

Course Information

Course Number: PHIL 1304
Course Name: Introduction to World Religions
Section: TBD
Semester: TBD
Time: TBD
Location: TBD
Credit Hours: 3

Instructor Information

Instructor: Justin Andrew Hill, M.A.
Email: Hill.Justin.Andrew@gmail.com
Office Hours: F, 3p-4p, via Zoom and by appointment.

Communication Expectations

Email or Canvas are preferred. Canvas messages will send me extra notifications, so they may be faster. I will try to respond within 24 hours, but please allow up to 2 business days (48 hours, M-F) for a response.

Course Description

This course introduces various world religions with parallel foci: philosophical features and socio-historic origins. The course accomplishes such an ambitious, cosmopolitan, unitarian introduction by surveying key *writings, insights, principles, commitments, and practices* from across the historical traditions of: the Indic religions (e.g., Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism), D/Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, African Traditional Religions, Rastafarianism, indigenous Latin American cosmologies (e.g., Mayan, Aztec, Pre-Incan, and Incan), Native American philosophy, western polytheism (e.g., Greek, Norse, and Egyptian), western philosophy, and decolonial indigenous religions.

The course is paced into four units, working against the east-west distinction: (i) Western Philosophy; i.e., an incisive, brief survey of metaphysical texts from Bergson, Emerson, Deleuze, and Nancy; (ii) Eastern Religions, e.g., the Vedic and east Asian traditions — despite reductive falsehoods of orientalist east-west dichotomies; (iii) Western Religions, e.g., Abrahamic monotheism, Persian Zoroastrianism, and Islamic Neoplatonism; and (iv) Decolonial Indigenous Religions, e.g., philosophies, cosmologies, and practices.

Course assignments include four in-person, timed, open-text essays; attendance; reading and watching videos before class when applicable (preparation); and in-class oral discussions and short response Exit Ticket activities (participation). Annotations are extra credit, worth 10% on each exam and 10% overall. Across the semester, each religion will answer three simple questions suggested to us by V.F. Cordova: (1) What is the world? (2) What is the human? (3) What is the human's *proper* way of being with the world? Philosophy answers the same questions with metaphysics, existentialism, and normative, practical ethics.

Student Resources and Basic Needs

Students are humans first. To learn effectively you must have basic security: a roof over your head, a safe place to sleep, enough food to eat, and other necessary external goods. If you or another student you know are having trouble with any of those things, please talk with me or use the campus resources available.

Course Requirements

- In-Person Bluebook Essay Exams (4)
 - Unit 1: Western Philosophy
 - Unit 2: Eastern Religions
 - Unit 3: Western Religions
 - Unit 4: Decolonial Indigenous Religions (Final)
- Attendance, Participation, and Preparation
 - Attendance [Readiness / Engagement]
 - Present.
 - Physical texts present, to annotate with notes from class discussion for exams.
 - Some degree of understanding of current conversation, even if thinking privately.
 - Participation [Exit Tickets]
 - In-class exit ticket written responses to guiding questions, pass/fail for accuracy.
 - Preparation [Assigned Videos]
 - Watch video lectures explaining/working through assigned readings before class.
- Extra Credit
 - Annotations Check: If 2/3 of annotations are completed per unit, then +10% on the exam.
 - Set Sweep: If all annotation bonuses are earned across the semester, +6% in the course.

Class time will be spent discussing what was read or watched outside of class. We will occasionally have concrete activities that will be turned in for a grade (i.e., exit tickets or group projects). Students will lead discussions from guiding questions and with instructor facilitation. During class, students annotate texts and take notes, even directly on primary sources. Only primary sources are allowed during the bluebook exams. Assigned readings and webpages can and should be printed off and brought to class to annotate.

Reading List

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands / La Frontera*, “*La harenia de Coatlicue / The Coatlicue State*.”
Bergson, Henri. *Introduction to Metaphysics*.
Cordova, V.F. *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V.F. Cordova*. Excerpts.
Deleuze, Gilles. “Immanence: A Life.”
———. “Zones of Immanence.”
Emerson, Ralph Waldo. “Acquaint Thyself First Hand with Deity.”
Nancy, Jean-Luc. “Of Divine Places.”

Course Learning Outcomes

Students will be given the opportunity to:

- 1) (*Knowledge Outcomes*)
 - a) become familiar with fundamental philosophical concepts;
 - b) become familiar with major philosophical traditions;
 - c) develop the ability to critically interpret difficult philosophical texts;
 - 2) (*Skill Outcomes*)
 - a) develop the ability to reason and write critically about difficult philosophical texts and issues;
 - b) develop the ability to teach themselves from source texts without background knowledge;
 - 3) (*Value Outcomes*)
 - a) reflect critically about ethical, political, aesthetic, and metaphysical [meta-ethical] issues;
 - b) reflect critically about the value of knowledge and truth;
 - 4) (*Citizenship and Professionalism Outcomes*)
 - a) develop professionalism regarding punctuality, communication, and deliverables;
 - b) develop commonly agreed upon citizenship virtues and characteristics; and
 - c) develop the ability to understand contradictory perspectives and harmonize stakeholders.
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Grading Policy

Please refer to the current University Catalog for additional information regarding grades and course withdrawal policies. For this course, daily writing activities [exit tickets], discussions, and in-person essay bluebook essay exams will be graded according to the following scale (adapted from Dr. Robin James):

A (90-100)	Thorough and critical understanding of the issues – subtly summarizes the major issues while also offering insightful interpretation. Outstanding argumentation, organization, and writing (grammar, vocabulary, etc.). No misunderstandings. Clearly above and beyond expectations. <i>Excellent presentation of key ideas.</i>
B (80-89)	Above average understanding, not as creative or exegetical as an A level product, nor does it capture all the ‘complexities’ of the issues. A thorough recapitulation of the text and/or discussion. Adequate argumentation, organization, and writing, with few presentational awkwardnesses. <i>No misunderstandings of key ideas.</i>
C (70-79)	Basic understanding, marked by <i>one or more significant errors or mis-readings</i> . Confused, disorganized writing that may address lots of information, but does not weave nor interpret it. Does not respond directly to all components of prompt.
D (60-69)	Very basic grasp of the material, presented in a highly confused manner.
F (50-59)	No comprehension of the material, and/or an utterly incomprehensible paper.
M/INC (0)	Missing/Incomplete. All earnest attempts will receive a minimum grade of 50.

This class follows a 1000-point total structure, but I round up such that 890+ points is an A, 790-889.9 points is a B, 690-789.9 points is a C, etc. The rounding is a hard cutoff. Note also there are 1100 points possible in the class, out of 1000, meaning there is 10% worth of extra credit in the course. The following point breakdown will be used to calculate your numerical grade:

{1100 points possible w/ extra credit}	1100 points / 1000 points
Essay Exams:	400 points / 1000 points
Western Philosophy	100 points
Eastern Religions	100 points
Western Religions	100 points
Decolonial Indigenous Religions (Final)	100 points
Attendance, Participation, and Preparation:	600 points / 1000 points
Attendance (present; physical texts)	150 points
Participation (short answer exit tickets)	300 points
Preparation (video lectures beforehand)	150 points
Extra Credit:	100 points / {null} points
Reading Annotations	40 points
Annotations Set Sweep	60 points

I reserve the right to curve exams, but I am more likely to create a debrief assignment targeting specifics.

Grading Feedback Expectations

I will return grades via Canvas within three weeks after the exam date. I will return your bluebooks to you during a class session shortly after I have recorded and released grades, with specific itemized feedback.

Graded Attendance, Participation, and Preparation

Amongst other things, I track attendance data to hold students accountable for behavioral patterns related to educational outcomes. Attendance will be recorded at the start of class. I will call you by your name for the first few weeks so that I can learn hundreds of them. When I call your name raise your printed reading in the air and say here. Absences will not be excused without some kind of formal documentation of the situation (e.g., doctor's note, wedding invitation, funeral pamphlet, tow-truck receipt, etc.). I am flexible to a variety of situations but need documentation. There are no maximum absences, but it's worth 15% in the course, meaning that you cannot earn an A in the course without attending. Plus, the material is tough.

Class participation is expected, and activities are graded. For the most part students earn discussion and attendance credit (tracked the same way) for showing up to class in the first place and for continuing to be respectfully engaged. You do not need to speak up, and students who speak are not graded. However, speaking aids their learning by allowing them to ask questions. Further, the following **are** mandatory:

- Attendance
 - **Present.**
 - **Printed readings must be present.**
 - If **called on**, some degree of awareness of the present conversation, even if listening and thinking privately. That is, if the student repeatedly has no idea what is happening in the

discussion or in the text and is not asking questions, they may lose participation credit. However, they are welcome to stay in class.

- Participation
 - Taking **notes on printed readings for exam**.
 - Clearly **listening** to fellow students.
 - **Annotating**, underlining, and highlighting printed readings; **two-thirds** of the unit must be marked substantively to earn the +10% extra credit on the exam.
 - **In-class activities** and **short responses** to guiding questions, **graded on accuracy**.
 - Preparation
 - **Guiding questions** and responses studied beforehand.
 - **Audiovisual readings and assigned video lectures watched ahead of time** to prepare for discussion. (Graded component.)
 - **Ready to ask questions** and focus on interesting points of discussion as a group.
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Late Work and Make-Up Work Policy

If something comes up that will interfere with your attending class, **especially** for any of our four exam dates, please let me know sooner rather than later. However, if there is a present emergency, please deal with that first and contact me later — you need not, for example, email me from the emergency room.

Missing exams may be taken late, until the end of Week 14, but will be graded down by five letter grades (e.g., -50%). Missing exams taken late *until the end of Week 10* will be graded down by three letter grades (e.g., -30%), to encourage catching up early. Note the third exam can only be made-up at **-50%** and the final cannot be made-up. Exams missed for excused absences can of course be taken without deduction.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI use is not permitted in this course. AI use will result in an “M/INC” grade designation of 0 points, as this course is intended to teach you to think for yourself and to communicate your thinking without aid.

Course Schedule

Date	Topics	Essential Readings	Assignments Due
Unit 0: Introduction <i>1-1.5 weeks</i>			
W1 mm.dd-dd		Meet Your Professor (MYP). Syllabus. Icebreakers / Meet Your Classmates (MYC).	
		Ibid., cont. Finish MYP, Syllabus, and MYC.	

Date	Topics	Essential Readings	Assignments Due
Unit 1: Western Philosophy 3 weeks			
W2 mm.dd-dd		No class. Labor Day.	Watch Bergson videos.
		Bergson, "Introduction to Metaphysics," in <i>The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics</i> .	
W3 mm.dd-dd		Ibid., cont. Deleuze, "Immanence: A Life," in <i>Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life</i> , pp. 25-32.	
		Ibid., "Zones of Immanence," in <i>Two Regimes of Madness</i> , pp. 266-69.	
		Emerson, "Acquaint Thyself First Hand with Deity."	
W4 mm.dd-dd		Nancy, "Of Divine Places," in <i>The Inoperative Community</i> , pp. 110-50.	
		Unit 1 Exam, Western Philosophy, 2025.09.17.	Unit 1 Exam, 45min.

Unit 2:
Eastern
Religions
4 weeks

W5 mm.dd-dd		Hinduism.	
		Jainism.	
W6 mm.dd-dd		Buddhism.	
		Confucianism.	
W7 mm.dd-dd		Taoism / Daoism.	
		Shintoism.	
W8 mm.dd-dd		Sikhism.	
		Unit 2 Exam, Eastern Religions, 2025.10.15.	Unit 2 Exam, 45min.

Unit 3:
Western
Religions
3 weeks

W9 mm.dd-dd		Western Paganisms, Animism, and Polytheisms (e.g., Egyptian, Greek, Celtic, and Norse).	
		Judaism.	
W10 mm.dd-dd		Zoroastrianism.	

Date	Topics	Essential Readings	Assignments Due
		Christianity.	All Missing Essay Exams Due for -30%.
W11 mm.dd-dd		Islam and medieval Islamic Neoplatonism.	
		Unit 3 Exam, Western Religions, 2025.11.05.	Unit 3 Exam, 45min.

Unit 4:
Decolonial
Indigenous
Religions
4 weeks

W12 mm.dd-dd		African Traditional Religions, Rastafarianism, and Decolonial Religion.	
		Indigenous Latin American Cosmologies (e.g., Mayan, Aztec, Pre-Incan, and Incan).	
W13 mm.dd-dd		Anzaldúa, <i>Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza</i> , Ch. 4, "La harenca de Coatlicue / The Coatlicue State."	
		Cordova, <i>How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V.F. Cordova</i> .	All Missing Essay Exams Due for -50%.
W14 No class.		No class. Thanksgiving Break.	
		No class. Thanksgiving Break.	
W15 mm.dd-dd		Cordova, cont.	
		Ibid., cont.	

Unit 4 cont.:
Final Exams
0.5-1 weeks

W16 mm.dd-dd		No class due to Reading Day. Office Hours by appointment.	
		Unit 4 (Final) Exam, Decolonial Indigenous Religions (Final), 2025.12.10.	Unit 4 (Final) Exam, 45min.

Important Dates

- **Holidays and No-Class Days**
 - {per semester and institution}
 - Beginning of Week 16: Reading Day
- **Grade-related Dates (Exams)**
 - End of Week 3: Intuitionism Essay Exam
 - End of Week 8: Ancient / Modern Philosophy Essay Exam
 - End of Week 12: American Pragmatism Essay Exam
 - End of Week 16: Continental Philosophy Essay Exam (Final)
- **Grade-related Dates (Make-Ups)**

- *End of Week 10: All Missing Essay Exams Due for -30%*
 - *End of Week 14: All Missing Essay Exams Due for -50%*
 - **Finals Week and Commencement**
 - *End of Week 15: Last Day of Class*
 - *Beginning of Week 16: Reading Day*
 - *End of Week 16: Final Exam*
 - *After Week 16: Commencement Weekend*
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Learning Resources

My Office Hours are listed above; you are always welcome to ask me questions; I encourage discourse. You are welcome to stop by to ask about assigned readings, continue class discussions, get feedback on essays and term papers in advance, get clarity with the assigned reading, or meet my German Shepherd.

[The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy \(SEP\)](#) is better than AI (*use Ctrl+F to find keywords instead of AI*). This is a great secondary source if you are struggling with the primary sources assigned in class. You can also use the SEP to help identify promising secondary sources, topics for term papers, and the broader discourse, context, and interpretation around assigned primary sources, both for reading and for writing.

{per institution; tutoring and writing centers}

Disclaimer

I reserve the right to alter this syllabus and modify the information given above at any time during the semester. All changes will be announced via the LMS, which should hopefully forward to your email.

University Policies

{per institution}
