

Buddhist Philosophy

PHIL 030
Syllabus – Spring 2024

Important Information:

Instructor: Rosanna Picascia
E-mail: rpicascl@swarthmore.edu
Day/Time: M/W/F, 10:30am-11:20pm,
Location: Beardsley 316
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2-4pm

Course Description:

This course explores some of the central arguments and debates in Indian Buddhist philosophy, spanning from the beginning of the Common Era up until the eleventh century. Topics include the following: the problem of human suffering, the existence of the self and the external world, the nature and source of mental content, epistemological skepticism, the rationality of anger, ethical selflessness, and the problem of other minds. Students will have the opportunity to reconstruct and critically analyze the arguments of Buddhist philosophers in their historical contexts, as well as ask what we can learn from them today.

Course Goals:

(1) To engage with and learn from brilliant philosophers from the past; (2) To learn how to read, think, and write about complex philosophical problems in a way that is both personally engaging and academically rigorous; and (3) To learn how to debate with one's peers about seemingly intractable problems in philosophy.

Course Readings:

You do not need to purchase any course materials. All the course materials will be available through Moodle.

Assignments:

Email to a friend:

Your first writing assignment is to write a short email (**about 500 words**) to a friend explaining what it means to say that the person is a convenient designator. Then, send the email to your friend (and cc me). Your sole aim in this assignment is to explain this concept in clear and accessible language so that your friend can understand.

Argument maps:

The readings for this course are challenging, but rewarding. They are best read slowly and carefully, and, if time-permitting, more than once. To help you digest, organize, and preserve what you've understood from the weekly readings, you will prepare a short reconstruction of the central argument (or one important sub-argument) from the week's primary text. You can think of this like an informal outline, but it can take other forms, like a diagram, flow chart, etc. While the content of Argument Maps is not graded, you will need to complete 10 to receive full credit for this component of your grade.

Below are some helpful questions to consider when preparing your outline:

- 1) What is the central philosophical problem/question the author is trying to solve?
- 2) What is the author's central position or claim?
- 3) What reasons does the author give for their claims?
- 4) How would you evaluate the author's argument? What position do you take on the topic or philosophical question?

Course engagement:

I define course engagement as the completion of any concrete course-related participation activity. Examples of course engagement include (but are not limited to) the following: participating in small group work, attentive listening, asking questions in class, contributing to class discussion, and coming to office hours.

Your grade will be based on 1) the completion and submission of small group activities centered on constructing or responding to arguments and 2) your own documentation and self-assessment of your course engagement. Regarding the first component, there will be weekly small group activities that will be collected and assessed for completion. Regarding the second component, three times during the semester, you will document your class engagement by filling out a self-assessment rubric.

Papers:

A Midterm paper and a Final paper are required for this course. The Midterm paper should be 6-8 pages (double spaced, 12-pt font), and the Final paper should be 8-10 pages (double-spaced, 12-pt font). Each paper will follow the traditional philosophical format: presenting and explaining a philosopher's argument on a particular philosophical question, anticipating objections to the argument, and developing your own argument on the question. I will distribute paper prompts in advance of both papers.

Grading:

- A. Midterm paper, 30% of overall grade
- B. Final paper, 30% of overall grade
- C. Argument maps, 20% of overall grade
- D. Email to a friend, 10% of overall grade

E. Course engagement, 10% of overall grade

Laptop and phone policy:

Laptops (and phones) are not permitted because they are bad for the classroom environment. The best evidence available suggests that laptops distract from learning, not only for the laptop users, but additionally, for those around them. Exceptions will be made based on need (see Accommodations Statement below).

Printing primary reading material:

Since the course material is available online or in pdf format, you will need to print out the **primary reading material**, which we will reference in class. Supplemental reading (background or commentary) does not need to be printed. Instead, make note of anything from the supplemental reading that you wish to discuss in class and bring those notes to class.

There is no charge for printing. Here is a list of printers available in public computing areas and residence halls- <https://kb.swarthmore.edu/display/PRIN/Printing+for+Students>

Accommodations Statement:

If you believe you need accommodations for a disability or a chronic medical condition, please contact Student Disability Services via email at studentdisabilityservices@swarthmore.edu to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs. As appropriate, the office will issue students with documented disabilities or medical conditions a formal Accommodations Letter. Since accommodations require early planning and are not retroactive, please contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. For details about the accommodations process, visit the Student Disability Services website. You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs. However, all disability-related accommodations must be arranged, in advance, through Student Disability Services.

Course Calendar

Week 1 (1/22): Course introduction: Buddhism as philosophy

1/22 (M): Overview of course content; in-class activity

First assignment: Read syllabus by next class

1/24 (W): Finish up in-class activity; discuss syllabus

1/26 (F): Buddhism as philosophy (Read material listed below)

Required reading:

Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, "Chapter 1: Introduction: Buddhism as Philosophy?"

Amber Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, "Chapter 1: The Buddha's Suffering."

Optional reading:

Jay L. Garfield and Bryan W. Van Norden, "[If Philosophy Won't Diversify, Let's Call It What It Really Is](#)," *The New York Times*

Week 2 (1/29): Introduction to self and the problem of suffering

Required reading:

Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, “Chapter 2: Empty Persons”

***Note: The primary reading for this week (selections of the Buddha’s discourses, i.e. *suttas*) is contained within Siderits’s chapter. In particular, pay attention to (and print out) the selection from the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* (pp. 51-52) and the *Milindapañha* (pp. 67-71 and 77-78).

Optional:

Amber Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, “Chapter 2: Practice and Theory of No-Self”

***Email to a friend due Monday, February 5th, before class**

UNIT I. INTRODUCTION TO ABHIDHARMA

***Argument Maps start this week**

Week 3 (2/5): Dharmas and momentariness: Vasubandhu (4th-5th cent) vs. the Buddhist Personalists (Pudgalavādins)

Required primary reading:

Vasubandhu’s *Treatise on the Negation of the Person* (*Pudgalapratishedhaprakaraṇa*) from his auto-commentary to the *Treasury of Metaphysics* (*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*) **sections 1-5, pp. 350-357** [section 6 is optional], trans. Matthew Kapstein, in *Reasons Traces*, Wisdom Publications

Required background reading:

Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, “Chapter 5: Abhidharma: The Metaphysics of Empty Persons,” **only sections 5.3-5.5**

Helpful commentary:

Amber Carpenter, “Persons Keeping Their Karma Together: The Reasons for the pudgalavāda in Early Buddhism,” in *The Moon Points Back* (ed. Koji Tanaka, etc)

Week 4 (2/12): Vasubandhu vs. Nyāya on the existence of a substantial self:

Explaining memory, possession, and agency

Required primary reading:

Vasubandhu, *Treatise on the Negation of the Person*, **section 7, pp. 353–369**, trans. M. Kapstein in *Reason’s Traces*, Wisdom Publications

Required commentary:

Amber Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, “Chapter 6: Irresponsible selves, responsible non-selves.”

UNIT II. INTRODUCTION TO YOGĀCĀRA

Week 5 (2/19): Vasubandhu’s attack on material objects

Required primary reading:

Vasubandhu’s *Twenty Verses* (*Vimśikā*)

Required Commentary:

Amber Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, “Chapter 7: The third turning: Yogācāra,” **only pages pp. 137-157**

Week 6 (2/26): Dignāga (c. 480-540) on the source and nature of perceptual content

Required primary:

Dignāga, *Investigation of the Percept* and auto-commentary (*Ālambanaparīkṣā* and *Ālambanaparīkṣāvṛtti*), **pp. 38-47**, trans. Douglas Duckworth et al., in *Dignāga’s Investigation of the Percept*, Oxford University Press, 2016

Required background

David Eckel, Jay Garfield, and John Powers, “Chapter 1: The Subject Matter of *Investigation of the Percept*,” **only pp. 3-27**, in Douglas Duckworth et al., *Dignāga’s Investigation of the Percept*, Oxford University Press, 2016.

Optional Commentary:

Margherita Serena Saccone, “The Conception of Atoms as Substantially Existing in Śubhagupta”

UNIT III. INTRODUCTION TO MADHYAMAKA

Week 7 (3/4): Nāgārjuna (c. 2nd century CE) on emptiness and dependent origination

Required primary reading:

Nāgārjuna’s *Dispeller of Disputes (Vigrahavyāvartanī)*, trans. Jan Westerhoff, Oxford University Press, 2010.

Reading Cluster #1:

Section 3.1: The status of the theory of emptiness [Objection/Response v. 1-4/v. 21-29]

Section 3.3 Intrinsically good things [Objection/Response v. 7-8/v. 52-56]

Section 3.7: The Mirage Analogy [Objection/Response v. 13-16/v. 65-67]

Section 3.8 Emptiness and Reasons [Objection/Response v. 17-19/v. 68]

Section 3.10: Conclusion: v. 70

*****Important note about this text:** This primary text is divided into two parts. The earlier verses delineate **objections** to Nāgārjuna’s theory of emptiness, while the later verses delineate his **responses** to those objections. This most fruitful way of reading this text is to read “Section 3. Commentary.” In his commentary, Westerhoff arranges the text by topic and so that the objections in the first part are immediately followed by the respective replies in the second part. This makes it easier to read as a philosophical text. You also get the benefit of reading Westerhoff’s commentary on the verses.

Helpful commentary:

Amber Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, “Chapter 4: The second Buddha’s greater vehicle,” **especially pp.78-92**

Due:

Midterm Paper: Wednesday, March 6th, before class

Spring Break: March 11th-15th

Week 8 (3/18): Nāgārjuna and epistemological skepticism

Required primary reading:

Nāgārjuna's *Dispeller of Disputes (Vigrahavyāvartanī)*, trans. Jan Westerhoff, Oxford University Press, 2010.

Reading Cluster #2:

Section 3.2: Epistemology [Objection/Response v. 5-6/v. 30-51]

Required commentary:

Johnathan Stoltz, *Illuminating the Mind*, chapter 7: Skepticism, **only 7.2 and 7.3 (pp.147-161)**

Week 9 (3/25): Śāntideva (c. 700-750) on the rationality of anger

Required primary reading:

Śāntideva's *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life (Bodhicaryāvatāra)*, Chapter 6: The Perfection of Patience, **especially verses 22-32**, (trans. V. Wallace and B.A. Wallace, Shambhala, 1997)

Helpful Commentary:

- Allie Aitken, "What's wrong with anger?" *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, Winter 2022
- Charles Goodman, "Uses of the illusion of agency: Why some Buddhists should believe in free will" in *Buddhist Perspectives on Free Will: Agentless agency?* (ed. Rick Repetti)
- Mark Siderits, "Paleo-Compatibilism and Buddhist Reductionism," *Sophia* 47 (2008): 29-42.
- Krista K. Thomason, *Dancing with the Devil: Why Bad Feelings Make Life Good* [Chapter 4: Anger]

Week 10 (4/1): Śāntideva on metaphysical and ethical selflessness

Śāntideva's *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life (Bodhicaryāvatāra)*, Chapter 8: The Perfection of Meditation, **especially verses 90-103**, (trans. V. Wallace and B.A. Wallace, Shambhala, 1997)

Required Commentary:

Selected chapters from *Moonpaths: Ethics and Emptiness* (Ed. The Cowherds). In particular, the following chapters are relevant:

Chapter 4: The Śāntideva Passage: *Bodhicaryāvatāra* VIII.90–103 (Jay Garfield, Stephen Jenkins, and Graham Priest)

Chapter 7: Does "Buddhist Ethics" Exist? (Mark Siderits)

UNIT IV: BUDDHIST EPISTEMOLOGY

Week 11 (4/8): Dharmakīrti and Dharmottara (c.740-800) on perception and perceptual judgement

Required primary reading:

Selections from *A Short Treatise on Reasoning (Nyāyabindu)*, trans. Dan Arnold in "Dharmakīrti and Dharmottara on the Intentionality of Perception" (*Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*)

Required background:

Johnathan Stoltz, *Illuminating the Mind*, chapter 3: Perception (**only sections 3.1 and 3.2**)

Required commentary:

George Dreyfus, "Can the fool lead the blind? Perception and the given in Dharmakīrti's thought"

Week 12 (4/15): Inferential reasoning and Ratnakīrti (c. 1000-1050) on the problem of other minds

Required primary reading:

Ratnakīrti's *Refutation of Other Minds (Santānāntaradūṣaṇa)*, pp. 203-212, trans. Jonardon Ganeri, *The Self: Naturalism, Consciousness, and the First-Person Perspective*, Oxford University Press, 2012.

Required commentary:

Masahiro Inami, "The Problem of Other Minds in the Buddhist Epistemological Tradition," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 29:4 (2011), 465-483.

Helpful background:

Johnathan Stoltz, *Illuminating the Mind*, chapter 4: Inference (you can skip section 4.5)

Week 13 (4/22): Dharmakīrti, Śāntarakṣita (c. 725-788), Kamalaśīla (c.740-795) on testimonial knowledge, scripture, and practical rationality

Required primary:

Selections from Dharmakīrti's *Commentary on the Sources of Knowledge (PV 1.214-223)*, along with auto-commentary, (PVSV), trans. in Dunne (2004).

Required background:

Jonathan Stoltz, *Illuminating the Mind*, chapter 5: Testimony (**only sections 5.0 and 5.1**)

Required commentary:

Sara McClintock, "Kamalaśīla and Śāntarakṣita on scripture and reason – The limits and extent of "practical rationality" in the *Tattvasamgraha* and *Pañjikā*" in *Scriptural Authority, Reason, and Action* (eds. Vincent Eltschinger and Helmut Krasser)

Optional commentary:

Rosanna Picascia, "Our Epistemic Dependence on Others: Nyāya and Buddhist Accounts of Testimony as a Source of Knowledge" *The Journal of Hindu Studies*

Week 14 (4/29): Catch up OR the Buddhist theory of exclusion (*apoha*)

Required primary reading:

Selections from *Dharmakīrti's theory of exclusion (apoha), Part I. On concealing. An annotated translation of Pramāṇavārttikasvavṛtti 24,16–45,20 (Pramāṇavārttika 1.40–91)* (trans. Vincent Eltschinger, etc)

Selections from *Dignāga's philosophy of language: Pramāṇasamuccayavṛtti V on anyāpoha* (trans. Ole Pind)

Background/commentary:

-John Taber, "Apoha for beginners" *The Journal of Hindu Studies*

-Selections from *Apoha: Buddhist Nominalism and Human Cognition* (eds. Arindam Chakrabarti, Mark Siderits, and Tom Tillemans)

Final paper due Wednesday, May 8th, by 5pm (last day of reading period)