Buddhist Ethics  
EMT 2630F  
Fall 2015

Seminars: Thursday 7:00 to 9:00 PM  
Office Hours: Wednesday 2:30 to 3:30 PM or by appointment

Office: Room m141 at 45 Willcocks Street  
Instructor: Henry Shiu, Ph.D.

E-mail: henry.shiu@utoronto.ca

Course Description:

Buddhism is a response to what is fundamentally an ethical problem – the perennial problem of the best kind of life for us to lead. The Buddha was driven to seek the solution to this problem and the associated ethical issues it arises. This course introduces students to explore whether an Asian religion such as Buddhism can shed any light on problems that the West has found difficult and controversial. The course applies Buddhist ethics to a range of issues of contemporary concern, and discusses the Buddhist response to ethical dilemmas confronting our modern societies. It also develops a careful, probing analysis of the nature and practical dynamics of Buddhist ethics in the particularities of different Buddhist traditions.

Course Objectives:

Since Buddhist ethics is an unfamiliar subject in the West, the course will take on various issues from a Christian perspective first as a point of departure. This allows students to examine the different ethical standards sparked from different religious orientations. Through such discussions, students will develop an in-depth understanding of the Buddhist moral teachings and how many of these ancient, Indian approaches could be modified and remained meaningful in our contemporary society.

Methodology:

The course is intended as an introduction to the study of Buddhist ethics. It is meant to critically examine the controversial issues of our world today. The class format will take on a variety of styles, including lectures, critical reading of canonical texts, academic works and films, exploring and examining the Buddhist principles in different contexts through class discussion, and the comparative reading of Buddhist ethics against the “norm” of Christian ethics in the Western world. Each of these methods is meant to stimulate an active learning process in which it is important for the students to engage. Each student brings unique experiences and perspectives to the seminar, and the seminar is intended to serve as a space for collaboration and shared learning.
Required Texts:


Recommend Text:


Course Evaluation:

Term Essay: 35%

(Essay Guideline will be posted on Blackboard)

Short Presentation: 25%

(A 10-minute presentation of the term essay to initiate discussion in class)

Class Participation: 10%

Weekly research on the assigned topics as reported or discussed in the media:

(To keep students up-to-date about the current developments of the various topics covered in class)

30%
Lecture Schedule:

September 17  
**Introduction:**
*Ethics East and West*
Reading: Keown (2005), chapters 1 and 2

September 24  
**Key Buddhist Values and Precepts:**
*The Shared Foundations of Buddhist Ethics*
Reading: Harvey, chapters 1 and 2
Keown (2000), chapter 1
Keown (2005), chapter 1

October 1  
**The Ethics of Liberty:**
*Mahayana Emphases and Adaptation*
Reading: Harvey, chapter 3
Keown (2000), chapter 2

October 8  
**Sexual Equality:**
*Status of Women and their Spiritual Potential*
Reading: Harvey, chapter 9

October 15  
**Animals and Humans:**
*The Issue of Animal Rights*
Reading: Keown (2000), chapter 4
Keown (2005), chapter 3

October 22  
**Natural World and Ecology:**
*Buddhist Influence on Deep Ecology*
Reading: Harvey, chapter 4
Keown (2000), chapter 5

October 29  
**Overconsumption and Overproduction vs. Unemployment:**
*Buddhist Economics*
Reading: Harvey, chapter 5
Keown (2000), chapter 8
Suggested Reading: E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*

November 5  
**The Concept of a “Just War”:**
*War and Peace*
Reading: Harvey, chapter 6
Keown (2005), chapter 5

November 12  
**Prolonging Life, or Suffering?:**
*Suicide and Euthanasia*
Reading: Harvey, chapter 7
Keown (2000), chapter 7
Keown (2005), chapter 7
November 19  Pro-life or Pro-choice?:
Abortion and Contraception
Reading: Harvey, chapter 8
   Keown (2000), chapter 6
   Keown (2005), chapter 6

November 26  Taming Desire:
Issues Regarding Sexuality
Reading: Harvey, chapter 10
   Keown (2005), chapter 4

December 3   Playing God?:
Cloning
Reading: Keown (2005), chapter 8
**Recommended Reading:**


**Course Policies:**

Policies for courses are contained in the TST Basic Degree/Advanced Degree Handbooks:

1) Late Policy: 5% penalty per day of lateness.

2) Completion of Course Work: All course work (including any late work) must be completed by the end of term, the last day of exams. Only in the case of illness (with a note from a doctor), bereavement or other unusual circumstances will an extension be considered and this must be authorized by the Basic Degree Committee and the Faculty.

3) Assignments: Essays and assignments can be submitted on Blackboard.

4) Consultation: Please do not hesitate to consult with me about any questions you may have.

5) Attendance: A minimum attendance of 80% is required for a passing grade. Habitual lateness for class will be counted as absence.

**Academic Integrity:**

Students should read carefully the academic discipline policy on, and severe penalties for, plagiarism and cheating. These are set out in the University of Toronto’s Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters available through the Office of the TST Director (cf. TST Basic Degree Handbook, p. 45) and on the web (http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm).
**Grading Scheme:**

The grading scheme for this course, as with all TST courses, is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>90-100</td>
<td>profound and creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>85-89</td>
<td>outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>80-84</td>
<td>excellent: clear evidence of original thinking, of analytic and synthetic ability; sound critical evaluations, broad knowledge base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>75-79</td>
<td>very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>73-76</td>
<td>good: good critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues, good familiarity with the literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
<td>satisfactory: adequate critical capacity and analytic ability; some understanding of relevant issues and with the literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FZ</td>
<td>0-69</td>
<td>failure: failure to meet the above criteria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Course Learning Outcomes:**

- **Religious Heritage:** Students develop a comprehensive and discriminating understanding of Buddhist Ethics, including the related canonical texts, historical development, and interpretive possibilities.

- **Cultural context:** Students develop an understanding of the cultural realities and structures within which the Buddhism provides an ethical approach to an existing controversial issue.

- **Depth and Breadth of Knowledge:** Students will develop a systematic understanding of the development of engaged Buddhist practice that leads to the application of Buddhist ethics in the morning society. They will be aware of the scope of its various forms of interpretation in global Buddhist thought, life, and practice.

- **Research and Scholarship:** Students will be able to use library and information resources in order to identify authoritative primary sources and relevant secondary sources for the study of the Buddhist religious heritage and the practice of *pastoral* ministry. They will be able to evaluate current research and interpretation in the study of Buddhist scripture, and compare it with established understandings in Christian social ministry, pastoral care, or worship and preaching. They will be able to report research systematically and intelligibly, and develop and support a sustained argument in written form, or in application to specialized pastoral practice such as worship practice, preaching, or pastoral care. Students will demonstrate critical understanding of their area of specialization of the relationship between faith practices, cultural contexts, and pastoral practices.
- Level of Application of Knowledge: Students will learn how the ancient Buddhist teachings have been modified and interpreted in ways that are practical and meaningful in the formation of contemporary Buddhist ethical standards.