

RELG 219: Ethics and the Good Life in South Asian Religions

Daniel M. Stuart

Course Description

Fundamental questions of ethical and moral inquiry in religious traditions of Asia

Course Overview

In this course, we read closely some of the ancient Hindu and Buddhist resources for thinking about the complexities of ethical action in the less-than-perfect world of human existence. We discuss ethical reflections in philosophical and literary texts, as well as actual practices for the cultivation of virtues. The questions the course addresses include: Where is moral agency located? What is ethical action? How is it determined by one's social location in the world, and how can one negotiate and make choices within these parameters or when confronted with competing interests? Should one engage actively in the world, or turn away from it, in order to work towards an ethical ideal?

Towards the end of the course, we turn to examine how traditional Buddhist and Hindu resources have been applied to contemporary issues such as ethnic or religious conflict, social justice, politics, human rights, and so on. Throughout the course, we discuss the role of religion in determining the ethical boundaries of human behavior, and the power of religious ideas and practices to define social identity and shape actual communities. Readings are all in English translation.

Learning objectives

Upon successful completion of the course, students should be able to:

- describe and explain the primary modes of religious, ethical, and philosophical inquiry in South Asia
- practice close reading of primary texts
- demonstrate competence and the appropriate vocabulary for discussing and debating issues of moral relevance

Readings

- Patrick Olivelle (trans.), *The Pañcatantra*
- Śāntideva: *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*
- Joan V. Bondurant: *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*
- Ann Grodzins Gold and Gloria Goodwin Raheja, *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India*
- Steven M. Parish, *Moral Knowing in a Hindu Sacred City*

Course Requirements and Grading

1. Participation (15% of final grade)
2. 5 quizzes (15%)
3. Short responses to readings (20%)
4. Mid-term exam (25%)
5. Final essay 25%

Grading Scale

100-90 A; 89-87 B+; 86-80 B; 79-77 C+; 76-70 C; 69-67 D+; 66-60 D; 59 and below F

Course Policies

Academic Integrity

The University of South Carolina has clearly articulated its policies governing academic integrity and students are encouraged to carefully review the policy on the Honor Code in the Carolina Community. Any deviation from these expectations will result in academic penalties as well as disciplinary action. The area of greatest potential risk for inadvertent academic dishonesty is plagiarism. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, paraphrasing or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgement.

Attendance

Prompt and regular attendance is crucial for success in the course. Attendance will be taken at the start of each class. We will follow the university's policy regarding attendance and the effect of unexcused absences on a student's course grade. If you are absent for an excusable reason, be sure to present the needed documentation to the instructor immediately upon your return (e.g., if you are absent for a legitimate medical reason, bring a doctor's note as soon as you come back to class). The University attendance policy specifies that students may miss up to 3 class meetings (10% of class time) without penalty. Beyond that, class absences will affect your class participation grade.

Classroom Conduct

All cell phones are to be turned off or silenced during class; there is no text messaging, web browsing, etc, during class. Please come to class on time, and be respectful of everyone else in the class. Refrain from personal attacks or demeaning comments of any kind. Disrespectful or disruptive behavior, such as talking out of turn, may result in dismissal from class and/or an academic penalty.

Assignment Submission

All assignments should be submitted using Blackboard's "submit assignment" link. Assignments lose 20% of their point value per day late and will be counted as if the whole assignment was submitted at the time of the latest timestamp present.

Midterm Exam

Makeup exams will be allowed only with pre-approval of the instructor or with an acceptable, documented reason. Acceptable reasons for makeup exams include severe illness, family emergencies or other unavoidable events including dangerous weather conditions and car accidents. Exam format for makeup exams may be different than the original exam and will likely utilize a short answer format. An oral examination may also be utilized if deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Accommodating Disabilities

Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and

may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, contact the Office of Student Disability Services: 777-6142, TDD 777-6744, email sasds@mailbox.sc.edu, or stop by LeConte College Room 112A. All accommodations must be approved through the Office of Student Disability Services.

Course Outline

Week 1: How to Study Religious Ethics in South Asia?

Week 2: Sources of Hindu Ethics

Reading: Maria Heim, "Differentiations in Hindu Ethics"
Anne E. Monius, "Origins of Hindu Ethics"

Week 3: The Quest for the Self

Reading: Patrick Olivelle (trans.), *The Upanishads* (selections)

Week 4: The Context-sensitivity of Hindu Dharma

Reading: Patrick Olivelle (trans.), *The Law Code of Manu* (selections)

Week 5: Complex Ethics in Epic Narrative

Reading: Emily Hudson, *Disorienting Dharma: Ethics and the Aesthetics of Suffering in the Mahābhārata* (selections)

Arti Dhand, "The Dharma of Ethics, The Ethics of Dharma: Quizzing the Ideals of Hinduism"

Week 6: Ethical Dilemmas through Animal Fables

Reading: Patrick Olivelle (trans.), *The Pañcatantra*

Week 7: Ethical aphorisms from Tamil-speaking South India: *Tirukkural*

Reading: *The Kural of Tiruvalluvar* translated with an introduction by P.S. Sundaram

Week 8: Buddhist Ethics

Reading: Damien Keown, "Origins of Buddhist Ethics"
Charles Hallisey, "Ethical Particularism in Theravāda Buddhism"

Week 9: Ethical Cultivation in Early Buddhism

Selections from Pali Buddhist Texts

Collins, Steven. *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism* (selections)

Week 10: Buddhist Monasticism and Training of the Body

Reading: Śāntideva: *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*

Suzanne Mrozik, "The Value of Human Differences: South Asian Buddhist Contributions toward an Embodied Virtue Theory," pp. 1-33.

Week 11: Buddhism, Vegetarianism, and Violence

Reading: D. S. Ruegg: “Ahimsā and Vegetarianism in the History of Buddhism”
Michael Zimmermann (ed.), *Buddhism and Violence* (selections)

Week 12: Gandhi

Reading: Joan V. Bondurant: *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*

Week 13: Ethics, Gender, and Development

Reading: Ann Grodzins Gold and Gloria Goodwin Raheja, *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India*

Week 14: The Moral World of Hindus in Modern Nepal

Reading: Steven M. Parish, *Moral Knowing in a Hindu Sacred City*

Week 15: Contemporary issues

Presentation of student papers in progress