reality is dispelled by the absolute truth that everything is not ontologically distinct from Brahman, an understanding of the absolute truth is not achieved in one lifetime, but over many lifetimes of mediation and study. Therefore, phenomenal reality is not to be so easily dismissed, and can shed new light on Sankara's theory of causation.

Sankara's discussion of causation has caused many disputes and misunderstandings of his philosophy. He clearly states that Brahman is the one, eternal cause of all things, but his discussion of causation in the realm of phenomenal reality is less clear. He discusses two types of changes, *parinama* and *vivarta* (Dasgupta 465 I). He describes *parinama* as a type of material change where the original material cause is lost. This is the made clear by an example. Milk is the material cause of curds, but it is not possible to get milk from the curds, so the original cause cannot be regained after it has caused itself to be turned into curds. On the other hand, *vivarta* is a type of material cause where the original material cause can be regained. For example, gold is the material cause

of a necklace, but it is always possible to get the gold back by melting the necklace and getting gold again. When Sankara discusses these types of changes he does not call either of them illusionary, because they belong to the level of understanding of phenomenal reality. While they ultimately can be reduced to Brahman, it does not follow that they are eliminated. This is demonstrated by the fact that "from the phenomenal standpoint, within which any such causal relation would be established, Brahman and the world are different in kind; qualitatively, they are incommensurable" (Deutsch 44).

This leaves open the possibility that while Sankara's metaphysics ultimately dissolves everything to Brahman, it does not eliminate the importance of other levels of understanding, including an understanding causation in phenomenal reality. This is shown most clearly in his assertion that there are three orders of reality and two levels of understanding. Also, since a grasp of phenomenal reality is necessary for an understanding of the absolute, in a sense they build upon each other. With this in mind, phenomenal reality is necessary to discern absolute reality; therefore it would follow that a complete conception of the universe includes an understanding of causation, beyond the absolute reality. Thus in order to grasp absolute reality and achieve liberation there must be an understanding of phenomenal reality first. Brahman is the material and efficient cause of the universe, but we see duality in our everyday experience that leads us to a different conception of causation.

For the reasons given above I believe that many philosophers have committed a category mistake by calling Sankara an absolute monist. While he does say that *ultimately* everything is Brahman he does not completely dismiss phenomenal reality; it is in fact an essential part of recognizing absolute reality. There is duality in our everyday

experience and so on the phenomenal level there is cause and effect, and this is why it is possible that the Advaita Vedanta philosophy does not necessitate eliminating cause and effect.

VII. Comparisons of Sankara and Plato

Sankara's philosophy has been compared to Plato's work by many commentators of comparative philosophy.[22] It is important to address this counterexample to a comparison of Aristotle and Sankara in order to demonstrate that there is much more to Sankara's thought than the commonly accepted Western label of idealist. They are both categorized as idealists and as the quotes will demonstrate, it is assumed that Plato and Sankara share many things in common. Many scholars have been made comparisons between Sankara's monist thesis of pure being or Brahman, and the Platonic Forms. Scholars have not only claimed that Sankara and Plato are both idealist, but also that they are both mythical. For example, "Platonic thinking as such moved within the mythical as did the Upanisadic" (Mohanty 315). Both systems of philosophy are called idealist, pointing to a transcendent reality, either of Forms or of Brahman. As Raju states, "Plato started in the right way from man's reason and went up to the Idea of the Good, which he identified with God; but that God was the ultimate foundation of man's whole being, not merely of reason, was not as clearly brought out by Plato as by Plotinus, whose philosophy has the same merits and defects as those of Vedanta" (Raju 317). In addition, scholars have noted that for a thing to exist it must take part in either a Form or Brahman, and they have argued that Sankara and Plato use the terms Brahman and Form to refer to being. In *Parallel Development, on* the chapter on "The Search for the Absolute," Hajime

[22] See section in works cited on Sankara and Plato.

Nakamura compares Sankara and the Upanisadic philosophers with the Greek philosophers, especially Plato (47-69). As discussed in the previous section, though, there are levels of reality for Sankara and levels of understanding that make these sorts of comparisons vague and surface ones at best. I agree that both Sankara and Plato place their ideas of being at the core of not only their philosophical systems but at the core of all phenomenal things, but I would argue that Aristotle does also. For example, for Sankara every thing is simply an aspect of Brahman, for Plato what is required for a thing to exist is that it must partake in a Form, and for Aristotle substances are the fundamental constituents of reality.

Another similarity noted between Plato and Sankara's work is that both are seen as foundational for their respective philosophical traditions. Plato is often considered the beginning of modern Western philosophy; likewise Sankara is often considered the motivating force behind the greatest philosophical insights that have come from Indian philosophy.[23] Both men fostered a philosophical climate in their cultures that lead to great insights and motivated new philosophical systems or a strengthening or weakening of other philosophical systems. However, all that has been said about Plato and Sankara as foundational can equally be applied to Aristotle, so this point is irrelevant as an objection to the comparison of this paper.

Thus it has become common to compare Sankara's Advaita Vedanta philosophy with Plato's philosophy and with idealists in the Western traditions generally.[24] In fact, it is not only common but seems to be accepted and not even argued for. For example, Scharfstein states, "Shankara, whose resemblance to the Neo-Platonist is more obvious"

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[23] In fact, Whitehead argued that all philosophy is simply a "footnote to Plato."
[24] Scharfstein compares Sankara with Spinoza another idealist philosopher.

(404). Even Dasgupta in *Philosophical Essay* states, “Plato in Greece, his seniors, the Upanisadic sages in India, and their follower, Sankara, denied the reality of all movement” (9). While I agree there are some similarities between Sankara and Plato, and idealists in general, it is of equal importance to point out the differences and in so doing, to do comparative work that focuses on Sankara and other Western philosophers. Comparisons between Sankara and Plato such as the ones described above ignore aspects of Sankara’s philosophy such as the dual level of understandings and orders of reality in Advaita Vedanta philosophy that would distance Sankara from Plato. If comparative philosophy is to provide deeper insights into philosophic systems, which I believe is the intrinsic value to comparative work, then the scholar must endeavor to find new points comparisons. We shall see this below as we compare Aristotle and Sankara.

VIII. Aristotle and Sankara

Several features of Aristotle’s and Sankara’s theories of causation are similar, and there are also several differences that are worth exploring. These similarities and differences will help to provide insight into their philosophies that will be instrumental in developing a deeper understanding of their thoughts. In the following paragraphs similarities are explored and differences are also outlined and these differences are presented from the perspective of the Western philosopher and from the perceptive of the Eastern philosopher.

One key similarity is that both Aristotle’s final cause and Sankara’s conception of Brahman are all-encompassing; that is, they each are seen as encompassing all of the other causes. For Aristotle the other three causes are *for the sake of* the final cause and

they cannot even come into existence without the final cause. For example, a silver bowl has a material cause - the silver - and an efficient cause - the process of making the silver bowl. But both serve the purpose of the final cause: to be a good bowl and not defective in some way. In other words, they serve the final cause because the material and efficient causes produce an object for a certain purpose or goal, to contain food or other entities. Similarly, Sankara's conception of Brahman encompasses all of the other causes. According to Sankara, in the order of the absolute reality Brahman is the only cause. Any cause in the level of phenomenal reality is ultimately reducible to Brahman because Brahman is ontologically identical to everything. Therefore, Brahman encompasses all causation in the phenomenal world. For example, the silver bowl does have a material cause - the silver - and this type of material cause is called *vivarta* because in this case the original material cause can be retrieved. But in the absolute reality Brahman is the cause of the silver bowl because the silver bowl is an aspect of Brahman. So Brahman encompasses the material cause.

A basic difference between the philosophers is that Sankara is concerned with causation on two levels, phenomenal reality and absolute reality, while Aristotle is only concerned with causation in phenomenal reality. Aristotle believes that substance is the fundamental constituent of reality and he therefore limits his discussions to the natural world. It could, however, be argued that Aristotle's conception of the final cause as the purpose of all the other causes, and as encompassing all the other causes, in a sense does mean he is discussing absolute reality, but this sense of the absolute realty is radically different from Sankara's. Sankara's claim is not only that conceptually there is an

ultimate reality, but that the phenomenal world is not ontologically distinct from this ultimate or absolute reality. They are the same thing.

Sankara distinguishes between two types of material causes that Aristotle does not distinguish. Aristotle defines the material cause as what a thing is made of, but Sankara divides this conception into two parts. Sankara discusses one type of material cause where the original material cause is lost (*vivarta)*. The second type of material cause is a cause where the original material cause can be retrieved even if the object undergoes vast changes (*parinama)*. This shows that Sankara had an insight into causation that Aristotle did not have. Also, from the perspective of the Western philosopher, there is no efficient cause for Sankara. He does not address the process involved in changing or shaping an object, whereas Aristotle does. This then demonstrates that Aristotle had an insight into causation that Sankara lacked.

Even though Sankara dealt with two types of material change, he was ultimately making a distinction without an ontological difference, meaning that since the only thing he admitted to his ontology was Brahman, by distinguishing levels of reality that were ultimately one reality the distinctions he made have no real differences between them. There is of course a conceptual distinction between these realities, but since they are all Brahman there is no real distinction between them. Sankara even says that “A thing as such does not become another different thing altogether, by merely appearing in a different aspect” (Deusch 37). Since Aristotle limited himself to the natural world the distinctions he made between the four causes are not just conceptual distinctions, but are real distinctions. The teleogical nature of the final cause it may be argued is a conceptual

distinction, though and so perhaps in the case of the final cause it is an ontological distinction without a difference.

The similarities and differences explored above demonstrate that Sankara and Aristotle have three main things in common between their theories of causation and their philosophies as a whole. First, they both have a general teleological approach to their philosophies. Aristotle thought that in order to explain the regularities in nature we had to understand the purpose of each object. Sankara also claimed that we had to understand the purpose of each individual, which is to know that each individual is identical to Brahman. In connection to this teleological approach both also have similar epistemic goals. Sankara and Aristotle place a high importance on having knowledge. Sankara claims that in order to truly have knowledge of the world and everything in it each individual must understand that they are ontologically the same as Brahman. Aristotle's epistemic claim is similar. He claims that in order to have knowledge of an object we must understand the purpose of that object. Finally, Aristotle and Sankara present layered or stratified explanations for causation. Aristotle posits four causes and the connections between them, while Sankara explains causation in different levels of reality.

IX. Conclusion

Before concluding the paper, there are a few points about comparative philosophy in general that also need to be explored. The vast amount of potential problems associated with comparative philosophy often diminish the value of a comparative project and so I wish to take some space to discuss three of them: the problem of subordinating one philosophy to another, the standards employed, and the notion of a "first philosophy"

or “world philosophy.” Many potential problems stem from subordinating one philosophic system to another. For example, Hegel believed that Indian philosophy was inferior to Western philosophy (Halbfass 1985). The judgment of Indian philosophy, and more generally Eastern philosophy, as inferior to Western philosophy comes from the fact that comparative studies have “been bogged down from the very beginning with the question of whether there is anything that can be called “philosophy” outside of the Western tradition” (Krishna 73). I believe that this misconception arises because scholars are applying Western categories to Eastern philosophy instead of evaluating Eastern philosophy on its own terms.

Another issue in comparative philosophy involves the different ways of analyzing or measuring consistency, and the standards that are employed by specific philosophers or traditions. There are degrees of consistency and ways to approach an analysis that different philosophers use; some have a loose consistency while others have a formal consistency, such as logic. So as Liat puts it, “efficient comparison is not only between words, but also meanings, intentions, and the whole systems of thought” (Liat 1953).

Lastly, some philosophers seek a first philosophy or a world philosophy and they do comparative work in hopes of uncovering universal views on understanding the world. Yet both of these terms are used in different contexts by different philosophers to mean or refer to different things. For the purposes of this paper, “first philosophy” will refer to a philosophy that contains some sort of universal truth or *the* universal truth (if it exists). “First philosophy” for our purpose will also include a theory of knowledge, the only knowledge that is truly possible. By contrast, I will use the term “world philosophy” to refer to a philosophy that encompasses all of the known philosophic traditions. It may be

a comprehensive philosophic outlook or just a common thread between all of the philosophical traditions; in addition it may be thought to show that there is some common knowledge that all humans share. As Raju puts it, “If human life is essentially the same everywhere, if values of life as to be made accessible to all men, then every culture will develop philosophies that bear essential similarities in thought, outlook, and aim. The aim of comparative philosophy is such cultural synthesis” (288). A first philosophy or world philosophy is often thought to be found by comparing Eastern and Western philosophical systems to find similarities of thought and to conclude that if some one similarity is found in all philosophies that this may give point to a world philosophy or first philosophy. If a scholar is approaching any philosophical question with such a goal already in mind it is inevitable that it will taint the results. It is important to bracket individual assumptions and goals in order to hope to come to any sort of truth or to develop a fair comparison of different philosophical traditions.

As has been demonstrated, there are many points of comparison between Aristotle’s and Sankara’s theories of causation. Both philosophers emphasize the goal or purpose of the object as the most important cause of an object making teleological claims. I believe this draws an interesting connection between the philosophies of Sankara and Aristotle. For Aristotle this goal is what the thing is made for, and for Sankara every object is made for the same reason, namely to know that it is the same as Brahman. This reflects the more basic fact that Aristotle is concerned with phenomenal reality, while Sankara is concerned both with phenomenal reality and with ultimate reality. Aristotle seems to have thought that questions of the ultimate reality were unanswerable, and so he chose to focus on the natural world, which could be explained.

Sankara and Indian philosophy in general does not believe that this a problem. They believe that the same approach to understanding the natural world could be used to analyze the absolute reality. While Sankara does admit, like Kant, that proving the existence of God or Brahman was impossible since this conception is beyond our finite minds, he nevertheless attempts to give proofs mainly through the Upanishads and sensory experiences. Sankara's attempt to explain absolute reality is rationalist.

In addition to these points of comparison, there are a few key similarities and differences. First, both Aristotle and Sankara use the same sort of methods in their search for knowledge. Both philosophers believe that correct knowledge of the phenomenal reality lead to true knowledge. Aristotle's epistemology rested on knowing the why of a thing, while Sankara's epistemology rested on knowing that individuals are ontologically indistinguishable from Brahman (which is the why of the individual for Sankara). This last point leads into the next point. Even though Aristotle's and Sankara's epistemic methods are similar they admit different entities into their ontology's. Sankara accepts only Brahman into his ontology, while Aristotle accepts individual substances into his. Third, both Aristotle's and Sankara's explanation of causation are stratified. Aristotle offers four causes that interact with one another and Sankara offers layers of reality and causation within these layers. These differences and similarities seem to point to the fact that both of these philosophers were wise men who attempted to explain the world around them in similar ways.

This comparative project has attempted to demonstrate that similarities and differences can be found in philosophies that have generally been considered vastly different by scholars. But if these comparisons are to be instructive and teach us

something new, they must be fair, clear, and focused on specific aspects of a philosophy and not an entire system. In order to accomplish this task the scholar of comparative philosophy has to provide background information, including the culture, history, influences of the philosophy, and in addition narrowing the scope to a particular philosopher or a particular text. This is not an easy task, since most students of philosophy in the West are unfamiliar with Eastern philosophy. This is largely due to the fact that Eastern philosophy has been located in religious studies departments in most schools. In addition, few scholars have a background in both Eastern and Western philosophy, which makes it difficult for the student to pursue interests in Eastern philosophy. Much historical background and language training is needed to do a comparative project, especially in such a vast philosophic tradition like Indian philosophy. [25]

It is hoped that one outcome of this paper is a new insight and greater understanding of Sankara and his philosophy, Advaita Vedanta. Sankara's thought cannot be reduced to Plato's Forms or to any other idealist philosophy as some commentators have argued. His philosophy is much richer than this. At the same time, this comparative project has endeavored to shed new light on Aristotle as well. Aristotle focused on phenomenal reality and set aside questions about the ultimate reality as unanswerable. Both Aristotle and Sankara founded vast traditions of thought and reason that have often been thought to be contrary to one another. However, this project has illuminated several points of comparison between Aristotle and Sankara that might make one think differently about both philosophers. As more students of philosophy in the West are

[25] This is also why there are not many scholars who have a background in both Eastern and Western philosophy.

exposed to Eastern philosophy, I believe that it will enrich their thinking and make them better students and philosophers.

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