

Today's Lecture

- **DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!**
- Concluding the *Upanishads*

Upanishads – Atman

- Where we roughly left off:
- (3) For Upanishadic philosophers the self, fundamentally, is a subject (of experience). That is to say, we are all *essentially* experiencers. When searching for our self in itself, then, we will be searching for pure subjectivity (or, perhaps, pure receptivity for experience), abstracted away from any context of experience (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.23-24).

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- This is what inclines the Upanishadic philosophers to search for our fundamental self through meditation. Through meditation we can discipline ourselves to move beyond mundane experience (or experience that arises through our interactions with the world), and, for the Upanishadic philosophers, slowly move towards that which is beyond or behind experience as such (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.23-25).
- Note that the quest to find the ground of inner reality is set up, by the Upanishadic philosophers, as a pursuit of That (the underlying essence of the self) which is free from evil, suffering, and mortality (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.21).
- Why?

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- Think of our *common discourse of our continuity of self through time* (or personal identity) **despite** various physical or psychological changes (despite the loss of at least certain body parts due to accident or disease, or the disappearance of at least certain character or personality traits) (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.21-22).
- This *at least appears to* point to something that **both** underlies changes to our bodily selves (or empirical selves) **and** allows us to talk of a continuing self.

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- Notice, also, the dialectic (i.e. a reasoning process that moves from thesis [or claim] through antithesis [or counter-claim] to synthesis [a more reflective claim]) towards the Self as described by Koller (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.21).
- For the reasons already discussed, *Atman* in such dialectics is thought of as fundamentally beyond change, suffering, aging and even death (though survival of death goes beyond the reasons we discussed a moment ago). This is the key premise in any argument about the nature of *Atman* in Hinduism.
- A consequence of this view, a ‘bullet’ that must be bitten, is that *Atman* is, fundamentally, beyond *samsara*. **Atman is not reborn, for Atman cannot die.**

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- Given this ‘fact’ (or putative fact) about *Atman*, no-‘thing’ is properly regarded as *Atman* that is subject to change, loss, suffering or death.
- Consequently, the Self is not properly identified with the physical body, the waking conscious self, the dreaming self, and the self underlying deep sleep (the non-conscious, or silently conscious, self).
- This is the way to understand the dissatisfaction exhibited by Indra to Prajapati’s ongoing instruction about *Atman* during the rather lengthy relationship they share as told in the *Chandogya Upanishad* (*Course Pack*, pp.7-10; Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.23-24).

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- There is another (heavy) cost to this view.
- *Atman* is that which underlies (or gives rise to), but *is not*, your *empirical self*. Your empirical self is comprised of your various physical and psychological states working together as some kind of interdependent ‘unit’.
- The Self which is Atman, then, is not the same (*per se*) as the self which constitutes you as you sit in this room **AND** that sets you apart from me as a self. So, the Self as Atman is importantly different from that which contributes to your, as opposed to my, *personal* identity.
- *Atman*, then, is in some sense neither you NOR me.

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- For Upanishadic philosophers, this perspective on the self and the Self yields two further consequences worth noting at this time (see *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* IV: 4: 5-7).
- (1) Release or liberation from *samsara* is achieved by transcending your-self, by transcending the ‘I’ or ‘me’ of personal identity.
- (2) The good life, or the morally fulfilling life, is to be had by transcending one’s egocentrism. By moving beyond an ‘I’ orientation, or the possessive ‘mine’, by acquiring a transcendent perspective of Reality, one moves beyond those motives of action that lead to wrong doing.
- By cultivating (2) you walk the Path to (1). *Arguably*, and this is a stronger claim, *(1) requires (2)*.

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- *Atman* cannot, according to the Upanishadic philosophers, be grasped as an object of knowledge (at least when knowledge is understood as propositional (or linguistic) in nature, or as arising from the senses, memory or reason).
- The *Kena Upanishad* describes *Atman* as both “other than the known and other than the unknown” (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.22). Other than known because it is not an object of knowledge in the way a table or chair is such an object, other than unknown because we can know, or can become aware of, the Self.