

DVPR 47004:
Religious Diversity as a Philosophical Problem

Spring term, 2017
T/Th 3:00-4:20, Swift Hall 400

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

Office hours: Swift 401A, **Thursdays, 4:30-6:00pm** (or by arrangement); sign up on the sheet kept by Julia Ivory-Woods (702-7049) in the Martin Marty Center

Objectives of the Course:

This course will introduce and characterize some of the philosophical challenges posed by the manifest diversity (or “pluralism”) of religious perspectives and claims. As befits a course on religious diversity (and in order to show that the problems are not new), the course will include significant attention to some non-Western discussions and examples; the first four weeks thus involve relevant readings from pre-modern and contemporary India, which has its own historical experience of religious diversity.

Course Requirements:

In addition to regular attendance and spirited participation in discussion, this class requires a 10-15-page paper (on a topic to be discussed with instructor), which will be due Friday, **June 9**. N.b.: **Late papers will not be accepted without prior notice.**

Required Readings:

Some of our readings are short selections available electronically through Chalk; one book (Matilal’s *Central Philosophy of Jainism*) is available only on reserve, though a PDF of the complete text can be downloaded. The following are not only on reserve at Regenstein, but also available for purchase at the Seminary Coop Bookstore (students found to have purchased them instead on Amazon may be subject to stern rebuke):

- Csaba Dezso, trans., *Much ado About Religion*
- C. S. Adcock, *The Limits of Tolerance*
- Richard Vernon, ed., *Locke on Toleration*
- John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*
- Nicholas Rescher, *The Strife of Systems*
- Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*

Schedule of Topics and Readings:

Week 1 (Tue., March 28 / Thur., March 30)

Course introduction: General reflections on “pluralism” as a philosophical problem – and a beginning with the early Indian case of King Aśoka. **Reading** (for Thur.): Nathan King, “Religious Diversity and its Challenges to Religious Belief” (Chalk); selections from Nikam and McKeon, eds., *The Edicts of Aśoka* (Chalk); Romila Thapar, “Aśoka and Buddhism as Reflected in the Aśokan Edicts” (Chalk). *Recommended:* John Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka*, pp.3-26 (“The Legend and Its Background”; Chalk)

Week 2 (Tue., April 4 / Thur., April 6)

The epistemological and ontological pluralism of the Jains. **Reading:** B. K. Matilal, *The Central Philosophy of Jainism* (on reserve, but also downloadable at <<http://tinyurl.com/mm9tgdw>>); Jonardon Ganeri, "Rationality, Harmony and Perspective" (Chalk); John Cort, "'Intellectual Ahimsā' Revisited" (Chalk)

>> Week 3 (NO CLASS on Tue., April 11; Thur., April 13 only)

Classical Indian philosophy and royal politics: Jayanta Bhaṭṭa's *Āgamadambara*. **Reading:** Csaba Dezso, trans., *Much ado About Religion*; Dan Arnold, "Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy, and the Argumentative Indian" (Chalk)

Week 4 (Tue., April 18 / Thur., April 20)

Secularism and the modern Indian state. **Reading:** Carl Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconsideration of Arabic and Persian Translations from Indian Languages" (Chalk); C. S. Adcock, *The Limits of Tolerance*

Week 5 (Tue., April 25 / Thur., April 27):

A founding document for modern Western discourse on pluralism: The "Letter on Toleration," by a contemporary of Dārā Shekuh's named John Locke. **Reading:** Richard Vernon (ed.), *Locke on Toleration*

Week 6 (Tue., May 2 / Thur., May 4)

Soundings in the sociology of modern American religious diversity. **Reading:** Courtney Bender, "From Alleged Buddhists to Unreasonable Hindus: Assessing the Impact of Post-1965 Religious Pluralism on First Amendment Jurisprudence" (Chalk); Courtney Bender and Wendy Cadge, "Constructing Buddhism(s): Interreligious Dialogue and Religious Hybridity" (Chalk); Courtney Bender and Wendy Cadge, "Yoga and Rebirth in America" (Chalk)

Week 7 (Tue., May 9 / Thur., May 11)

The much-discussed "pluralist" alternative. **Reading:** John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, at least pp.1-55, 73-95, 111-143, 153-171, 210-251, 299-315, 362-380.

Week 8 (Tue., May 16 / Thur., May 18)

The positions of some "reformed epistemologists," etc. **Reading:** William Alston, "Religious Diversity and Perceptual Knowledge of God" (Chalk); Alvin Plantinga, "Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism" (Chalk); Jason Springs, "On Giving Religious Intolerance Its Due: Prospects for Transforming Conflict in a Post-secular Society" (Chalk); Jennifer Lackey, "Taking Religious Disagreement Seriously" (Chalk)

Week 9 (Tue., May 23 / Thur., May 25)

The grounds and implications of *philosophical* diversity. **Reading:** Nicholas Rescher, *The Strife of Systems*

Week 10 (Tue., May 30 / Thur., June 1):

The American pragmatist tradition has the last word. **Reading:** Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*

Final papers due Friday, June 9!