

RLST 23900 / SALC 23903
Buddhist Thought in India & Tibet

Winter term 2017
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30-2:50
Wieboldt 106

Instructor: Dan Arnold (d-arnold@uchicago.edu)

Office hours: Swift Hall 401A (702-8276), **Thursdays, 3:00-5:00pm** (or by arrangement); for appointments during regular office hours, sign up on the sheet kept by instructor's secretary, Julia Ivory-Woods (jlwoods1@uchicago.edu) in the Martin Marty Center, Swift Hall 2nd floor

Course objectives: It is often remarked that Buddhist traditions challenge many conceptions of what it means to be a *religious* tradition; among other things, Buddhist thought is decidedly *atheistic*, and Buddhist conceptions of what is ultimately valuable accordingly differ from those found in the theistic traditions that inform much thinking about "religion." Even more counter-intuitively, Buddhists affirm (with virtually all Indian traditions) the reality of an endless "cycle" (*samsāra*) of rebirth, while at the same time denying that there are any real *selves* that undergo rebirth. Indeed, the cardinal doctrine of the Indian Buddhist tradition – the doctrine that arguably drives all Buddhist philosophical thought – is that persons are not (or do not "have") anything like *selves*; rather, all of us are ultimately "without self" (*anātma*). Buddhist philosophers well understood that this claim is profoundly counter-intuitive; on the Buddhist analysis, there is nothing to which we are more desperately attached than the experience of ourselves as temporally enduring, autonomous agents. Despite the powerful hold this idea has on us, it is, Buddhists argue, profoundly mistaken; indeed, it is our mistaken attachment to *self* that enmeshes us in the existential suffering that (according to Buddhists) essentially characterizes our lives. Religious transformation accordingly consists, for Buddhists, in eliminating existential suffering by rightly (and *deeply*) understanding that we are not at all as we habitually think we are – an understanding that radically undermines the habitually felt difference between "self" and "other."

What all of this means depends, of course, on just what it would mean to have a "self," and the history of Buddhist thought attests many ways of elaborating the tradition's basic insight; indeed, Buddhist philosophy comprises something like the full range of philosophical approaches found in the history of "Western" philosophy. Keeping always in view the question of how the various developments make sense as *religiously* significant, we will in this class trace the philosophical development of the "without-self" doctrine according to a model that still structures most traditional Tibetan monastic curricula. Starting, then, with a couple of weeks spent introducing the basic doctrine (against its relevant Indian background), our readings will be loosely structured according to a typical Tibetan presentation of the main philosophical schools of thought. According to this traditional schematization – which structured the education of the 14th Dalai Lama, whose many popular writings flow out of this – the many and various philosophical developments of the Indian Buddhist tradition crystalize around four principal schools of thought. These are traditionally represented in an ascending hierarchy that culminates with the school styled *Madhyamaka* (the "middle way" school), which most Tibetan Buddhists agree in taking to represent the pinnacle Buddhist thought; in ascending order, these four "schools" are: **Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Yogācāra, and Madhyamaka.** (Available translations of Tibetan monastic textbooks that exemplify this schema are particularly hard to use, but an example

of one will be available on reserve at Regenstein: Geshe Lhundup Sopa and Jeffrey Hopkins, trans., *Cutting Through Appearances: Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism*.)

Over the course of the term, it is hoped that we will develop both a rudimentary understanding of recurrent Buddhist insights and tropes, and a sense of the complexity and diversity of the tradition. Thus, the course will encourage recognition of some of the insights that are widely shared across the range of the Indian Buddhist tradition, while at the same time encouraging the appreciation that the tradition attests a wide variety of ways to approach and systematize these insights.

Required Readings:

All readings are available on reserve at Regenstein Library; all non-book-length readings can be found electronically on Chalk (chalk.uchicago.edu), where they are to be found under “Library Course Reserves.” The following books should be available for purchase at the Seminary Coop Bookstore; ***students found to have purchased them instead on Amazon may be subjected to stern rebuke.***

- Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*
- Patrick Olivelle, trans., *Upaniṣads*
- Kate Crosby & Andrew Skilton, trans., *Bodhicaryāvatāra*
- Mark Siderits & Shoryu Katsura, trans., *Nāgārjuna’s Middle Way*
- The Dalai Lama, *The Universe in a Single Atom*

Course Requirements:

In addition to exemplifying regular attendance and spirited participation in discussion, students will be required to submit a paper of moderate length (12-20 pages), on a topic to be developed in consultation with the instructor. Papers will be **DUE FRIDAY, MARCH 17TH.**

Schedule of Topics & Readings:

WEEK 1: Tuesday, January 3: Course Introduction.

Thursday, January 5: Lecture: On the Dalai Lama and his education. **Readings:** Georges Dreyfus, “Literacy and Memorization”; “The General Structure of the Tibetan Monastic Curriculum”

WEEK 2: The Indian background to Buddhism: The *śramaṇera* movement and the *Upaniṣads*. **Reading for Tuesday, January 10:** Michael Witzel, “Vedas and Upaniṣads”; Patrick Olivelle, trans., *Upaniṣads*, pp.xxix-xxxvi, xlix-lvi, 34-71, 148-156, 171-76

Thursday, January 12: *More Upaniṣads:* Olivelle, pp.231-247; Dan Zahavi, “The Experiential Self: Objections and Clarifications”; Matthew Kapstein, “Indra’s Search for the Self and the Beginnings of Philosophical Perplexity in India”

WEEK 3: *Readings for Tuesday, January 17:* The Buddhist rejoinder: There is no self! **Readings:** “Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma” (*Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*); “The Characteristic of Nonself” (*Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*); Matthew Kapstein, “Missing Persons: The Inapprehensible ‘I’”

Thursday, January 19: Dialogue on selflessness with a Greek king. **Readings:** Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, pp.15-68; T. W. Rhys Davids, trans., *The Questions of King Milinda*, pp.40-78

WEEK 4: *Reading for Tuesday, January 24:* Rhys Davids, trans., *The Questions of King Milinda*, pp.1-39

Thursday, January 26: Introduction to the *reductionist* philosophical project of the Abhidharma literature: The *Vaibhāṣika* and *Sautrāntika* schools of thought. **Readings:** Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, pp.105-37; Paul Williams, “On the Abhidharma Ontology”

WEEK 5: More on Abhidharma. *Readings for Tuesday, January 31:* Selections from Buddhaghosa’s *Path of Purification*: “Buddhaghosa on No-self” (= Steven Collins, trans., *Path of Purification* XIII, 24-36; XIX, 18-20); “The Immaterial Septad” (= Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli, trans., XX, 76-88). (Note that the complete text of Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli’s translation of Buddhaghosa’s massive work is available online at <<http://tinyurl.com/7tpampm>>.)

Readings for Thursday, February 2: Vasubandhu’s “Treatise on the Negation of the Person” (= *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, chapter 9), trans. Matthew Kapstein

WEEK 6: Towards some idealist implications of Abhidharma: Dharmakīrti’s proof of rebirth. *Readings for Tuesday, February 7:* Richard Hayes, “Dharmakīrti on Rebirth”; Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, pp.138-79

Thursday, February 9: More Dharmakīrti: Logic and epistemology. **Readings:** Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, pp.208-30; Th. Stcherbatsky, trans., *Buddhist Logic*, vol. II, pp.1-46 (= chapter 1 of Dharmakīrti’s *Nyāyabindu*)

WEEK 7: Interlude Buddhist ethics: *Readings For Tuesday, February 14:* Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, pp.69-84; Jay Garfield, “Ethics” (= *Engaging Buddhism*, chapter 9)

Readings For Thursday, February 16: Crosby and Skilton, trans., *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, pp.3-19, 30-44, 75-104

WEEK 8: *Readings for Tuesday, February 21:* The idealist Yogācāra school of thought: Vasubandhu, “A Proof, in Twenty Verses, of there Being Nothing but Mental Events” (Arnold, translation)

Readings for Thursday, February 23: Vasubandhu, “Instruction regarding the Three Natures” (Paul Griffiths, trans., *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*)

WEEK 9: The pinnacle of Buddhist philosophy: Madhyamaka. *Readings for Tuesday, February 28:* Siderits and Katsura, trans., *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way*, selections (pp.1-42, 71-88, 109-120, 193-211, 267-305)

Readings for Thursday, March 2: Siderits and Katsura, continued; Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, pp.180-207

WEEK 10: Conclusion: The Buddhism of Tibet and the 14th Dalai Lama. *Reading for Tuesday, March 7:* The Dalai Lama, *The Universe in a Single Atom*, continued

FINAL PAPERS DUE FRIDAY, MARCH 17!