

Lecture 5

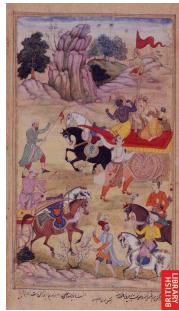
Arjuna's Dilemma

The *Bhagavad Gita*

- Bhagavad Gita = Song of the Lord
 - most popular philosophical-religious text in India
 - written circa 100 BCE, after founding of Buddhism
 - embedded in the *Mahabharata*
- Two main characters:
 - **Arjuna**: prince in warrior caste; the hero
 - **Krishna**: Arjuna's charioteer; Brahman incarnate

Arjuna's Situation

- Arjuna's family is vying for power against some relatives
- War is imminent
- Arjuna is commanded to lead his family's army



Arjuna's Dilemma

- Arjuna is torn between ahimsa and dharma
 - **Ahimsa** = the principle that one should cause no harm
 - **Dharma** = duty / responsibility (that accompanies one's caste status)

"When I see all my kinsmen, Krishna, who have come here on this field of battle, life goes from my limbs and I sink, my mouth is sear and dry; a trembling convulsion overcomes my body, and my hair shudders in horror.

I cannot see any glory if I kill my own kinsmen in the sacrifice of battle."

Arjuna's Request

- Arjuna asks Krishna for advice
- The *Bhagavad Gita* is Krishna's reply
 - also specifies a picture about the kind of life most worth living and what makes a life satisfying



Two Basic Themes

1. One should discover one's true self
 - **jiva** = the sense of oneself as a person in the world making choices
 - **Atman** = one's true self
 - Need to lose one's jiva sense of self
 - NB: This is not the same as "losing one's self"
 - This is a familiar theme from the *Upanishads*
2. The way to do this is through disciplined self-practice = **yoga**
 - more specific than *Upanishads* about how one should live
 - *General Suggestion*: yogic practice allows one to attain resignation *in* action without renunciation *of* action

Yoga

- BG suggests four kinds of yoga
 - each leads to moksha and loss of one's jiva sense of self
 - which one to follow is a function of one's temperament and situation
- *Unifying Idea*: each allows one to perform an action without associating one's *self* with the action



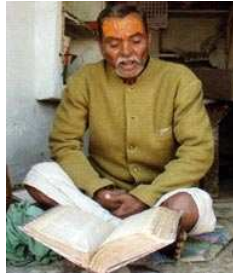
Raja Yoga

- Yoga of meditation
 - discussed in *Upanishads*
 - contentless awareness → no separation between knower and known
 - not very practicable for those with families or work obligations



Jñana Yoga

- Yoga of knowledge and study
 - understanding how things really are
 - aims at the kinds of experience we have when engrossed in a good book



Karma Yoga

- Yoga of work, of actions and consequences
 - aims at experiences like being "in the zone"
 - being "in the zone" is almost paradoxical
 - being "in the zone" is a paradigm case of being resigned in action without renouncing action itself



Bhakti Yoga

- Yoga of faithful devotion
 - intense dedication to a personal manifestation of Brahman
 - lose one's jiva sense of self through concentrated focusing on something other than oneself
 - object of devotion is a function of one's temperament



Krishna's Argument

1. Death is not eternal.
 - 2.13; 2.22
 - echoes popular belief in reincarnation
2. And Atman is eternal.
 - 2.12; 2.19
3. It is Arjuna's duty to participate in a justified war; and it is in his power to do so.
 - 2.31

"As the Spirit of our mortal body wanders on in childhood and youth and old age, the Spirit wanders on to a new body: of this the sage has no doubts."
(2.13)

"If any man thinks he slays, and if another thinks he is slain, neither knows the ways of truth. The Eternal in man cannot kill: the Eternal in man cannot die."
(2.19)

"Think thou also of thy duty and do not waver. There is no greater good than for a warrior to fight in a righteous war."
(2.31)

Krishna's Argument

4. Arjuna can renounce his jiva but still act, by throwing himself into the fight.
 - 2.47; 2.55-71; 3.1-35
5. Arjuna can find internal solace in devotion to Krishna and perform his duties wholeheartedly.
 - section 4

"Set thy heart upon thy work, but never upon its reward. Work not for a reward; but never cease to do thy work." (2.47)

The Moral

- Arjuna's true enemy is *not* his family
- His true enemy is ...
- Throwing himself into war is a way for Arjuna to kill his desires and attain moksha. (karma yoga)

Krishna's Instructions

- Krishna next instructs Arjuna in the different kinds of yoga

"The Spirit that is in all beings is immortal in them all: for the death of what cannot die, cease thou to sorrow." (2.30)

"Prepare for war with peace in thy soul. Be in peace in pleasure and in pain, in gain and in loss, in victory or in the loss of a battle." (2.38)

"This is the wisdom of Samkhya - the vision of the Eternal. Hear now the wisdom of Yoga, the path of the Eternal and freedom from bondage." (2.39)



Samkhya-Yoga

- The *BG* endorses the *complementarity* of metaphysics and practice
 - cognitive understanding and practical experience both lead to moksha
 - both paths lead to the same summit

"Ignorant men, but not the wise, say that Samkhya and Yoga are different paths; but he who gives all his soul to one reaches the end of the two. Because the victory won by the man of wisdom is also won by the man of good work. That man sees indeed the truth who sees that vision and creation are one." (5.4-5)

The Best Yoga

- *BG* emphasizes **bhakti yoga**, the path of faithful devotion

"Those who set their hearts on me [Krishna] and ever in love worship me, and who have unshakeable faith in me, these I hold as the best Yogis." (12.2)



Morality

- Bhakti yoga is superior to other kinds of yoga, because ...
 - The scriptures determine what the moral laws are
 - If an act violates one of these laws, then ...
 - Hence, if an act violates one of the laws, ...
 - In contrast, if an act is performed in devotion to Krishna, then ...

"Let the scriptures be your authority for determining what should be done and what should not be done."

- 16.24

"He who discards scriptural law and acts according to the promptings of his own desire does not attain either perfection or happiness or the supreme goal."

- 16.23

Renunciation in Action

- Bhakti yoga is also superior to the others because ...
 - if one devotes one's actions to a god, there is no need to worry about the consequences
 - only *intentions* matter

"Offer all thy works to God, throw off all selfish bonds, and do thy work. No sin can then stain thee, even as waters do not stain the leaf of the lotus." (5.10)

"He who works not for an earthly reward [i.e., consequences], but does the work to be done, he is a Sanyasi, he is a Yogi." (6.1)

Self-Veridical Knowledge

- Bhakti yoga allows one to attain moksha by tapping into self-veridical knowledge
 - there is no separation between the knower and the known, because not worrying about consequences allows one to act selflessly



Philosophical Worry #1

- Self-veridical knowledge is not an intersubjectively verifiable state
 - this is a familiar point from the *Upanishads*
- The experience of self-veridical knowledge confirms / proves itself
 - outside tests cannot verify it
- BUT: ...

Special Vision

- Arjuna has a special vision of Krishna as Brahman

"When Krishna, the God of Yoga, had spoken this, he then appeared to Arjuna in his supreme divine form. ...And Arjuna saw ... the whole universe in its variety, standing in a vast unity in the body of the God of gods." (11.9-13)

- Why? Because bhakti yoga allows him to see reality as it really is: love is a way of knowing



Philosophical Worry #2

- In love, the lover and beloved become one
 - no separation between knower and known → self-veridical knowledge
- BUT: ...

Exam 1
next Tuesday!