

PHILOSOPHY 430

Philosophy of Zen

Fall 2025

Mid-term Exam Essay

Due Monday, October 20

Write a 4-6 page essay on the following topic. Your essay should be double-spaced with proper 1 inch margins and then uploaded to Lamakū by the due date.

The Starting Point of Zen

What are the central teachings of the Buddha, as recorded in *The Pali Canon*? Explain the Buddha's teachings of the Four Noble Truths and the Fire Sermon. What is meant by *śūnyatā*, the profound 'perfection of wisdom' taught in *The Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* that is the central teaching of Mahāyāna Buddhism? How does Nagarjuna explain this teaching and its significance? What did Yogācāra add to the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism? What are some of the main features of Daoism, as suggested in the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*? How do these Buddhist and Daoist influences shape the starting point of Zen in China as reflected in the Chan Buddhist texts attributed to Bodhidharma and Huineng? What do you think so far of this philosophy of Zen? Do you think Zen is relevant for us today? What do you find most interesting? What do you find to be questionable or problematic?

Grading Rubric

- 1) **Writing** (20%): An A paper will be well-written.
- 2) **Content** (50%): An A paper will reflect a good understanding of the texts and include some citations from the texts.
- 3) **Reflection** (30%): An A paper will include some thoughtful reflection on the topic.