

Today's Lecture

- A word of caution about this lecture
- Concluding *The Bhagavad Gita*
- Regarding your assignments: I will be handing them back tomorrow (Friday) from 1530 to 1630 (from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.) in my office (TC 306).

A word of caution about this lecture

- In this lecture I will only emphasize certain slides (this will help us complete the *Gita* in this lecture). So I'm just going to skip certain slides in the slideshow (with only a passing comment about their content). Your handout contains them all, albeit in brief.
- I include the other slides to help you with the implications of the slides I do emphasize **AND** to round off my presentation of the *Gita*.
- If you have any questions regarding this other material, come and see me about it (or raise questions in the *next* class).

The Bhagavad Gita: Subsequent chapters

- 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).

Caturvarnashramadharm

- There are four *varnas* (literally ‘colors’) (Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1989, pp. 317): the *Brahmana varna* (priests, scholars, intellectuals); *Kshatriya varna* (warriors, kings, politicians, jurers); *Vaishya varna* (merchants, traders); and *Shudra varna* (servants, laborers) (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp. 49-51).
- This stratification should look familiar. Something akin to it was dominant in Feudal Europe, and can still be observed in certain social institutions in various European countries (England being an obvious example).
- Ironically, it was class outlooks like this that supplied *at least some* of the theoretical underpinnings to rationalize colonization, including the British colonization of India.

Caturvarnashramadharm

- Your place in this class structure is decided by *at least* two factors: (i) your parentage or lineage and (ii) your behavior in this life/birth (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp. 49, 51).
- Some ways in which your parentage is important: (i) If your parents are of the same class, you will inherit that class. (ii) If your parents have married from classes forbidden to marry, your class will be significantly lower than the highest of the two classes of your parents (*Course Pack*, p. 13).

Caturvarnashramadharm

- Some ways in which your behavior is important: There are certain sins or crimes that result in loss of class or caste. These include killing a *brahmin*, having sex with a wife of one of your close relatives, having sex with a sibling, even selling the *Vedas* (see *Course Pack*, pp. 17, or, for more details, Patrick Olivelle, *Dharmasutras: The Law Codes of Ancient India*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 32, 113-14, 168-69, 249-50).
- One's birth into a given family, and the associated class status, is seen to be the result of karmic forces (see *Course Pack*, pp. 11, 12, 16).

Another brief digression on *karma*

- There are three basic kinds of karma: (1) That which exists as a result of past actions but remains latent in this life; (2) That which is active in bringing about events in this life (e.g. determining into what family you are born, the psychological dispositions with which you are born, or the quality of your life); (3) That which is created from actions you do in this life.
- (2) is the karma that determines class or caste identity.

Caturvarnashramadharm

- Good karma leads to better and better rebirths. This is manifested in the Terrestrial realm through, among other things, successive births in higher and higher *varnas* (see *Course Pack*, pp. 11, 19).
- Of course, those with especially good karma are not born in the Terrestrial realm at all (see *Bhagavad Gita* 9:20-21 or 14:18 or *Course Pack*, p.12).
- Theoretically, then, no one can be blamed for your birth into any one of the Hindu *varnas* except yourself. What appears to be a profound social inequity based on inheritance and luck is viewed as karmic justice.

- Each *varna* has its own duties, rights, and responsibilities (this is in addition to the duties arising from *sadharana dharma* [summed up as the avoidance of killing other beings, telling the truth, the avoidance of stealing, cultivating self-control, and maintaining one's purity (*Manusmriti* X.63; see page 12 of your *Course Pack* and page 51 of your *Asian Philosophies*)]).
- Theoretically it is held that *varnadharma* contributes to a stable society (it sustains society), by allotting to each person responsibilities and duties which are tailored to his or her natural abilities/capacities (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.49, 50; *Course Pack*, p. 13).
- Do note that 'Caste system' primarily refers to the thousands of *jatis* (literally 'births') which are subsumed under the four *varnas* (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p. 49).

Caturvarnashramadharmā

- A brief philosophical reaction to the *varnadharma*:
- (1) As I have already said, there is nothing (morally) wrong with recognizing and categorizing *character types* within the human community. There is even some psychological sense to it.
- (2) There is even nothing (at least obviously) wrong with recognizing and categorizing people *according to their aptitudes*.

Caturvarnashramadharm

- There are, however, several problems attaching to the *varnadharma* as I've described it.
- (1) There is no good reason to think that differences in aptitude, intellectual skill, cognitive health, or behavior come down to an individual's genetic makeup. Genetic makeup is a necessary condition for *certain* aptitudes, intellectual skills, or behavior (in particular those aptitudes, intellectual skills or behavior only possessed [to the best of our knowledge] by *homo sapiens sapiens*), but it is not sufficient.
- (2) Consequently, though it *might* be the case that some people are just 'natural' leaders, philosophers, poets or artisans, there is no good reason to think that this is determined by their lineage.

Caturvarnashramadharmā

- (3) *Even IF* there are some people who are just ‘natural’ leaders, philosophers, poets or artisans (whatever that might mean), there is no good reason to think that one social category is *more* important, significant, or (spiritually or morally) pure than another.

Caturvarnashramadharmā

- Where does the *Gita* stand on the *varnadharma*?
- (1) The author(s) of the *Gita* do(es) not reject the *varnadharma*. Several passages make this clear (see 4:13 or 18:40-47).
- (2) It is interesting, however, that the *Gita*'s outlook on the *varnadharma* differs in certain significant ways from what is found in either the *Dharmasutras* or such *Dharmashastras* as the *Manusmriti*.
 - (i) Krishna does not concern Himself with the 'purity' of class marriage.
 - (ii) He does not appear to link the *varnas* to parentage. Instead He explicitly associates character traits or aptitude with each *varna*.

Caturvarnashramadharmā

- (iii) When parentage does come up, Krishna does not assure those of noble character that they will be born in the homes of those well versed in the *Vedas* or mature on any Path to *moksha* (see 6:41-42). This seems suspiciously *unlike* what is talked about in the *Manusmṛiti*.

Caturvarnashramadharmā

- (iv) It gets even more interesting. In at least one place Krishna suggests that there are three possible destinations for those possessing the various characteristics associated with the three *gunas*. Those who possess sattvic characteristics do not remain in the terrestrial realm (our realm), instead this is ‘promised’ for those possessing the characteristics associated with *rajas*. *ALSO*, all humans qualify for this promise, not just those from among the twice-born (see 14:18; interestingly *something like this* is admitted in *Manusmṛiti* [see XII.40 in your *Course Pack*, p.12]).
- (v) One more observation is noteworthy. Unlike the *Manusmṛiti* or even the *Dharmasūtras*, Krishna does not advocate treating individuals differently based upon caste or class (see 5:18-19, 25; 6:29-32; 12:4, 13, 17-19; 14:19-25).

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- With regards to moral agency, as this nicely falls out of point (v) in the previous slide, Krishna, or the author(s) of the *Gita*, mention(s) various moral virtues to be cultivated by the person of firm wisdom. Among these, as you have seen, we find nonattachment, compassion, benevolence, impartiality, and a lack of egocentricism.
- Note also that the person of firm wisdom sees her-self proper as importantly separate from her empirical self. In at least two separate passages Krishna talks of the person of firm wisdom perceiving herself as distinct from that which acts in the body.

The Bhagavad Gita: Subsequent chapters

- “Wholehearted, purified, mastering body and mind, his self becomes the self of all beings; he is unstained by anything he does. The man who has seen the truth thinks, ‘I am not the doer’ at all times - when he sees, hears, touches, when he smells, eats, walks, sleeps, breathes, when he defecates, talks, or takes hold, when he opens his eyes or shuts them: at all times he thinks, ‘This is merely the sense-objects acting on the senses’” (5:7-9).
- “Calmly renouncing all actions, the embodied Self dwells at ease as the lord of the nine-gated city, not acting, not causing action. It does not create the means of action, or the action itself, or the union of result and action: all these arise from Nature” (5:13-14).

- Now there is a sense in which these passages can be understood quite straightforwardly and, albeit eventually, quite literally. But we need to take care. We need to carefully distinguish between the unenlightened agent and the enlightened agent.
- **The problem we are trying to avoid.** We don't want a view of embodied agency such that it *makes no sense of how* we, as selves, act (morally) in the body and also pursue liberation from *samsara*.
- A possible solution is the following. The person pursuing *moksha* through one of the *margas* or *yogas* becomes so detached from self, and self-interest, that *it is as if* the doer of action is not her-self. Upon reaching *moksha-in-the-body* *there is no-self*, or at least *no particular self*, to see as the embodied actor.

Ashramadharma

- How does the *ashramadharma* connect with all of this?
- There are, traditionally, four *ashramas*: student (*brahmacarya*); householder (*grihastha*); forest dweller (*vanaprastha*); recluse/renunciant (*sannyasa*) (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, 51; *Course Pack*, p. 12 or 13).
- Ideally each *ashrama* represents a stage in the life of a devotee Hindu male (though you do find attempts to allegorize these stages so that women can be said to enter the *ashramas*) (*Course Pack*, pp. 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20).

Ashramadharma

- There are differences within Hinduism regarding this very feature of *ashramadharma*. Some allow the possibility of by-passing the householder and forest dweller stages of life. Some emphasize the householder stage to the exclusion of all others. Yet others maintain that one can adopt any one stage as a life-style.
- It is important to recognize that different duties and responsibilities fall on individuals depending on their stage of life (see *Course Pack*, pp. 13-17).
- Together the four *ashramas* facilitate the pursuit of the *purusharthas* (the aims of humanity) (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.52).

Purusharthas

- There are four *purusharthas*. *Dharma* (righteousness, right living), *artha* (wealth, property, ‘worldly’ success), *kama* (pleasure, love, eros, enjoyment), and *moksha* (liberation) (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.47-49).
- Neither *artha* nor *kama* can be pursued without regard for (what is required by) *dharma* (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.48). It is often suggested that *dharma*’s placement as first in the list of the *purusharthas* is indicative of its importance in the pursuit of the other aims of life.

Purusharthas

- The aims of life can be thought of in a number of ways. (1) The pursuit of *artha* and *kama* (in accordance with *dharma*) teach individuals that such pursuits yield fruit which are impermanent and so ultimately unsatisfying. This, it is thought, will motivate these individuals to aim for that which yields permanent fruit, namely *moksha* (see Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.49).
- (2) The inclusion of *artha* and *kama* in the aims of life reflect Hinduism's long standing interest in worldly success, benefits, blessings and pleasures (remember the Vedic sacrifices). While the inclusion of *dharma* and *moksha* reflects the long-standing interest in ritual (and moral) purity and release from rebirth, respectively (see Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.47).

Purusharthas

- (3) The four *purusharthas* nicely connect to the four *ashramas*. As a student, Hindu males of the three highest *varnas* learn, among other things, *dharma*. During the household stage Hindus pursue *artha* and *kama* (within, of course, the confines of *dharma*). For both forest dwellers and recluses the primary pursuit is *moksha*. See Koller's discussion of this in your *Asian Philosophies*, p. 51. He suggests that the *ashramas* provide the structure necessary for the pursuit of the *purusharthas*.

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- Where does the *Gita* sit with the *ashramadharmas* and *purusharthas*?
- This is actually unclear. Do note the following, however.
- By implication the value of the student and household *ashramas* are recognized. The student *ashrama* is necessary to gain knowledge of Vedic scripture, and thus, *dharma*. Arjuna was a householder.
- The recluse *ashrama* is explicitly mentioned, though not always favorably. When it is mentioned favorably it is so only within the context of pursuing one of the *yogas* or *margas* conducive to *moksha* (see 2:58-61, 68; 4:26, 28-30; 5:2-29; 6:1-4, 17, 46).

The Bhagavad Gita: Subsequent chapters

- Krishna seems critical, from time to time, of those who pursue pleasure or wealth (see 2:45 or 6:8).
- In saying this, His human persona is a king from a neighboring kingdom, and so someone of wealth. Also, He promises birth into a family of wealth for those among the righteous who spend a long life in heaven (see 6:41).
- *Perhaps* it is best to see His criticism of lives geared towards pleasure or wealth as criticisms of those who are *attached* to these *purusharthas*.
- In saying this, it is difficult to see why anyone would *pursue* these *purusharthas* if they were genuinely unattached to either.