

# Today's Lecture

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

# Any questions about the assignments?

- A word of caution against any misconception of what can be achieved in draft feedback from me: Do remember that even if I read over a draft of your work that my comments are always brief (read incomplete) reflections on what you have given or shown me. **It is not my place to provide you with complete ideas or complete direction on the way you are developing your argument.** That would be professionally inappropriate. In all fairness to your peers, if you want me to provide a *substantive* response to your work I have to grade it.

# *The Bhagavad Gita*

- Do note, again, that what I am offering you is *A* reading of the *Gita*, not *THE* reading of the *Gita* (whatever that might mean).
- It's okay to disagree with my reading ... just be able to backup your choices of interpretation (i.e. make sure your choices cohere with the *Gita* both in the context of the passages in dispute and elsewhere in the text).

# *The Bhagavad Gita: First response*

- Where we left off:
- Krishna provides several responses to Arjuna's dilemma.
- **First**, Arjuna, an *arya* or noble, is acting in a way unbecoming his station (both as a *Kshatriya* and a male) 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*).
- 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.

# *The Bhagavad Gita: Second response*

- Arguably, Krishna's **next response** (see *Bhagavad Gita* 2:11-25 or pages 47-50 of Mitchell's *Gita*) constitutes a step into a broader or deeper metaphysical framework than the one implied in his first response.
- Alternatively, Krishna decides that the failure of His first response is due to a deeper problem in Arjuna's outlook than what first meets the eye.
- Krishna **now offers a view of personal identity** not unlike what we have already encountered under the rubric of Upanishadic philosophy (though there will be differences that emerge through the dialogue).

# *The Bhagavad Gita: Second response*

- On one level of existence we have various people passing through birth, childhood, youth, old age and death.
- Krishna even implies in 2:12 (page 47 of Mitchell's *Gita*) that we move from one life to another birth (read life) at death.
- On another level, however, we have an underlying Self, variously described as “ageless ... eternal ... birthless ... Unchanging” (Mitchell, *Bhagavad Gita*, pp. 49, 50).
- This deeper Self is *untouched* by the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

# *The Bhagavad Gita: Second response*

- “If you think that this Self can kill or think that it can be killed, you do not well understand reality’s subtle ways” (*Bhagavad Gita* 2:19 or Mitchell, *Bhagavad Gita*, p.49).
- “The sharpest sword will not pierce it; the hottest flame will not singe it; water will not make it moist; wind will not cause it to wither. It cannot be pierced or singed; moistened or withered; it is vast, perfect and all-pervading, calm, immovable, timeless” (*Bhagavad Gita* 2:23-24 or Mitchell, *Bhagavad Gita*, p.50).

# *The Bhagavad Gita: Second response*

- Note that:
- Arjuna, if he joins the fight, will be killing (at least in a straightforward sense of that word), so the Self Krishna is talking about cannot be Arjuna in any straightforward sense of personal identity.
- On the other hand, Arjuna is offered a view of the self as That which moves through particular births fundamentally or essentially untouched by any given physical environment and so beyond death or harm.
- One implication of this claim: The identities of each, or any given, birth are in an important sense irrelevant to the identity of this Self.

# *The Bhagavad Gita: Second response*

- Is important not to see this Self as merely another way of talking about individual souls being reborn after death.
- 2: 17 and 18 (see pages 48-49 of Mitchell's *Gita*) read,
- “The presence that pervades the universe is imperishable, unchanging, beyond both *is* and *is not*: how could it ever vanish? These bodies come to an end; but that vast embodied Self is ageless, fathomless, eternal. Therefore you must fight, Arjuna.”
- This description of the Self is not consistent with a description of individual souls moving from birth to birth.
- Importantly, however, Krishna does not see this as a denial of selfhood, but it is a reconceptualization of what that means.

# *The Bhagavad Gita: Third response*

- Krishna's **third response** is an interesting one, not because it goes beyond, or falls short of, the metaphysics of the second response, but because it tries to move Arjuna beyond his current metaphysical view by first starting where he is.
- Krishna allows in this third response that we might think of the self as properly embodied, much like the picture of rebirth that involves individual souls moving from birth to death to rebirth.
- In such a picture of samsaric existence each birth (through youth, old age and death) is only one form or manifestation out of many that the Self adopts or undergoes. Sorrow, then, for any one death seems, to Krishna, misplaced, even wrong headed.

# *The Bhagavad Gita: Third response*

- So from 2:26 on (see pages 50-51 of Mitchell's *Gita*) we read,
- “Even if you think that the Self is perpetually born and perpetually dies - even then, Arjuna, you have no reason for sorrow. Death is certain for the born; for the dead, rebirth is certain. Since both cannot be avoided, you have no reason for sorrow. Before birth, beings are unmanifest; between birth and death, manifest; at death, unmanifest again. What cause for grief in all this?”
- Manifest = manifested (in physical form).