

Today's Lecture

- Administrative stuff
- Concluding Vedanta: Vishishtadvaita Vedanta; Dvaita Vedanta

Administrative stuff

- The spreadsheet containing your overall grades so far is now online (it excludes the marks for the latest quiz). Just go to the course site and follow the relevant link. If there are any discrepancies I should know about, please let me know. (I've already had one discrepancy, so do check.)
- Keep the grading legend that came with your graded assignment. I will be using that legend for each of your assignments. If you lost it, I have posted another one just like it on the course web site.
- The web site, by the way, has been updated.
- Remember that you must submit your assignments to Turnitin in order to receive a passing grade. So don't forget (for those of you who have yet to submit your first assignment)!

Last Lecture

- Any lingering questions?

Vishishtadvaita Vedanta: Ramanuja

- Where we left off.
- Though a quite common way to translate ‘Vishishtadvaita’ is ‘qualified non-dualism’ this *can be* misleading. For this reason certain scholars prefer the phrase ‘the non-duality of the qualified’.
- Ramanuja, *though holding a monistic view of reality, does not* view individuals, objects in the world or the cosmos itself as lacking reality (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.89).
- This is a significant departure from the teachings of Advaita Vedanta.

Vishishtadvaita Vedanta: Ramanuja

- Individuals, objects in the world or the cosmos itself are real as modes, qualifications or expressions of *Brahman*.
- Even though each object, process or event is fundamentally *Brahman*, the differences which individuate them are also real (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.89).
- This is what Koller means by saying the unity of *Brahman* is seen as a unity of differences and our identity with *Brahman* regards our fundamental substrata (see Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.89).

- Koller mentions two arguments that purportedly ground or justify Ramanuja's monism.
- (1) For there to be an identity of *A* and *B*, *A* and *B* must be as ontologically significant as each other (when this identity yields a *substantive* metaphysical claim, it implies a distinction between *A* and *B*). So if '*Brahman is All*' is true, both *Brahman* and every-thing must be equally ontologically significant. If the claim that '*Brahman is All*' is *substantive*, there must be a distinction that can be made between *Brahman* and every-thing (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.89-90).
- (2) To say that there is knowledge is to imply a knower and a known. Thus the self cannot be properly regarded as "pure knower" (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.89) (i.e. as simultaneously both knower and known).

Vishishtadvaita Vedanta: Ramanuja

- Ramanuja's monism is no small point. Think back to the problem I mentioned for Western Dualism. If matter and consciousness are essentially different, then you need a third element or fundamental constituent of Reality to act as a medium for any causal interaction between the two.
- I suggested that Samkhya attempt to get beyond this problem for dualism by suggesting that the appearance of embodiment is illusory. But what remains as a problem for Samkhya is the relationship between *purusha* and *prakriti*. After all, *purusha* affects *prakriti* and *purusha* can be affected by *prakriti*.
- There is a solution open to the Hindu (though not Samkhya) that is not so easily available to the Western Dualist. What is it?

Vishishtadvaita Vedanta: Ramanuja

- What is the solution? ... *Brahman*.
- If everything is fundamentally or essentially the same, then there is no problem caused by the interaction of consciousness and the body (i.e. the central nervous system) ... after all, they are not essentially different. (This is the move made by Western Monists, though they more often than not choose matter as the fundamental stuff of Reality.)
- There is a cost here, however. If *Brahman* is essentially consciousness, and All is *Brahman*, then everything is essentially consciousness. You cannot, then, view matter as devoid of consciousness. Scriptural passages that suggest this must be false.

- How are we to understand the relationship of multiplicity and unity, or the world and *Brahman*?
- Consider Vaishnavite theology, in particular their teaching that Vishnu has a series of *avatars* (literally ‘to cross down’). Krishna and Buddha are, for the traditional Vaishnavite, *avatars* (manifestations) of Vishnu. They are, *in that sense*, one (or one and the same Ultimate or Supreme Being) ... Krishna is Vishnu and Buddha is Vishnu, ergo (*in that sense*) Krishna is Buddha. In an important and obvious sense, however, Krishna is not Buddha and Buddha is not Krishna.
- Take this point further. Though Arjuna is, according to Ramanuja (and possibly the *Gita* [see 10:37]), a mode of Vishnu (i.e. *Saguna Brahman*), he is not in any simple way Krishna.

Vishishtadvaita Vedanta: Ramanuja

- These *avatars* are modes of, *we* are expressions of, *Brahman*.
- An analogy used by Ramanuja likens the nature of metaphysical reality to the nature of persons. Each of us, as individual persons, are, according to Ramanuja, embodied selves (i.e. there is a body and there is a[n inner] self). *Brahman* is to individuals, objects in the world and the cosmos itself, what the (inner) self is to the person – *Brahman* is the animator, the inner controller. Individuals, objects in the world and the cosmos itself are to *Brahman* what the body is to the person (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.89).

Vishishtadvaita Vedanta: Ramanuja

- Just as the inner self of the person and the person taken as an embodied whole are often conflated, one being treated as (for all intents and purposes) the other, so *Brahman* is also the Inner Controller and the whole person (see Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p. 89).
- This understanding of metaphysical reality places a great deal of control over our lives and destiny into the ‘hands’ of *Brahman* (as the Inner Controller). Our path towards *moksha* is then in large part due to the grace of God (i.e. *Saguna Brahman*).

Vishishtadvaita Vedanta: Ramanuja

- In *moksha* the liberated self realizes its true nature (i.e. realizes its God-like qualities) (see Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp. 89-90).
- It should be pointed out that the likening of metaphysical reality to the nature of persons *necessitates that Brahman as Self and* individuals, objects in the world and the cosmos *as Body eternally coexist* (see Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p. 90).
- Liberation of the individual does imply the dissolution of individuality, however.

Vishishtadvaita Vedanta: Ramanuja and causality

- Change through causal activity can *really* occur within Ramanuja's framework without requiring that *Brahman* changes or that *Brahman* is importantly distinct from the world of change.
- Within Ramanuja's framework *Brahman* is both the material and efficient cause of the cosmos (and everything in it). Change (causal activity) occurs at the level of the world, while *Brahman* (as the material and efficient cause) remains eternally the same (see Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p. 89).

Dvaita Vedanta

- Madhva went even further than Ramanuja in his reaction to Shankara. Though the course our experience takes and the form of our reality is indeed dependent on the creative work of *Saguna Brahman*, we are, according to Madhva, importantly distinct from *Brahman*. This also holds for the objects of empirical existence (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.90).
- The basic ‘elements’ of what constitutes the Real (*Brahman*, selves and matter) **eternally coexist**.
- Each individual (substance or self) have particularities that set it apart from other individuals (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.91).

Dvaita Vedanta

- Madhva proffers two arguments for this position based upon the nature of knowledge.
- (1) Knowledge depends upon the perception of difference, even if only between the self as knower and That which is known. Through perception we register differences between objects and our-self, and our-self and other selves. Since we cannot coherently deny the reality of these differences, contends Madhva, we must accommodate these differences in our metaphysics (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.90-91).
- (2) Knowledge is always *knowledge of* (something) **AND** *knowledge for* (someone). The very possibility of acquiring knowledge logically implies the existence of both an object and a subject of knowledge (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.91).

Dvaita Vedanta

- Madhva also offers an argument based on conceptual analyses of the nature of suffering and *Brahman*.
- Individuals *must* exist as repositories of suffering and pursuers of *moksha*. (That suffering exists is a commitment arising from the testimony of scripture and experience).
- *Brahman*, by Its very nature, does not suffer (*Brahman* is without change).
- Individuals are, then, importantly different from *Brahman* as those who suffer and those who are liberated.
- If *A* and *B* are, at one time slice, substantially different, they cannot ever be said to be substantially the same.
- So individuals remain distinct from *Brahman* even when in a liberated state (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.91).

Dvaita Vedanta

- This kind of argument based upon substantial differences between two individuals (broadly construed) yields an ontology containing selves, *Brahman* and material objects (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.91).
- When applied to selves this teaching has the consequence that each self has **inherent differences** which work themselves out in the path these selves take throughout their existence.

Dvaita Vedanta

- Madhva conceded that this might mean that some individuals never reach *moksha*. Some may forever remain within *samsara* following a path determined by their inherent qualities.
- Though God creates the cosmos and oversees the karmic law as it operates in *samsara*, the destiny of each individual is ultimately a working out of what was already inherent in them.