



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

Between Buddha and the West: Big Questions in Philosophy - 35155

Last update 31-03-2025

HU Credits: 2

Degree/Cycle: 1st degree (Bachelor)

Responsible Department: Asian Studies

Academic year: 0

Semester: 2nd Semester

Teaching Languages: Hebrew

Campus: E. Safra

Course/Module Coordinator: Prof. Eviatar Shulman

Coordinator Email: eviatar.shulman@mail.huji.ac.il

Coordinator Office Hours: Wednesday before class upon appointment, or Tuesday 12-13 at Mt. Scopus

Teaching Staff:

Prof. Eviatar Shulman

Course/Module description:

Buddhism and Indian philosophy address most of the great questions of philosophy and present their own, challenging positions that offer new perspectives on these great debates. In this course we aim to understand the Buddhist and Indian contributions to these debates and to see whether they can help philosophy move forward, with the help of the stronger embodied and phenomenological approaches the espouse that take reason as a practical method rather than as an end in itself. We will thus discuss questions in a comparative perspective between East and West such as - what is real, and what is the nature of reality? Is there a Self, what is man and what is his responsibility? What is the nature of language and knowledge? What is causality and is it independently real?

Course/Module aims:

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

1. To understand the big questions that have troubled humanity worldwide and to develop their own answers to them.
2. To question the nature of philosophy in life and assess its relevance.

Attendance requirements(%):

100

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction: There will be lectures assisted by PPTs, but these are geared toward discussion, which will also be supported by short written assignments throughout the semester, on which most of the final grade is based.

Course/Module Content:

A full and detailed list will be updated closer to the second semester. Generally, the following themes will be treated, with one to three classes, and normally two, devoted to each -

1. The nature of ordinary objects and their relation to conceptuality.
2. The nature of reality between realism and idealism.
3. Language, knowledge, and the degree in which they reflect reality (or "reality").

-
4. Consciousness and its relation to matter. The relation between body and soul.
 5. The Self- is it real, unreal, both or neither?
 6. Causality.
 7. Free will.

Required Reading:

Required readings are primary sources, and recommended ones are accompanying scholarly materials. Per class -

2. Descartes, *Meditations* 1-2.

3-4. Selections from "The Questions of King Milinda."
"The shore discourse to Rahula" (*Cūḷa-rahulovāda-sutta*)

5. David Hume, selections from "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding."

•

6. Nagarjuna, "Root Verses of the Middle Way", chs. 1-5, 13,15, 24

•

7. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction.

8. Vasubandhu, "20 verses (*Vimshatika*)

9. Georges Berkeley. "A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Understanding", 1-24.

10. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* / John Locke
Dignaga, pramanasamuccaya

11. Chalmers, David J. (1995). "The Puzzle of Conscious Experience." *Scientific American* 273.6: 80-86.

12. Husserl, Zahavi

13. Strawson, Galen. "Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism Entails Panpsychism." In *Real Materialism and Other Essays*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008.

Additional Reading Material:

2. "René Descartes," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

3-4.

• גתין, ר. (2014). בודהיזם: היסטוריה, דת, תרגול. ישראל: אלטרנטיבות, פרק 6.

• Collins, S., (1982). *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, ch. 3.

• Garfield, J. L. (2022). *Losing Ourselves: Learning to Live without a Self*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022, ch. 2.

5. "David Hume," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

6. Huntington, C. W., (2007). "The Nature of the Madhyamaka Trick." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 35: 103-131.

• Garfield, J. L., (2008). "Turning a Madhyamaka Trick: Reply to Huntington. *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36: 507-527.

7. "Immanuel Kant," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

8. King, R., (1994). "Early Yogācāra and its Relationship with the Madhyamaka School." *Philosophy East & West* 44 (4): 659-684.

9. *Georges Berkeley*, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

10. Dreyfus, G. (1996). "Can the Fool Lead the Blind? Perception and the Given in Dharmakīrti's Thought." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 24, no.3: 209-229.

• "Idealism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [section 3].

11.

• Nagel, Thomas. "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *Philosophical Review* 83 (1974): 435-50.

• Varela, Francisco (1996). "Neurophenomenology: A Methodological Remedy to the Hard Problem." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 3: 330-349.

• Churchland, Patricia, (1997 [1988]). "Can Neurobiology Teach Us Anything About Consciousness." In Block, N., Flanagan, Owen and Güzelde, Güven, (eds.), *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, Cambridge and London: MIT, pp. 127-140.

• Crick, Francis, and Koch, Christof (1997). "Toward a Neurobiological Theory of Consciousness." In Block, N., Flanagan, Owen and Güzelde, Güven, (eds.), *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, Cambridge and London: MIT, pp. 277-292.

• Dennett, Daniel C. (1991). *Consciousness Explained*. Boston, MA: Little Brown.

• Evan Thompson (2017). *Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation and Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press. Chapter 10, "Knowing: Is the Self an Illusion?", pp. 319-366.

Grading Scheme:

Essay / Project / Final Assignment / Home Exam / Referat 50 %

Submission assignments during the semester: Exercises / Essays / Audits / Reports / Forum / Simulation / others 50 %

Additional information:

Most of the work is during the semester -

two submissions of 1-2 pages, and four shorter half-page responses. The final submission is up to 2-3 pages on one of the themes we studied.

Ongoing participation in the forum will give bonus points.