

RWCLS Colloquium

EMOTIONS IN THE BHAGAVAD GITA

My paper aims to carry forward the cross-cultural dimension in the philosophy of emotion especially in relation to the Hindu text, the Bhagavad Gita or the Gita. Both Bilimoria & Johnson contend that the Gita offers a view “regarding the regulation of emotions and the appropriate role of emotions in moral reasoning.” They also argue that the Gita provides us with a social construction view of emotions where the moral import of a dilemma or a counsel is contextualized in terms of the emotions appropriate to the specifics of one’s personal and cultural settings. My paper explores the relationship between emotions and morality in the Gita from a different direction. By focusing on a concept central to the Gita’s morality, namely, equanimity (samatvam), I consider its conceivability as an emotion. Equanimity, in its cognitive dimension, involves mastering one’s mind and senses. A typical interpretation is that emotions play no role in this process. However, the Gita also depicts the yogi not only as equanimous but also as marked by positive emotions such as compassion, love and joy. My paper develops a theory of emotions in the Gita, especially by considering whether equanimity can be viewed as primarily a result of social construction.

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