

Buddhist Philosophy | REL3938 & PHI3930, SPRING 2021

Prof. Mario Poceski (Religion Dept., University of Florida)



Class Time

Tue, period 4, and Thu, periods 4 & 5. On Tue the class will be online, via Zoom, for all sections; on Thu it will be in MAT 105 for the F2F sections, via Zoom for online sections.

Office Hours

Because of the pandemic, office hours will be primarily via Zoom, by appointment. Appointments need to be made one day in advance. There is also the option of F2F office hours, on Thursdays, 9:30-10:30 am, in 132 Anderson Hall.

Contact Information

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Course Description

The course is a survey of the main concepts and traditions of Buddhist philosophy. It focuses on the classical systems of Buddhist philosophy that developed in India, covering both the early schools and the Mahāyāna movement. Additionally, it explores the growth and transformation of Buddhist philosophy outside of India, especially in China. While Buddhist philosophy tends to be shaped by soteriological concerns, centered about a quest for spiritual liberation or insight into reality, the course examines the creative ways in which major Buddhist thinkers have addressed central philosophical concerns with metaphysical, hermeneutical, epistemological, and ethical implications.

Prerequisites

The class is open to students from all majors who are interested in learning about Buddhist philosophy. There are no formal prerequisites, and no knowledge of Asian languages is required.

Course Format

This is a combination of lecture and discussion course. Students are encouraged and expected to engage in class discussions and critical analysis of the course materials.

Requirements

- Reading of the assigned materials.
- Class attendance and participation.
- Two exams (50%).
- Film review (10%), due 3/30 (5 pm).
- Paper abstract and annotated bibliography (10%), due 3/23 (5 pm).
- Research paper (25%), due 4/21 (5 pm).
- Class presentation (5%).

Textbooks (required)

- Siderits, Mark. *Buddhism as Philosophy: An Introduction*. Ashgate, 2007.
- Garfield, Jay L., and William Edelgass, eds. *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

Other Readings (required)¹

- Poceski, Mario. “Buddhism in Chinese History.” Mario Poceski, ed. *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to East and Inner Asian Buddhism*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2014: 40–62.
- Poceski, Mario. “Buddhist Philosophy in China.” Charles Taliaferro and Stew Goetz, eds. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion*. Blackwell, 2021 (in press).

Books for further study (recommended)

- Garfield, Jay L. *Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Gethin, Rupert. *Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Williams, Paul, Alexander Wynne, and Anthony Tribe. *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2012.



Course Schedule²

W 1 1/12	Introduction Siderits, ch. 1; Garfield, intro
W 2 1/19	Early teachings and epistemological frameworks Siderits, ch. 2; Garfield, ch. 15
W 3 1/26	Notions of self and philosophy of mind Siderits, ch. 3; Garfield, ch. 23
W 4 2/2	Buddhist ethics Siderits, ch. 4; Garfield, ch. 32
W 5 2/9	Abhidharma metaphysics Siderits, ch. 6; Garfield, ch. 1 (optional: ch. 26)
W 6 2/16	Mahāyāna doctrines and ideals Siderits, ch. 7; Garfield, ch. 33
W 7 2/23	Exam 1 (Tue) 2/25 is recharge day (no class)
W 8 3/2	Yogacara explorations of perception and reality Siderits, ch. 8; Garfield, ch. 3 (optional: ch. 18)
W 9 3/9	Madhyamaka doctrine of emptiness Siderits, ch. 9; Garfield, ch. 2
W 10 3/16	Buddhist philosophy in China Poceski, “Buddhism in Chinese History” & “Buddhist Philosophy in China”
W 11 3/23	Film: <i>I heart Huckabees</i> (David O. Russell, USA, 2004)
W 12 3/30	Tiantai conceptions of mind and truth Garfield, ch. 21 & 29
W 13 4/6	Huayan and Zen philosophies Garfield, ch. 6, 7, & 30
W 14 4/13	Exam 2 (Tue) & student presentations (Thu)
W 15 4/20	Student Presentations

¹ Available online, in pdf format.

² Tentative and subject to change.

Educational Objectives and Learning Outcomes

- Acquiring general knowledge about the key ideas and main traditions of Buddhist philosophy.
- Introducing major themes and concepts in Buddhist studies.
- Expanding the students' intellectual vision and the field of philosophical discourse by exposure to non-Western traditions.
- Learning about select worldviews, values, and norms that characterize Asian civilizations, especially India and China.
- By reading, reflecting upon, and discussing a broad range of materials, as well as by conducting independent research, students receive training in critical thinking and effective analysis. They also develop writing and communication skills that enable them to intelligently discuss key issues from a multiplicity of perspectives.
- The course facilitates students' enhanced understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures and societies, which can serve as constructive conceptual framework for reflecting on their own social mores and cultural norms.

Online e-Learning System & email Communication

- The syllabus and other course materials are posted online via UF's e-Learning system, using Canvas.
- The exams are taken online, via Canvas, using online proctoring.
- Students should send all written communications to the instructor directly, using the email address given above.

Grading

- The final grade is based on each student's individual performance and his/her fulfillment of the course requirements, as stipulated in the syllabus.
- The same course rules and expectations apply equally to all students—no student is entitled to special consideration or unique treatment. Other extraneous or irrelevant factors, including student's personal desires or expectations about grades, are not considered.
- Students should not expect retroactive changes or other forms of grade modification.
- Students should take all assignments and other course requirements very seriously. There are no opportunities to do additional work for extra credit or better grade.
- No incomplete grades are given, except in very exceptional circumstances, in which case the students should contact the instructor no later than a week before the last day of classes.
- Final grades are computed according to the standard grading scheme in Canvas.

Attendance and Participation

- **Attendance** is expected of all students, starting with the first day of classes. Students who have problems with class attendance or punctuality should think twice before enrolling in the course. (For more on the university's attendance policies, see the Undergraduate Catalog).

- Students are advised to take extensive **notes** in class, and to use them prudently in their preparation for the exams.
- Student with exceptional **participation** performance may be awarded up to 3 **bonus** points (3% of the final grade). This bonus is entirely based on the instructor's discretion, and the final assessment considers both the quantity and quality of student's participation in classroom discussions, as well as other elements of coursework.

Exams

- The exams are taken online, via Canvas, during regular class hours. They are proctored.
- The exams are primarily based on the materials presented in the class lectures/discussions, plus the readings. They are not cumulative (i.e., Exam 2 will cover the materials studied after Exam 1).
- Exams primarily consist of multiple-choice and short Q&A; there might also be a single short essay (a few paragraphs, and not more than one per exam).
- No make-up exams are given, except in documented instances of illness or other emergency, in which case the student must contact the instructor directly before the exam, if feasible, or as soon as possible.
- If any student has a valid reason to request rescheduling of an exam—such as observance of a religious holiday—he/she must contact the instructor in person and make suitable arrangements one week before the examination. Failure to act in accord with these instructions leads to a failing grade.

Written Assignments

- The film **review** will be of *I heart Huckabees*, the film assigned to the class. It should follow the standard format of a film review, and it should be around 500 words long.
- The **abstract** and **bibliography** must clearly state the topic and provide provisional title of the final paper. It should contain a short—250 to 300 words—abstract of the paper and at least 8 titles of academic publications pertinent to the student's research topic, each of them annotated with a short (one or two sentences) summary of contents that indicates how it is relevant to the stated topic.
- The final paper should be 2,500 words, inclusive of notes and citations. Graduate papers should be 50% longer. There should be a bibliography at the end of the final paper.
- The written assignments must be submitted in MS **Word** and must follow standard academic format. Use standard font, such as Calibri 12, with 1.5 spacing and 1" margins. Do not forget to include paper title, course name, instructor title and name, date, and page numbers.
- The written assignments must be **submitted digitally**, via e-Learning, before the final deadline.
- **No late submissions** will be accepted under any circumstances. Students are encouraged to avoid procrastination and make early submissions, at least **a week before the final deadline**.
- Students are welcome to bring early drafts of their papers and ask for feedback/advice, during the office hours.

Class presentation

- Each student needs to deliver in person a short class presentation on the final paper, towards the end of the course.
- The class presentation needs to be accompanied with a polished and informative PowerPoint presentation.

Classroom Conduct

- All students are required to join the class on time, as late arrivals (and early departures) are disruptive and disrespectful.
- Students are expected to be courteous and respectful, abstaining from disruptive behavior that adversely affects others and is contrary to the pursuit of knowledge. Examples of such behavior include talking with someone, displaying active disinterest in the class (e.g., sleeping or inappropriate computer use), or putting down others. Phones should be turned off during class. Offending students will be asked to leave.

Office Hours and Communication

- Students are encouraged to schedule office hours, especially if they have questions or need help with the course materials.
- The instructor is glad to assist students with their pursuit of knowledge and facilitate their success with the course.
- The instructor is also willing to discuss relevant academic topics that, due to time constraints, are not covered in class in much detail.
- Any questions about the course requirements or any aspect of the coursework should be resolved by consulting the instructor directly, preferably during office hours. Pleading ignorance or lack of common sense are not valid excuses for failures to fulfill requirements or abide by course policies.

Plagiarism and Cheating

- Plagiarism and cheating will result in a failing grade and other serious penalties.
- For more information, see the “Academic Honesty—Student Guide” brochure (posted online by the Dean of Students Office).

Disability

- A student who has a documented disability that may require some modification of testing or other class requirements should consult the instructor in person at the beginning of the course so that appropriate arrangements may be made.
- The student is responsible for communicating his/her needs to the instructor, as early as possible. All arrangements for changes pertaining to the quizzes and the exams must be made at least one week in advance.

Other Notices

- Registration in the course implies that each student enters a contractual agreement with the instructor, whereas he/she is accountable for fulfilling all course requirements and adhering to the course policies.
- Students are responsible for knowing and following all schedules and instructions contained in this syllabus, as well as any other instructions given in class (remember, attendance is not optional).



- *A fool who knows his foolishness is wise at least to that extent, but a fool who thinks himself wise is a fool indeed.*
- *Think not lightly of good, saying, "It will not come to me." Drop by drop is the water pot filled. Likewise, the wise man, gathering it little by little, fills himself with good.*
- *Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is a law eternal.*

The Dhammapada