

BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

PL 298B, Spring 2007
MW 11:00 – 12:15 pm; Miller 319
859-4551
Office hours: M: 4:00-5:00, and by appointment.

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Description: This course is an introduction to some of the core themes in Buddhist philosophy in India, China, and Japan. Together we will explore Buddhist accounts of language, consciousness, meaning, personal and social ethics, the nature and purpose of human existence, and some of the varieties of meditation, their functions, and their practice.

Format: Class meetings will combine informal lecture with seminar-style discussion. Class periods will be devoted to clarifying the most prominent points in the assigned readings and reflecting together on the questions and ideas that they raise.

Texts: There are six texts required for this course; they should be available in the Colby Bookstore: (1) Holder, *Early Buddhist Discourses* (EBD); (2) Williams, *Buddhist Thought* (BT); (3) Garfield, *Empty Words* (EW); (4) Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra of the Six Patriarch* (PS); (5) Kasulis, *Zen Action/Zen Person* (ZAZP); (6) Tanahashi, *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen* (MD). Additionally, there will be some readings on Electronic Reserve (ER).

Attendance: You are expected to attend all class meetings prepared to participate in class discussion. Preparation includes at least one careful reading of the assigned text and bringing written questions and notes to class. For each class meeting, set aside about three hours for preparation. “Participation” means an active engagement in class discussion, which may include particularly attentive listening and making space for others, as well as asking other students questions and responding to their comments. Because this class will include much discussion, careful preparation, participation, and regular attendance is necessary for its success. I expect you to make a commitment to attend every class and arrive on time, both for your own personal learning and for the contribution you will make to the class community. For this reason, if you miss more than two classes or come late to a number of classes, your final grade will be lowered.

Weekly Assignments: Beginning the first week of class, a brief, written response to the assigned reading will be due each week. You may hand it in on Monday or Wednesday. The weekly response should be at least 500 words (not including quotations), and should accomplish two tasks. First, answer all the questions listed below the assigned reading for that day. These answers will generally require you to set the context for your response and explore a particular theme. Second, please conclude your weekly response with two questions that the text raises for you. Occasionally, the weekly assignment will be specifically tailored to a particular reading or theme and will have a different format.

The weekly assignments are intended to increase your engagement with the texts so that everyone is ready for discussion in class. Additionally, these assignments will help cultivate a habit of reading critically and giving reasons for your opinions, two of the most important skills you will cultivate in a philosophy class. Your writing should reflect a serious and sincere engagement with the text.

There will be ten weekly assignments. You can choose which weeks that you do not hand in an assignment, but no more than one assignment will be accepted each week. Together, the ten weekly assignments will be worth 30% of your final grade.

Papers: There are two papers required for this course. The first paper will be 7-8 pages and is worth 25% of your grade. The first draft of this paper is due on Monday, March 19th. You will exchange papers with a classmate and review/critique each other's work. The peer review is due on Wednesday, March 21st. The written peer review is worth 5% of your final grade. The second draft is due on Monday, April 2nd. I will return your papers with my comments on Monday, April 9th. That week I will be happy to meet with you to discuss the papers and comments. The final draft of the first paper is due on Monday, April 16th.

The final paper will be 10-12 pages long and worth 30% of your grade; it is due on Wednesday, May 16th. I will schedule individual meetings on Thursday, May 4th and Friday, May 5th to discuss your final paper.

All written assignments for this class should be typed, with one-inch margins, 12 point font, in Times New Roman. The weekly assignments should be single-spaced; the papers should be double-spaced. Put your name, my name, the course title, and the date on the first page. Number and staple the pages, and make sure to keep a copy. In the interest of consuming less paper (and thereby killing fewer trees and introducing less pollution into the biosphere) I strongly encourage you to print on both sides of the paper when you hand in your work.

Learning to write well-crafted, reflective papers will be one of the most significant skills you learn in your college education. Writing well is not easy. For many students writing is an intimidating challenge. If you are having difficulty or are feeling overwhelmed, please make an appointment with me; I will be happy to work with you on your writing regardless of your level of confidence or skill. Also, the Writing Center is available for all students and can assist you in improving your skills in reading, writing, and studying. Their website is:

<http://www.colby.edu/writers.center/>. The Writing Center website has good links that answer many writing questions: <http://www.colby.edu/writers.center/writinglinks.html>, and also tips for writing: <http://www.colby.edu/writers.center/tips.html>. For help with writing philosophy papers in particular, see: <http://www.philosophypages.com/sy.htm>.

Learning Differences: This class will honor all necessary accommodations for students with documented learning differences. If you have a learning difference or believe you may have a learning difference that requires specific accommodation, please make an appointment with Mark Serdjenian (x4255) in the Dean's Office. The Dean's Office will then let me know which accommodations are appropriate.

Office Hours: I will have office hours on Mondays from 4:00-5:00. Office hours can be busy. I would be happy to make an appointment for a longer period of time. To arrange an appointment, you can speak to me after class, call, or email me. Most days I am in my office and you should feel free to stop by to talk about the class, your writing, or the texts.

Grading: I believe that receiving honest evaluation from teachers and peers is an important element in learning. I do not believe that giving letter grades is central to the learning process. Throughout the course I will try to communicate clearly about assignments and expectations for excellent work. I will try to be fair, open, and honest about the grading process. College can be very challenging and you may find yourself academically or emotionally overwhelmed. If you are under too much stress, or feel as if you are falling behind, please make an appointment to see me and we can work together to find a way for you to flourish in this class.

The final grade for this course will be computed as follows:

1.	Ten weekly assignments	30%
2.	First paper (7-8 pages)	25%
3.	Peer Review	5%
4.	Final paper (10-12 pages)	30%
5.	Participation	10%

Academic Honesty: I support Colby's commitment to academic honesty. Have faith in your own ability to think clearly and creatively. Don't plagiarize. If you have questions about what needs to be cited and proper conventions for citation, ask me, make an appointment with the Writing Center, or go to the Writing Center resources webpage on plagiarism:
<http://leeds.bates.edu/cbb/index.php>.

Some Suggestions for Reading Buddhist Philosophy

1. Many of the primary texts we will be studying are obscure and difficult to interpret without secondary literature. If you are totally lost, read through the whole reading and then reread more carefully and try to figure out the text's three or four main theses.
2. Even if you are not writing a daily response for the day, the questions in the syllabus should indicate some of the areas on which you should focus your attention.
3. There are many internet sites which have information on Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy. Be wary of them. If you want good introductions to the thinkers/schools we will be studying you can look at the online version of the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy. On occasion, this may make it easier for you to figure out what the main claims really are.
4. Make a list of the significant **terms** and **vocabulary** in the author's argument.
5. Make a list of the significant **distinctions** that the author makes.
6. Make a list of the significant **examples** the author uses to illustrate her points.

Date Assignment

2/05 M **Introduction: The role of philosophy in Buddhist traditions**
Syllabus, course goals, expectations, and assessment.

2/07 W **Introduction to Buddhism and the life of the Buddha**
Williams (BT) 1-34
Holder (EBD) 1-18

Questions for weekly response:

1. What is the basic meaning of the following terms: “Buddhism”; “Saṅgha”; “Dharma”
2. What is the relationship between Buddhism and its Brahmanical background?
3. What is the significance of the hagiography of the Buddha for Buddhist traditions?
4. What is the distinction between the “noble quest” and the “ignoble quest?”

2/12 M **Four Noble Truths: Guest Lecture: Lobsang Samten**
Williams (BT) 41-55
Holder (EBD) 51-58

Questions for weekly response:

1. What are the four noble truths?
 2. Are you persuaded by the relation between the first two truths? Why? Why not?
- Optional lunch with Lobsang Samten in Foss private dining room.

2/14 W **Buddhist hermeneutics and the Doctrine of Not-Self**
Williams (BT) 34-40; 56-62
Holder (EBD) 83-86; 96-100; 101-16

Questions for weekly response:

1. How do you understand the metaphors of the water snake, the arrow, and the raft?
2. What is the doctrine of not-self? Is it a persuasive doctrine?

2/19 M **Vasubandhu’s Critique of the Person**

Kapstein “Vasubandhu’s Treatise on the Negation of the Person” (ER) 347-75
Kapstein “Synthetic Selves” (ER) 113-30

Questions for weekly response:

1. What are the main points in Vasubandhu’s argument against substantial selves?
2. Are you persuaded by Vasubandhu’s argument? Why? Why not?
3. How do Candrakīrti and Vasubandhu differ in their approach to the problem of personal identity?

2/22 W **Cause and Dependent Origination:**

Williams (BT) 62-72

Holder (EBD) 26-41; 60-72

Questions for weekly response:

1. What is dependent origination?
2. Are you persuaded that all phenomena are dependently originated?
3. According to the *Mahānidāna Sutta* and the *Mahātaṇhāsankhaya Sutta*, what is the liberating function of insight into dependent origination?

2/26 M **Theravāda Insight Practice and Mindfulness**

Williams (BT) 81-87

Holder (EBD) 43-58

Dhammika Bhikkhu “A Spectrum of Meditative Practices” handout

Questions for weekly response:

1. What is the distinction between *samatha* and *vipassanā*?
2. What is the function of the practices described in the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*?
3. Please follow one of the descriptions in “A Spectrum of Meditative Practices” and do the practice.

2/28 W **Theravāda Insight Practice and Mindfulness**

Achaan Chah “Observing Your Mind” handout

Buddhadesa Bhikkhu “Insight by the Nature Method” handout

Mahasi Sayadaw “Insight Through Mindfulness” handout

Dhiravamsa “The Meditative Mind” handout

Godwin Samararatne “Watching Thoughts and Emotions” handout

Questions for weekly response:

1. Do all five readings and then keep a journal on your meditation practice.
2. Does the practice of mindfulness meditation change your perspective on any of the philosophical claims we have studied so far?

3/05 M **Introduction to Mahāyāna Thought**

Williams (BT) 96-111; 131-52

Prajñāpāramitā Literature (ER 163-70)

Questions for weekly response:

1. What general characteristics distinguish Mahāyāna from non-Mahāyāna Buddhist thought?
2. In what ways does the *Prajñāparamita* literature manifest some of Williams’s descriptions of Mahāyāna?

3/07 W **Mahāyāna: Nāgārjuna**

Garfield (EW) 24-45

Questions for weekly response:

1. What, according to Garfield, is Nāgārjuna’s distinction between cause and condition?
2. What is the relationship between emptiness and dependent origination?

3/12 M **Mahāyāna: Nāgārjuna**
Garfield (EW) 46-68

Questions for weekly response:

1. What is the relationship between emptiness and knowledge?
2. In what way can Nāgārjuna be understood to relinquish all views?
3. Are you persuaded by Nāgārjuna's argument?

3/14 W **Yogācāra: Vasubandhu**
Williams (BT) 152-60
Garfield (EW) 128-51
Garfield (EW) 109-27

Questions for weekly response:

1. What are the three aspects/natures?
2. What is the relation of Mind to the three aspects/natures?
3. What is the difference between Vasubandhu's understanding of emptiness and Nāgārjuna's?

3/19 M **Yogācāra: Vasubandhu**
Vasubandhu "Twenty Verses and Their Commentary" (ER) 161-75
Garfield (EW) 152-69

Questions for weekly response:

1. What is Vasubandhu's theory of perception in the "Twenty Verses"?
2. Do you agree with the ontological/epistemological idealism being discussed here? Why? Why not?

First draft of first paper due.

3/21 W **Ineffability and the Limits of Thought**
Garfield (EW) 86-105; 170-83

Questions for weekly response:

1. According to Garfield and Priest, what is the novel paradox Nāgārjuna introduces and why is it important?
2. What are the differences between how ineffability is understood in Madhyamaka and in Yogācāra?

Peer review of first paper due.

3/26 M No Classes: Spring Break

3/28 W No Classes: Spring Break

4/02 M **Indian Tantra**
Williams (BT) 192-244
McDonald "Some Tibetan Practices" handout
Lama Yeshe "Meditation in Tantra" handout

Questions for weekly response:

1. What is tantric Buddhism and how is related to other Indian Buddhist traditions we have studied?
2. Do one of the meditations from McDonald or Lama Yeshe.

Second draft of first paper due.

4/04 W **Hua-yen and T'ien T'ai**
"Chinese Buddhist Tradition" (ER) 268-79

Questions for weekly response:

1. In what way does Fa-tsang's account differ from earlier accounts of dependent origination and emptiness that we have read?
2. What are the three dharmas according to Chih-i?

Passover

4/09 M **Ch'an: Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch**
Yampolsky (PS) 125-53
Kasulis (ZAZP) 3-28

Questions for weekly response:

3. According to the Sixth Patriarch, what is the perfection of wisdom?
4. Why is the Sixth Patriarch's verse an indication of greater wisdom than the other verse?
5. What is the relationship between Ch'an/Zen accounts of emptiness and Indian accounts of emptiness?

Second draft of first paper returned with comments.

4/11 W **Ch'an: Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch**
Yampolsky (PS) 153-83
Kasulis (ZAZP) 29-54

Questions for weekly response:

1. What does it mean to discard false views and how does one do it, according to the Sixth Patriarch?
2. How do Taoism and Ch'an/Zen respond to emptiness?

4/16 M **Guest Lecture: Stefano Mui Barragato, Margaret Ne-Eka Barragato**
Zen Practice
Dōgen (MD) 29-43
Shunryu Suzuki "Zen Mind" handout

Questions for weekly response:

1. According to Dōgen, what does it mean to practice zazen?
2. Practice zazen as described by Shunryu Suzuki.
3. Please bring two questions to class for the guest speakers.

Optional lunch with guest speakers in Foss private dining room.

Final Draft of first paper due.

4/18 W **Zen: Dōgen**
Dōgen (MD) 69-75
Kasulis (ZAZP) 65-103

Questions for weekly response:

1. Why is enlightenment "like the moon reflected on the water"?
2. What does Dōgen mean when he writes that "this birth and death is the life of buddha"?
3. According to Kasulis, what is Dōgen's account of the self?

4/23 M **Zen: Dōgen**
Dōgen (MD) 76-83
Kasulis (ZAZP) 104-26

Questions for weekly response:

1. What does Dōgen mean when he exhorts us to “actualize the time-being”?
2. According to Hakuin, as interpreted by Kasulis, what is the “Great Doubt”?

4/25 W **Zen: Dōgen**
Dōgen (MD) 84-94
Kasulis (ZAZP) 127-41

Questions for weekly response:

1. What does Dōgen mean by “undivided activity”?
2. What does Dōgen mean by “study of the way”?
3. What does Kasulis mean by “Zen Action/Zen Person”?

4/30 M **American Buddhism: Guest Lecture: Michael Masatsugu**
Iwamura “The Oriental Monk in American Popular Culture”
Optional lunch with Guest Speaker in Foss private dining room.

5/02 W **Engaged Buddhism**
Queen “A New Buddhism” (ER) 1-26
Hunt-Perry and Fine “All Buddhism is Engaged” (ER) 35-62

Questions for weekly response:

1. What is the relationship between Engaged Buddhism and Buddhist traditions?
2. Do you agree with the claim that all Buddhism is engaged? Why?

5/04 Th Meetings to discuss final paper

5/05 F Meetings to discuss final paper

5/07 M **Eco-Buddhism**
Dōgen (MD) 97-107
Macy “The Ecological Self” (ER) 441-46

Questions for weekly response:

1. What does Macy mean by an “ecological sense of self”?
2. What are the possibilities and limitations of EcoBuddhism?

Olin 1, 7:00 pm Film showing: *Enlightenment Guaranteed*.

5/08 Tu 7:00 pm Film showing: *Spring, Summer, Winter, Fall, Spring*.
Smith Runnals Lounge

5/09 W **Other Modes of Teaching Dharma: Cinema**

5/16 W **FINAL PAPERS DUE**