

ETHICS AND THE GOOD LIFE IN SOUTH ASIAN RELIGIONS

RELG 219
Professor DANIEL M. STUART
Fall 2014



Meetings: Monday/Wendensday/Friday, 10:50-11:40, Humanities Classroom 412
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Course Description

In this course, we read closely some of the ancient Hindu, Jain, 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. We will also watch a number of films that provide food for thought on some of the traditional materials under discussion. 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 each course unit, we turn to examine how traditional resources have been applied to contemporary issues such as ethnic or religious conflict, social justice, politics, modern identity, 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 Outcomes

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

Required Texts

- Stoler Miller, Barbara. 1986. *The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War*. Bantam Classics.
- Harvey, Peter. 2000. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values, and Issues*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Links to course readings on Blackboard

Bibliographical information for readings accessed on Blackboard:

- Blackburn, Simon. *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Brown, Judith M, and Anthony Parel, eds. 2011. *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Chapple, Christopher Key, ed. 2002. *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life*. Cambridge, MA: distributed by Harvard University Press.
- Dalrymple, William. 2010. *Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India*. New York.
- Dhand, Arti. 2002. "The *Dharma* of Ethics, the Ethics of *Dharma*." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 30, no. 3: 347–372.
- Doniger, Wendy, ed. 1980. *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Edelglass, William, and Jay L Garfield. 2009. *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Doniger, Wendy and Brian K. Smith, trans. 1991. *The Laws of Manu*. New York: Penguin.
- Embree, Ainslie Thomas, Stephen N Hay, and William Theodore De Bary, eds. 1988. *Sources of Indian Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Louis Fischer, ed. 1962. *The Essential Gandhi: An Anthology*. New York: Random House.
- Jones, Lindsay, ed. 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA.
- Keown, Damien. 1996. *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- King, Sallie B. *Socially Engaged Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009.
- Larson, Gerald James. 1987. "'Conceptual Resources' in South Asia for 'Environmental Ethics' or the Fly Is Still Alive and Well in the Bottle." *Philosophy East and West* 37, no. 2: 150–59.
- Olivelle, Patrick, trans. 1997. *Pañcatantra: The Book of India's Folk Wisdom*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Parekh, Bhikhu C. 2001. *Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ramanujan, A. K. 1989. "Is There An Indian Way of Thinking? An Informal Essay." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 23, no. 1: 41–58.

Rolston, Holmes. 1987. "Can the East Help the West to Value Nature?" *Philosophy East and West* 37, no. 2: 172–90.

Schweiker, William, ed. 2005. *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Films

- *Dharm* (2007)
- *Devi* (1960)
- *Gandhi* (1982)
- *Ahiṃsa—Non-violence* (1987)
- *Samsāra* (2001)
- *Never Let Me Go* (2010)

Course Requirements, Grading Breakdown

- **20% Class Participation**—This includes regular attendance and participation in class discussion. **Attendance is mandatory, and if you miss more than four class sessions, you will lose 5% of your participation grade for every additional class missed.**
- **20% Completion of short written responses to weekly readings**—The reading responses will be submitted on Blackboard and will be based on writing prompts posted on Blackboard. **Responses are due by mid-day every Thursday.** A response should be between 100 and 150 words in length. These short reflections provide a valuable opportunity to think about the assigned readings prior to our last class discussion of each week. They will be graded on a credit/no credit basis. Only responses submitted on-time will be accepted.
- **30% Mid-term Exam: Date of Final Exam: 10/22/2014**
- **30% Final Essay: Essays will be assigned on 11/21/2014 and due on 12/8/2014** (a short guide describing what is expected for the papers will be distributed when the essay is assigned).
- **In-class Engagement**—active engagement in the classroom forms an important part of the course. Meaningful contributions to class discussions and other in-class activities enhance everyone's learning experience. Consistent contributions can lift a student's final grade by as much as one full grade, e.g., from a B+ to an A. Students should feel free to discuss the quality of their class participation with the instructor at any point during the semester.

Note taking: Laptops and electronic devices are **NOT** permitted in class. This means that you **cannot** use your cellphone, smartphone, PDA, etc. If you use any such device during class time, you will be asked to leave and be counted as absent. Students should take notes using pen/pencil and paper.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: As students at USC, you are bound by the University of South Carolina Honor Code. All work produced for RELG 219 must be your own. The professor does not tolerate cheating or plagiarism under any circumstances. **By enrolling in the course and accepting the terms of this syllabus, you indicate your acceptances of this policy.** Instances of cheating will immediately result in a zero for the assignment, and the professor reserves the right to pursue more drastic action with the Office of Academic Integrity and the University administration.

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

Class Schedule and Assigned Readings

Week 1—What does it mean to study religious ethics in South Asia?

Common Frameworks of Thought in Indian Religions

- 8/25 (M) Introductory Class: “Ethics,” “the good life,” and “South Asia.”
8/27 (W) Blackburn 2003 [2001], pp. 1-7; Potter 1963, pp. 1-24
8/29 (F) Jones 2004, Encyclopedia of Religion: *karma*, *saṃsāra*, and *mokṣa*; Encyclopedia
Britannica on “Hinduism (religion)”, pp. 1-5 (pdf)

Week 2—Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists

Ethicization and the Ethics of Dharma?

- 9/1 (M) ***Labor Day—no class***
9/3 (W) Obeyesekere 1980, pp. 137-164
9/5 (F) Dhand 2002

Week 3—Hindu Ethics

Context Sensitive Dharma

- 9/8 (M) Monius 2005; Heim 2005
9/10 (W) The Laws of Manu, Doniger 1991, pp. xv-xviii, pp. lii-lvii, pp. 17-24, pp. 34-35,
pp. 43-49, pp. 58-61, (optional: pp. 278-290)
9/12 (F) Film: *Dharm* (2007)

Week 4—Hindu Ethics (cont.)

Problematizing Action

- 9/15 (M) Stoler Miller 1986, 1-27
9/17 (W) Stoler Miller 1986, 29-81
9/19 (F) Stoler Miller 1986, 83-154

Week 5—Hindu Ethics (cont.)

Ethics in Narrative

- 9/22 (M) Olivelle 1999, Book I, pp. 3-45
9/24 (W) Olivelle 1999, Book II, pp. 71-104
9/26 (F) Film: *Devi* (1960)

Week 6—Hindu Ethics (cont.)

Gandhiji

- 9/29 (M) Parekh 2001, pp. 1-48; Bilgrami in Brown and Parel, eds., 2011
10/1 (W) Fischer 1962 (pdf), pp. 8-18, 21-30, 86-88, 96-101, and 120-135
10/3 (F) Film: *Gandhi* (1982)

Week 7—Jain Ethics

Violence Revisioned

- 10/6 (M) *Sources of Indian Tradition* 1988, pp. 49-75
10/8 (W) *Sources of Indian Tradition* 1988, pp. 76-92
10/10 (F) Film: *Ahimsa—Non-violence* (1987)

Week 8—Jain Ethics (cont.)

Suicide, Suffering, and the Good Life

- 10/13 (M) Dalrymple 2010, pp. 1-28
10/15 (W) Chapple 2002, pp. 3-34 (Tatia and Koller)
10/17 (F) Chapple 2002, pp. 63–94 (Cort)

Week 9—Jain Ethics (cont.)

Is Renunciation Always Good?

- 10/20 (M) Chapple 2002, pp. 95–139 (Dundas and Chapple)
10/22 (W) **Mid-term exam**
10/23-10/26 October break—no class on 10/24

Week 10—Buddhist Ethics

The Extreme Middle Path

- 10/27 (M) Keown 2013 [1996], pp. 17-31 and 48-60
10/29 (W) Harvey 2000, pp. 8-35
10/31 (F) Harvey 2000, pp. 36-59

Week 11—Buddhist Ethics (cont.)

Societal Negotiations

- 11/3 (M) Harvey 2000, pp. 60-88
11/5 (W) Harvey 2000, pp. 88-122
11/7 (F) Film: *Samsāra* (2001)

Week 12—Buddhist Ethics (cont.)

The Way of the Bodhisattva

- 11/10 (M) Harvey 2000, pp. 123-149
11/12 (W) Harvey 2000, pp. 150-186
11/14 (F) Film: *Never Let Me Go* (2010)

Week 13—*Buddhist Ethics (cont.)*

Engaged Buddhism

11/17 (M) King 2009, pp. 1-27

11/19 (W) King 2009, pp. 27-38; Kent 2010

11/21 (F) Edelglass and Garfield 2009, pp. 419-427 and pp. 428-436; **Paper topics distributed**

Week 14—*What can South Asian ethics teach non-Asian thinkers?*

12/1 (M) Rolston 1987, pp. 172-190

12/3 (W) Larson 1987, pp. 150-159

12/5 (F) Ramanujan 1989, pp. 41-58

Final Papers due: Monday, December 8, 12 pm. Papers should be submitted in hard copy to the religious studies office on the third floor of Rutledge.