

Self-Transformation in Ancient Platonist and Buddhist Philosophy

Overview

Meetings	Fall 2021 (Term 1), Wednesdays from 10am-12:50pm PT, Philosophy Seminar Room
Instructor	Dr. Michael Griffin (michael.griffin@ubc.ca), UBC Philosophy & CNERs
Format	In-person (as safety allows). Optional discussion platforms on Discord & Canvas .

UBC's Point Grey Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəyəm ([Musqueam](#)) people.

Summary



This seminar will explore themes of self-knowledge and self-transformation in ancient Greek Platonism through a cross-cultural dialogue with Buddhist philosophy.

Several Platonic dialogues, and many Buddhist sutras, construct philosophy after the pattern of medicine: it is a skilful practice that aims to diagnose an ailment endemic to the human condition, and to prescribe a course of treatment. Superficially, Socrates and the Buddha also appear to offer similar diagnoses: an undetected ignorance, especially about the nature of the self (*autos*, *ātman*), conditions motivational conflict, a felt lack of genuine agency, and individual and collective suffering.

Through a close reading of paired texts from ancient Buddhist and Platonist philosophical commentary, we'll try to illuminate and interrogate their positions in dialogue, including their characterization of the self and diagnosis of human suffering, their construction of 'philosophy' as a category after the model of medicine, their search for metaphysical resources to motivate and justify a novel ethical framework, their rhetorical constructions of 'awakening', and their critical engagement with their own social contexts.

A list of topics and recommended readings is included [below](#).

No prior experience with either Greek or Buddhist philosophy is assumed, and the seminar is adaptable to individual interests. ☒ Please [contact me](#) with suggestions and queries!

Image credit: Unsplash @jovisjoseph

Self-Transformation in Ancient Platonist and Buddhist Philosophy

Meetings

We'll typically divide each meeting into two sessions, which may have different but related topics. Here's an example. If for any reason, including health and safety considerations, the course needs to pivot online during the term, we can adapt this schedule flexibly.

Session	Component	Duration	Time (Pacific)
Session 1	Introduction	5 minutes	10-10:05am
	Talk or presentations	60 minutes	10:05-11:05am
	Debrief & discuss	10 minutes	11:05-11:15am
Break	Rest & break time	15 minutes	11:15-11:30am
Session 2	Introduction	5 minutes	11:30-11:35am
	Talk or presentations	60 minutes	11:35am-12:35pm
	Debrief & discuss	10 minutes	12:35pm-12:45pm

Online Discussion

Between meetings, here are a few ways that we can keep in contact, discuss readings, and plan sessions.

- **Seminar Discord server (unofficial & optional).** [Click here to join](#). Note: since Discord is not FIPPA-compliant, don't post any private or identifying information here.
- **UBC Canvas Discussion.** Join through the [Canvas course](#).
- **Email.** You can always reach out to me by email at michael.griffin@ubc.ca.

Participation in Meetings

I hope this class will offer a welcoming space for intellectual exchange and community, that's supportive of each of our well-being and health. I appreciate your help in cultivating an atmosphere of mutual respect, care, and sensitivity in class, in keeping with UBC's values and policies (below).

I recognize that we'll all have different access to time, in-person availability, and technology to communicate. You're welcome to excuse yourself from a meeting or from any course content, in advance or during class. Likewise, if you're not in a position to contribute in real-time but have ideas to share later, feel free to email me, or use our asynchronous discussion platforms instead (above).

Self-Transformation in Ancient Platonist and Buddhist Philosophy

Suggested Assessment Structure

Component	Due	Percent
Engagement with the course.	Through term	10%
This is primarily a completion grade, and a venue to recognize your presence and good-faith participation in the class throughout the term. I fully recognize that we'll <i>all</i> engage differently, especially in this unusual year. I recognize that attendance (in person or even online) may be difficult for different reasons, and we'll try to make opportunities for many modes of participation!		
Cultivate questions for 2 sessions (<i>Thaumaturge of the Readings</i>)	Sign up by Sep 15 for Sep 15–Nov 24	10%
“Philosophy begins in wonder (τὸ θαυμάζειν... ἀρχὴ φιλοσοφίας),” suggests Socrates (<i>Tht.</i> 155cd)—which could be translated, “amazement is the root of curiosity.” One who invites wonder (<i>thaumatourgos</i>) facilitates curiosity! I’m asking each participant to sign up to act as “ thaumaturge ” for two sessions. This is a “light-touch” role, to think with care about the readings, excerpt important passages for a weekly <i>Anthology</i> , prepare questions, and invite discussion. You’re one of the gardeners for these weeks! There’s a channel for you on Discord as well.		
Present your research plan, and ideas.	Sign up by Oct 13 for Nov 24–Dec 8	25%
During the last classes of term, you’re warmly invited to sign up to present a draft of your course-related research to the class. Your presentation should last 20 minutes; we’ll then have 5 minutes for a summary by your commentator , and 5+ minutes for discussion . I invite you to find a colleague to act as commentator for your presentation, and I’m also happy to help.		
Comment on a colleague’s research plan.	Sign up by Oct 15 for Nov 24–Dec 8	15%
Sign up to comment on the research presentation of a colleague! Share your questions and comments with your colleague in writing (1-2 pages), copy the instructor on a version of these comments, and share with the class in a 5-minute session after they present.		
Write and submit your final research paper.	Due Dec 1–15 (flexible)	40%
During the December examination period, submit a substantial paper (usually in the range of 4,000–5,000 words, but the scope can vary with your topic, in consultation with the instructor). Your paper should develop and argue for a thesis in an area of your research interests relevant to the course’s content and methodologies. See also the assessment guide here .		

Health & Safety Notes

What if I (a student) am feeling unwell?

First and foremost, take care of yourself and those around you! If you are sick, it is important that you stay home. Complete a self-assessment for COVID-19 symptoms [here: https://bc.thrive.health/covid19/en](https://bc.thrive.health/covid19/en). In this class, the assessment scheme is intended to provide flexibility so that you can prioritize your health and still succeed.

What if the instructor is feeling unwell?

If I am feeling unwell, I will not come to class. I will make every reasonable attempt to communicate plans for class as soon as possible (by email and other platforms). Our asynchronous video content and synchronous meetings will still be available, and I will try to make arrangements to keep class moving.

What's the policy about masks in class?

Provincial Health Orders and UBC policy now mandate masks in all indoor public spaces on campus. These spaces include classrooms, residence halls, libraries, and common areas. Students who wish to request an exemption to the indoor mask mandate must do so based on one of the grounds for exemption detailed in the [PHO Order on Face Coverings \(COVID-19\)](#). Such requests must be made through the [Center for Accessibility](#) (Vancouver campus).

UBC's Values and Policies

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions.

Details and resources for accessing support are available here:
<https://senate.ubc.ca/policies-resources-support-student-success>

Self-Transformation in Ancient Platonist and Buddhist Philosophy

Summary of Topics

See the following pages for a detailed schedule.

Overview

Introduction

- [Week 1: Welcome, overview, and methodologies](#) (Sep 8)
- [Week 2: Ancient philosophies as medicines](#) (Sep 15)

1. Candidates and criteria for selves

- [Week 3: Platonic souls and selves](#) (Sep 22)
- [Week 4: 'Neither self nor not-self': The five aggregates in the Nikayas](#) (Sep 29)

2. Self-cultivation in Plato

- [Week 5: Capacities of Plato's plural and simple soul](#) (Oct 6)
- [Week 6: Contemplating Forms and receiving inspiration](#) (Oct 13)

3. Buddhist 'path' literature and abhidharma

- [Week 7: Commentarial synthesis & triple training: discipline, concentration, insight](#) (Oct 20)
- [Week 8: Insight: Abhidharma and the two truths](#) (Oct 27)
- [Week 9: Constructions of 'awakening' and effortless action](#) (Nov 3)

4. The Neoplatonist 'scale' of virtue and self

- [Week 10: Platonist virtues of concentration and attention](#) (Nov 17)
- [Week 11: Platonist virtues of embodied receptivity to inspiration](#) (Nov 24)

Conclusion

- [Week 12: Review and conclusions](#) (Dec 1)

Readings and Resources

Online resources

- Via [Canvas](#), you can access the Library Online Course Reserves (LOCR) system, which should include links to most secondary scholarship cited in the outline below.
- The course's shared Google Drive will contain the **syllabus**, **sign-up sheet**, **timelines**, and a folder of *Anthologies* (excerpts from texts and papers) for each week. I'd ask each week's thaumaturges to help contribute to these *Anthologies*. The Google Drive link is here: <https://bit.ly/phil510shared>

Self-Transformation in Ancient Platonist and Buddhist Philosophy

Other resources

- You may find useful a copy of Plato, either *Eight Essential Dialogues* (ed. Reeve) or the ‘big red book’, Cooper & Hutchinson’s *Plato: Collected Works*. Both are published by Hackett.
- You might find suttacentral.net a useful resource for Pāli material cited in the course. You can also find online free copies of Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga*, which I’ll cite from often.
- The readings below include a number of broad introductory works to both traditions. Let me know if you’d find more useful along these lines!
- **You can preview a [sample of excerpts from several ancient texts we’ll read at this link](#).**
- **A provisional list of primary and secondary readings is below. Don’t expect that you’ll have to read *everything* for a given week.** The course structure will involve rotating, voluntary discussions of clusters of primary texts and papers, so you can choose to ‘specialize’ in particular sub-topics, while presentations will offer broad coverage.

Self-Transformation in Ancient Platonist and Buddhist Philosophy

Detailed Schedule of Topics and Readings

Introduction

Week 1 Overview and Methodology (Sep 8)

Topics

- Timelines, sources, and methodologies
- Platonism & Buddhism as philosophy: constructing *philosophia*, *dharmā* and *dr̥ṣṭi*
- Marginalized voices and colonial appropriations of ancient philosophies

Suggested Readings

- Amber Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (Routledge, 2014), ch. 1: 'Buddha's Suffering'.
- Andrea Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato & the Construct of Philosophy* (CUP, 1995), c. 1.
- Tim Connolly, *Doing Philosophy Comparatively* (Bloomsbury, 2015), introduction & ch. 1.
- **Optional context:** Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy* (Ashgate, 2007), chs. 1-2 • Julia Annas, 'Ancient Philosophy for the 21st Century', in *The Future for Philosophy* (Oxford, 2004), 25-43 • Evan Thompson, *Why I am Not a Buddhist* (Yale UP, 2020), introduction & ch. 1
- Cr. Addey, 'Plato's Women Readers', *Brill's Comp. to the Rec. of Plato* (Brill, 2017), 411-32
- Kathleen Wider, 'Women Philosophers in the Ancient Gk World', *Hypatia* 1.1 (1986), 21-62

Week 2 Ancient Philosophies as Medicines (Sep 15)

Topics

- 'Philosophy as a way of life': Pierre Hadot, Martha Nussbaum, Jonardon Ganeri
- Medical analogies and craft skill in Platonist and Buddhist dialogues
- Constructing philosophy as a discipline and way of knowing

Greek Sources

- Plato, *Apol.* 29d-30b, 36e-37a:
- Plato, *Crito* 47d-48a: Medical metaphor
- Xenophon, *Mem.* 1.2.37; Plato, *Gorgias* 503e: Skill and craft analogies
- Plato, *Apology* 29d-30b, *Laches* 187e-188b: Socratic metaphilosophy, consistency
- P. *Crito* 46a-48a, *Charm.* 161c: Knowledge

Buddhist Sources

- MN 22/SN 22.86: Dukkha & cessation
- MN 63: Medical metaphor, the arrow
- SN 47.8: Skill and craft analogies
- MN 26: The noble and ignoble search
- AN 3.65: Criteria of knowledge
- AN 4.23: Consistency of view and action

Scholarship

- C.W. Gowans, 'Medical Analogies in Buddhist and Hellenistic Thought', in Clare Carlisle & Jonardon Ganeri (eds.), *Philosophy as Therapeia* (Cambridge, 2010), ch. 1; see also vol. Intro.
- J. Sellars, 'Plato's *Apology of Soc.*: A Metaphilosophical Text', *Phil. & Lit.* 38.2 (2014), 433-45.
- Anthology: Excerpts from P. Hadot, M. Nussbaum, M. Chase, Richard Sorabji, John Sellars

1. Candidates and criteria for selfhood

Week 3 Knowing One's Self for Plato (Sep 22)

Topics

- *Gnōthi sauton*: Self-knowledge in Platonism and earlier currents
- Self-cultivation (*epimeleia tou heautou*)
- Criteria for a self, incl. synchronic & diachronic unity, voluntariness, non-suffering

Sources

Self-knowledge

- [Plato], *Alcibiades I*, 128a-131a; Plato, *Philebus* 48c-e; *Phaedrus* 229e-230a; *Charmides* 164d-168a; *Phaedo* 115c-d; *Symposium* 207d-208b
- Anthology: Excerpts from Homer, 'Delphic' maxims, Pindar, Proclus, and Olympiodorus

Candidates and criteria for self

- [Plato], *Alcibiades I*, 128a-131a; *Philebus* 48c-e; *Apol.* 29d-30b: possessions, status
- Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 53-55: body
- Plato, *Phaedo* 65e-68c, 115c-d: body
- Plato, *Symposium* 207d-208b: habits, desires, pleasures, pains, fears, knowledge
- Plato, *Symposium* 210e: contrast with the Form of the Beautiful
- Plato, *Republic* 4, 436a-439b: desires, status, reason

Scholarship

- Rachana Kamtekar, 'Self-Knowledge in Plato', in U. Renz (ed.), *Self-Knowledge: A History* (Oxford, 2017), ch. 1.
- Jonardon Ganeri, 'A Return to the Self: Indians and Greeks on Life as Art and Philosophical Therapy', in Clare Carlisle and Jonardon Ganeri, eds., *Philosophy as Therapeia* (Cambridge, 2010), ch. 9.

Week 4 'Neither Self nor Not-Self': Buddhist Aggregates (Sep 29)

Topics

- Buddhist *anātman* positions in context
- Candidates and criteria for the self in the Nikayas
- Criteria for a self, incl. synchronic & diachronic unity, voluntariness, non-suffering

Sources

Self-Knowledge

- MN 22.22: Suffering of self-doctrines
- MN 2.8, 22.38, SN 12.15: Neither self nor non-self
- Buddhaghosa, *Vism* I 54 on MN 27: 'they stop at what is merely seen'

Self-Transformation in Ancient Platonist and Buddhist Philosophy

Candidates and criteria for the self

- AN 8.6: Gain, loss, fame, possessions
- SN 22:82,24: Five aggregates: form, feeling, perception, formations, consciousness
- Milindapañhā II.iii.6: sensations
- SN 12:61: consciousness
- MN 22.28-9: Disenchantment and diachronic disunity
- Milindapañhā II.1: The chariot and synchronic disunity
- SN 22:59: Voluntariness of self

Scholarship

- Amber Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (Routledge, 2014), ch. 2 ('Practice and Theory of No-Self')
- Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy: An Introduction* (Ashgate, 2007), ch. 3 ('Non-Self')
- Jonardon Ganeri, *The Self: Naturalism, Consciousness, and the First-Person Stance* (Oxford, 2012), ch. 1: 'Conceptions of Self'

2. Self-Cultivation in Plato

Week 5 Functions in the plural soul (Oct 6)

Special guest: Dr [Sylvia Berryman](#) (UBC)

Topics

- Functions (*erga*) of living beings: Plato and Aristotle on realizing potentiality
- The 'divided self': Motivational plurality and harmony in the soul
- Models of the philosopher's *psychē*: (1) harmonized plurality and (2) purified simplicity

Sources

Entelechy: Actualizing potentials

- Plato, *Republic* 1, 351c-354c: Justice and *aretē* as functional health in groups and individuals
- Aristotle, *NE* 1.1; 1.7: Well-being and the human *ergon*
- Excerpts from Aristotle, *De Anima* and *Physics*: plural capacities (*dunameis*)

Plurality and simplicity

- Plato, *Gorgias* 503c-504c: Harmonizing the soul
- Plato, *Republic* 4, 443b-d: Achieving *harmonia* between reason, spiritedness, and appetite
- Plato, *Phaedo* 65a-67d; 79c-e: Concentration and distraction; desire and the body
- Plato, *Republic* 9, 591b-592b: Internal unity
- Plato, *Republic* 10, 611b-612a: Return to the simple soul
- Plato, *Timaieus* 42e-44b; 69c-72d: Circles and parts of the soul

Scholarship

- Eric Brown, 'The Unity of the Soul in Plato's *Republic*', in R. Barney, T. Brennan, and C. Brittain, *Plato and the Divided Self* (Cambridge, 2012), ch. 3, with Introduction to vol.

Self-Transformation in Ancient Platonist and Buddhist Philosophy

- Sylvia Berryman, *Aristotle on the Sources of the Ethical Life* (Oxford, 2019), Introduction & ch. 2
- Christopher Shields, "[Aristotle's Psychology](#)", in E.N. Zalta (ed.) *Stanford Enc. of Philosophy*.
- **Optional:** Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind* (Harvard, 2007), chs. 1-2 • Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (2009), ch. 1, pp. 18-26 • Ronna Burger, *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates on the Nicomachean Ethics* (Chicago, 2008), Introduction.

Week 6 Contemplation and inspiration (Oct 13)

Topics

- Contemplation of Forms and 'becoming like god'
- Models of the philosopher's *psychē*: (3) contemplation and (4) inspiration
- Modern scholarly approaches: developmentalism in Plato
- Ancient commentators' synthetic approach: path or scale (*bathmoi*) of virtue and well-being

Sources

- Plato, *Theaetetus* 176a-c: Wisdom and likeness to God
- Plato, *Republic* 6, 500c-e; 7, 514a-520a: Paradigms and the Allegory of the Cave
- Plato, *Symposium* 210e: The Form of Beauty
- Plato, *Phaedrus* 244a-256e: Divine Mania and the chariot myth
- Aristotle, *NE* 2.1; 6.13; 7.10: Natural, habituated, and philosophical virtue
- Aristotle, *NE* 10.6-8: Contemplation like gods
- Preview: Selected Neoplatonic texts on the 'scale of virtues' (*bathmoi aretōn*)

Scholarship

- David Robjant, 'The Earthy Realism of Plato's Metaphysics, or: What shall we do with Iris Murdoch?' *Philosophical Investigations* 35: 43-67.
- Julia Annas, 'Becoming Like God: Ethics, Human Nature, and the Divine', in Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Cornell, 1999), ch. 3.
- Julia Annas, 'What Use is the Form of the Good? Ethics and Metaphysics in Plato', in Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Cornell, 1999), ch. 5.
- Michael Griffin, 'The Greek Neoplatonic Scale of Virtues' (summary for course)
- **Optional:** Allan Silverman, '[Plato's Middle Period Metaphysics and Epistemology](#)', in E.N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* • Blake E. Hestir, *Plato on the Metaphysical Foundation of Meaning and Truth*, Cambridge University Press, 2016, intro. • David Sedley, 'The Ideal of Godlikeness', in Gail Fine (ed.), *Plato 2: Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul* (Oxford, 1999), 309-28.

3. Self-cultivation in Buddhist 'path' literature

Week 7 Commentary: virtue, concentration, and insight (Oct 20)

Topics

- Buddhaghosa's construction of path (*magga*) and triple training (*tisikkhā*)
- Commentary as philosophy and practices of 'globalized philology'
- Constructions of cognitive unity through discipline (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), equanimity (*upekkhā*), mindfulness (*satī*), and wisdom (*pañña*)

Sources

- Buddhaghosa, *Vism* I 1-20, I 41, I 54: *Sīla* as coordination (*samādhāna*); contrast with 'natural' and 'customary' *sīla*
- Buddhaghosa, *Vism* III, 2-3; IV, 88: *Samādhi* as coordination (*samādhāna*)
- Buddhaghosa, *Vism* IV, 74: Jhāna in the (abhidhammic) cognitive series
- Buddhaghosa, *Vism* IV, 111-117; 156-75: Equanimity (*upekkhā*), mindfulness, and unity
- Buddhaghosa, *Vism* VIII, 232: Unification of mind through insight or wisdom (*pañña*)

Scholarship

- W. Chu, 'Path', in R.E. Buswell (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* 2 (Macmillan, 2003), 635-640.
- Maria Heim, *Voice of the Buddha: Buddhaghosa on the Immeasurable Words* (Ox., 2018), intro.
- Robert Sharf, 'Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience', *Numen* 42.3 (1995), 228-83.
- Evan Thompson, 'Jonardon Ganeri's Transcultural Philosophy of Attention', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 101.2 (2020), 489-94.
- **Optional:** Pauk Bhikkhu Anālayo, 'Meditation Maps, Attainment Claims, and the Adversities of Mindfulness', *Mindfulness* 11 (2020), 2102-12 • Maria Heim, 'Buddhaghosa on the Phenomenology of Love and Compassion', *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Philosophy* (2015)

Week 8 Insight: Abhidharma, two truths, emptiness (Oct 27)

Topics

- A theory of two truths: ultimate and conventional
- Abhidharmic analysis and the stream of dharmas
- Theravāda and Yogācāra perspectives: *bhavanga-citta*, dreamless sleep, and 'bare awareness'

Sources

- Buddhaghosa, *Vism* XVII 167, 172: A stream of continuity; experiencer as convention
- Ācariya Anuruddha, *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, excerpts from introduction (outline)
- *The Heart Sutra* (*Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*)
- Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośa* VI 4: Conventional and ultimate reality
- Vasubandhu, *Trīṃśikā* verses 1-4: Levels of consciousness

Self-Transformation in Ancient Platonist and Buddhist Philosophy

Scholarship

- Noa Ronkin, 'From the Buddha's Teaching to the Abhidhamma', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 64 (2010), 341-65.
- Catherine Prueitt, 'Karmic Imprints, Exclusion, and the Creation of the Worlds of Conventional Experience in Dharmakīrti's Thought', *Sophia* 57.2 (2018), 313-35.
- Christian Coseru, 'Whose Consciousness? Reflexivity and the Problem of Self-Knowledge', in M. Siderits, C. Keng, & J. Spackman (eds.), *Buddhist Philosophy of Consciousness* (Brill, 2020)
- Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy: An Introduction* (Ashgate, 2007), ch. 6 ('Abidharma')
- **Optional:** Evan Thompson, *Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy* (Columbia UP, 2014), ch. 1 ('Seeing') • Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, '[Phenomenological Approaches to Self-Consciousness](#)', in E.N. Zalta (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* • Bhikkhu Anālayo, 'In the Seen Just the Seen: Mindfulness and the Construction of Experience', *Mindfulness* 10 (2019), 179-84 • Amber Carpenter, 'Persons Keeping their Karma Together: The Reasons for the Pudgalavāda in Early Buddhism', in Koji Tanaka, Yasuo Deguchi, Jay L. Garfield & Graham Priest (eds.), *The Moon Points Back* (Oxford, 2015) • Sonam Thakchoe, '[The Theory of Two Truths in India](#)', in E.N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Week 9 'Awakening' and effortless action (Nov 3)

Topics

- Notions of 'bare awareness' and non-conceptual and non-dual experience
- Conceptualizing awakened volition (*cetanā*) and action
- Somatic practices

Sources

- Bāhiya-sutta (Ud 1.10 at 6,24)
- *The Heart Sutra* (*Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*), review
- *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* XI: 31
- Atiśa, *Bodhipathapradīpa* (excerpts)
- *Pointing Out Instructions to the Old Woman* attrib. to Padmasambhava (terma discovered by Nyang Ral Nyima Özer)

Scholarship

- Maria Heim, *The Forerunner of All Things: Buddhaghosa on Mind, Intention, and Agency* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 59-65 on the arahat's intentions and neutral karma.
- Robert Sharf, 'Mindfulness and Mindlessness in Early Chan', *Philosophy East and West* 64.4 (2014), 933-64.
- Edward Slingerland, *Effortless Action: Wu-wei as conceptual metaphor and spiritual ideal in early China* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 7-19.
- Evan Thompson, 'What's in a Concept? Conceptualizing the Nonconceptual in Buddhist Philosophy and Cognitive Science', forthcoming in Christian Coseru (ed.), *Reasons and Empty*

Self-Transformation in Ancient Platonist and Buddhist Philosophy

Persons: Mind, Metaphysics, and Morality: Essays in Honor of Mark Siderits (London: Springer, 2021).

- **Optional:** Robert Sharf, 'Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience', *Numen* 42.3 (1995), 228-83 • Bhikkhu Analāyo, 'The Bāhiya Instruction and Bare Awareness', *Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies* (2018) 19: 1-19 • Jake Davis & Evan Thompson, 'Developing Attention and Decreasing Affective Bias in Mindfulness Meditation', *Handbook of Mindfulness* (2014), 42-61 • Kate Crosby, *Esoteric Theravada: The Story of the Forgotten Meditation Tradition of Southeast Asia* (Shambhala, 2020), introduction

4. The Greek Neoplatonist scale of virtues

Week 10 Neoplatonist virtues of concentration and attention (Nov 17)

Topics

- Virtue: natural, habitual, constitutional, purificatory, contemplative, paradigmatic, & inspired
- Neoplatonist exercises of attention, concentration and mindfulness
- Hagiography in Mediterranean late antiquity

Sources

Hellenistic background

- Epictetus, *Handbook* 1; *Discourses* 1.4, 18-21: practices of concentration
- Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 5.11, 5.16, 6.11, 7.13, 10.24, 10.38: mindfulness and attention

Neoplatonists on attention

- Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.4.9-10: Awareness (*nous*) prior to reflexivity (*antilēpsis*)
- Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.9.9-10: Encountering the One
- Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 8, 7-24 and 23, 4-13: A 'multiple-operation' account of attention
- Porphyry, *On Abstinence* 1.39-43: 'Single' and 'multiple-operation' attention

Scales of virtue

- Olympiodorus, *On Alcibiades I* 172, 5-12: Levels of self-knowledge
- Olympiodorus, *On Phaedo* 8.1-4: Levels of virtue
- Damascius, *On Phaedo* 1.138-44: Levels of virtue, and inspiration

Scholarship

- Dominic J. O'Meara, 'Patterns of Perfection in Damascius' *Life of Isidore*', *Phronesis* 51.1 (2006), 74-90.
- D.M. Hutchinson, *Plotinus on Consciousness* (Cambridge, 2018), chs. 1-2, pp. 6-44
- John Sellars, 'Roman Stoic Mindfulness: An Ancient Technology of the Self', in Matthew Dennis and Sander Werkhoven (eds.), *Ethics and Self-Cultivation* (Routledge, 2018), 15-20.
- Michael Chase, 'Attention in Neoplatonism: From Plato to Porphyry and Some Christian Church Fathers' (draft online).

Self-Transformation in Ancient Platonist and Buddhist Philosophy

- **Optional:** John Dillon, 'An Ethic for the Late Antique Sage', in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (1996) • Dirk Baltzly, 'The Virtues and Becoming Like God', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 26 (2004), 297-321 • Charles Brittain, 'Attention Deficit in Plotinus and Augustine: Psychological Problems in Christian and Platonist Theories of the Grades of Virtue', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 18.1 (2003), 223-75 • Pierre-Julien Harter, 'Spiritual Exercises and the Buddhist Path: An Exercise in Thinking With and Against Hadot', in D.V. Fiordalis (ed.), *Buddhist Spiritual Practices: Thinking with Pierre Hadot on Buddhism, Philosophy, and the Path* (Mangalam Press, 2018).

Week 11 Neoplatonist virtues of receptivity to inspiration (Nov 24)

Topics

- *Epitēdeiotēs*: Receptivity to inspiration in music, movement, ritual, prophecy, and love
- Exemplars of somatic inspiration from the Pythia to Asclepiogeneia
- Neoplatonic ritual life and theurgy: receptivity to the One, asleep and awake
- Posthuman transformation: angels, daimons, and the 'autokinetic' and 'heterokinetic'

Sources

- Plato, *Phaedrus* 244a-245a; 257a-e (review): Inspiration
- Hermias *On Plato's Phaedrus* 89-95: Receiving inspiration; psychology & *mania*
- Iamblichus *On the Mysteries* 2.2, 3.2, 3.11: Becoming angels; oracular women
- Olympiodorus *On Alcibiades I* 20,4-13: Authentic living
- Proclus *PT* 1.3 and *On Timaeus* III, 231,8-10 and 245,24-26: All things within
- Damascius *On Phaedo* 1.171-2: Enthusiasm, ritual, and philosophy
- Damascius *On Phaedo* 1.6: Relating to daimones
- Damascius *On Phaedo* 1.62: Dreamless sleep

Scholarship

- M. David Litwa, *Posthuman Transformation in Ancient Mediterranean Thought: Becoming Angels and Demons* (Cambridge, 2021), Introduction; pp. 1-20
- Christina-Panagiota Manolea, 'Possessed and Inspired: Hermias on Divine Madness', *International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 7 (2013), 156-79.
- Crystal Addey, 'Plato's Women Readers', *Brill's Comp. to the Rec. of Plato* (Brill, 2017), 411-32.
- Christoph Helmig & A.L.C. Vargas, 'Ascent of the Soul and Grades of Freedom: Neoplatonic Theurgy Between Ritual and Philosophy', in P. d'Hoine and G. Van Riel (eds.), *Fate, Providence, and Moral Responsibility in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought* (Leuven, 2014), ch. 14, 253-66.
- Marilena Vlad, 'Stepping into the Void: Proclus and Damascius on Approaching the First Principle', *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 11.1 (2017), 46-70 • Crystal Addey, *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism: Oracles of the Gods* (Routledge, 2014), intro.
- **Optional:** Chad Jorgenson, *The Embodied Soul in Plato's Later Thought* (Cambridge, 2018).

Presentations

- [As scheduled](#)

Conclusion

Week 12 Spontaneous action revisited; synthesis & review (Dec 1)

Topics

- Review and discussion
- Modern analogues and challenges
- Platonist and Buddhist perspectives on acting from spontaneity
- Transformative experiences and the ‘oneness hypothesis’
- Presentations

Presentations

- [As scheduled](#)

Week 13 Presentations (Dec 8) as needed

Presentations

- [As scheduled](#)