

Today's Lecture

- Third In-class Quiz
- Any questions about the assignments?
- Continuing the *Gita*

Third In-class Quiz

- What is the philosophical starting point for the *Bhagavad Gita*? In other words, what initially motivates the dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna?

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: Third response

- Where we left off:
- 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).
- Note the emphasis on reason in this passage.

The Bhagavad Gita: Third response

- In verses 31 through 37 of Chapter 2 (pages 51-52 of Mitchells' *Gita*) Krishna offers a view of agency and (moral) responsibility in light of dharma **that coheres with Arjuna's starting point, and with the basics in Krishna's third response.**
- As a warrior, as a *Kshatriya*, he has an obligation to act honorably in the face of danger to his Kingdom and fight.
- This fight has the advantage of being just, **and because of this** Arjuna is in a win-win situation. If he is victorious in battle he saves his Kingdom and his place as its ruler. If he dies in battle he will receive a heavenly reward.
- On the other hand, if he shirks his duty he will be ruined both in the eyes of his peers, all people of dharma, and, by implication, destined for a lower rebirth.

The Bhagavad Gita

- **From verse 39 on Krishna suggests a view that moves beyond this last response.** This view Krishna christens the “wisdom of yoga” (2:39 or page 53 of Mitchell’s *Gita*).
- Arguably, this view of matters harkens back to Krishna’s second response.
- It is important to try and puzzle out what Krishna is doing here. The reading of this passage I will suggest is one where we are to move beyond concern for a better rebirth. Perhaps better yet, we are to move beyond the **mere concern for a better rebirth.**

- In 2:43 (at the top of page 54 of Mitchell's *Gita*) Krishna states,
- “Driven by desire for pleasure and power, caught up in ritual, they strive to gain heaven; but rebirth is the only result of their striving”.
- The “they” here are “foolish men” (2:42) or those who are “irresolute” (2:41).
- This passage implies a goal that is superior to a better rebirth. As do these ones:
- “The scriptures dwell in duality. Be beyond all opposites, Arjuna: anchored in the real, and free from all thoughts of wealth and comfort” (2:45 or page 54 of Mitchell's *Gita*).
- “Action is far inferior to the yoga of insight, Arjuna. Pitiful are those who, acting, are attached to their action's fruit's” (2:49 or page 55 of Mitchell's *Gita*).

The Bhagavad Gita

- What does Krishna have in mind?
- Arguably, Krishna is concerned to proffer a Way or Path that escapes the snares of samsara (i.e. having to be reborn in one of the realms of existence). To escape these snares we must act without accruing either bad **OR GOOD** karma (which is the determining force in bringing us ‘back again’ after death).
- Krishna’s suggestion here will lay the foundation for his view of what we might christen ‘ideal moral agency’.
- He suggests that, to escape rebirth, the person of wisdom (or the person of firm wisdom) should act for the sake of the action, rather than for any (good or bad) consequence of said action.

The Bhagavad Gita

- What does he mean by ‘acting for the sake of the action itself rather than for its consequences’? At least this much. We act when an action is necessary or when it is commanded by duty, rather than for a desire for personal benefit, glory or even pleasure. Note this has implications for the pursuit of better rebirth. We will encounter this view in more detail in later chapters.
- Krishna states,
- “The wise man lets go of all results, whether good or bad, and is focused on action alone. Yoga is skill in actions. The wise man whose insight is firm, relinquishing the fruits of action, is freed from the bondage of rebirth and attains the place beyond sorrow” (2:50-51 or page 55 of Mitchell’s *Gita*).