

Today's Lecture

- Administrative stuff
- *The Bhagavad Gita: Subsequent chapters*

Administrative stuff

- You now have a revised reading schedule for the rest of term. Do note the relevant changes. This week we will be finishing the remaining material from our look at the first twelve chapters of the *Gita*. We need to move with some speed this week, so I ask for your patience as the speed of the lectures picks up.
- Also, all of your required texts (apart from the *Course Pack*) are now available at the Bookstore.

Administrative stuff

- Remember that, for your second assignments, I will not look at drafts in the week of the assignment deadline.
- I will return your graded assignments sometime this week.
- I will not return them to you *unless* you have submitted your assignment text to Turnitin.com (**Course ID: 1083846; Course password: dukkha**).
- Also, can Oriel Thomson come and see me after class (or in office hours)?

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- Where we left off:
- As Koller's mentions, these Paths are designed to lead us away from attachment to our empirical (or *guna*) self, and in so doing, lead us to *moksha* (see Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.46).
- Koller's point, which mentions the *guna*-self, nicely leads us into a discussion of *guna*-nature. What, after all, are the *gunas*?

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- The *gunas* mentioned in the *Gita* (see 3:5, 27-29; 7:12-14), and by Koller (*Asian Philosophies*, p.46), are the basic constituents of matter (see Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.46 or *Bhagavad Gita* 3:5). We will run into a slightly more detailed treatment of *guna*-nature in our discussion of *Samkhya*. For now remember that *all* matter is fundamentally constituted by *gunas*.
- So the *guna*-self is the empirical or material self. So what does *that* mean? Think of your-self as you look in the mirror, or touch yourself, or even introspect about your desires, beliefs and preferences. *That's* your empirical self.
- Note that even the mind qualifies as material in the *Gita* (see 3:37; 5:8-9; 10:22 [combined with 3:28]).

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- There are three *gunas*: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* (*Bhagavad Gita* 7:12; 14:5; Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p. 46).
- Our empirical self, our embodied self, is constituted by these *gunas* in a *certain ratio*. Some of us have *sattva* naturally dominating *rajas* and *tamas*, some of us have *rajas* dominating *sattva* and *tamas*, some of us have *tamas* dominating *sattva* and *rajas* (*Bhagavad Gita* 4:13; 14:5-13 or Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p. 46).

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- Why does this matter (pun intended...sorry)?
Certain traits are associated with each *guna*, traits that manifest themselves in our characters as embodied beings (Koller *Asian Philosophies*, p. 46).
- Do note that this means we should view certain character traits, or dispositions of character, as being, in some important sense, material in nature (this nicely resonates with contemporary Western psychology).

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- Koller writes, “... *sattva*, is the tendency that inclines one to intellectual activity. ... *rajas*, is the tendency that inclines one to vigorous action. ... *tamas*, inclines one to devotional activity” (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.46).
- This leads to the suggestion that each of the *Yogas* or Paths to *moksha* are best suited to certain character types, represented by what *guna* is believed to be dominant in the relevant individual.
- If you are ‘naturally’ sattvic you should pursue the *Jnanayoga*. If you are, instead, ‘naturally’ rajasic you should pursue *Karmayoga*. If, instead, you are ‘naturally’ tamasic you should pursue *Bhaktiyoga* (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.46).

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- This is not the end of the matter. The later *Gita* (chapters 13 through 18) associates other traits with these *gunas*.
- *Sattva* is characterized by knowledge, wisdom, and freedom from sorrow, and connected to: attachment to joy and knowledge; charity given without expectations; proper engagement in obligatory action (i.e. it is done without attachment to results); especially moral agents (i.e. who are free of attachment, courageous and steadfast) (14:9, 11; 17:20; 18:23; 18:26).
- *Rajas* is characterized by passion and craving or greed, and connected to: constant activity; charity given halfheartedly and with hope of favor or merit; obligatory action done for reasons of self-interest; an agent who is impulsive, greedy and violent (14:7; 17:21; 18:24; 18:27).

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- *Tamas* is characterized by ignorance and delusion, and connected to: dullness, sleep and depression; charity inappropriately given (i.e. to the wrong person at the wrong time) and given grudgingly; obligatory action irresponsibly done (i.e. in delusion, with no care for the harm it may cause); an agent who is undisciplined, stupid, mean and lazy (14:8; 17:22; 18:25; 18:28).
- Krishna counsels Arjuna to cultivate sattvic tendencies, dispositions or qualities (see 18:20, 23, 26, 33, 36-37, 50-62 and compare with Krishna's earlier prescriptions). As anyone does this she moves closer to realization of *Atman* identity, and is assured a better rebirth if she dies before attaining enlightenment (6:37-45).

- A brief philosophical reaction:
- There is *a sense in which* this kind of characterization of personality or character types is *relatively* straightforward and *understandable*. There are individuals who *in fact* do lack certain aptitudes and who are inclined to certain kinds of behavior and preferences.
- What is unclear is how much of this is merely genetic and how much is developmental or even social. It is here that philosophical worries arise about how the *Gita* accounts for our various qualities of character or cognitive aptitudes (more on this in a second).
- Also, there are thinly veiled value judgments contained in Krishna's depiction of human character types. This is especially problematic as these traits are associated with what has become a hereditary class system.

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- As I have said, unfortunately, though not surprisingly, these traits are also associated with the *varnas*, with the ‘purest’ qualities being associated with the higher classes (and castes) (see *Bhagavad Gita* 18:42-44).
- As this raises, once again, the topic of the *varnadharma*, let me say something about it now, and then just add more details in subsequent lectures as required.
- The full term associated with this area (broadly construed) of Hindu *dharma* is *caturvarnashramadharma*. This is a rather long word for the duties (*dharma*) pertaining to the four (*catur*) classes (*varnas*) and stages of life (*ashramas*) (Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1989, pp. 316-21).