

# Today's Lecture

- Some (I hope) final administrative comments
- Concluding the preliminary comments
- Orientation for Hinduism
- The Rig Veda and Vedic Hinduism

# Some (I hope) final administrative comments

- Do note that the edition of Koller's *Asian Philosophies* you ought to buy is the 4th Edition. It has chapters and material not contained in earlier editions, material for which you are responsible.
- The UWO Bookstore mistakenly marked the Koller text as suggested. The course outline is correct, this text is required. I have contacted the Bookstore in the hopes of correcting this.
- Conze's *Buddhist Scriptures* is still on order. We don't need it until well into the term, so that's okay.

# Some preliminary comments about philosophy and Eastern Philosophy

- I've said a lot about meditation already. So let me sum up these comments by noting some things of importance when thinking of the issue.
- To assess the epistemic value of meditation (i.e. whether meditation yields knowledge) we need to discover why perception, memory, reason, introspection or the testimony of others (i.e. legitimate authorities) are regarded as sources of knowledge and, assuming these sources of belief **ARE** sources of knowledge, see if meditation meets the relevant criteria.

# Some preliminary comments about philosophy and Eastern Philosophy

- Even if you have good reasons for holding that meditation is a legitimate source of knowledge, this tells you nothing yet about what knowledge can be gained through meditation.
- Indeed, we need to first discern which meditation techniques are optimal for acquiring knowledge (different Eastern traditions emphasize different techniques). Then we need to inquire after what knowledge can be gained through meditation.
- What will become clear from reading Hindu, Jain, Buddhist and Taoist philosophy is that meditation experience does not appear to yield a determinate body of knowledge.

# Some preliminary comments about philosophy and Eastern Philosophy

- When inquiring into whether meditation yields knowledge we need to either (i) develop and adequately defend a particular view of knowledge or (ii) show the relevant similarities between what we properly already regard as knowledge and those beliefs produced by meditation in situations taken to be optimal for forming true beliefs.
- What you want to **avoid**, in developing a view of knowledge, is a view that **lets too much in** (e.g. clearly false or irrational beliefs [like 'The earth is flat']) or **excludes too much** (e.g. highly probable beliefs [like 'The earth is extremely old']).

# Some preliminary comments about Indian Philosophy

- Indian Philosophy is **NOT** a homogeneous philosophical system of beliefs, perspectives or values ... and in this it resembles Anglo-American Philosophy and European or Continental Philosophy. This should not be a surprise.
- There are, however, shared themes and shared perspectives on some epistemic issues (like basic sources of knowledge [be it perception, reason or meditation]) and some metaphysical issues (like karma, rebirth/transmigration, or *moksha*).

# Some preliminary comments about Indian Philosophy

- Some common themes to note right off the bat:
- All of the traditions we will study under the rubric of Indian Philosophy (e.g. Hinduism, Jainism and Theravada and early Mahayana Buddhism) hold the following in common.
- (1) We have had more than one birth and we will have more to come (i.e. they all believe in *some form of rebirth*). Do note, *Hindus, Jains and Buddhists have very different views of rebirth*. Also, some Hindus and some Buddhists differ with other Hindus and Buddhists on the nature of rebirth.



# Some preliminary comments about Indian Philosophy

- (2) Our cycle through birth, death and rebirth (or death, birth and redeath) is driven by our past actions (i.e. they all believe in *some form of karma*). The various theories of Karma can be summed as follows: What we sow, we reap. They differ in the details.
- (3) We can stop, or escape, this cycle of birth, death or rebirth (this cycle is called *samsara*, which literally means ‘to wander’). Again, they differ as to how to escape from, and what existence may be like beyond, *samsara*. This escape from *samsara* is called *moksha*, or liberation.
- (4) We want, or will want, to escape from *samsara*.



# Some preliminary comments about Indian Philosophy

- (5) *Moksha*, or liberation, is achieved primarily through self-knowledge. This self-knowledge minimally requires (i) living an ethical life and (ii) practicing some kind of technique to help us move beyond our ordinary perception of Reality (including our perception of ourselves).
- (6) Philosophy and religious practice are not separated or viewed as essentially incompatible. Hindu, Jain or Buddhist philosophy also has a religious function or role to play. (This is an important difference between Eastern and Western philosophy.)

# Some preliminary comments about Indian Philosophy

- There is already a philosophical consequence of some of these themes.
- In so-called Western cultures we pursue either our own happiness or our own pleasure with great effort, sometimes at great cost. Why?
- It is notoriously difficult to motivate the regard for others in Western moral philosophy. The default view of human agency is to think of it as ultimately self-interested.
- Both of these elements of either Western life-styles or philosophy have a different place in Hindu, Jain or Buddhist life or philosophy.

# Some preliminary comments about Indian Philosophy

- Consider the view of rebirth shared by a great many Hindus, Jains and Buddhists. (i) It has no beginning, and it has no end. (ii) Each of us have already had an infinite number of births.
- Two consequences fall out of this claim, if it is true:
- (1) Imagine a life of great wealth or poverty, great freedom or oppression, you have lived them all (and you will, in all probability, live them all again), and
- (2) a great many of those you encounter in your life ‘travels’ have already been your partner, your sibling, your parent, your child (this includes nonhuman animals by the way).
- How will this make a difference to how you live your life?

# Some preliminary comments about Indian Philosophy

- Think of (1). If you have already enjoyed immense wealth, there is no special need to pursue it at great cost in this life.
- Think of (2). If another being has already been your parent, sibling or partner you have already been in a relationship of mutual love and respect with that individual (*at least in some birth*). Realizing that now should, according to many Hindus, Jains or Buddhists, change your attitude about, and regard for, them.
- Arguably, this makes rebirth an attractive philosophical view.

# Some preliminary comments about Indian Philosophy

- How do we critically evaluate claims about the after-life (or after-death) ... including rebirth?
- (1) There is one sure way of testing the veracity of such claims ... die (and see what it's like).
- This is not a wholly desirable state of affairs (at least for me). Is there any other way to test such claims?
- (2) We can test such claims against what we already know about ourselves or the world. If these claims contradict what we already know, then we have a *prima facie* reason to reject them as probably false.
- This only allows us to falsify claims. It doesn't confirm them.

# Some preliminary comments about Indian Philosophy

- (3) We can see if such claims are predicted by theories or perspectives already reasonably held to be true.
- This method won't work if the epistemic value of these theories or perspectives depends on the truth of the claims about the after-life (or after-death) in question. In such a circumstance, an appeal to these theories or perspectives to defend claims about the after-life (or after-death) would be circular (a fallacious form of reasoning known as '**begging the question**').