

# Upanishads

Kupperman

## Religion and Philosophy

- When is religion philosophy?
  - It's not when the religion is correct, nor when it appeals to faith, devotion, or revelation
- Religion is philosophy when there are *arguments* for one's stance toward the world
  - What is meant to persuade are arguments
    - Arguments are open to counter-arguments
- The philosophical approach to life is to provide rational argumentation as the justification for how to live one's life

## Themes

- Life and Death: Karmic Bondage
- What is the true nature of the Self? *Atman* is Brahman
- What is the true nature of reality? Reality is illusory
- How is one liberated? Knowledge and yoga

## Life and Death

- What comes after death? Where does this life lead?
- Hindu thought about life and death is conceived in relation to reincarnation
  - **Reincarnation:** the view that after death, one enters a new life
    - One will remember little to nothing of the past life upon entering the next life
- The quality of the next life depends on one's karma

## Karma

- **Law of Karma:** The quality of the next life depends on the virtues exhibited in this life
  - Karma means "to make" and refers to the making of the soul
  - Karma is a force arising from each action and determines future existence
    - Different Hindu traditions find karma in different substances: psychological, metaphysical (spiritual), moral, or physical (body mass and energy)
- Karma is like a seed which, given the right conditions, will grow and produce according to its own nature
- We reap what we sow, whether immediately or in the future

## Liberation from Samsara

- One can escape bondage to samsara
  - **Samsara:** the cycle of death, life, and re-death
  - **Moksha:** liberation from bondage
- Moksha is achieved by pursuing the path of joy and not the path of pleasure
  - What is the "path of joy" and what is the "path of pleasure"?
  - How do these two paths differ?

## *Atman* is Brahman

- *Atman* is Brahman
  - The quest to understand and make true this identity is central to the Upanishads
  - ***Atman***: the inner self that is unborn and undying
  - **Brahman**: unchanging ultimate reality that is the ground of all existence
- Ancient Indian Vedic thought was polytheistic (2000-1500 BCE)
  - Polytheism is the view that there are many gods
  - Upanishads conceive of the many gods as various dimensions of one divine reality, Brahman

## Personal Identity

## Questions to Ponder

- Do you persist through time?

Imagine yourself in high school. Now, imagine yourself 20 years from now looking at your picture in your high school yearbook.

What makes you think you are the same person now as then?

What thing(s) determine that you are that person in the yearbook and not some other person?

How can you be sure that you even existed back in high school?

Can you, based on your answers above, survive biological death?

## Distinction

- Numerical vs. Qualitative Identity
  - Numerical identity: what is required for some past, present or future entity to be you
    - Why is there only one you instead of several (past you, present you, and future you)?
  - Qualitative identity: two things are qualitatively identical when they have all the same properties
    - The desks in this room are qualitatively identical
    - Are the desks in this room numerically identical?
- No person remains qualitatively identical over time, although they may remain numerically identical

## Persistence Through Time

- The attempt to explain what makes you the same person through time concerns numerical identity
  - What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for you to remain the same thing through time?
  - Are you the same person now as when you were a fetus?
  - Will you be the same person in some future vegetative state as you are now?
- What makes you the person you are now?
- Will this *person* survive death?

## Who Are You? What Makes You Who You Are?

- Who are you? Who is the self that makes you the same person now as you were 20 years ago?
- How do you come to know this self? How do you come to know and identify this self that persists?
- We learn of the self through
  - Experience (Hume/Parfit)
  - Posit an entity as necessary for experience but separate from experience (Kant/Reid/Chisholm)
  - Core self that is unchanging (*atman*)

## *Atman* and Identity of a Person

- Just as the many gods have different personalities, so too humans have different personalities
- But, if the different gods are really different aspects of a divine reality so too distinct human persons are really different aspects of the same divine reality
  - One's personality is a superficial reality
  - True reality is found in *atman* as Brahman

## *Atman* Argument (Kupperman)

1. Each of us has a persistent "me."
  2. This "me" (as it intuitively seems) must be unchanging.
  3. But personality, thought patterns, and so on, do change.
  4. Therefore the persistent "me" cannot include such elements. (p. 11)
  5. If the persistent "me" lacks individuating characteristics, then one's "persistent me" is the same as anyone else's "persistent me."
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6. We are all the same "persistent me."

## Ultimate Reality

- The argument about persons concludes that all things with consciousness are ultimately the same
- The Upanishads think that the inner nature of all things are the same
  - The ultimate reality of all things is the same
  - This "field of inner realities" is Brahman
- Questions:
  - Are *atman* and Brahman the same things in two different aspects (heads and tails of the same coin)?
  - Is the identity relation of *atman* to Brahman one of parts to whole (drop of water in an ocean)?

## Implications

- When correctly understood, different gods of a single religion or multiple religions are different aspects of one divine reality (Brahman)
- Each person is part of a single, divine reality
  - Each person is god (Brahman)
- The entire universe is one thing
  - **Pantheism:** the view that everything is god and god is everything
- Ultimate reality never changes
  - Brahman is always Brahman
  - Change occurs in one's understanding that *atman* is Brahman

## Problems

- *Atman* is the self surrounded by layers of personality
  - These layers of personality are not you nor part of the real you
  - Nonetheless, these layers exist and the goal is to see beneath them to *atman* as Brahman
- Are the individual layers of personality also Brahman?
  - If so, then why is *atman* necessary?
  - If not, then not all is Brahman.

## Search for Atman

- Thinking or believing that *atman* is Brahman is not enough to achieve liberation (moksha)
- To achieve liberation, one must free oneself from the law of karma
- To free oneself from the law of karma requires one to live a life where one's thinking is constantly focused on and consumed by the idea that *atman* is Brahman
- Yoga is the technique by which the mind becomes focused on *atman* is Brahman

## State of Enlightenment

- The experience of *atman* is nondual
  - There is no experiential distinction between knower and known
  - There is no sense in which one psychically says, "there is *atman*"
  - Upon reflection, one might recognize *atman*. But, one would not recognize *atman* at the moment of experiencing it.
- It is a full-time job to experience *atman*
- Consumed by the view that *atman* is Brahman would result in the disappearance of all boundaries. All things would be seen as fundamentally the same.
- In the state of enlightenment, the enlightenment itself would be meaningless. All would be *atman* is Brahman.

## The Pleasure Trap

- Pleasures are a trap because they are temporary, transitory, fleeting experiences
  - Pleasurable experiences are connected to things that come into and go out of existence
  - Gaining pleasurable experiences leads one to want more pleasurable experiences lest one become bored, which in turn creates frustrations when not achieved
  - Pursuing or being affected by pleasures means that one is not focused on the ultimate, unchanging reality (Brahman)
- Caring for or pursuing pleasure means that all one's pleasant experiences will end and bring suffering

## Global (Objectless) Joy

- Joy stands in contrast to pleasure
  - Joy is not connected to objects, it is not transitory, it will not end, and it will not lead to suffering
- Joy is a state of experience . . .
  1. from inside the person and is not dependent on external objects or circumstances
  2. arising from an uncluttered and open psychic life
  3. arising from a well-functioning psychic life in tune with oneself.

## Kupperman on Joy

- "This concept of joy makes it understandable that the Upanishads view the search for enlightenment as a path that, without requiring antecedent suffering, will lead to predictable joy." (17)

## Superficial Reality

- You are not your personality. You are *atman*, which is Brahman.
  - Individual personality is an illusion.
  - But, the illusion can be experienced and is more vivid at the beginning of the search for *atman* than at the end.
- You are not changing. *Atman* is Brahman never changes.
- Searching for *atman* means that one will become more "Brahman-ish" while at the same time always having been Brahman.
  - Both statements are true given certain criteria (analogy of physical objects that are both dense and empty space).

## Ultimate Reality

- Ultimate Reality is understood when one understands and experiences the criteria of *atman* is Brahman
  - Using this criteria, one understands that all things are one and unchanging.
- Superficial Reality is understood from the perspective of one trapped by pleasures and experiences not engrossed by *atman* is Brahman.
- Truths can exist in both realms of reality.