

Great Books in Asian Religions
SCAR 2GB3
Term 2 – 2022/23

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Description

This course provides a broad introduction to certain foundational texts in several Asian religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Daoism. We will rely on translations of primary source material with some use of secondary scholarship, film, and multi-media. Subjects will include the creation of the world, the intersection of gods and humankind, suffering, enlightenment, poetry, past lives, war, revenge, love, death, and the meaning of life. No big deal. Students will not only gain broad knowledge of the religions of Asia, but will also be encouraged to think critically about their place and purpose in the universe. This isn't a class where I teach you about the meaning of life, it's one where we chew those big questions over together. No previous knowledge of Asian religions is required for this course and the assignments are awesome.

Requirements

- 3 x weekly assignment = 45%
- Interview someone about the meaning of life and produce a written transcript = 15%
- Write up (or multi-media presentation) built on that interview = 40%

Weekly Assignments – 3x15%

1. Imagine you are Arjuna receiving the talk from Krishna in the Gita. What is he trying to convince you to do? What is your dilemma? How does he motivate you? Be sure to follow the structure/style of the Gita. 500-600 words. **Due date is January 30th by 7pm.**
2. Turn an event from your life into a Jataka: Place it in the past, with different characters, and then reveal at the end which one was you and what the lesson was. Be sure to follow the structure/style of the Jataka texts we read for class. 500-600 words. **Due date is February 27th by 7pm.**
3. Take an event from your life and place it into Journey to the West. Decide which of the main characters in the story you will be. Make sure we understand the lesson of the story. Be sure to follow the structure/style of Journey to the West that we read for class. 500-600 words. **March 27th at 7pm.**

Interview Assignment 15% and 40%

This assignment will consist of two parts. First you must interview a friend or relative about one of the fundamental questions we are examining in class. This question could be any of the following (we will discuss other questions in class):

- What is the meaning of life?
- What is the nature of the self?
- How does one best live a purposeful life?

Interviews will generally run from 30 to 60 minutes. The first part of the assignment is to provide a typed transcript of the interview, minimum 15 pages. This is worth 15% of your overall grade and is due by **March 13th at 7pm**. The second part of the assignment is to write a 1000-word essay that summarizes the most significant aspects of the interview and connects them to a major theme (or themes) and readings from class. One way to frame it would be to write a letter to your future child/grandchild about what it means to be a human being. Connect explicitly to themes we have dealt with in class, such as suffering, selfhood, happiness, and duty. Cite specific texts we have read for class. This part is worth 40% of your overall grade and is due by **7pm on April 10th**. Further details and grading rubrics for both assignments will be provided in class.

There is no final exam in this course.

Required Readings

(SUBJECT TO CHANGE – CHECK COURSE PAGE REGULARLY)

All readings are available on Avenue or as Ebooks that are found online through Mills Library.

Background Readings: Optional

I have put several background readings for those of you who want some more context on Indian, Chinese, and Japanese religions. They are not required, but they will help you on your interview essay and weekly assignments.

- “Indian Religions: An Overview” by Jan Gonda. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. 2nd ed. [Avenue].

- “Indian Religions: Mythic Themes” by Wendy Doniger. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. 2nd ed. [Avenue].
- “Buddhist Philosophy, Indian” by Richard Hayes. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*—read overview to epistemology sections. [Avenue].
- “China” Mario Poceski. *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. [Avenue].
- “Buddhist Philosophy, Japanese” by John Moraldo. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. [Avenue].

You are responsible for all material on this syllabus and for making up missed lectures. Course content and scheduling may change, all notifications will be made on the course web page and, when possible, in lecture and tutorial. Students should be checking the course page regularly for notices.

The course website can be found via Avenue to Learn.

Course Outline

(SUBJECT TO CHANGE – CHECK COURSE PAGE REGULARLY)

January 9th : Introduction and course overview / Axial Age and Issues of Translation

- Read David Foster Wallace’s commencement address to Kenyon College in 2005, “This is Water.” [Avenue]
- We’ll watch some fun, mind-bending videos in class and talk about life.

January 16th : India Intro and Upanishads

- The Early Upanisads: Annotated Text and Translation. Patrick Olivelle.
 - Read Isa Upanisad, Katha Upanisad, Mundaka Upanisad, Chandogya Upanisad- chapter 8. sections 7-12 (this begins on page 279). [Avenue].
- This is also a good time to read the optional material on Indian religions: “Indian Religions: An Overview” by Jan Gonda and “Indian Religions: Mythic Themes” by Wendy Doniger. [Avenue].

January 23rd : The Mahabharata and The Gita

- The Bhagavad Gita Easwaran, Eknath.
- Read Chapter 2. [Avenue].
- Start reading Narayan, R. K. *The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic*. [Avenue].

January 30th : Ramayana

- Finish reading *The Ramayana*. [Avenue].

February 6th : Buddhism and Suffering

- [*Dhammapada*](#) (Chapters 8, 12, 20, 24—click on the “Thannissaro” link for each chapter)
- Zadie Smith, “Suffering like Mel Gibson.” [Avenue].
- Also a very good time to read Richard Hayes, “Buddhist Philosophy” in optional readings.

February 13th : Jataka Tales

- Shaw, Jatakas: Birth Stories of the Bodhisatta.
 - The cat story, the story of the barleymeal sack, the story of the fish, the story of the monkey king, and the story of the tortoise. [Avenue].

READING WEEK – No Class

February 27th : Buddhism in China

- Start reading *The Monkey and the Monk: An Abridgment of The Journey to the West* Edited by Anthony C. Yu. 2006 [Ebook]. Read preface and chapters 6,7,14-17,22
- [For some general background on the story and characters, see this page.](#)

March 6th : Journey to the West

- Finish reading *The Monkey and the Monk*.

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW IS DUE 7pm.

March 13th : *Lotus Sutra*

- [The Lotus Sutra PDF](#)
- Read chapters 1,3,4,12,16. [Avenue].

March 20th : Confucianism

- The Path:
 - Pages 1-53. It's easy reading and potentially life changing. [Avenue].

March 27th : Daoism

- The Path:
 - Chapter 5. [Avenue].

April 3rd : Japan

- The Platform Sutra.
 - You only have to read from pages 17-24. [Avenue].
- Good time to read optional background reading on Japanese religion: John Moraldo, “Buddhist philosophy, Japanese” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. (Part 2 can be skimmed.

April 10th : Ten Foot Square Hut and Koan wrap up

- Kamo no Chome. *Hojoki Visions of a Torn World*. [Avenue].
 - Pages 31-78. It will take you, less than 30 minutes.

FINAL WRITE UP OF INTERVIEW DUE 7PM.

Final Exam – Nope.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Your Responsibilities:

You are responsible for all material on this syllabus and for making up missed lectures and assignments. Course content and scheduling may change, all notifications will be made on the course web page and, when possible, in lecture and tutorial. Students are responsible for regularly checking the course web page.

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

The course website can be found on Avenue to Learn.

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

You are also responsible for bringing concerns about grading to the attention of your TA and myself in a timely manner. This means that if you have questions about your grade on a particular assignment or test, you must let us know within two weeks of the official posting of that grade. Your concerns must be specific. Please do not come to us with: "I think I deserve a better grade," or "I worked really hard." Please also be aware that if you ask me to double check your grade on an assignment, there is just as much chance that your grade will go down as up.

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

If you are ever in a situation where you are not sure if what you are submitting constitutes plagiarism, contact me immediately.

Authenticity / Plagiarism Detection

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster’s use of Turnitin.com please go to the [Office of Academic Integrity website](#).

Courses with an On-line Element

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Online Proctoring

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work

[McMaster Student Absence Form \(MSAF\)](#): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”.

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image

may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.