

Today's Lecture

- Your Koller Text
- Beginning Vedic Hinduism

Your Koller Text

- Some of you have run into problems getting your Koller text, primarily because the UWO Bookstore ran out of stock.
- The Bookstore has assured me that 40 are on order and should arrive tomorrow or Thursday.
- Re the first in-class quiz (on Thursday by the way [to begin soon after class begins]): Just concentrate on your lectures and handout on philosophical method for this quiz. I won't start asking questions based on text content until the second quiz.

Some preliminary comments about Indian Philosophy

- Where we left off:
- (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**').
- As an example think of appeals to authority using narratives involving the appearance or 'testimony' of those purported to have died but who now exist 'elsewhere'.

Some preliminary comments about Indian Philosophy

- It could be the case that, as it stands, we cannot make a reasoned defense of either a denial or affirmation regarding the existence of an after-life (or after-death).
- This doesn't have to finish the discussion. We have three possible responses open to us.
 - (1) We can simply adopt a denial that an after-life exists until evidence to the contrary appears.
 - (2) We can remain agnostic on the issue (i.e. we can remain neutral on the matter).
 - (3) We can simply adopt an affirmation that an after-life exists until evidence to the contrary appears.
- (1) and (3) suffer from two weaknesses. (i) On the face of it, neither is any more or less rational than the other. (ii) Either option may be based on fallacious reasoning.

Some preliminary comments about Indian Philosophy

- If we remember that a **fallacious argument** or an **example of fallacious reasoning** is so because the **principle of inference or reasoning used to move from the premises to the conclusion is not a reliable means of obtaining a true statement/claim**, then we should avoid arguing that something is true *because of* a lack of contrary evidence, or that something is false *because of* a lack of supporting evidence. To do so is to commit a fallacy known as ‘**an argument from ignorance**’.
- Put simply, this is because a lack of contrary evidence is not a definitive or even reliable indicator of the truth of, or a lack of supporting evidence is not a definitive or even reliable indicator of the falsity of, a belief or claim in dispute.

Some very preliminary comments on Hinduism

- Hinduism is **NOT** one religion.
- The term ‘Hinduism’ refers to a diversity of religious traditions that hold the Vedas as authoritative in religion and practice (Koller, *Asian Philosophers*, p.6).
- Within Hinduism you can find those who believe in the God or Goddess, or in many Gods and Goddesses, and those who shy away from such a theistic emphasis.
- There is no one way to be a ‘good Hindu’. This fact about Hinduism allows for a sometimes remarkable degree of tolerance within the Tradition taken as a whole. (This does not mean that there is no sectarianism within Hinduism (or religious killings) ... but up until recently this differed in ‘flavor’ or spirit from what you might encounter in Christianity or Islam.)

The *Vedas* and Vedic Hinduism

- Vedic Hinduism is the early Hinduism that arose out of and informed the content of the Vedic scriptures.
- The oldest of the Vedic literature is dated to between 1500 and 1200 B.C.E (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.3-4).
- It was not set down in writing for perhaps a thousand years after its creation. (Writing was considered a ‘polluting’ activity ... a rather common view in human antiquity.)

The *Vedas* and Vedic Hinduism

- The word '*veda*' means 'wisdom' or 'knowledge' (see Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.347).
- As you've already seen, *Veda* is a term used to refer to a certain subset of the Hindu scriptures.
- There are two ways to refer to the Vedic scriptures. You can talk of the collections of verses (that form the basis of the rest of the Vedic literature) as the *Vedas*, or talk of the Vedic literature proper (or as a whole) as the *Vedas*.
- Vedic literature includes the *Samhitas* (or collections of verses) and *Brahmanas* (or commentaries), *Aranyakas* (or forest treatises), and the *Upanishads* (the principal *Upanishads* contain early Hindu philosophy) (see Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.4-5).

The *Vedas*

- When using the term ‘narrowly’ for the *Samhitas* (literally ‘the collections’), we talk of four *Vedas*, one of which is the *Rig Veda* (Koller quotes from some of the *Rig Veda* in your text [see pages 17-19], he also mentions the other three *Vedas* on page 4).
- Each collection of verses has an associated set of *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*.

The Vedas

- *Brahmanas* consist of lectures (representing the perspectives of various schools in which brahmins received their instruction or training) dealing with the myths and commentaries surrounding certain sections of the *Vedas*.
- *Aranyakas*, or forest treatises, consist of reflections on the greater or deeper significance of the ritual elements (broadly construed).
- *Upanishads* consist of reflections on that which underlies, or underpins, Vedic religious thought and practice. Often viewed as the end (*vedanta*) of the *Vedas* (see Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.5).

The *Vedas* (broadly construed)

- An aside: Philosophical schools (or *darshanas*) who ground their reflections and arguments on the *Upanishads* are often referred to as Vedantan.
- The *Upanishads* are often highlighted in the study of Vedic Hinduism as *the beginning of* philosophical reflection in Hinduism (e.g. Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.3).
- I'm nervous about this claim, though it is a common one, largely because it contains an implicit judgment regarding the philosophical value of the reflection which precedes the *Upanishads*. Yet there are passages in the *Rig Veda* that qualify as philosophical.
- Consider the passages quoted on pages 17-19 of your Koller text.

The *Vedas*

- The *Vedas*, understood narrowly or broadly (Hindus more often than not use the term in its broad sense), are regarded as *shruti* (literally ‘that which is heard’).
- This gives them a status *analogous* to revealed scripture in, say, the Abrahamic Traditions.
- *Shruti* are the highest scriptural authority in Hinduism.
- As *shruti* they are regarded as both timeless and authorless. They are timeless in that they are eternal. They are authorless in that they were revealed to (heard by) ancient sages (or *rishis*) and passed down thereafter from teacher to student (see Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.15).

The *Rig Veda*

- The *Rig Veda*, which is the *Samhita* often read at this level of study of Hinduism, contains 1028 verses divided into 10 books or sections.
- Though the various hymns of the *Rig Veda* address the gods in a worshipful manner (and so may hold some salvific import), such hymns typically entreat these gods for particular blessings or benefits in this life for the participants (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.15-16).
- In the evolution of Vedic Hinduism you see the understanding of the significance of religious ritual change.

The Vedas

- Over time Vedic ritual becomes treated as a microcosm of macrocosmic events (events in the world, the atmospheric or celestial realm, or heaven).
- Consequently, Vedic rites become understood as the means for manipulating the relevant cosmic powers or natural forces to gain the benefits sought after (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.16).
- Under such an interpretation of the rituals/rites, the priests and their skill in the ritual become more important than the particular deities who are addressed. The priests' skills in manipulating the elements are the sufficient and necessary conditions for bringing about the desired effects in the world.

The Vedas

- This becomes an important historical event. The priests, or Brahmins, officiating over the public Vedic rites begin to assume the status associated with the top of the social hierarchy and so begin to acquire a great deal of social power.
- This will coincide with the gradual emergence of a social hierarchy known as the varnadharma (for a sneak peek look at pages 49-51 of your *Asian Philosophies*). This is now more widely known as ‘the caste system’ ... though what we can now observe as the caste system in Hinduism is the result of almost three millennia of development and change.

The Vedas

- A note of caution: There is much speculation in the literature about the change that occurs in the Vedic Religion as participants move from petitioning gods or goddesses for blessings or forgiveness to manipulating them to achieve a certain sought after end.
- **Be careful not to too quickly adopt a framework that sees such a move as a mark of ‘maturity’ within the culture.**

The Vedas

- There is little reason to view polytheism as somehow more culturally primitive than monotheism or monism. (i) Certainly some contemporary expressions of polytheism are no older than some contemporary expressions of monotheism or monism. (ii) There is also no qualitative philosophical difference between some expressions of polytheism (like some popular Hindu views of the divine) and some expressions of monotheism or monism (like popular Christian views of the divine).