

Asian Philosophies: Buddhism & Jainism

Midterm Buddhist Analysis

Due Thursday, Feb. 20, by class time; upload on Canvas as .doc or .pdf under “Home” or “Assignments”

René Descartes (1596–1650) is widely regarded as the father of modern western philosophy. His text *Meditations on First Philosophy* made a lasting contribution to the theory of knowledge (epistemology).

Descartes is known for famously saying, “*cogito ergo sum*” (Latin), or “I think, therefore I am.” For Descartes, one could doubt one’s body, or one’s perceptions of the sun, or sky, or other phenomena, leading to a belief that nothing exists at all. However, Descartes asserted that the very act of thinking provides a foundation that one cannot doubt. For Descartes, the certainty of thought provides the firm foundation for careful philosophical analysis. As Descartes states:

I have convinced myself that there is absolutely nothing in the world, no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies. Does it now follow that I too do not exist? No: if I convinced myself of something, then I certainly existed. But [say] there is a deceiver of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately and constantly deceiving me. In that case, I too undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me . . . he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I *think* that I am something. So, after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind. (1904, 25)

Essay Question: Do you feel that Buddhist philosophy agrees and/or disagrees with Descartes’ *cogito* assertion that “I think, therefore I am” as the foundational truth on which to base philosophical exploration? Please justify your answer utilizing concepts and context from our course readings and conversations on Buddhism. You do not need to include any additional research about Descartes beyond what is provided above.

Papers will be assessed (with percentage and points) with the following rubric (40pts total; 3-4 double-spaced pages):

- **INTRODUCTION (1/2 page max; 10%, 4pts)**
Short introduction stating your answer to the essay question (approx. 1/3 page max)
- **ANALYSIS (approx. 2-3 pages; 50%, 20pts)**
The analysis provides support and justifications for the answer you have described in the introduction. Students will justify their answers by utilizing course texts, resources, and conversations, providing citations for direct quotes or paraphrases of an author’s idea (see Formatting below).

Students may utilize any or all of the following sources: Harvey, Appleton, or Buddhist Texts A, B, C, or D.

Students may utilize Buddhist terms, context, concepts, key figures, debates, textual examples, philosophical ideas, cosmology, ethical commitments, among others, that they feel support their answer.

However, the best papers will organize their support into 2-4 key themes that are explained in relation to other relevant Buddhist elements. The goal is to present a focused snapshot of Buddhist thought in relation to this essay question, rather than merely “throwing” multiple concepts at the essay question in a haphazard way.

Students will not be able to account for Buddhism as a whole; rather, the aim is to construct a response to the essay question that puts multiple ideas and resources into conversation with Descartes' claim

- **ORGANIZATION (20%; 8pts)**
 - The body of the essay should follow from the introduction.
 - Please divide key support/justification themes into distinct paragraphs that introduce the reader to each new idea.
 - Break long paragraphs into 2+ ideas/paragraphs wherever possible

- **CONCLUSION (approx. 1/3 page max; 5%; 2pts)**

A brief conclusion should recap the basic assertion of the introduction

- **FORMATTING and CITATIONS (15%; 6pts)**
 - 4-5 double-spaced pages, not including Works Cited
 - Please number pages
 - Run spell and grammar check
 - Please use in-text citations (see *Bedford Handbook* under “Resources” on digital syllabus) to signal when you use a: (a) direct quote, or (b) paraphrase an author’s unique idea. Due to the well-known nature of terms such as “*dukkha*,” “*nīrvaṇa*,” etc., you do not have to cite a source for these terms at every mention or definition. However, if you use a direct quote to define a term, or if you paraphrase a unique idea about a term, you must cite so a reader can find the source of that insight or content.
 - Please provide a Works Cited list (see *Bedford Handbook* under “Resources” on digital syllabus)
 - Students should practice italicizing Pāli or Sanskrit terms; you do not need to use diacritics (the symbols above letters in Indo-Aryan languages, such as *nīrvaṇa*, *saṃsāra*, etc.), though you are welcome to.

Upload your paper to Canvas “Home” or “Assignments” as .doc or .pdf by Thursday, February 20, by class time

Works Cited

Adam, Charles and Paul Tannery, editors. *Oeuvres de Descartes*, vol. 7, Paris: J. Vrin. 11 vols.