

Today's Lecture

- Your Course Pack is ready at In Print.
- Concluding the preliminary comments.
- Orientation for Hinduism.

Administrative stuff

- Your Course Pack is ready at In Print
- You now have your First Assignment topics.
- You now have your Tentative Reading Schedule for the term.
- Any questions either about last lecture or the Course Outline?

Some preliminary comments about philosophy and Eastern Philosophy

- There is much wisdom in the traditions we will be studying, and reasonable answers to many of the questions that have concerned philosophers in both the East and the West, but this is not to say that everything we will find in these traditions will survive philosophical scrutiny. And that's okay. This same is true of any philosophical or religious tradition in the West.
- So we need to travel that difficult and fine line between being dismissive towards something otherwise unfamiliar or unfriendly to what we currently believe, or hold to be true, and being too receptive. As we will see through the course of this class, this is much more difficult than it sounds.

Some preliminary comments about philosophy and Eastern Philosophy

- The topics covered under the rubric of Eastern philosophy largely resemble those encountered in Western philosophy.
- It is customary to divide Western philosophy into three basic areas of study, and this fits as well in the Eastern sphere of philosophy as in the West. First we find an area known as **Epistemology**.
- The term comes from two Greek words, *episteme* or knowledge and *logos* or word, theory or account. **Epistemology is the theory of knowledge.**

Some preliminary comments about philosophy and Eastern Philosophy

- Under such a category of philosophical inquiry philosophers attempt to answer such questions as 'What is knowledge?', 'What is a rational belief?', 'What is a justified belief?', 'What are the common sources of knowledge?', 'Are religious beliefs rational?', 'Is there moral knowledge?', and 'Do we know anything about Reality?'

Some preliminary comments about philosophy and Eastern Philosophy

- As you can imagine, these questions are as important to Hindu, Buddhist or Taoist philosophers as they are to Anglo-American or Continental philosophers. Where you will find Eastern philosophers differing significantly from their Western counterparts is on the issue of common sources of knowledge. A great many Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, Taoist and Neo-Confucian philosophers advocate using various meditation techniques to acquire knowledge about Reality.
- **Indeed for these philosophers ultimate knowledge about Reality can be had only through certain kinds of meditation.**

Some preliminary comments about philosophy and Eastern Philosophy

- The second area of philosophical inquiry has become known as **Metaphysics**. **Metaphysics concerns questions about the nature of Reality, or various elements of Reality**. This is importantly different from epistemology in that it asks questions about what must be the case about Reality to best explain our knowledge of it.
- Under this category of philosophical inquiry philosophers ask such questions as 'Is Reality mind-independent, or does Reality require the presence of perceivers to perceive it?', 'What is Reality made out of?', 'Are we real?', 'Is the world real?', 'Do we survive death?', 'Do we have souls?', 'Are we reborn after we die?' and 'Does the Deity exist?'.

Some preliminary comments about philosophy and Eastern Philosophy

- Again it should come as no surprise that these kinds of questions can be found in the discussions of philosophers in both the East and the West. The view that Reality is significantly different from how we commonly perceive or conceive it is much more common in Eastern than it is in the Western philosophy, but you will find it in some Western philosophy (for examples see Berkeley or Kant).

Some preliminary comments about philosophy and Eastern Philosophy

- The third and final area of philosophical inquiry concerns **Value Theory**. In many ways this area of philosophical inquiry can be subsumed under either Epistemology or Metaphysics.
- Questions like 'Do we have moral knowledge?', 'What is the good?', and 'Are there moral facts or truths?' belong to this category of inquiry and are also good examples of either epistemic or metaphysical questions, respectively.
- As we will see throughout the course, concerns about right action and moral character motivate much Eastern philosophy, and this, once again, parallels what can be observed in Western philosophy (though that is a different course form this one).

Some preliminary comments about philosophy and Eastern Philosophy

- Some questions you might ask yourself as you move through the course material are the following: (1) 'What is knowledge?', (2) 'What is a rational belief about x (where x is a particular area of interest)?', (3) 'Is meditation a legitimate source of knowledge?', (4) 'How do we decide what is a legitimate source of knowledge?', (5) 'What is the nature of Reality?', (6) 'Am I real?' (this may not be an intelligible question), (7) 'Do I have a soul?', (8) 'Will I be reborn when I die?', (9) 'What is it to be good or live a good life?', and (10) 'What are my moral duties?'
- You will find various philosophers in our readings giving various, incompatible answers to these questions ... so you can't agree with them all!

Some preliminary comments about philosophy and Eastern Philosophy

- Take care in critically evaluating such issues as whether we have a soul or whether meditation is a legitimate source of knowledge.
- The view that we have a soul does not easily cohere with what we now know of the brain and the (so-called) 'inner workings' of our minds. In particular, embodied experience and our physiological health seem to have profound effects on the contents of our minds and our overall personalities. These observations about our minds (broadly construed) are difficult to explain if we have a soul which somehow exists prior to, or otherwise independent of, our brains/bodies. (As you will see, Buddhist philosophers deny the existence of souls.)

Some preliminary comments about philosophy and Eastern Philosophy

- There are some puzzles to work out if you believe that you possess a soul:
- (1) You slowly acquire the ability to think at increasing levels of complexity, and this seems causally connected to the maturity and health of your brain. If it exists, the soul does not seem to be an *independent* thinking thing.

Some preliminary comments about philosophy and Eastern Philosophy

- (2) Your personality, or character traits, seem contingent on the maturity and health of your brain. Down syndrome adults appear to think in ways, and have reactions to the surrounding environment, that are, at least sometimes, relevantly different from their properly functioning counterparts. Individuals suffering from Alzheimer's exhibit deteriorating cognitive abilities and an increasing loss of those elements associated with their personal identity. If it exists, the soul does not seem to have an independent personality.

Some preliminary comments about philosophy and Eastern Philosophy

- (3) Your personal identity (*who* you are as a person), then, seems tied to your embodied existence. You are, in large part, what everyone else sees/perceives. What, then, is the relation between you and your soul? Does it make sense to tie your (continued) existence, as a person, to the (continued) existence of your soul?