

### **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.  
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Office Hours: F, 3p-4p, via Zoom at TBD  
  
Date Modified: July 7, 2025

### **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 for a response (i.e., 48 hours, not including weekends; e.g., I will respond to an email received at 1pm on Friday by 1pm on Tuesday).

### **Course Description**

This course introduces various world religions with parallel foci: philosophical features and sociopolitical functions. 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, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism), Daoism, 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 religions. The course is paced into four units: (i) Western Philosophy; incisive survey of writings from Bergson, Emerson, James, Deleuze, and Nancy; (ii) Eastern Religions; (iii) Western Religions; and (iv) Indigenous / Decolonial Religions. Course assignments include four in-person, exegetical essays; attendance; reading and watching videos before class (preparation); and discussions and activities (participation). Annotations are extra credit.

## 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

- Written Exams (4) [*In-Person, using physical readings and annotations*]
  - Western Philosophy
  - Eastern Religions
  - Western Religions
  - Indigenous / Decolonial Religions (Final)
- Attendance, Participation, and Preparation
  - Attendance
    - Present.
    - No laptops allowed.
    - Physical texts required, to annotate with notes from class discussion for exams.
  - Participation
    - In-Class Activities and Exercises (semi-routine; not every class)
  - Preparation
    - 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, +4% 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., daily work). Students will lead discussions from guiding questions and instructor facilitation. Students can spend time in class annotating texts or taking notes (even directly on primary sources). Only primary sources are allowed during the bluebook exams.

## Reading List

Bergson, Henri. *Introduction to Metaphysics*.  
Cordova, V.F. *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V.F. Cordova*.  
Deleuze, Gilles. "Immanence: A Life."  
———. "Zones of Immanence."  
Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Acquaint Thyself First Hand with Deity."  
James, William. "What Pragmatism Means."  
Nancy, Jean-Luc. "Of Divine Places."

All excerpted readings are posted as PDFs to Canvas → Files → Readings and should be **printed ahead** and brought to class for your Attendance, Participation, and Preparation grade. Readings are required for attendance credit. Check the course schedule for weekly reading assignments. Expect 25-40 pp. per week. Use the assigned video lectures to help work through the assigned readings, since I structure the texts and dissect the components as we go along in the videos. Use the guiding questions and exemplar annotations.

## 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.

## Grading Policy

Please refer to the current University Catalog for additional information regarding grades and course withdrawal policies. For this course, in-person written 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. Excellent presentation of key ideas.
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. No misunderstandings of key ideas.
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 thematize or 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 <b>earnest</b> 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
Written Exams:	600 points / 1000 points
Western Philosophy	100 points
Eastern Religions	150 points
Western Religions	150 points
Indigenous / Decolonial Religions (Final)	200 points
Attendance, Participation, and Preparation:	400 points / 1000 points
Attendance (physical text; no laptops)	150 points
Participation (writing activities in-class)	50 points
Preparation (video lectures beforehand)	200 points
Extra Credit:	100 points / {null} points
Reading Annotations	60 points
Annotations Set Sweep	40 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 four 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 written or itemized feedback.

### ***Graded Participation and Preparation***

Class participation is expected but graded flatly, untracked. 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 do are not rewarded, except insofar as doing so aids their learning by allowing them to ask questions. However, the following **are** mandatory:

- Participation
  - **No laptops in use.**
  - Clearly **listening** to fellow students.
  - If **called on**, some degree of awareness of the present conversation. 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.
  - Optional
    - Taking **notes on printed readings for exam.**
    - **Annotating**, underlining, and highlighting printed readings; **two-thirds** of the unit must be marked substantively to earn the +10% extra credit on the exam.
- Preparation
  - **Printed readings must be present.**
  - Guiding questions and responses studied beforehand.

Active listening entails turning towards the one speaking and not speaking over one another. Generally we'll rely on raising hands but can try discussing freely as we get to know each other. Having taught in a middle school with disrespect, I reserve the right per university-policy to ask disruptive students to leave.

### ***Graded Attendance***

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.

### **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 three letter grades (e.g., -30%). Missing exams taken late but before Week 10 will only be graded down by two letter grades (e.g., -20%), to encourage catching up early. Note only the first two exams can be made up at this reduced rate. Exams submitted as make-up work for an excused absence 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.

### **A note about higher education in Texas**

Texas Senate Bill 17, the recent law that outlaws diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at public colleges and universities in Texas, does not in any way affect content, instruction, or discussion in a course at public colleges and universities in Texas. Expectations and academic freedom for teaching and class discussion have not been altered post-SB 17, and students should not feel the need to censor their speech pertaining to topics including race and racism, structural inequality, LGBTQ+ issues, or diversity, equity, and inclusion. *Nota Bene: Per Popper's paradox of tolerance, intolerance will not be tolerated.*

(Source: The Texas Conference of the American Association of University Professors, 1/10/23)

### **Course Schedule**

Date	Topics	Essential Readings	Assignments Due
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Introduction  
1-1.5 weeks

W0 mm.dd-dd		Meet Your Professor (MYP). Syllabus.	
W1 mm.dd-dd		Ibid., cont. Icebreakers / Meet Your Classmates (MYC).	
		Ibid., cont. Finish MYP, Syllabus, and MYC.	

Western  
Philosophy  
4 weeks

W2 mm.dd-dd		Intuitionism as Spiritual Listening.	
		Bergson, "Introduction to Metaphysics," in <i>The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics</i> .	
		Ibid., cont.	
W3 mm.dd-dd		Being Virtue as Experiencing Divinity.	
		Emerson, "Acquaint Thyself First Hand with Deity."	
		Religion as Functionally Beneficial / Pragmatic.	
		James, "What Pragmatism Means."	
W4 mm.dd-dd		Quantum Mechanical Metaphysics as Religious.	
		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.	
		Temples, Places, Worlds, Divine Experience (or the Lack thereof), and Interpersonal Ethics.	
		Nancy, "Of Divine Places," in <i>The Inoperative Community</i> , pp. 110-50.	
W5 mm.dd-dd		Ibid., cont.	
		<b>Unit 1 Exam, Western Philosophy.</b>	<b>Unit 1 Exam, 50min.</b>

Eastern  
Religions  
4 weeks

W6 mm.dd-dd		Hinduism.	
		Buddhism.	
W7 mm.dd-dd		Daoism.	

Date	Topics	Essential Readings	Assignments Due
		Confucianism.	
W8 mm.dd-dd		Zoroastrianism.	
		Jainism.	
W9 mm.dd-dd		Sikhism.	
		<b>Unit 2 Exam, Eastern Religions.</b>	<b>Unit 2 Exam, 50min.</b>

Western  
Religions  
3 weeks

W10 mm.dd-dd		Western Paganisms, Animism, and Polytheisms (e.g., Egyptian, Greek, Celtic, and Norse).	
		Ibid., cont.	
W11 mm.dd-dd		Judaism.	
		Christianity.	<b>All Missing Written Exams Due for -20%</b>
W12 mm.dd-dd		Islam and medieval Islamic Neoplatonism.	
		<b>Unit 3 Exam, Western Religions.</b>	<b>Unit 3 Exam, 50min.</b>

Indigenous /  
Decolonial  
Religions  
3 weeks

W13 mm.dd-dd		African Traditional Religions, Rastafarianism, and Decolonial Religion.	
		Indigenous Latin American Cosmologies (e.g., Mayan, Aztec, Pre-Incan, and Incan).	<b>All Missing Written Exams Due for -30%</b>
		Anzaldúa, <i>Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza</i> , Ch. 4, "La harenencia de Coatlicue / The Coatlicue State."	
W14 mm.dd-dd		Native American Philosophy.	
		Cordova, <i>How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V.F. Cordova</i> .	
		Ibid., cont.	<b>All Missing Written Exams Due for -30%</b>
W15 mm.dd-dd		Ibid., cont.	
		Ibid., cont.	

Final Exams  
0.5-1 weeks

W16 mm.dd-dd		No class due to Reading Day. Office Hours by appointment.	
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Date	Topics	Essential Readings	Assignments Due
		Unit 4 Exam, Indigenous / Decolonial Religions (Final).	Unit 4 Exam, 50min.

## Key Concepts

### *Unit 1: Western Philosophy*

- Analysis vs. Intuition (Bergson)
- Concrete Duration (Bergson)
- Listening (Bergson; Nancy)
- Spirit (Emerson)
- Virtue (Emerson)
- American Pragmatism (James; Dewey)
- Genetic Theory of Truth (James)
- Functionalist Account of Meaning (James)
- Unity vs. Multiplicity (Bergson; Deleuze; Nancy)
- A Life (Deleuze)
- Transcendental Field (Deleuze)
- Immanence (Deleuze)
- Transcendental Empiricism (Bergson; Deleuze; Nancy)
- Transcendent (Deleuze)
- Singularity (Deleuze; Nancy)
- Univocity of Being (Deleuze)
- Being-With (Nancy)
- Divine Places (Nancy)
- Religious Experience / Winking (Nancy)
- Exposure (Nancy)
- Destitution (Nancy)
- Divine Names (Nancy)
- Primacy of Difference (Deleuze; Nancy)

### *Unit 2: Eastern Religions*

- Hinduism
- Buddhism
- Daoism
- Confucianism
- Zoroastrianism
- Jainism
- Sikhism

### *Unit 3: Western Religions*

- Greek Polytheism
- Norse Polytheism
- Egyptian Polytheism
- Judaism
- Christianity



- Islam
- Medieval Islamic Neoplatonism's impact on monotheism

*Unit 4: Indigenous / Decolonial Religions*

- African Traditional Religions
- Rastafarianism
- Decolonial Religion
- Liberation Theology
- Christian Anarchism
- Mayan Cosmology
- Aztec Cosmology
- Pre-Incan and Incan Cosmologies
- V.F. Cordova, *How It Is*. (Native American Philosophy; TBD).

**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 Written Exam
  - End of Week 8: Ancient / Modern Philosophy Written Exam
  - End of Week 12: American Pragmatism Written Exam
  - End of Week 16: Continental Philosophy Written Exam (Final Exam; No Make-Ups)
- **Grade-related Dates (Make-Ups)**
  - End of Week 10: All Missing Written Exams Due for -20%
  - End of Week 14: All Missing Written Exams Due for -30%
- **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

**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}