

Hinduism and the Beginning of the Universe

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Michael Egnor:

Welcome to Mind Matters News. This is Mike Egnor. I have the privilege of interviewing Arjuna Gallagher. Arjuna Gallagher is a Hindu, he is from New Zealand. He has a wonderful YouTube channel called Theology Unleashed and has done a fascinating documentary entitled The Persecuted Saints That You've Never Heard Of. I recommend both his channel and his documentary, they're great. Welcome back, Arjuna.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Great to be here. Thank you.

Michael Egnor:

In this session, we wanted to talk a little bit about creation and the universe. How do Hindus understand all of creation? Is the universe eternal? Was it created at a moment in the past?

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah. One unique and defining feature of Hinduism is definitely the idea of eternity with cyclical creation and destruction. I mentioned that in an earlier segment. With regard to the Big Bang, there's this explanation of how creation happens, which you find in the Bhagavatam and it's pretty intricate. You have Mahavishnu, who is a form of God, lying down on the Causal Ocean and exhaling and inhaling. And with every exhale, all of the universes come out of his body. And with every in inhale, they all come back into all of the pores of his body. And these are correlated with the creations and destructions of the material universe.

Arjuna Gallagher:

This would be something all the way back to the Big Bang and then all the way up to the Big Crunch, if we were to make the assumption that what science is looking at when they stare into space and when they hypothesize about the Big Bang and the expanding universe, that maybe it's all going to contract again into a big crunch. If we were to make the assumption that's talking about what the Bhagavatam is talking about, then those would map onto one another. And then you get further creation from that. It gets quite fantastic from there. There's a Lord Brahma governing. I don't know how much I should get into the explanation of how the cosmos exists.

Michael Egnor:

Yeah. Are these taken generally to be metaphorical or is there a belief that these are substantially real, these explanations?

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah. There's a belief that this is actually how things are going on. If someone wanted to say, "This is too fantastic, I can't believe you actually believe this", then my reply would be, "There's actually only one

fantastic claim, which is the existence of God." Once you've assumed that God exists, you have a being full of the potencies that are capable of producing all of this. That the real fantastic worldview is atheism, where every step is a miracle.

Michael Egnor:

Right. Yeah. I don't ascribe to Hindu theology, I'm a pretty mainstream Catholic, but the really crazy stuff is atheism. I don't think any theist is really crazy, meaning that just the existence of anything in itself is a miracle, is a remarkable, astonishing thing. I'm open to all kinds of ideas, except the idea that there is no God, which I think is crazy. There's been a lot of, obviously, advances in cosmology and in basic physics over the past century. Particularly, for example, in quantum mechanics and general relativity. Is there anything in Hindu theology that reflects on those advances or relates to them?

Michael Egnor:

As an example, Werner Heisenberg, who's a physicist who was very important in the development of quantum mechanics, commented that the phenomenon in quantum mechanics of a collapse of the quantum wave form, that is that quantum systems exist in multiple states of potentiality and with measurement or observation coalescent to a single actuality, really is a reflection of Aristotle's understanding of change, of potency and act. That Aristotelian metaphysical perspective was embraced by Thomas Aquinas, so it's really part of the Catholic or Christian way of looking at metaphysics. Is there anything that you can think of in modern physics that has a parallel in Hindu metaphysics or Hindu theology?

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah. The best person to have on for this discussion would be Akhandadhi. I'll see if he can come on your podcast sometime because he's really good at this kind of thing.

Michael Egnor:

Oh, sure.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Because I look at this kind of stuff but I'm not always looking back to the tradition to see where it's found there. With regard to quantum physics, my favorite explanation of that is that it's like the pixels in a video game don't render until you actually move the screen there, or maybe it renders a little bit ahead of time so that it can predict where you're going to move and not have any lag. Similarly with quantum physics, if you're not looking at the particle, it hasn't selected a state. This is done in computer processing and video games to save on computational power, and perhaps something similar goes on with the universe. Of course, we would put the observer in every living entity, not just in humans, so that changes things somewhat. But I guess some living entities aren't actually affected by the change in state of certain quantum functions, so the wave state might not change until a human looks at it in many cases.

Arjuna Gallagher:

I'm not sure where you'd find that in the metaphysics of the tradition. I mean, we have this idea of the material energy that God is the largest and the smallest, so he's both containing the universe and inside of every atom in the universe, and everything's going on by the Sanskrit word Shakti, by God's powers and energies. With that, miracles and all sorts of things are possible. But with that, matter is also... Sure,

it's something physical following physical laws, but I've heard people argue that simulation hypothesis is supported by the Vaishnava world view.

Arjuna Gallagher:

I'm not sure exactly what quotes they base it on, though. But it does seem to make sense because the idea here is that the material universe is meant to deliver sensory experiences to living entities in order to have effects on their consciousness, which ultimately bring them back to God and help them overcome their selfish desires and so on. If you see the universe as meant for that purpose, then matter could be explained as rather than being something out there that exists independently of anything else. It's like an algorithm that governs the deliverance of experiences to living entities.

Michael Egnor:

It sounds like it's an idealism of sorts. What really exists is mental and that the physical is just a state of mind.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah. I used to think that idealism meant that things are on the existing minds, but after studying it a little bit more, I think that it could be compatible with that Vedic world view. I mean, the view ahead of idealism was that... If that was the view, I guess it would be patently absurd because there has to be something out there that we're all both interacting with because we have a shared experience of reality, so there's got to be so out there. I guess idealism is just saying that the foundation of what's out there is in the mind of God or something of that sort.

Michael Egnor:

Yeah. I was always fascinated by the consilience of Plato's view of forms, that there's a realm in which the ideal representations of things or the ideal act... I'm sorry. That what we're seeing are representations of an ideal actuality that exist in a separate world. Saint Augustine said that separate world was God's mind, that reality is essentially a thought in God's mind and that we are thoughts in God's mind. I just thought that was a fascinating way to look at it. But of course, being a Thomist, my commentary on that would be, "It may very well be that reality is a thought in God's mind, but that God is a Thomist." That explains why Thomism works so well.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Right. That does relate to the Hare Krishna view, which is that there's the original, pure spiritual reality which has everything you find here but in a pure state, whereas in the material world where we are, it's the perverted reflection. So any kind of form or pleasure or anything you might chase or experience here is a perverted reflection of something that exists in a pure state in the spiritual world.

Michael Egnor:

That seems to be a perspective that a lot of religious faith have. There's very much an aspect of that in Christianity, that there's an ultimate perfection, which is God, and that his creation is a limited version of that ultimate perfection. From your own perspective, Arjuna, or from the perspective of the Hindu faith, what do you think about the intelligent design movement in science in the Western world?

Arjuna Gallagher:

I think it's awesome. I'm a big fan of the Discovery Institute and work like Michael Behe and Stephen Meyer and your own work on arguments from the brain for consciousness not being caused by the brain. This idea that... Prabhupada, which is the founder of the Hare Krishna movement in the West, gave an argument which a philosopher called Joe Schmid told me we could call a construction argument. A construction argument that Prabhupada used is that the creator has to have all the qualities of creation, so the creation can't have any qualities that aren't found in the creator.

Arjuna Gallagher:

An analogy for this would be that the production of a table requires various ingredients. The builder needs to have more knowledge than it's required to build a chair. You can't build a chair or a table having only the amount required to build a chair. You need to have more knowledge. You need to have more wood, because there'll be wasted wood. You need to have a certain amount of tools. And without all those things, you can't build a chair. I guess this is the argument from sufficient reason. This was an argument used in the tradition to argue for person of God, because I have personal qualities, I have a name, I have a form and so on. Therefore, God must also have a name and a form and so on.

Arjuna Gallagher:

He also used this argument against atheists, that we've got all this material world with all these creatures in it and it has to come from a source power. Prabhupada also used an argument he called Life Comes from Life. "These rascal scientists", Prabhupada would use words like that. He'd speak in quite name-calling ways to rascal scientists who are diluting the public. It's not an anti-science thing. Obviously if scientists are building bridges and saving lives and all that sort of stuff, that's awesome. But when they want to tell us things like, "Matter explains life", then that's nonsense. He would challenge them, "Go on your lab and put some chemicals together and produce life, and then you can come and tell me that life comes from matter."

Michael Egnor:

Yeah. It seems to me that the better science gets, the more it seems to resemble engineering. I'm a big fan of engineering, I like houses that stay up and bridges that stay up and things like that. A lot of the theoretical science is absolutely fascinating stuff, but the metaphysical claims made by quite a few scientists, the materialist or atheist claims, I think are badly misguided.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah. This reductionist world view is really good at a lot of things. Like if you get smashed up on the motorway, they're really good at putting you back together because musculoskeletal stuff is really mechanical and engineering principles. Reductionism works well for that kind of thing, but they really fail at looking at the bigger picture. My wife is a trained naturopath and we also have a naturopath we go and see. There's so many things that can go wrong with the body. You go to a doctor and they'll be like, "The tests come back fine." And you're like, "Okay." Then you do some research, go to a naturopath, and they'll look into this whole bigger picture of how one thing's causing another thing and look at the organism as a whole. Somehow that gets missed by this reductionist picture.

Michael Egnor:

Yeah. Yeah. I think the reductionism which so often accompanies materialism is a really impoverished way of looking at things. It's not even internally consistent. Well, thank you, Arjuna, for joining us in this session. We will have another session where we'll talk about contemporary issues in our culture and in

science. It's been my privilege to have Arjuna Gallagher with us. Please join us for our next session. This is Mike Egnor from Mind Matters News.

Announcer:

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