


Lecture 3
Philosophical Themes
in the *Upanishads*

The Issue of Atman

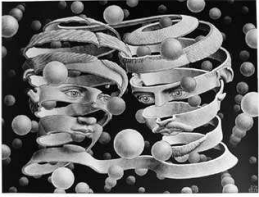
1. Who am I *really*?

- there is a difference between what we *appear* to be and what we *are*
- our five senses do not provide a satisfying answer



The Issue of Atman

- we are never conscious of what does our perceiving
- but *this* is who we *really* are
- so: reality is never an object of consciousness
 - we are that which sees but is not seen, that which is aware but not an object of awareness



The Issue of Atman

- we are never conscious of what does our perceiving
- but *this* is who we *really* are
- so: reality is never an object of consciousness
 - we are that which sees but is not seen, that which is aware but not an object of awareness
- we cannot have this knowledge by becoming an object for ourselves
- to know who we really are, we must *identify* with what we are
 - no separation of knower and known
 - transformation *into* truth
 - satya

The Issue of Atman

- Atman is knowing knowing itself
- Atman is *consciousness itself* that is not *consciousness of anything*
- Each of us *really* is consciousness itself
- We can experience this by going beyond the objects of consciousness, beyond subject-object duality (cf. yoga)

The Issue of Brahman

2. What is reality *really*?
- What is there?
 - Where does what there is come from? (what is the *basis* of reality?)
 - *Upanishads* focus on *second* question
 - "Brahman" is the name given to the basis of reality, whatever it is
 - Brahman must be unlimited:
 - since it is the basis, there is nothing that could limit it.
 - But this is not very informative.

The Issue of Brahman

– *Chandogya Upanishad* says that Brahman is space (as in place)

- space is behind the location of physical objects, waiting to be filled by *objects*
- likewise, Brahman is behind real things, waiting to be filled by *beings*



"Wherefrom do all these worlds come? They come from space. All beings arise from space, and into space they return: space is indeed their beginning, and space is their final end." (1.9.1)

The Issue of Oneness

3. Atman = Brahman

- nothing distinguishes my Atman from yours, because ...
- no discriminating features → Atman is one (not a plurality)
- Brahman is also a oneness
- hence: the reality of what you are is the same as reality itself, because ...

"We should consider that in the inner world Brahman is consciousness; and we should consider that in the outer world Brahman is space."

–*Chandogya Upan. 3.18.1*

The Issue of Plurality

4. Appearance vs. Reality

- the variety and plurality of objects in the world is not the ultimate reality
- ultimate reality is discovered by realizing one's Atman
- **tat tvam asi** (that is you)
- **neti, neti** (not this, not that)
 - Atman is everything (as a whole) but nothing (in particular)

"This invisible and subtle essence [Brahman] is the Spirit of the whole universe. That is reality. That is truth. TAT TVAM ASI."

–*Chandogya Upan. 6.14*

The Issue of Maya

5. Knowledge of Atman / Brahman brings freedom

- no subject-object distinction in selfless awareness → no experience of oneself as distinct from others → no experience of oneself undergoing pain or illness or death

"One who sees this [that Atman is Brahman] does not experience death, sickness, or distress anymore."

-Chandogya Upan. 7.26.2

The Issue of Maya

- even though world of everyday experience is not ultimate reality, it still exists
- the appearances are *illusions*, not *delusion*
- world of appearances is world of **Maya** = illusion

- knowledge of ultimate reality does not remove illusions
- but it does allow one to enjoy the appearances: this is the path of joy
 - think magic shows (see next slide)



Reading for Next Time

- *Upanishads*: 113-132
 - Chandogya Upanishad: 113-126
 - Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad: 127-132

also: **Quiz #2 next class!**
(covering material from Lectures 2 & 3)
