

KINGSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE
of The City University of New York

Philosophy 78: Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Taoism: Philosophy in Asian Traditions

Professor Barnhart

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Office Hours:

Monday 11:30-12:30

Wednesday 11:30-12:30

Thursday 11:30-12:30

Texts:

Patrick Olivelle, translator. *Upanisads*. Oxford University Press, 1996.

Burton Watson, translator. *The Vimalakirti Sutra*. Columbia University Press, 1997.

Edward Slingerland, translator. *Confucius, Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. Hackett Publishing Co., 2003.

This course surveys the development of philosophical thought in the great Asian religious traditions. Special emphasis is placed on the major philosophical debates between and within these divergent traditions. Though we will be concerned with what sorts of religious beliefs typify each tradition, our primary focus will be on the ways in which these beliefs are interpreted, justified, and defended against their rivals. Students should expect to come away with both an appreciation of the intellectual riches of Asia and a basic introduction to the enduring philosophical questions with which mankind perennially wrestles.

Requirements

There will be two short papers, an initial and a final examination, specific due dates to be determined in class. Topics for essays will be provided well in advance.

In addition, since this is a philosophy course, class attendance and participation in discussion is also emphasized. Besides due dates and topics for papers, the week's readings are also posted in class. So, should a class be missed, it is important to check to see what assignments, if any, were made.

Grades are determined on the basis of three weighted factors: performance on the two written essays, the two examinations, and participation in class discussion.

Academic Policy

All due dates are determined in class well in advance. If some difficulty in meeting the deadlines is encountered, I must be notified in advance to make alternative arrangements. Otherwise, due consideration of the tardiness is given in assessing the work's merits. Missed tests will be graded with an F, again, unless prior arrangements are made in advance.

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. I retain the right to fail any student caught using sources without attribution. All source material must be appropriately footnoted. If you have any questions regarding the acknowledgment of sources please see me before turning in your assignment in order to avoid unnecessary trouble.

A class functions smoothly and provides an atmosphere appropriate to learning when all observe certain rules of conduct. (1) Show up on time. Any student arriving after attendance has been taken will be counted as present only at the discretion of the instructor. (2) No excessive absences (more than five). (3) No private conversation or unnecessary disturbances (this includes eating) during the class. (4) Please turn off all electronic devices while class is in session. Failure to follow these basic rules will have academic consequences.

I strongly urge you to take advantage of office visits especially if you are having difficulties with the course material.

Schedule of Topics and Assignments

March 3,4: Introduction; Themes in Asian Traditions; India and the Vedic Tradition. Purchase books, read Introduction in Olivelle, *Upanisads*, xxiii-lvi.

March 8-11: The early Upanishads, What is *Brahman*? What is *Atman*? Read Chap. 4, *Bṛhadaranyaka* Upanisad, 52-72 in Olivelle.

March 15-18: *Atman=Brahman*? Read *Katha* Upanisad in Olivelle, 230-247. ESSAY I TOPICS

March 22-25: Hindu Teaching. Read *Chandogya* Upanisad, chap.s 6&7, 148-166 in Olivelle.

March 29-April 1: Buddhism, introduction to major themes, Theravada and Mahayana. Read Watson, *Vimalakirti Sutra*, Introduction and Chap. 1, 1-14 and 17-30.
ESSAY I DUE (see below for sample essay topics)

SPRING BREAK!

April 14,15: Vimalakirti's challenge to Buddhist teaching. Read Watson, Chap.s 2-4, 32-63.

April 19-22: Buddhism's internal dialogue. Read Watson, Chap.s 5-10, 64-120.

April 26-29, Buddhist Law and Hindu Duty. Read Watson, Chap.s 11-14, 121-146. STUDY

May 3: EXAMINATION I

May 6: Last day for W, start Confucius reading, Slingerland, *Confucius*, Introduction, xiii-xxv.

May 10-13: Core Confucian teachings. Read Slingerland, Books 3-7 of the *Analects*, 17-77.

May 17-20: Confucian conduct. Read Slingerland, Books 1-2, 9-10, 1-16, 86-110.

May 24-27: Ren and good government. Read Slingerland, Books 12-14, 125-173.

June 2: Final reflections, review. What are the themes within Asian Philosophy?

Essay Topics 1

Choose one of the following topics and write a 750-1,000 word essay (3-4 typed pages, double-space) in response. Make sure your answer is focused on the question and give reasons.

1. In his 1922 novel Siddhartha, Hermann Hesse writes, “It is written: ‘Your soul is the whole world’” in describing the basic teachings of Hinduism. Discuss this claim in light of your readings from the Upanishads and the concepts of Atman and Brahman. Find a passage or passages that explain and defend or discredit this idea. [Be sure to analyze your evidence.] Do you think there is any truth to this claim?

2. What is the “rule of substitution”? What does it show with regard to Brahman and the self or Atman? Provide some examples from the texts and analyze them thoroughly in order to support your interpretation. Is the “rule” a convincing argument in support of the existence of Brahman?