

Phil. 179: Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy

Course Description

This is an introduction to Buddhist philosophy, focusing on its origins as preserved in the early *sūtra* literature. In addition to providing a broad overview to early Buddhist thought, this course will examine three topics in particular: the Buddhist doctrine of *anātman* or “no-self”; karma and rebirth; and meditation practice, with particular emphasis on the first of these topics. We will also look at the contemporary reception of Buddhism in the West. All of these topics will be approached not only as theoretical or intellectual questions, but also as *practical* and *ethical* questions, concerning the question of how best to live. In this sense, the course will center and emphasize the Buddhist “soteriological” project that is central to all Buddhist thought: namely, the liberation from suffering.

Objectives

This course will provide students many opportunities to practice the fundamental skills of philosophical inquiry, including the extraction, expression, and evaluation of arguments articulated in philosophical texts; the crafting of compelling and convincing philosophical prose; and the development of one’s own informed point of view on philosophical issues. With respect to the direct topic at hand, students completing this course should be able to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the central teachings of Buddhism: the Four Noble Truths; *nirvāṇa*; the no-self theory; karma and rebirth; implications for personal identity, epistemology, and ethics; and meditation practices.
2. Critically appraise the philosophical views of this vast tradition.
3. Use the knowledge acquired in the course to assess their own philosophical and religious views and practices.

With respect, more broadly, to the general skills of reading, writing, and critical thinking, students completing this course should know:

4. How to produce a cogent argument and how to express it with maximum perspicuity, both in writing and orally.
5. How to articulate and even welcome objections to one’s views; how to apply the principle of charity to others’ opinions; and how to address objections and competing views effectively and respectfully in one’s writing.

6. How to read, analyze, and articulate arguments and viewpoints in primary philosophical texts, both historical and contemporary
7. How to develop and defend one's own position with respect to problems that have occupied both historical and contemporary philosophers.

Texts

All readings will be made available on the course website.

Zoom and Remote Learning

Zoom link: <https://ucla.zoom.us/j/93493159425>

This course will take place remotely, via Zoom. That includes both the lecture portion and the discussion section. All sessions of the lecture and section will occur synchronously, and it is expected that you will attend them live, in real time. However, I may choose to record the lectures and make them available, on an as-needed basis, for students who must miss class for legitimate reasons. If so, the recording will *not* include any video of people. So even if you have your camera on and you ask a question during lecture, only your audio, not your video, will show up on the recording.

Zoom learning can be difficult. In general, I think of class participation as a collective good: the participation of each member of the class contributes, not only to their own learning, but to the learning of all the other participants. In other words, your engagement (or dis-engagement) affects not only you, but everyone else. This is especially true on Zoom: for instance, when many people have their cameras off, this impacts the course experience for everyone. As such, you will be required to keep your cameras turned on while in lecture and section (with exceptions and accommodations to this rule being made on an as-needed basis). Having your camera off (without an exception) will negatively affect your participation grade for the course.

Course Requirements

The course requirements are designed to help you build three types of skills relevant to philosophy (and general life): (1) how to clearly and productively discuss a difficult text or complex topic, (2) how to read a difficult text, and (3) how to clearly and compellingly express yourself in writing.

Attendance and Participation (20%).

Philosophy is not simply a set of facts or questions that one could passively memorize; it is rather a way of approaching important problems and thinking them through. As such, philosophy is something that is “done.” It is thus crucial to learning philosophy that it be actively practiced. Your attendance and informed participation in the class is therefore expected and required. This entails completing all required readings before class, and regular attendance and engagement during class and discussion section. You can also participate by taking part in other fora, such as office hours. More specifically, all of the following counts as active participation:

- Asking questions and engaging with the instructor and other class participants in a courteous and charitable dialogue about the week’s required reading.
- Asking a classmate to clarify or repeat a point they made or asking them a question about something they said.
- Explaining that you are confused or unsure about some aspect of the course material.
- Visiting office hours or scheduling an appointment with me to discuss the material.

For further examples of effective participation, please see **“But How Do I Participate? A Sampling of Ways to Contribute to a Philosophical Conversation,”** by Olivia Bailey, which is posted to the course website.

Although attendance is required, I understand that things do sometimes come up. **Given this, everyone will be granted two no-penalty absences from lecture and one no-penalty absence from discussion section.** Beyond those, however, any unexcused absence from lecture or section will detract from your participation grade.

Two Short Writing Exercises (15% each). At two points during the course, you will be asked to conduct a brief “experiential exercise” and write a 1-2 page reflection on your experience. For instance, you may be asked to experiment with a meditation practice and reflect on your experience. These exercises will be graded on a pass/no pass basis. We will be looking for effort, open-mindedness, and sincerity, rather than the “persuasiveness” or “originality” of your insights.

Two Essays (25% each). Half of your grade will be determined by the two required papers you must complete for the course. Having to explain our ideas to others in writing forces us to be clear, and to be thoughtful and honest about the positions we hold. We will talk about what is expected of the problem essays, and discuss tips for writing well in philosophy, before the papers are due.

First essay. Your first essay will be a short paper of 2-4 double-spaced pages with 1-inch margins and 12 pt. font. You will be able to select from among a choice of different questions.

Second essay. The second essay will be a slightly longer and somewhat more complex paper of 4-6 double-spaced pages (with the same formatting as above). Again, you will be able to select from among a choice of different questions.

Summary Grade Breakdown and Paper Due Dates

Assignment	Length	Due	Percent of Grade
Participation	-----	-----	20%
Short Writing Exercise 1	1-2 pages	Aug. 14	15%
Short Writing Exercise 2	1-2 pages	Aug. 28	15%
First Essay	2-4 pages	Aug. 21	25%
Second Essay	4-6 pages	Sep. 13	25%

Grading and Late Policy

Unless otherwise stated, all assignments will receive a letter grade based on the UCLA 4.0 scale. Papers are due at the time and date specified. Work turned in late is considered to have been turned in the next day and will be penalized 1/3 of a grade (A to A-, B- to C+, etc.) for each day late (including weekend days). Unless otherwise noted and under appropriate circumstances, short extensions on papers may be granted so long as they are arranged 36 hours in advance of the deadline. **Both of the two essays must be submitted to pass the course.**

Accommodations

Students needing academic accommodations based on a disability should contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) at (310) 825-1501 or in person at Murphy Hall A255. When possible, students should contact the CAE within the first two weeks of the term as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. For more information visit www.cae.ucla.edu.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. Cite all sources consulted. Students are expected to know and comply with University regulations regarding academic integrity, information about which is available here:

Student Code of Conduct: <https://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/studentconductcode>

Academic Integrity: <https://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Academic-Integrity>

Tips for Avoiding Plagiarism: <https://guides.library.ucla.edu/citing/plagiarism/avoid>

If you have any question about what counts as a violation of academic integrity or how to cite your sources, please consult with me. Err on the side of caution. Any standard citation style will do (Chicago, APA, MLA, etc.). If you aren't sure which to use, consider Chicago style author-date format: https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html

Resources

- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): <https://www.caps.ucla.edu/> or (310) 825-0768
- CARE: Advocacy Office for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Misconduct: <https://careprogram.ucla.edu/> or (310) 206-2465 (24 Hour Crisis Counseling (888) 200-6665)
- UCLA Writing Programs: <http://www.wp.ucla.edu/>
- Professor Jim Pryor's writing tips for philosophers: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

Course Readings and Schedule

As you may already know, reading philosophy is challenging. Here are some resources students report they've found useful in improving their reading experience (but feel free to contact me for more guidance about reading):

- <https://www.blogs.ppls.ed.ac.uk/2017/02/28/read-philosophy-step-step-guide-confused-students/>

- <https://philosophy.arizona.edu/sites/philosophy.arizona.edu/files/Rosati%2C%20How%20to%20Read%20a%20Philosophical%20Article%20or%20Book.pdf>
- <http://melissajacquart.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/How-to-Read-Philosophy-Handout.pdf>

~ Note: this schedule below is tentative and liable to change as the class progresses ~

Class session	Date	Topic	Reading	Source	# of Pages
1	August 5	Buddhism as Philosophy	Required		
			“Buddhism as Philosophy?: Introduction to Philosophy as a Subject Matter, and to Buddhism as Philosophy,” Mark Siderits	Mark Siderits, <i>Buddhism as Philosophy: An Introduction</i> (“BaP”), Ch. 1	15
			The Shorter Discourse to Mālunkyaṇputta (<i>Cūḷa-mālukyasutta</i>)	<i>Early Buddhist Discourses</i> (“EBD”), John J. Holder (ed. & trans.)	6
			Discourse to the Kalamas (<i>Kālāma Sutta</i>)	<i>EBD</i>	6
			“The Buddha’s Suffering,” Amber Carpenter, pp. 1-14	<i>Indian Buddhist Philosophy</i> (“IBP”), Ch. 1	14
			Optional		
			“The Doctrinal Position of the Buddha in Context,” Paul Williams & Anthony Tribe	Paul Williams & Anthony Tribe, <i>Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition</i> (“BT”), Ch. 1	40
2	August 7	Overview of Buddha’s teachings I: truth and suffering	“Buddha,” Mark Siderits	<i>The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i>	14
			Required		
			The Greater Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness (<i>Mahāsatiṭṭhānasutta Sutta</i>)	<i>EBD</i>	16
			“Mainstream Buddhism: The Basic Thought of the Buddha,” Paul Williams & Anthony Tribe, pp. 41-56	<i>BT</i> , Ch. 2	15
			“Four Truths: The Disease, the Cause, the Cure, the Medicine,” Rupert Gethin, pp. 59-74	Rupert Gethin, <i>The Foundations of Buddhism</i> (“FoB”), Ch. 3	15

Class session	Date	Topic	Reading	Source	# of Pages
			"The Buddha's Suffering," Amber Carpenter, pp. 14-19	<i>IBP</i> , Ch. 1	5
			Optional		
			"Early Buddhism: Basic Teachings: The Basic Teachings of Gautama the Buddha," Mark Siderits, pp. 15-24	<i>BaP</i> , Ch. 2	9
			"Living in the Present," Kieran Setiya, pp. 127-39	<i>Midlife: A Philosophical Guide</i> , Ch. 6	12
			Assignment		
			Short exercise 1 assigned		
3	August 12	Overview of Buddha's teachings II: liberation from suffering	Required		
			"Four Truths: The Disease, the Cause, the Cure, the Medicine," by Rupert Gethin, pp. 74-84	<i>FoB</i> , Ch. 3	10
			"Early Buddhism: Basic Teachings: The Basic Teachings of Gautama the Buddha," Mark Siderits, pp. 24-31	<i>BaP</i> , Ch. 2	7
			Assignment		
			Essay 1 assigned		
4	August 14	No-self	Required		
			"Non-Self: Empty Persons," Mark Siderits, pp. 32-50	<i>BaP</i> , Ch. 3	18
			Optional		
			"The Definition and Status of Self in Buddhism," Miri Albahari, pp. 50-63	<i>Analytical Buddhism: The Two-Tiered Illusion of Self</i> , Ch. 3	13
			"What Did the Buddha Mean by 'No Soul'?", Richard Gombrich	Richard Gombrich, <i>What the Buddha Thought</i> ("WBT"), Ch. 5	9
			"Not-self," Paul Williams & Anthony Tribe, pp. 56-62	<i>BT</i> , Ch. 2	6
			"Theravāda Philosophy of Mind and the Person: Anatta-lakkhana Sutta, Mahā-nidāna Sutta, and Milindapañha," Peter Harvey	<i>Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings</i> ("BPER"), ed. William Edelglass and Jay Garfield, Ch. 23	9

Class session	Date	Topic	Reading	Source	# of Pages
			Assignment		
			Short exercise 1 due by 11:59pm PST		
5	August 19	Self as “Conventionally Real”	Required		
			“Non-Self: Empty Persons,” Mark Siderits, pp. 50-68	<i>BaP</i> , Ch. 3	18
			Optional		
			“An Interpretation of the Not-Self Doctrine,” Christopher Gowans	<i>Philosophy of the Buddha: An Introduction</i>	12
			“The Two Truths,” Nicolas Bommarito	<i>Seeing Clearly: A Buddhist Guide to Life</i> , Ch. 13	6
			“Pudgalavāda Doctrines of the Person,” Dan Lusthaus	<i>BPER</i>	11
			“Knowing: Is the Self an Illusion?,” Evan Thompson	<i>Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy</i> , Ch. 10	48
6	August 21	No-Self as Practice	Required		
			“Practice and theory of no-self,” Amber Carpenter, pp. 20-34	<i>IBP</i> , Ch. 2	15
			Optional		
			“The Experience of Self Beyond Personality” (excerpt) and “Three More Liberating Ways of Looking: (3) — Anattā,” Rob Burbea	<i>Seeing That Frees: Meditations on Emptiness and Dependent Arising</i>	25
			“Anātman, the Buddhist Doctrine of No-Self: Why ‘You’ Do Not Really Exist,” Jack Malden	<i>Philosophybreak.com</i>	9
			“The Trip Treatment,” Michael Pollan	<i>The New Yorker</i>	35
			Assignments		
			Essay 1 due by 11:59pm PST		
			Short exercise 2 assigned		
7	August 26	The Ethics of No-Self	Required		
			“Ethics: Abandon the Self to Abandon Egoism,” Jay L. Garfield	<i>Losing Ourselves: Learning to Live Without a Self</i> , Ch. 7	14

Class session	Date	Topic	Reading	Source	# of Pages
			“Thich Nhat Hanh’s <i>Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism</i> ,” William Edelglass and Thich Nhat Hanh	<i>BPER</i> , Ch. 36	9
			Optional		
			“The Broad Structure of Buddhist Ethics,” and “Buddhist Ethics as Moral Phenomenology,” Jay L. Garfield	<i>Buddhist Ethics: A Philosophical Exploration</i> , Ch.’s 2-3	25
			“Buddhist Reductionism and the Structure of Buddhist Ethics,” Mark Siderits, pp. 269-276	<i>Studies in Buddhist Philosophy</i> , Ch. 5	8
			“Ethics in Indian Buddhism,” Charles Goodman and Aaron Schultz	<i>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i>	22
8	August 28	Karma & Rebirth I: Rebirth & the Person	Required		
			“Buddhism, Rebirth, and the Human Person,” Bruce Reichenbach	<i>The Law of Karma: A Philosophical Study</i> , Ch. 8	10
			“Karmic Questions,” Amber Carpenter, pp. 102-105	<i>Indian Buddhist Philosophy</i> , Ch. 5	3
			Optional		
			“Introduction,” (pp. 11-13), “More about Karma, and Its Social Context,” “The Antecedents of the Karma Doctrine in Brahminism,” and “Jain Antecedents,” Richard Gombrich	<i>WBT</i> , Ch.’s 1-4	44
			Assignment		
			Short Exercise 2 due by 11:59pm PST		
			Essay 2 assigned		
9	September 4	Karma & Rebirth II: Craving (<i>taṇhā</i>) and Desire	Required		
			Anguttara-Nikaya, III, 4, 33, “Fruitful and Barren Karma”	<i>Buddhism in Translations</i> , trans. Henry Clarke Warren	7
			“The Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving (<i>Mahātaṇhasankhāya</i>)”	<i>EBT</i>	14
			“Mainstream Buddhism: The Basic Thought of the Buddha,” Paul Williams & Anthony Tribe, pp. 43-47	<i>BT</i> , Ch. 2	4

Class session	Date	Topic	Reading	Source	# of Pages
			Optional		
			“Some Central Distinctions and the Four Noble Truths,” pp. 24-30; “The Definition and Status of Self in Buddhism,” pp. 61-3; “The Reflexively Assumed Self,” pp. 108-9, Miri Albahari	<i>Analytical Buddhism: The Two-Tiered Illusion of Self</i> , Ch.’s 1, 3, 4	12
10	September 9	Meditation	Required		
			“Attention as a Means of Self-dissolution and Reformation,” Amber Carpenter	<i>Ratio</i> , 2018, 31:376–388.	13
			Optional		
			“The Buddhism Path: The Way of Calm and Insight,” Rupert Gethin, pp. 174-201	<i>FoB</i> , Ch. 7	27
			“What Is It Like to Be a Baby?: Consciousness and Attention,” Alison Gopnik	<i>The Philosophical Baby</i> , Ch. 4	25
			“Is the Default Mode of the Brain to Suffer?,” Drake Baer	<i>The Cut</i>	n/a
			“Concentration or Insight: The Problematic of Theravāda Buddhist Meditation-Theory,” Paul Griffiths	<i>The Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>	20
11	September 11	Buddhism in the West	Required		
			“Is Mindfulness Buddhist? (And Why It Matters),” Robert H. Scharf	<i>Meditation, Buddhism, and Science</i> , David L. McMahan and Erik Braun (eds.)	15
			Optional		
			Buddhism Without Reincarnation? Examining the Prospects of a ‘Naturalized’ Buddhism,” by Jan Westerhoff	<i>A Mirror Is For Reflection: Understanding Buddhist Ethics</i> , Jake H. Davis (ed.)	18
N/A	September 13	N/A	Assignment		
			Essay 2 Due by 11:59pm PST		