

Today's Lecture

- Administrative stuff
- Continuing the *Gita*

Administrative stuff

- You now have your second assignment topics. You have plenty of time in which to do it, but don't let this tempt you to put it off until the last week.
- This time around I must stipulate that I will not look at drafts in the week of the assignment deadline.
- I will return your graded assignments sometime *next* week.
- I will not return them to you *unless* you have submitted your assignment text to Turnitin.com.

- Where we left off:
- 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*).

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- Why would action without attachment to the consequences of action yield, in the eyes of Krishna, action that accrues no karma, or at least no debt that must be repaid or received in a future birth?
- Here's a first stab at answering the question.
- The unwise or unenlightened person is almost always motivated by desires arising from self-interest. This is certainly the view of the *Gita*.
- The self, then, becomes specially culpable or responsible in these instances of choice and action.
- Krishna seems to imply that this is not the case for the genuinely self-less agent, acting without *any* self-interested motives (see 2:71-72).

- This is, *arguably*, the moral significance of the idea of nonaction in action (an idea that will come up in subsequent chapters). This is not explicitly raised as an idea in Chapter Two but, given its prominence elsewhere, it is (exegetically) safe to assume its assumption here.
- Nonaction is importantly nonculpable. If I throw you out the window, you are not culpable for breaking it, I am. If a tree, when blown over, crushes your car, it is not culpable for the destruction of your property. In both these situations what is missing is (intentional) action.
- *I think* that what Krishna is suggesting is that acting without *any* self-interested motives, or without concern for the possessive mine or the 'I', is, for all intents and purposes, nonaction in action. Such actions are not, under this description, karmically culpable.

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- Note Krishna is not suggesting that this Way or Path is easy. On the contrary it will be achieved only slowly and through great effort or discipline (see 2:40, 59-61).
- Note also that this Way or Path will depend upon developing skill in meditation. The goal is to reside in the insight drawn from realizing Atman awareness, or the awareness of the Self. That is to say, the goal is to live in this world while absorbed in the Self.
- (Interestingly, Krishna equates the Self with Himself in 2:61 or at the bottom of page 57 of Mitchell's *Gita*. This will be important in subsequent chapters.)

- Thus Krishna states,
- “When a man gives up all desires that emerge from the mind, and rests contented in the Self by the Self, he is called a man of firm wisdom. ...
- And so Arjuna, when someone is able to withdraw his senses from every object of sensation, that man is a man of firm wisdom. In the night of all beings, the wise man sees only the radiance of the Self, but in the sense-world where all beings wake, for him is as dark as night. ...
- Abandoning all desires, acting without craving, free from all thoughts of ‘I’ and ‘mine,’ that man finds utter peace. This is the divine state, Arjuna. Absorbed in it, everywhere, always, even at the moment of death, he vanishes, into God’s bliss” (2:55, 68-69, 71-72 or pages 56, 59 and 60 of Mitchell’s *Gita*).

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- A question to ask at this point: How will the wise person, grounded in the Self, approach life? Alternatively, how will the wise person, grounded in the Self, live as a moral being?
- The metaphysics and psychology discussed by Krishna in Chapter Two implies a moral outlook on proper action.
- In 2:56-57 (pages 56-57 of Mitchell's *Gita*) Krishna describes the wise person as “free from greed, fear, anger” and as “unattached to all things”. It get more interesting. Krishna, as you have seen describes the wise person as “free from all thoughts of ‘I’ and ‘mine’” (2:71, or page 59 of Mitchell's *Gita*).
- What kind of moral life falls out of this description of the person “of firm wisdom” (2:68)?

The Bhagavad Gita: Subsequent chapters

- There are three topics raised in Chapters Three through Twelve that I want to cover before moving on from the *Gita*: (i) The *trimarga*, (ii) *guna*-nature, and (iii) the ideal moral agent.
- Krishna proffers at least three Paths or Ways to achieve *moksha* (or liberation from *samsara*).
- Do remember that these are three Paths or Ways to go beyond samsaric existence, rather than merely three Paths or Ways to a better rebirth.
- This being said, a better rebirth is assured as one ‘matures’ in one, or more, of the Paths.