

Indian Philosophy

PHIL 299-F04, Fall 2025

Basic course information

Instructor: Justin Mooney

Email: jmooney@holycross.edu

Office: Stein 412

Office hours: TR 11-1pm

Course dates: Aug 26th - Dec 5th

Days: Tuesdays and Thursdays

Time: 2:00pm - 3:15pm

Room: Stein 223

The best way to communicate with me outside of class is via the email address listed above. I will do my best to answer emails within 48 hours at most, and usually sooner.

Course description and objectives

Some of the most influential philosophical ideas in history sprouted and matured in India (and in South Asia more generally). This course will survey these philosophical ideas, with a special emphasis on Hindu and Buddhist philosophy. We will read both primary and secondary sources on topics central to these traditions, such as karma, rebirth, liberation, the self, suffering, knowledge, religious pluralism, God or Brahman, and emptiness.

As we think through topics such as these, we will be working to develop and hone philosophical skills such as analyzing concepts, constructing and critiquing arguments, and evaluating philosophical theories.

The objectives for this course are the following:

1. Learn about some of the philosophical traditions of classical India, and what they have to say about topics like the self, suffering, knowledge, and liberation.
2. Begin (or continue) to develop philosophical skills, especially the ability to properly interpret challenging philosophical texts.
3. Begin (or continue) to develop philosophical virtues, such as open-mindedness.
4. Learn to express philosophical ideas clearly, whether verbally or in written work.

To meet these objectives, you will be asked to read and engage with both primary and secondary texts of Indian philosophy.

Assignments

Exams: There will be two exams in this class: a midterm (to be administered in class on Oct 9th) and a non-cumulative final (to be administered in class on the date set by the university). Each exam is worth 25% of your final grade. These will be multiple-choice exams and the best way for you to prepare for them is to take good notes during class and study those notes. More details about the exams will be provided in class.

Writing prompts. Most days of class will include a short writing assignment. I will provide a prompt that is related to the reading or topic for that day, and you will be given a small portion of class time to hand-write a response. You will need to bring either a notebook or other writing paper to class so that you can complete and submit these assignments. They will be graded on a credit/no-credit basis. There will be 20 writing prompts in total over the course of the semester, but you only need credit for 15 of them to get full points toward your final grade, so if you miss a few, don't sweat it! Altogether, they will be worth 30% of your final grade (2% each). More details about these writing prompts will be provided in class.

Readings: there will be one or more assigned readings to complete before each class session (with a few exceptions, such as exam days). You are expected to complete these readings on time. As a form of reading accountability, the writing prompts (see above) will sometimes ask you to reflect on the reading that was due that day.

Participation: this is a discussion-based class, and participation will be important to your learning experience. It will also count for 20% of your final grade. In this class, participation includes attendance, speaking up in small-group and whole-class discussions, and completing in-class activities and assignments. However, attendance is the most important factor determining your participation grade because it is the easiest for me to measure accurately, and it is necessary for most of the other elements of class participation. You are not required to visit me during my office hours, but doing so a few times throughout the semester, for the purpose of discussing anything related to the class, *may* boost your participation grade.

Extra credit: The philosophy department will host a guest speaker on October 3rd at 4pm. Everyone is encouraged to attend. If you attend and complete a short reflection assignment (details to be provided in class), I will award you 1 percentage point of extra credit on your final grade.

Readings

There are three required texts for this course:

1. Carpenter, Amber D. (2014). *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*. New York, NY: Routledge.

2. Dasti, Matthew and Stephen Phillips (2017). *The Nyāya-sūtra*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.
3. Rambachan, Anantanand (2006). *The Advaita Worldview: God, World, and Humanity*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

All other readings will be provided.

Grades

Your final grade in this class breaks down as follows. The midterm exam is worth 25% of your final grade; the final exam is worth 25%; the writing prompts are collectively worth 30% (2% each); and participation is worth 20%. This class will use a standard grading scale:

A	93-100%	C	73-76%
A-	90-92%	C-	70-72%
B+	87-89%	D+	67-69%
B	83-86%	D	63-66%
B-	80-82%	D-	60-62%
C+	77-79%	F	0-59%

Policies¹

Attendance: Students are expected to attend class regularly and to fulfill all obligations of the course as outlined on this syllabus and discussed during class. If you need to miss a class session, you should communicate with me about this in advance. Whether an absence is excused is at the discretion of the instructor. Poor attendance counts against your participation grade. Students should also read and abide by [the College's class attendance policy](#).

Extensions: Extensions on homework assignments may be granted in special circumstances such as family and medical emergencies. Whether the relevant circumstances qualify the student for an extension is at the instructor's discretion. Whenever possible, students who need an extension on an assignment should communicate with the instructor about their situation prior to the official deadline. In cases where an extension is NOT granted, assignments will be deducted by 1/3 letter grade for each day they are late (e.g. a B+ paper

¹ Many of the following policy statements are taken or adapted from the Curriculum Committee Course Guide.

drops to a B paper if it is one day late; it drops to a B- if it is two days late; etc.). Assignments more than one week late will not be accepted.

Make-up exams: Students who miss an exam due to special circumstances such as a family or medical emergency may be permitted to make up that exam at a later date. Whether the relevant circumstances qualify the student for the opportunity to take a make-up exam is at the instructor's discretion. Whenever possible, students who need to miss an exam for any reason should communicate with me about this ahead of time. Students who miss an exam and do not qualify to take a make-up exam will receive a failing grade on that exam.

Technology: use of electronic devices such as laptops and cell phones is not permitted in class. There are two exceptions to this rule. First, some students have accommodations through Accessibility Services which permit them to use a laptop or similar device in class. Second, I will sometimes permit the use of laptops or similar devices to complete in-class group assignments.

Recording: PLEASE NOTE that, consistent with applicable federal and state law, this course may be video/audio recorded as an accommodation only with permission from the Office of Accessibility Services. Students are not permitted to record the contents of this class under any other circumstances.

Class Discussion: There will be many opportunities for in-class discussion during this course, including both small-group and whole-class discussion. Students are expected to be respectful of others at all times.

Academic Integrity: All education is a cooperative enterprise between faculty and students. This cooperation requires trust and mutual respect, which are only possible in an environment governed by the principles of academic integrity. As an institution devoted to teaching, learning, and intellectual inquiry, Holy Cross expects all members of the College community to abide by the highest standards of academic integrity. Any violation of academic integrity undermines the student-faculty relationship, thereby wounding the whole community. Students in this class are required to read the full text of [the College's Academic Integrity Policy](#) and to abide by its standards.

Artificial Intelligence: artificial intelligence may be used for the purposes of minor editing, such as correcting spelling and grammar, but not to compose sentences and paragraphs from scratch. If you do choose to use artificial intelligence to edit your work, you must indicate in a footnote or at the end of your document which AI tools you have used, and how you have used them. Failure to comply with this policy may result in a failing grade on the relevant assignment.

Accessibility: The College of the Holy Cross is committed “[to providing students with disabilities equal access to the educational opportunities and programs available at Holy Cross in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as amended, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Massachusetts laws.](#)” Any student who feels the need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the [Office](#)

[of Accessibility Services](#) to discuss support services available. Once the office receives documentation supporting the request for accommodation, the student would meet privately with Accessibility Services to discuss reasonable and appropriate accommodations. The office can be reached by calling 508-793-3693. If you are already registered with Accessibility Services, please be sure to get your accommodation letters and deliver them to your instructors in a timely fashion. Instructors need at least 4-5 days advance notice to be able to facilitate the process of receiving testing accommodations.

Schedule

*This schedule is subject to change.

Aug 26	No reading (class intro)
Aug 28	Vedic Religion (no reading)
Unit 1	Buddhism
Sept 2	Olivelle, “Ascetic Withdrawal or Social Engagement”
Sept 4	Carpenter, “The Buddha’s Suffering” (IBP, chapter 1)
Sept 9	“Kalama Sutta” (on religious pluralism)
Sept 11	“The Shorter Exhortation to Mālunkya” (on quietism)
Sept 16	“The Great Chapter” (from <i>Therīgāthā</i>)
Sept 18	No class (I will be at a conference)
Sept 23	Carpenter, “The Practice and Theory of No-Self” (IBP, chapter 2) <i>The Questions of King Milinda</i> 2.1.1. (excerpt about the chariot)
Sept 25	Carpenter, “Karmic Questions”, (IBP, chapter 5) <i>The Questions of King Milinda</i> 2.2.1. (excerpt about personal identity) <i>The Questions of King Milinda</i> 2.2.6 (excerpt about the fire)

Sept 30	Carpenter, “The Second Buddha’s Greater Vehicle” (IBP, chapter 4)
Oct 2	Carpenter, “The Third Turning: Yogācāra” (IBP, chapter 7)
Oct 7	Review for midterm exam
Oct 9	Midterm Exam
Fall break!	
Unit 2	Nyāya
Oct 21	Dasti and Phillips, <i>Nyāya-sūtra</i> , Introduction & chapter 1, “Knowledge Sources”
Oct 23	Dasti and Phillips, <i>Nyāya-sūtra</i> , chapter 3, “In Defense of the Real”
Oct 28	Dasti and Phillips, <i>Nyāya-sūtra</i> , chapter 4, “Self”
Oct 30	Dasti and Phillips, <i>Nyāya-sūtra</i> , chapter 6, “God”
Nov 4	Dasti and Phillips, <i>Nyāya-sūtra</i> , chapter 8, “The Right and the Good”
Nov 6	Dasti and Phillips, <i>Nyāya-sūtra</i> , chapter 9, “Debate”
Unit 3	Vedānta
Nov 11	Rambachan, “The Human Problem” (TAW, chapter 1)
Nov 13	Rambachan, “The Nature of Atman” (TAW, chapter 3)
Nov 18	Rambachan, “The Source of Valid Knowledge” (TAW, chapter 4) Rāmānuja, excerpt from <i>Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya</i> (Thibaut, p. 66)

Nov 20	Rambachan, “Brahman as the World” (TAW, chapter 5) <i>Chandogya Upanishad</i> , chapter 6
Nov 25	Rambachan, “Brahman as God” (TAW, chapter 6) Śaṅkara, <i>Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya</i> II.i.32-33 (Gambhirananda, pp. 360-362) Rāmānuja, <i>Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya</i> II.i.32-33 (Thibaut, p. 303)
Nov 27	Thanksgiving Break!
Dec 2	Śaṅkara, <i>Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya</i> II.i.34-35 (Gambhirananda, pp. 362-365) Rāmānuja, <i>Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya</i> II.i.34-35 (Thibaut, pp. 303-305)
Dec 4	Rambachan, “Liberation” (TAW, chapter 7) Review for final exam
Dec 15th	Final Exam at 3:00pm

Acknowledgments

I’ve borrowed some ideas for this course from Neil Dalal, who was my primary mentor with respect to Indian philosophy. I borrowed the extra credit assignment form Omar Quiñonez. And I’ve borrowed the idea of including acknowledgements on a syllabus from Devin Gouvêa.