COURSE DESCRIPTION

According to thinkers in classical India, the goals of life were fourfold, encompassing the pursuit of social-moral duty (dharma), economic and political power (artha), bodily pleasure (kama), and finally, release (moksha) from the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. The “four goals” provide a useful key for understanding Indian intellectual history in its classical moment – roughly, the half millennium between the second and seventh centuries. This pivotal era witnessed the definition of new forms of social and political thought, the creation of new types of expressive literature in Sanskrit, and the crystallization of the Hindu religion. In this course, we explore classical Indian thought through a variety of theoretical and literary texts articulating the ideas and values of the age. Most of these works were originally written in Sanskrit, the ancient Indian language of culture and power that served as a lingua franca uniting vast portions of Southern Asia. The emphasis is on close reading and discussion of the translated texts themselves, and critical engagement with the ideas and values they present.

SCHEDULE

9/7 M: Introduction to course. Close Reading: The puruṣārthas. Three goals (tri-varga) or four goals (catur-varga)?

9/9 W: The Sanskrit language and the “Sanskrit Cosmopolis”

9/11 F: The Vedic background to classical India: Veda, mantra, and sacrifice
READ: A.L. Basham, Origins and Development of classical Hinduism, entire book; refer especially to chapters 1 & 2)

I. Dharma: “duty”

9/14 M: The Laws of Manu, introduction
(refer to Basham, Classical Hinduism, pp. 98-105)

9/16 W: The Laws of Manu, close reading

*9/18 F: The Laws of Manu, discussion
The sacrificial context of dharma in Manu
*reading response due

9/21 M: NO CLASS

9/23 W: The Bhagavadgita of the Mahabharata, introduction
(refer to Basham, Classical Hinduism, chapters 3, 5, &6)
9/25 F: The Bhagavadgita, close reading

*9/28 M: The Bhagavadgita, discussion
Krishna’s metaphysical justifications for killing
*reading response due
* short paper #1 assigned

9/30 W: The Sauptikaparvan of the Mahabharata, introduction

10/2 F: The Sauptikaparvan, close reading

*10/5 M: The Sauptikaparvan, discussion
Battle as sacrifice, destruction as creation
*reading response due

II. Artha: “power”

10/7 W: Kautilya’s Arthasastra, introduction

10/9 F Kautilya’s Arthasastra, close reading

*10/12 M: Kautilya’s Arthasastra, discussion
Manu vs. Kautilya on the purpose of kingship
*reading response due

**10/14 W: Visakhadatta’s The Minister’s Seal, introduction
**Paper 1 due: The problem of violence

10/16 F: The Minister’s Seal, close reading

*10/19 M: The Minister’s Seal, discussion
The play’s ideal: Kautilya’s shrewdness or Rakshasa’s loyalty?
*reading response due

*10/21 W: Vishnu Sharman’s Five Discourses on Worldly Wisdom, introduction
*Longer paper assigned: see “papers” section below

10/23 F: Five Discourses on Worldly Wisdom, close reading

10/26 M [FALL BREAK]

*10/28 W: Five Discourses on Worldly Wisdom, discussion
Fables for princes, or fables for ministers?
*reading response due

III. Kāma: “pleasure”

10/30 F: Vatsyayana’s Kāmasūtra, introduction
11/2 M:  
*The Kāmasūtra*, close reading

*11/4 W:  
*The Kāmasūtra*, discussion
  Do women have agency in the Kamasutra?
  *reading response due

*11/6 F:  
*Grow Long, Blessed Night*, introduction
  *deadline for approval of Option 1 for the longer paper assignment

11/9 M:  
NO CLASS

11/11 W:  
*Grow Long, Blessed Night*, close reading

*11/13 F:  
*Grow Long, Blessed Night*, discussion
  Is love, as opposed to pleasure, a vernacular emotion?
  *reading response due

*11/16 M:  
Kalidasa’s *The Recognition of Shakuntala*, introduction
  *short paper #2 assigned: The Conflict of Kama and Dharma in Shakuntala

11/18 W:  
*The Recognition of Shakuntala*, close reading

*11/20 F:  
*The Recognition of Shakuntala*, discussion
  How does the conflict between *kama* and *dharma* help structure *Shakuntala’s* plot?
  *reading response due

IV. Moksha: “release”

11/23 M:  
*The Upanishads*, introduction
  (refer to Basham, *Classical Hinduism*, ch. 4)

11/25 W:  
THANKSGIVING BREAK

11/27 F:  
THANKSGIVING BREAK

11/30 M:  
*The Upanishads*, close reading

**12/1 Tuesday:  
[not a class day] **paper #3 due: The Conflict of Kama and Dharma in Shakuntala

*12/2 W:  
*The Upanishads*, discussion
  The role of imagery in the Upanishadic teachings
  *reading response due

*12/4 F:  
Patanjali’s *Yogasutra*, introduction

12/7 M:  
*Yogasutra*, close reading
*12/9 W: Yoga sutra, discussion
  Sankhya dualism and Upanishadic monism in the Yoga sutra
  *reading response due

12/11 F: TBA

**12/16 W [no class]** longer paper due on Wednesday, December 16th
COURSE FORMAT

This course is run as a lecture/discussion class, focusing on a series of eleven “great books”, all of which are foundational texts of Indian civilization, and many of which are among the masterpieces of world literature. Our usual schedule will be to read and discuss one book per week.

Each week, the first class session will typically be in lecture format, and is intended to provide you with a general introduction to the book and the ideas dealt with therein. The second class will generally revolve around a close reading of one or more passages from the book, and a collective attempt to unpack its implications and significance. There will be ample opportunities for discussion on these occasions. The final class on each book will be given over entirely to discussion, and will depend on your active engagement and initiative for its success.

For each book, a handout will be posted on the course Moodle in advance of the first session, to guide your reading and thinking, and to suggest certain directions for discussion. You will also be required to write a brief, one-page reading response, to be turned in on the day of final discussion for each book. These responses are not conceived as formal papers, but rather as mechanisms to help you engage closely with the text, and thus to prepare yourself for the ensuing discussion. (These reading responses are explained in more detail below.)

The books will be read in four groups of three (or in one case, two), each group relating to one of the four goals of life. Typically, the first book we will read in each grouping is an abstract, prescriptive, theoretical text (śāstra or sūtra), and the next two books are works of expressive literature (sāhītya or kāvyā) which relate to that goal through their subject matter.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Readings: There is a considerable amount of reading for this course, but most of it you should find enjoyable. With one exception, all major readings for the course are original Indian works of the classical period, so you will be engaging directly with the primary sources for understanding classical Indian thought. The one additional assigned book is an accessible introduction to classical Hinduism that will help orient you to the primary texts. It is crucially important that you stay up-to-date with the assigned reading.

Copies of all but two of the required books are available for purchase at Broad Street Books; two books are out of print (asterisked below), and accordingly, digital versions will be available on Moodle. One copy of each assigned book is additionally available on reserve at the reserve desk of Olin Library. Books are listed in the order that they will be read:

BL1152.3 .B37 1989


The Arthaśāstra: Selections from the Classic Indian Work on Statecraft. Edited and translated, with an introduction, by Mark McClish and Patrick Olivelle. JA84.I4 K3813 2012

PK3798.S91 M73 1968 [Play and introduction available on Moodle; copy on reserve; not available for purchase.]


Additionally, some copies of an optional book are available for purchase at Broad Street, should you be interested. This is NOT REQUIRED READING. This is a poetic biography of the Buddha told by a noted Brahman author who converted to Buddhism; aside from being an important early form of the life of the Buddha, it is a fascinating attempt to redefine dharma in accordance with the renunciatory teachings of Buddhism.


2. **Participation in discussions.** Everyone is expected to contribute regularly and wholeheartedly to the weekly “close readings” and discussions. The success of the course – for all of us – will depend on everyone taking part. Be sure to bring all your questions, doubts, and ideas to class.

3. **Weekly reading responses.** Each week, you are required to turn in a one-page reading response to that week’s book. These are to be turned in as hard copy only, at the beginning of the class session at which the book will be discussed. These are intended to help you formulate your ideas and questions relating to the book, and thus to prepare you for the discussion. They need not be comprehensive summaries of the book, nor do they need to be carefully crafted and polished formal papers. What I am looking for is evidence of your engagement with the book and its ideas. You should be selective, focusing on one or two key ideas or questions that catch your interest as you read. These ideas and questions can relate to some of those posed in the weekly reading and discussion guide, or they can be anything else that strikes you as significant, relevant, or curious about the book. Even though they need not be fully polished, they should clearly articulate and communicate your ideas. These reading responses will be graded according to a simple system of “check” (good), “check-plus” (especially good), or “check-minus” (some effort, but perfunctory, off-target, or disengaged). If you fail to turn in a response, you will receive a “zero”.

4. **Papers.** There are three papers assigned for the course. You will receive detailed instructions when the assignments are made, but the general nature of the papers is as follows:

   A. Short paper #1 (3-5 pages): The problem of violence (*himsa*). Does classical Indian thought sanction violence – specifically, killing? When is killing permitted, and when not? How is killing reconciled with the ideal of nonviolence (*a-himsa*)? DUE: Wednesday, October 14th.

   B. Longer paper (7-10 pages). DUE: Wednesday, December 16th
      Option 1: on a topic of your choice (subject to my pre-approval BY FRIDAY November 6th).
      Option 2: on the continuing relevance of classical Indian thought in today’s India. Current newspapers in India frequently have articles or columns referencing the idea of dharma and its relevance to Indian society today. Referring to the series of short articles made available to you (and augmenting them with additional sources you can find on-line), what are some of the major ways in which dharma is understood differently today? To what extent does there appear to be continuity with the classical conception of dharma, and to what extent does the sense of the word seem to have changed?
C. Short paper #2 (3-5 pages): The conflict of kama and dharma in Sakuntala. In Kalidasa’s play, The Recognition of Shakuntala, the unfolding of the plot can be understood in terms of an inherent conflict between the goals of kama and dharma. How does this conflict play out in the case of the principal characters, Dushyanta and Shakuntala? Does the play offer any insights into the nature of the conflict, and the relationship between these two goals? DUE: Tuesday, December 1st (not a class day).

The three papers are due no later than 5:00pm on the date specified, and they may be submitted either electronically or as hard copy. If submitting electronically, please send to pwagoner@wesleyan.edu as an email attachment, either in MSWord or PDF format. Hard copies can be turned in to me in person, or placed in my mailbox in the Art History Program office (41 Wyllys Ave, Room 318). Be sure not to use the boxes next to Esther Moran’s desk for turning in papers; these boxes are where you pick up graded papers and exams.

5. Examinations
There are no exams in this course.

6. Policy on extensions: There will be no extensions given for any written assignment except in the case of a medical or personal emergency supported by a letter (or email message) from your class dean. The weekly reading responses are due at the start of class on the day of the text’s discussion, and the papers are due no later than 5:00pm on the date stated. N.B.: If a reading response is not turned in by the deadline, you will receive a “0” (zero) for that response. If a paper is turned in after the due date, your grade will be reduced by one letter grade for each day or fraction of a day that the paper is late. Please note that Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays are also days.

7. Honor Code and Plagiarism: Please be sure you have read and understood the section in the latest copy of the Student Handbook describing the Honor Code and Plagiarism. In particular, pay special attention to the section on plagiarism, which describes the acceptable ways of quoting, paraphrasing, and citing the works of others, and acknowledging the ideas of others. Any suspected violations of the honor code will be reported to the Honor Board. If you have any questions about the interpretation of the honor code as it relates to this class, please do not hesitate to ask me.

8. Grading: The following criteria are used for grading papers:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>A/A-</td>
<td>Excellent in all or nearly all aspects. The interest of the reader is engaged by the ideas and presentation. Effective organization and writing. Paper marked by originality of ideas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>Clear argument, clear writing, good evidence, appropriate response to assignment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B/B-</td>
<td>Technically competent, with perhaps a lapse here and there. The thesis is clear, properly limited, and reasonable, and the prose is generally good but not distinguished. Use of evidence is sufficient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+/C</td>
<td>A competent piece of work but not yet good. More or less adequately organized along obvious lines. Thesis may be unclear or over-simple. Development is often skimpy. Use of evidence may be inadequate. Monotony of sentence structure is apparent and errors may be sprinkled throughout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-/D/D-</td>
<td>A piece of work that demonstrates some effort on the author’s part but that is too marred by technical problems or flaws in thinking or development of ideas to be considered competent work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E/F</td>
<td>Failing grade. Essay may not respond to assignment. Essay may be far too short. Grammar and style may be careless.</td>
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Your overall grade for the class will be calculated as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper 1</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper 2</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper 3</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Responses</td>
<td>20%*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20% (this is based on the frequency and nature of your contribution to class discussions, willingness to ask questions, etc.)</td>
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*to calculate the reading response portion of your grade, all 11 reading response grades will be averaged. For this purpose, a “check-plus” equals an A (95%), a “check” equals a B+ (88.3%), and a “check-minus” equals a B- (81.7%). Missing reading responses will be counted as 0%.

9. **Students with Disabilities:** It is the policy of Wesleyan University to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services, in addition to making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at: [http://www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html](http://www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html)

10. **Classroom etiquette:**
- please arrive on time
- please turn off your cell phone and other electronic devices before you come into the classroom
- please do not get up and leave the room before class is over
- if you bring food or beverages, please throw your trash away when class is over. **Do not leave your trash on the tables, as other people will be using the classroom throughout the day.**