

In preparation for the final exam, which is Wed. 12 May, RLM 4.102, you should master three of the following six topics: (a) yoga and ethics, (b) yoga and epistemology (the epistemology of mysticism as well as, possibly, debunking explanations by Freudians or historicists, etc.), (c) yoga and metaphysics, in particular the mind-body problem, (d) yogic psychology from a philosophic point of view, (e) yoga and aesthetics (life as art), and (f) philosophic examination of karma-yoga. FOUR TOPICS WILL APPEAR ON THE EXAM, from which you will choose one on which to write a philosophic essay. The following questions may or may not appear on the exam. But sketching out your thoughts on their various parts doubtless will help you achieve your full potential (yogic and philosophic, well, maybe not yogic). Good luck!

1. Is the moral teaching of the *Yogasūtra* (YS), or another yogic text of your choosing, egoistic, restricted to an answer about why, considering one's own self-interest, one should be moral? Practice of *yama*-s, *niyama*-s, etc., is read by some as in one's own best interest, which is the attainment of *samādhi*. In contrast, others say that even in the YS, and all the more in the *Gītā* and other yogic texts, there is consideration of the value of others (moral pull as well as push). Who is right? Does yoga encourage selfishness? You may also discuss the implications for moral philosophy of such yogic theses as karma (including possibly group karma) or the *siddhi* of *a-himsā* ("non-injury") or anything involving ethical values mentioned in the YS or another yogic text. An exceptional essay might try to work in the idea that to heighten or expand one's own awareness (i.e., to make yogic progress) is the best thing one can do to help others. Is this correct?

2. Aristotle writes: "Neither by nature nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit." In other words, we become good by doing good things over and over again and bad conversely. Relate this view to the YS's teaching about *saṁskāra* and purification. Optionally, go on to address why an ethical transformation is viewed as a prerequisite for yogic accomplishment. Or, explain why Aurobindo claims that a person undergoing psychic or spiritual transformation should not hold herself to conventional moral codes. Is this correct?

3. Is there anything that is universally recommendable in yoga, or does the recommendability of yoga depend upon self-chosen, ultimately arbitrary goals of individuals? For example, is the "sattvacization" of one's nature to which many YS practices are directed a good thing in general, or is it desirable only for those who think either that sattvacization is a good thing in itself or that it leads to something intrinsically good? What about *prāṇāyāma*, "breath-control"? Is it only for those who want other yogic goals, or is it recommendable for everyone? In a similar vein, is the yoga of the *Gītā* or of Aurobindo or the An-uttara Yoga of Buddhist Tantra only for those who accept the corresponding metaphysical views? An interesting phenomenon: Gym-yoga teachers are wont to preface instructions for postures with an "If you want to.") Write an essay on the conditions of the recommendability of yogic practices. Possible leads: the importance of personal assimilation, physical health as a universal value, a pluralist and existentialist view of self, power of concentration as a universal value, criteria for curriculum selection (including "physical education") for grammar schools, etc.

4. Consider the relationship between art and yoga, as you yourself (creatively) envisage it or as envisaged by a classical exponent such as Abhinava Gupta (c. 1100). Abhinava, a Kashmiri Shaivite, invented a new yoga that he elucidated in the terms of a Vedantic non-illusionist philosophy (in which Shiva and the Goddess, Shakti, are central) and a new aesthetic theory. The yoga has two sides. The first is, roughly speaking, the discipline to "capture the essence" of every experience, to find *rasa* ("juice" or "flavor" or "joy") in every life circumstance ("see life as art"). "Rasa" is an aesthetic concept that entails aesthetic distance such that there can be, for example, "aesthetic value" even in extreme pain or suffering or in various character flaws such as anger or greed. Here the guiding idea seems to be that of a "witness" to life, a training of seeing one's own life in the way that one would watch in delight a good movie. The second side of the yoga involves the idea of the yogi or yogini as artist. Tantric philosophy finds the world to be created for the purpose of the God's and Goddess's aesthetic enjoyment (brought about in some ultimate fashion by Devi, the Divine Energy, the World Mother). Consonantly, the culmination of the new yoga is to be creative expression by individuals making perfect art by means of openness to the energies of their "higher selves." Thus the second side of this yoga as art is "making life art" through integration with a higher self. Is there irreconcilable tension between the two sides of Abhinava's yoga? What is your opinion of this, in whole or in part? Be creative!

5. (A) Discuss what philosophers call the mind-body problem with respect to yogic phenomena. Various brands of materialism view “consciousness,” “desire,” “will,” and the like as terms of a seriously deluded “folk psychology.” Some materialists presume these terms will disappear in a future biology which will be capable of fully explaining “mind” in chemical terms, i.e., in talk about brain chemistry and neural principles. Does the fact that yogic practice can increase voluntary control constitute a problem for such a “reductionist” approach? (How far, would you say, having studied some of the literature, can control extend? To the minds and bodies of others?) (B) Alternatively, explore one or more of the following metaphysical views with respect to yoga: Sāṃkhya dualism, theism or pantheism or spiritual monism (as in the *Gītā*, Advaita Vedānta, Aurobindo, or another text), and/or an anti-metaphysical pragmatism or skepticism, Buddhist or another. (C) For either Advaita or Sāṃkhya, you might consider our abilities to identify/disidentify with various roles and instruments (including the body and *citta* according to Advaita, etc.) in connection with a philosophic discussion of personal identity. With Buddhism, you might discuss the same issues and focus on karma as forming continuity from one moment, and indeed one life, to the next.

6. Explain what Roger Walsh means by a “paradigm clash” in “The Consciousness Disciplines and the Behavioral Sciences: Questions of Comparison and Assessment.” Is he right to criticize behavioral scientists for assessing yogic states etc. as psychopathological because they have made insufficient effort to enter themselves into those states and to appreciate the radically different assumptions that motivate yogic advocacy?

7. Outline an historicist account of one of more yogic practices or beliefs. A historicist feels free to use theories of anthropology and sociology (“Religious practices are rituals binding together a society or tribe, providing social cohesion” for example). You may also use Freudian theses, if you wish, for example, the claim that religion is “wishful thinking” or the view that all “superconsciousness” is internalization of societal mores and values (“superego”). Nevertheless, the mainstay of your approach should probably be the arbitrariness of cultural artifacts such as yoga, whose continuity is to be explained by the history—or at least by bits or dimensions of the history—of Indian culture. You need not be too specific about chronology of texts, etc., but do focus on one or another practice or belief. Alternatively, *defend* one or more beliefs or practices from such debunking.

8. Examine one or more psychological teaching of the *Yoga-sūtra*, such as concentration (*ekāgratā*), *saṃyama*, meditation, *siddhi*-s, disidentification, dispassion, and so on. Then try to expand to include—in a meaningful way, illuminating the connection—anything Tantric, from practice to belief, from the Tibetan *an-uttara-yoga* to the “psychic being” concept in Aurobindo, from *rasa* to the disgusting practices attributed to Tantrics of the Left-Hand path. Is the Tantric development anticipated in the earlier psychology? Is it compatible with it? Optionally, go on to say briefly what you think about these beliefs or practices. Should there be laws against such things, for example, or should we recommend them to the local school board?



9. Explain the *karma-yoga* teaching of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, addressing, in particular, its moral dimensions. First, what does Krishna mean by the injunction to Arjuna to act without desire for the action’s fruit? Is such “disinterested action” possible? Second, does *karma-yoga* practice have moral value; in particular, could it plausibly provide “meaning” (in a moral sense) for a person’s work? (Here is a rough explanation of the relevant concept of “meaning.” People seem generally to use this idea of meaning in regard to what connects a line of action, or even an entire life, to morally larger activities or events or things. For example, a person might say with respect to what makes her feel that her work is significant is that it connects her to a group or an action that is far more important than herself. So, let us say, that acts possibly meaningful in this sense would be those focused on less strictly selfish contributions that include others’ interests. Examples might include (a) family, (b) job, (c) nation or culture, (d) humanity, and even (e) self, as in taking responsibility for one’s own education or self-development.) Examine the proposition that the *Gītā*’s prescription of *karma-yoga* amounts to, in the case of Arjuna, and in other examples of your choice, advice to fight in a spirit of self-sacrifice, for the purpose of *dharma* in the broadest sense (“for upholding of the worlds”), and thus to make, and to find, his fighting morally significant.