

Institute of Buddhist Studies – Graduate Theological Union HRPS 8322: PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF BUDDHISM III. 2015

Instructor: Gordon Bermant
On-Line

Texts:

Komito, David (1987). Nagarjuna’s “Seventy Stanzas”: A Buddhist Psychology of Emptiness
Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion. Abbreviated K in the table.
Lopez, Donald S., Jr. (2012). The Scientific Buddha: His Short and Happy Life. New Haven: Yale University. (L)
Thompson, Evan (2015). Waking, Dreaming, Being. New York: Columbia University. (T)

Other readings posted on the course Moodle site.

Texts are available at the Buddhist Book Store in Berkeley or on-line.

Activities: Frequent discussions via Moodle. I anticipate active participation by all who are in the course.

Term paper: see last row of the table below. Length: 3500 words including references (but I will read more if it’s really interesting). Topic agreed on between student and me.

Block	Dates	Topics	Texts	Moodle Readings/Participations
1	Feb 2 Feb 14	Time & Causality	K 21-35,79-95,102-121 T Prologue; Introduction; 231-232, 39-45	Bermant Already But Not Yet Bermant on causality Gallagher & Zahavi , 83-87 Smolin , x-xix Discussions for block 1
2	Feb 16 Feb 28	Perception & Embodiment	K36-51 L 1-20 T 21-39, 45-66	Langer Byrne & Hilbert (see especially Teller’s commentary Williams on Cittamatra (Yogacara) Discussions for block 2
3	Mar 2 Mar14	Consciousness & Embodiment	K 52-75 L 21-46 T 67-106	Nagel , What is it like to be a bat? Hofter , Reflections on Nagel (includes Nagel’s last page) Hoffman on Griffiths Discussions for block 3
4	Mar 16 Mar 28	Emotion & Embodiment SPRING BREAK 3/23 – 3/27	L 47-80 T 107-138	Guenther & Kawamura (Ye-shes rGyal-mtshan) 64-98 Discussions for block 4
5	Mar 30 Apr 11	Mind & Cosmos	L 81-100 T 139—166, 250-271	Gethin , 112-132 Nagel , Mind and Cosmos 3-12, 127-128 Discussions for block 5
6	Apr 13 Apr 25	Self & Person	K 66-75 T 319-366	Kurzban Rahula 51-66 Thubten 40-53 Discussions for block 6
7	Apr 27 May 9	Science, Subjectivity & Salvation	K, 172-178 L 101-132 T 273-318	Dowman xiii-xxix, 79-91 Rahula 35-44 Smolin , 265-271 Discussions for block 7
8	May 11 May 16	Completing and submitting term paper by midnight on Friday, May 16		
	May 23	Commencement at IBS, SKSM		

		and other seminars		
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Comments on the syllabus:

The three books are different in style and intent. **Komito** introduces us to Nagarjuna’s Mahayana teaching of emptiness with an excellent introduction to Psychology constructed within a Tibetan Madhyamaka tradition. You may already know that Nagarjuna is claimed as a major figure within the lineages of diverse Mahayana traditions, from Tibetan Gelug, as here in Komito’s book, to Japanese Jodo Shinshu. There is a very large commentarial literature surrounding Nagarjuna’s writing, some of it going to alternative accounts of fundamental human nature. There are several topics in this area that could become very nice term paper topics.

Thompson’s brand-new book is a worthy successor to Varela, Thompson, & Rosch’s classic introduction to this field, *The Embodied Mind* (1991). Between the publications of the two books, Thompson has become one of the foremost philosophers at the intersection of contemplative studies including Buddhism, philosophy including analytic and phenomenological traditions, and cognitive science bridging neuroscience and psychology. His 2007 book *Mind in Life* covers much of the same ground but with a heavier emphasis on phenomenology and complexity theory with a surprising silence about Buddhism.

Lopez occupies the “right wing” of our texts. He brings his deep scholarship to the argument that 19th and 20th century European scholars invented a Buddha who met the value criteria of their own western Enlightenment preferences, so that the Buddhism that we inherited from European sources has been, in a way, “sanitized” of irrational, supernatural features that in fact are deeply embedded in the historical facts of the matter. This is a bracing and wholesome perspective for us to keep in mind, to prevent us from imagining a Buddhism whose founder, miraculously, had insight into the most modern physical and biological developments.

The themes developed in the three textbooks are picked up and elaborated in various ways in the additional readings that I’ve placed in the Moodle files and assigned for the course.

Organization: The course is divided into modules. Modules 1-7 occupy two weeks each. Readings are assigned in the first week, and discussion questions in the second week. I’ve placed the questions into what Moodle calls Forums. I’d like everyone to contribute to the discussions by having conversations with each other using the Forum spaces. Please respond directly to the discussion question to begin with, then branch out as seems appropriate. Students bring a variety of backgrounds and interests to this course, and I encourage you to learn from each other. I will also post an “open forum” for each two week period, without a specific question in it, for you to use in collective conversations in threads that you decide for yourselves.

Obviously, on-line communication inevitably suffers in comparison with face-to-face opportunities. I’ll do my best to keep the materials fresh and lively, and I look forward to your active participations throughout the term.