

Today's Lecture

- Any questions about the assignments?
- Continuing the *Gita*

- Remember that it's not the size of your vocabulary, but (i) *the clarity of your work* and (ii) *the reasonableness of your position* that makes a good philosophy assignment.
- Two general rules of thumb that you might find useful: (1) Make sure you are careful in your reading of the philosophy on which you are commenting, and (2) make sure you adequately defend your claims (even when these are claims of interpretation) ... don't assume anything to be obviously true.
- One way in which arguments commonly fail is that the conclusion far outpaces the premises provided to support it. Make sure that you conclude no more than what you can adequately defend. Broad sweeping generalizations are always tempting, but they are also almost always hasty (read indefensible).

Any questions about the assignments?

- I don't mind if you use the first person pronoun ... it makes for better sentences.
- Don't talk about your opinions, this is irrelevant in a philosophy assignment. What matters is what you believe and why you believe it.
- Don't worry about concluding anything profound. That can wait for your dissertation.
- Also don't worry about being original. After over two millennia of philosophy in both the East and the West, you can't be original. Just make sure you are reasonable and fair.

The Bhagavad Gita

- Where we left off:
- (5) The *Gita* is significant in the development of Hinduism for three reasons:
 - (i) It encapsulates much Upanishadic philosophical, spiritual and moral teaching (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.44);
 - (ii) as a repository of Vedic teaching it was ‘available’ to those outside of the twice-born *varnas*, or classes (unlike the *Vedas* themselves); (i.e. the *Gita* brought Vedic teaching to ‘the masses’ thus circumventing the relevant restrictions imposed by the *varnadharma*);

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- (iii) it is regarded by many scholars to be a crucial unifying text in the history of Hinduism, bringing together Vedic ritualism, Upanishadic teaching, and incorporating various elements from contemporary devotional traditions.
- This unifying character of the *Gita* means that there are theological or philosophical elements or themes from the aforementioned sources in tension with each other within the text.

The Bhagavad Gita

- There are several approaches available to dealing with the tensions in the text:
- (A) You can simply concede that there are irreconcilable differences or contradictions in the Gita due to the diverse character of the traditions or outlooks being brought together within the one text.
- This will mean rejecting the common Hindu approach to the text.
- This approach requires as much defense as the other two. So you would need to show why the various themes or elements in the *Gita* are ultimately irreconcilable.

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- (B) You can attempt a 'reconciliation' of the outlooks. This can be attempted in at least one of two ways: (i) You can interpret each way of approaching Reality as being in some sense inferior to the one preceding it as you move from Vedic ritualism through devotionalism to a rather Upanishadic outlook (or, alternatively, as you move from Vedic Ritualism through a rather Upanishadic outlook to devotionalism), or (ii) you can interpret each outlook as expressing within its relevant framework, using vocabulary appropriate to that framework, insight into the same fundamental reality.

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- (C) You can simply allow that there is more than one Way to be a Hindu, as offered in the text, with no one Way being taken as superior to any other. Each Way will simply appeal to different individuals as they work out a Path to walk through life.
- Again, all three approaches require defense. Many Hindus adopt either (B) or (C).

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- (6) The title itself means the Song (or *Gita*) of the Lord (or *Bhagavan*). This points to its emphasis on devotion as a Path to *moksha*.
- (7) You can approach this text in at least one of two ways: (i) literally or (ii) allegorically. Neither one is clearly superior to the other, though there will be problems with taking the setting too allegorically.
- Think of it this way. The literal approach falls out of an attempt to understanding the meaning of the text as it is set down, while an allegorical approach falls out of applying the teaching of the text to our lives in the here and now.

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- (8) The basic context for the dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna is the coming battle between the armies under the Pandavas and under the Kauravas. Arjuna is a Pandava and cousin to the Kauravas.
- The battle is necessary because the Kauravas have refused to give the Pandavas back the kingdom they lost when Yudhisthira (the head of the Pandavas) gambled it away to Duryodhana (the head of the Kauravas). (It was agreed that the Pandavas could have their kingdom back after successfully remaining out of sight for thirteen years (twelve of which had to be in exile)).

The Bhagavad Gita

- The *Gita* is often described as a “book of crisis” (Klostermaier, Klaus. 1989. *A Survey of Hinduism*. New York: State University of New York Press, p.105). It starts with a personal crisis and moves towards its resolution.
- In Chapter One we find Arjuna faced with a fundamental moral dilemma ... he finds himself in a moral context where his moral duties are in conflict (should sound familiar).
- On the one hand he has a duty as a ruler to defend his Kingdom and his claim to the Kingdom.
- On the other hand he has a duty to uphold filial loyalty, the integrity of the family (broadly construed) and other general duties of dharma (see *Bhagavad Gita* 1:21-47 or pages 43-45 of Mitchell's *Gita*).

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- Krishna's basic solution to Arjuna's crisis, offered in Chapter Two, is to encourage him to reevaluate his view of the self and human agency.
- Krishna offers Arjuna two basic perspectives on what lies before him. One outlook makes use of Arjuna's view of human agency and its karmic significance, the other makes use of a view of the self grounded in Upanishadic philosophy (though, as we will see later, it is not merely a reiteration of an Upanishadic view).
- Importantly, the content of Chapter Two sets the path for the rest of the dialogue.

- Krishna provides several responses to Arjuna's dilemma.
- First, Arjuna, an *arya* or noble, is acting in a way unbecoming his station and in a fashion that threatens his chance of heaven (see *Bhagavad Gita* 2:2 or page 46 of Mitchell's *Gita*).
- This is clearly an appeal to values found in the *Vedas*, particularly the early *Vedas* and the *Dharmasutras* (or treatises on *dharma*). On the one hand there is the value attached to achieving heaven, or a heavenly paradise. On the other hand there is the value attached to living according to his nature as an *arya*.
- This fails to move Arjuna. Interestingly, this fails to move Arjuna because such considerations pale in the light of what must be done to achieve either victory or a heavenly reward. Clearly, Arjuna is no hedonist.