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 temporarily 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 śramanera 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 In apprehensible ‘I’”


**Week 4: Readings 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 *Vaiśhāsika* and *Sautrāntika* schools of thought. Readings: Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, pp.105-37; Paul Williams, “On the Abhidharma Ontology”

**Week 5: More on Abhidharama. 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 Abhidharama: Dharmakīrti’s proof of rebirth. Readings for Tuesday, February 7:** Richard Hayes, “Dharmakīrti on Rebirth”; Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, pp.138-79


**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., *Trīsvabhāvanirdeśa*)
**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. *Readings for Tuesday, March 7:* The Dalai Lama, *The Universe in a Single Atom,* continued

*Final papers due Friday, March 17!*