

Graduate Seminar in Vedānta

Fall 2021
Wed 3-6 p.m.
Location TBD

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Office Hours: Friday 10:30-11:45 a.m.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The main purpose of this course is to carefully study four prominent Vedāntic traditions of India. These traditions, whose philosophical and praxic frameworks are grounded in exegeses of the *Vedānta Sūtra*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, and Upaniṣads, have played a prominent role in India's intellectual history. In particular, we will look at Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta (non-dualism), Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta (qualified non-dualism), Madhva's Dvaita Vedānta (dualism), and Caitanya's Acintya Bhedābheda Vedānta (incomprehensible difference-cum-nondifference). The course's various readings will examine each of these traditions with both a broad and a narrow lens. Attention will be paid to topics such as God-self relationships, soteriology, spiritual praxis, and exegetical interpretations, etc. At the end of the course, you should have an awareness of the significance of the Vedāntic traditions, a strong understanding of their philosophical and soteriological frameworks, and knowledge of the interpretative moves made by each tradition.

REQUIRED READINGS

Bartley, C.J. 2015. *The Theology of Rāmānuja: Realism and Religion*. London: Routledge.

Holdrege, Barbara. 2015. *Bhakti and Embodiment: Fashioning Divine Bodies and Devotional Bodies in Kṛṣṇa Bhakti*. New York: Routledge.

Maharaj, Ayon (ed.). 2020. *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Vedānta*. New York: Bloomsbury. (Link to a free copy of the selected readings in course resources)

Prabhupāda, A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami. 1972. *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

Rambachan, Anantanand. 2006. *The Advaita Worldview: God, World, and Humanity*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Sampatkumaran, M. R. 1985 (trans.). *The Gītābhāṣya of Rāmānuja*. Bomba: Marya Indological Research Institute. (Link to a free online copy in course resources)

Sarma, Deepak. 2003. *An Introduction to Mādhva Vedānta*. London: Routledge.

Sastry, Alladi Mahadeva (trans.). 1977. *The Bhagavad Gita with the Commentary of Sri*

Sankaracarya. Madras: Samata Books. (Link to a free online copy in course resources)

Sonde, Nagesh D. 2011. *Sri Madhvacarya Bhagavad Gita Bhashya and Tatparya Nirnaya*.
Mumbai: Self-published by author. (Link to a free online copy in course resources)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There are a total of 1000 points possible in this course, allocated in the following way:

Attendance and Participation (300 points)

Regular attendance in class is mandatory. You get one “free” unexcused absence. However, every absence thereafter will deduct 25 points from your attendance grade. These absences may be excused if there are good reasons for doing so (sickness, travelling for sports, doctor appointment, etc.). There are a total of 150 points you can acquire via attendance.

In addition, students are expected to actively participate in class by asking questions, participating in discussions, making insightful comments, etc. There are a total of 150 points you can acquire via participation. It should be emphasized that simply showing up to class will not suffice to get the full 150 points.

Response Papers (300 points)

For every class after the first class, you are required to write a response paper of roughly 800-1200 words to the readings for the week. These papers are due when class begins. You have the flexibility to write about anything so long as it pertains to the readings. However, these response papers should illustrate that you have carefully read the readings and have thought critically about the issues or topics discussed therein. Each short response counts for 25 points, and you must write 12 short responses to get the full 300 points. Note, there are 13 classes you can write a paper for – so it is permissible to omit 1 paper during the course. However, you can also opt to write 13 response papers, in which case I will drop the response paper that you received the lowest grade on and instead base your grade on your highest 12 response papers. Points will be deducted from papers if it is evident from reading them that you did not carefully read the readings and think critically about them.

Final Paper (400 points)

The final paper counts for 400 points. The paper should be 20-25 pages, double spaced, in Times New Roman font. The final paper can be on any topic related to Vedānta. These papers should not merely describe one of the Vedāntic traditions we have covered – they should engage critically with one or more of the Vedāntic traditions we have covered and address questions such as “how does Rāmānuja’s interpretation of the *mahā-vākyas* differ from Śaṅkara’s interpretation of them?” A good paper might also say, compare two Vedāntic traditions and analyze their views on a particular motif such as the soteriological efficacy of devotion. Reading and referencing sources that we have not covered in classes is a plus; however, it is possible to get the full points by focusing primarily on assigned readings provided that one’s analysis is insightful and demonstrates careful attention to the readings.

GRADING

Letter Grades (In Points)

930-1000 = A
900-929 = A-
870-899 = B+
830-869 = B
800-829 = B-
770-799 = C+
730-769 = C
700-729 = C-
670-699 = D+
630-669 = D
600-629 = D-
Below 600 = F

COURSE SCHEDULE

Aug 25: Introduction

Readings: Ayon Maharaj, *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Vedānta*. Introduction.

Sep 1: Advaita Vedānta Part 1

Readings:

Anantanand Rambachan, *The Advaita Worldview*.

Sep 8: Viśiṣṭādvaita Part 1

Readings:

C.J. Bartley, *The Theology of Rāmānuja*.

Sep 15: Dvaita Vedānta Part 1

Readings:

Deepak Sarma, *An Introduction to Mādhva Vedānta*.

Sep 22: Acintya Bhedābhedā Vedānta Part 1

Readings:

Barbara Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment*. Introduction and chapters 1-3.

Sep 29: Acintya Bhedābhedā Vedānta Part 1 cont.

Readings:

Barbara Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment*. Chapters 4-6 and Conclusion.

Oct 6: Advaita Vedānta Part 2

Readings:

Alladi Sastry, *The Bhagavad Gita with the Commentary of Sri Sankaracarya*. Chapters 1-9.

Oct 13: Advaita Vedānta Part 2 cont.

Readings:

Alladi Sastry, *The Bhagavad Gita with the Commentary of Sri Sankaracarya*. Chapters 9-18.

Oct 20: Viśiṣṭādvaita Part 2

Readings:

M.R. Sampatkumaran, *The Gītābhāṣya of Rāmānuja*. Chapters 1-9.

Oct 27: Viśiṣṭādvaita Part 2 cont.

Readings:

M.R. Sampatkumaran, *The Gītābhāṣya of Rāmānuja*. Chapters 9-18.

Nov 3: Dvaita Vedānta Part 2

Readings: Nagesh, Sonde, *Sri Madhvacarya Bhagavad Gita Bhashya and Tatparya Nirnaya*. Chapters 1-9.

Nov 10: Dvaita Vedānta Part 2 cont.

Readings: Nagesh, Sonde, *Sri Madhvacarya Bhagavad Gita Bhashya and Tatparya Nirnaya*. Chapters 9-18.

Nov 17: Acintya Bhedābheda Vedānta Part 2

Readings: A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda, *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. Introduction and chapters 1-9.

Nov 24: No class

Readings:

Dec 1: Acintya Bhedābheda Vedānta Part 2 cont.

Readings:

A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda, *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. Chapters 9-18.

December 15: Final Papers Due