

The Department of Religious Studies presents

The Imaginative Impulse: Law and Aspirational Ethics in Medieval India



**Professor Donald R. Davis
University of Texas at Austin**

Thursday, April 21st, 2016

Reception: 5:30 PM

Lecture: 6:00 PM

126 Voorhies Hall

Donald R. Davis, Jr. is Associate Professor of Sanskrit and Indian Religions in the Department of Asian Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. He has published several studies of Hindu law and Dharmaśāstra including *The Boundaries of Hindu Law: Tradition, Custom, and Politics in Medieval Kerala* (2004) and *The Spirit of Hindu Law* (2010).

A rule is a constraint, but also a hope. Drawing on anthropological and legal theories of rules, this presentation will first address the theory of rules found in a major hermeneutical tradition of medieval India. The philosophy of language in this tradition embodies a mode of ethical thought in which imagined normativity replaces the real. Hindu jurisprudence accepted this view of rules and the presentation will then examine the imaginative impulse in the famous twelfth-century Hindu legal treatise called the *Epitome of the Law* by Vijnanesvara. Broader comparative questions of the role of imagination in religious law generally will conclude the discussion with reference to the works of Joseph Karo, Gratian, and al-Ghazali.

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