

PHIL/SAN 250: Critical Thinking in Advaita Vedānta
Ph.D. Seminar, Fall 2013, Wed. 3-6 PM

Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University (West Bengal, India)
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Course description:

This course concerns critical thinking both *within* and *about* the philosophical tradition of Advaita Vedānta. We will read and discuss recent scholarly literature concerning some of the most important and interesting philosophical controversies and puzzles raised both by Advaitin thinkers themselves and by their philosophical opponents such as Rāmānuja and Madhva. For instance, does Śaṅkara lapse into eisegesis in his efforts to find characteristically Advaitic doctrines—such as the doctrine of *upādhi*-s and the illusoriness of the universe—in the Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and the *Brahmasūtras*? What is the nature of *avidyā*? What is the role and ontological status of *Īśvara* in Śaṅkara’s philosophy? Is the *jīvanmukta* fully liberated or does the *jīvanmukta* have a trace of ignorance that accounts for the *jīvanmukta*’s continued existence in the body? Do Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara hold different views on the question of whether the waking and dream states are on an ontological par? Is there *avidyā* in the state of deep sleep? Is *nirvikalpa samādhi* necessary for *brahmajñāna*? Does Swami Vivekananda’s modern exposition of Advaita Vedānta differ substantially from Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta? Each week, we will discuss tricky philosophical questions such as these.

Each week, every student is expected to write a 1-2 page critical response to the assigned article, which both summarizes the main points of the article and critically discusses different aspects of the article. Each student will read their critical response out loud at the beginning of class, and our discussion will start from points raised in these critical responses. At the end of the semester, students must submit a final research paper (15-20 double-spaced pages) on any topic relating to the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta.

Topic 1: Advaitic interpretation of the *prasthānatraya*

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, “The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads”
(in *Indian Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 106-220)

Ayon Maharaj, “Toward a New Hermeneutics of the *Bhagavad Gītā*: Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo, and the Secret of *Vijñāna*” (*Philosophy East and West* 65.4 (2015), 1209-1233)

V.S. Ghate, *The Vedānta: A Study of the Brahma-Sūtras with the Bhāṣyas of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, Madhva, and Vallabha* (1981)

Topic 2: *Īśvara*

Paul Hacker, “Distinctive Features of the Doctrine and Terminology of Śaṅkara: *Avidyā*, *Nāmarūpa*, *Māyā*, *Īśvara*,” (in *Philology and Confrontation*)

Topic 3: Advaita and *bhakti*

Lance Nelson, “The Ontology of *Bhakti*: Devotion as *Paramapuruṣārtha* in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism and Madhusūdana Sarasvatī” (*Journal of Indian Phil.* 32 (2004), 345-392)

Topic 4: *Jīvanmukti*

A.C. Das, “Advaita Vedānta and Liberation in Bodily Existence” (*Philosophy East and West* 4.2 (1954), 113-123)

G.R. Malkani, “A Note on Liberation in Bodily Existence” (*Philosophy East and West* 5.1 (1955), 69-73)

Lance Nelson, “Living Liberation in Śāṅkara and Classical Advaita: Sharing the Holy Waiting of God” (in Fort and Mumme, ed., *Living Liberation in Hindu Thought*, 17-62)

Christopher Framarin, “The Problem with Pretending: Rāmānuja’s Arguments against *Jīvanmukti*” (*Journal of Indian Philosophy* 37 (2009), 399-414)

Topic 5: *Avasthātraya*

Saccidānandendra Sarasvatī, *Mūlāvidyānirāsaḥ* (selections)

Martha Doherty, “A Contemporary Debate among Advaita Vedantins on the Nature of *Avidyā*” (*Journal of Indian Philosophy* 33 (2005), 209-241)

Andrew Fort, “Dreaming in Advaita Vedānta” (*Phil. East and West* 35.4 (1985), 377-86)

Chakaravarthi Ram-Prasad, “Dreams and Reality: The Śāṅkarite Critique of *Vijñānavāda*” (*Phil. East and West* 43.3 (1993), 405-455)

Topic 6: *Samādhi*

Michael Comans, “The Question of the Importance of *Samādhi* in Modern and Classical Advaita Vedānta” (*Philosophy East and West* 43.1 (1993), 19-38)

Topic 7: *Adhyāsa*

Daya Krishna, “*Adhyāsa*: A Non-Advaitic Beginning in Śaṅkara Vedānta” (*Philosophy East and West* 15.3 (1965), 243-249)

G.R. Malkani, “A Discussion of Daya Krishna’s Views on Advaitic *Adhyāsa*” (*Philosophy East and West* 16.1 (1966), 81-83)

Topic 8: “Neo-Vedānta”

Paul Hacker, “Schopenhauer and Hindu Ethics” (in *Philology and Confrontation*)

Paul Hacker, “Vivekananda’s Religious Nationalism” (in *Philology and Confrontation*)

Andrew Nicholson, “Vivekananda’s Non-Dual Ethics in the History of Vedānta”
(forthcoming)

Topic 9: Advaita and Western philosophy

J.F. Staal, *Advaita and Neoplatonism* (1961)

Ayon Maharaj, “Śrī Harṣa *contra* Hegel: Monism, Skeptical Method, and the Limits of Reason” (*Philosophy East and West* 64.1 (2014), 82-108)