

History of Indian Philosophy
Philosophy 300
Fall 2019
Term Paper Assignment
Due: Wednesday, December 18 (2:00 PM)

Write an 6-10 page (double-spaced) paper on one of the following topics. A good paper will be well written, have a sound exposition of at least one of the texts considered in this course, and some decent reflection about the issues raised in the texts.

Sample Paper Topics

The Practice of Yoga in Yogācāra Buddhism vs Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali

What is the difference between the goal of the practice of yoga outlined in Vasubhandu's *Triṃśikā-kārikā* and the practice of yoga outlined in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*? Explain the basics of the theory laid out in the *Sāṃkhya Sūtra*, the theory behind the *Yoga Sūtras*, the key notions of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛiti*, the Sāṃkhya theory of evolution and its concept of liberation as *Kaivalya*. What is the goal of yoga announced in the famous second line of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*? What are the eight limbs or methods (*Sādhanās*) outlined in the *Yoga Sūtras*? What is Yogācāra Buddhism? Why has it sometimes been referred to as the school of 'mind or consciousness only' (*Vijñānavāda*) and thus understood as a kind of idealism? Explain its teaching concerning eight levels of consciousness (*vijñāna*) and its distinctive teaching concerning the *ālaya-vijñāna*? What is meant by the notion of *vijñapti-mātra*? Both the eight limbs of yoga outlined by Patañjali and the Buddhist eightfold path end in *Samādhi*. What might be the difference between the Hindu and Buddhist understanding of *Samādhi*?

Mahāyāna Buddhism vs Advaita Vedānta

What is the difference between the conception of enlightenment in Mahāyāna Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta? Explain the central teaching of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* and how Nāgārjuna explain this doctrine as following from the central doctrine of Buddhism and thus consistent with the middle path taught by the Buddha? What did Nāgārjuna mean by the "two truths" he distinguishes in chapter 24 of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, the "conventional" or "provisional" (*saṃvṛti*) truth, and the "ultimate" (*paramārtha*) truth? How is it that Nāgārjuna argues in chapter 25 of that text that there is no difference between samsāra and nirvāṇa? What did he mean by this and what are the implications of this view for the Mahāyāna Buddhist understanding of enlightenment? What is the distinctive teaching of Śāṅkara's Advaita Vedānta? Explain the crucial distinction between *nirguṇa Brahman* and *saguṇa Brahman*. What is the distinction Śāṅkara makes between two levels of reality and how does this compare with Nāgārjuna's distinction between two truths?

Vedānta

Explain the basic difference between the Sāṃkhya and Vedānta philosophies. Then explain the differences between the Vedānta philosophies of Śāṅkara, Rāmānujā, and Madhva. How do each understand the nature of reality and how does this view shape their understanding of the path to enlightenment?