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Introduction of Self

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The Brahminical or orthodox (astika) schools of Indian philosophy, especially the Vedantins and the Nyaya-Vaisesika argue that the self or Atman is a substantial but non-material entity. The Katha and Chandogya Upanishads for example define the Brahminical conception of the self as follows:

The light of the Atman, the spirit is invisible, concealed in all beings. It is seen by the seers of the subtle, when their vision is keen and clear. The Atman is beyond sound and form, without touch and taste and perfume. It is eternal, unchangeable, and without beginning or end: Indeed above reasoning.

An invisible and subtle essence is the Spirit of the whole universe. That is Reality. That is Truth. THOU ART THAT. The Brahminical view on the nature of the self as portrayed in the Upanishads can be summarised as four major theses:

- The self exists
- The self is immortal and without beginning or end
- The self is essentially non-material
- The self is identical with Brahman, the highest reality

The heterodox (nastika) schools in Indian philosophy, such as the Carvaka materialists and the Buddhists, question the Brahminical arguments for a substantial, persistent and non-material self on metaphysical, moral and political grounds. The Buddhists and the Carvaka oppose the Hindu caste system and believe that the Vedas are full of falsehoods, self-contradictions and tautologies. The Carvaka accuse the Brahmins of being impostors who abuse the words of the Vedas and interpret them to suit their own egoistic needs. The Vedas are in their opinion nothing but a means of livelihood for the Brahmins who are lazy, lacking in intellect, energy, self respect and sense. The views on the self by the Carvaka and the Buddhists are illustrated by the following quotes:

The soul is but the body characterised by the attributes signified in the expressions.

'I am stout' 'I am youthful' 'I am grown up' 'I am old' etc. It is not something other than that.