

PHIL 302: HISTORY OF BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

Fall 2021 Mid-term Exam

Due: Monday, October 18

Write a 4-6 page essay in response to one of the following topics. Upload your responses to Laulima as either a Word or pdf file. Use your last name as the name of the file.

The Teachings of the Buddha

What are the Four Noble Truths taught by the Buddha in his first sermon and how might these truths be explained in terms of a visit to a physician? In your answer explain the key terms *duhkka*, *trishna*, and *nirvana* as well as the eight steps of the eightfold path. Explain how the notion of *pratityasamutpada* can be said to be the central doctrine of Buddhism. Why does it imply a rejection of the fundamental teaching of the *Upanishads*? How is it that the Buddha's teachings of *anatman* and *anitya* follow from this central teaching? Explain the Buddha's teaching called the *Fire Sermon*. What were the two contrasting interpretations of the *Fire Sermon* suggested in the film *The Buddha*? How might the *Fire Sermon* thus raise the central question concerning *nirvana*?

Nagarjuna and the Prajnaparamita Sutras

Explain the teaching of *shunyata* that is the *prajnaparamita* taught in the *Heart Sutra* that is the central teaching of Mahayana Buddhism? How did Nagarjuna explain *shunyata* as consistent with *pratityasamutpada*, the central teaching of the Buddha? Why was it necessary for the *Prajnaparamita Sutras* to emphasize this teaching of *shunyata*? Why was the school of Mahayana Buddhism founded by Nagarjuna known as the *Madhyamika* or "Middle Way" School? What did Nagarjuna mean in stating that there is no difference between *samsara* and *nirvana* and what are the implications of this view?

Yogacara Buddhism and the Transformation of Consciousness

What was the focus of the Yogacara school of Mahayana Buddhism? Also known as *Vijnanavada*, what are different ways this designation has been understood? Explain what is meant by the process known as *vijnaptimatra*? How did they understand different levels of consciousness and what did they mean by the form of consciousness called *alaya-vijnana*? According to Yogacara, how is *nirvana* attained through a radical and sudden turning over of this basis of consciousness? How does this notion of the transformation of the *alaya-vijnana* suggest a connection with the earlier Mahayana teaching concerning the *tathagata-garbha*?

Grading Rubric

1) Writing 20%

Grammar and spelling, composition and style. Your essay should be well organized. There should be an introduction, development of a theme, and a conclusion.

2) Philosophical Content 50%

The essay should reflect an adequate understanding of the texts. Your exposition of the text should include *at least two quotations* from the primary text material. All quotes should be properly marked within the text and must include a reference to the text cited.

3) Commentary 30%

Your own thoughtful reflections on the topic.