

Buddhist Philosophy (Asynchronous)
(Tentative)

Fall 2020
Professor Tao Jiang

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Zoom Office Hour: TBA

Course Description:

This class is an introduction to some of the foundational doctrines of Indian Buddhist philosophy. We start with the received teachings of the historical Buddha that center on the problem of suffering, the nature of the self and a distinct conception of reality. We survey some of the major schools of Buddhist philosophy that have developed from the Buddha's teachings and our focus will be on the two major schools of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism, Madhyamaka and Yogācāra.

We will focus on teachings of two critical figures: the historical Buddha (founder) and Nāgārjuna (the best-known Indian Buddhist philosopher). It offers an extensive introduction to foundational Buddhist doctrines, such as the Four Noble Truths, dependent origination, not-self/no-self, emptiness, and theories of mind, through a close reading of important primary texts with proper historical contextualization.

Core Curriculum Goals:

This course fulfills the following goals in the core curriculum: HST, AHo.

- Explain the development of some aspect of a society or culture over time. [HST]
- Employ historical reasoning to study human endeavors, using appropriate assumptions, methods, evidence, and arguments. [HST]
- Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production. [AHo]

Course Requirements:

Those who enroll under 01:840:369 and 01:730:369 (Buddhist Philosophy)

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| * Pop quizzes after each session | 15% |
| @ Two reflection essays | 10% |
| • Two Exams | 50% |
| # One Book Report | 25% |

* After watching the video and going over the reading materials for each session, there will be a pop quiz, consisting of multiple-choice questions for you to answer. The pop quiz is open book, but you cannot consult each other about it.

@ Everybody is required to write two 2-page reflection essays in the course of this semester, each worth 5 points. I have listed two topics for you to choose from in writing the reflection essays. Each topic has several questions to help you frame your reflection and steer your focus to the critical points in that topic. You can write on any or all aspects of that topic. The due date is listed on the course schedule below. Reflection essays have to be submitted to Canvas. Email submission or late submission will be rejected.

● The two exams are open book, but academic integrity rules are strictly observed. This means that you can consult books and your notes when answering the questions but cannot consult each other in any way. Answers should not be simply copied from the book verbatim. Please use your own language to paraphrase the readings when answering the questions. You can take it within any 2-hour window from the 24-hour period stipulated in the syllabus. Once you have started, you will not be able to stop the clock. More detailed instructions will be provided before the exams.

You are required to write a 7-page (double-spaced, size 12 font, Times New Roman font) book report on book E listed below by the end of the semester. Basically, you should follow this structure: identify the central thesis and summarize how the author presents it through several sub-theses. It should be treated as a summary and analysis of the book, NOT an opinion piece. Please use word or pdf format and submit it to Canvas by 11:59 pm on Wednesday, December 16, 2020. Email submissions will be rejected. Late submission will result in a 5-point-per-day reduction of the grade.

Those who enroll under 01:840:423 (Seminar in Buddhism)

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| * Open-book pop quizzes after each session | 15% |
| @ Two reflection essays | 10% |
| ◆ Term Paper | 75% |

* After watching the video and going over the reading materials for each session, there will be a pop quiz, consisting of multiple-choice questions for you to answer. The pop quiz is open book, but you cannot consult each other about it.

@ Everybody is required to write two 2-page reflection essays in the course of this semester, each worth 5 points. I have listed two topics for you to choose from in writing the reflection essays. Each topic has several questions to help you frame your reflection and steer your focus to the critical points in that topic. You can write on any or all aspects of that topic. The due date is listed on the course schedule. Email submission or late submission will be rejected.

◆ The students who take this course as a seminar are required to write a research paper (approximately 20 pages) on a topic of Buddhist philosophy. Please consult with the instructor about the topic before starting the research for the paper. It is due on Canvas by 11:59pm on Wednesday, December 16, 2020.

Course Policies:

- The class strictly follows the university policy on academic integrity. It is available at <http://nbacademicintegrity.rutgers.edu>

Textbooks (additional readings will be posted online):

- A) *The Foundations of Buddhism*, by Rupert Gethin. Oxford.
- B) *Buddhism as Philosophy*, by Mark Siderits. Hackett.
- C) *Early Buddhist Discourses*, by John Holder. Hackett.

- D) *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, translated by Jay Garfield. Oxford.
- E) *Contexts and Dialogue: Yogācāra Buddhism and Modern Psychology on the Subliminal Mind*, by Tao Jiang. Hawaii.

Tentative Schedule:

This is an online, asynchronous, course. Before starting this course, everybody is required to watch the **introductory video** wherein I lay out the overall design of this course, its structure, requirements, and how to read the syllabus. To make sure that you watch the introductory video and understand the syllabus, you need to answer several multiple-choice questions about the syllabus to finish the introduction to this course.

You should stick to the following routine to structure your study: watch the video clip for each lesson, study the readings, and answer the multiple-choice questions in the pop quiz for each lesson.

Each week there is a synchronous online meeting/office hour (time to be determined later after surveying the students' availability). While you are not required to attend, I strongly advice everybody to attend the weekly synchronous meetings as it will be helpful to discuss issues that arise from the course each week. If you have any question about the reading assignment, especially the primary texts we use in the class, that will be a good occasion to bring them up.

The course is structured on a weekly basis. Each week's coursework has to be finished by Saturday of that week. This means that you cannot wait till the second week to do the first week's work or try to do the second week's work in the third week. If you do not finish the assignment for one week, you will not be able to access the following week's materials as each week has as prerequisite the prior week's work. This also means that you will not be able to take the exams without finishing the weekly assignments by every Saturday.

Week 1 (Sept. 1-4): The historical Buddha and his teachings

Week 2 (Sept. 8-11): Four Noble Truths (I)

Week 3 (Sept. 14-18): Four Noble Truths (II)

Week 4 (Sept. 21-25): Problem of the Self

1st reflection essay due on Saturday, Sept. 26

Two topics to choose from:

- A) **Suffering**: Does suffering have meanings? Give an example of suffering that is meaningful to you and another that is meaningless. What are their differences? What does meaning do to the way suffering is experienced and interpreted?
- B) **Control**: Give an example of you in control of your actions, thoughts, or feelings under some circumstances and another example of you losing control. What are the differences between the two examples?

Week 5 (Sept. 28-Oct. 2): Abhidharma Buddhism

Week 6 (Oct. 5-9): **1st exam on Wednesday, Oct. 7**

Week 7 (Oct. 12-16): Intro to Mahāyāna Buddhism

Week 8 (Oct. 19-23): Nāgārjuna (I)

Week 9 (Oct. 26-30): Nāgārjuna (II)

Week 10 (Nov. 2-6): Nāgārjuna (III)

2nd reflection essay due on Saturday, Nov. 7

Two subjects to choose from:

- A) Time: What does a typical day look like in your shelter-at-home? Has that changed the way you experience time? If so, how? Is time dependent on something or is it always the same? Why or why not?
- B) Emptiness: Describe an empty object in granular details. Does it have an essence? If so, what is it? If not, what makes it what it is? Does it have any meaning in your life? Where does its meaning come from? Does its emptiness make it meaningless? Why or why not?

Week 11 (Nov. 9-13): Buddhist epistemology

Week 12 (Nov. 16-20): **2nd exam on Wednesday, Nov. 18**

Week 13 (Nov. 23-25): Yogācāra Buddhism (I)

Week 14 (Nov. 30- Dec.4): Yogācāra Buddhism (II)

Week 15 (Dec. 7-10): Yogācāra Buddhism (III)

Book report or term paper due on Canvas by Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2020