

Guiding Questions for Reading and Discussion

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PHIL 1304: Introduction to World Religions

Nota Bene: The numbers on the left refer to the week and then either part one or part two of the aforementioned week in the following convention: WW.PP, such as 03.02 for Week 3, Part 2.

For MW and TR sections, parts one and two refer to explicit days of class — e.g., part one on MT and part two on WR. For MWF sections, part one is extended into W, and part two begins W and ends F. When possible, MWF sections will finish part one M and begin part two W, leaving F for questions, exploration, and growth. This extra time has yet to happen as content is plentiful.

- 02.01 Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Acquaint Thyself First Hand with Deity [The Divinity School Address],” 1832, <https://emersoncentral.com/ebook/Divinity-School-Address.pdf>. Accessed most recently on December 1, 2025.

1. What is the relationship between deity, spirit, and truth?
2. How does Emerson argue that we have misunderstood Christianity?

- 02.02-04.01 Bergson, *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. R. Ashley Audra and Cloutesley Brereton, with the assistance of W. Horsfall Carter (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013 [1932]), excerpts.

- pt1
1. TBD

- pt2
1. TBD

- pt3
1. TBD

- pt4
1. TBD

04.02i

Gilles Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life” [1995], in *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 25-33.

1. What is *A Life*?
2. What is the significance of the example from Charles Dickens? Why does everyone lose their sense of self to save the degenerate rogue’s life?
3. Whose perspective is *A Life*? If we are entangled in strange ways, how does this interact with solipsism? If solipsism is still possible, how would it be multiple?
4. How does Deleuze’s view contrast with the “experience-in-the-brain” model?
5. What active verbs describe how the concepts/notions articulate and express behavior patterns out in the world? Avoid linking verbs when writing on ontology.
6. What is the difference between “a” life and “the” life? This determination into suchness, particularness, thatness, mineness, and as-it-is-ness is called haecceity. Still, how does Deleuze transform the medieval haecceity (with its assumption of transcendence) into the dimension of immanence and actualization? How does this relate to singularities, indices, and *abschattungen*, i.e., adumbration, in phenomenology?
7. How does “a” life connect from the first instance the unity of beings due to giving primacy to the indefinite article “a”? This indefiniteness is an index rather than a transcendental form “out there,” separate and away from the world.
8. How do immanence and transcendence relate to monism and dualism? How do these relate to the nature of consciousness? How do they describe the production of conscious experience and its necessary preconditions?
9. How might *A Life* and its accompanying model of consciousness relate to “an answer to the meaning of life” and why we exist in the first place?
10. Does Deleuze replace transcendence with immanence as “the true reality,” or does he show how they interrelate? Is one of these two fundamental metaphysical structures subordinate or superior to the other structure? Are they inseparable?

Deleuze, “Zones of Immanence” [1985], in *Two Regimes of Madness: Gilles Deleuze Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2007 [2001]), 266-69.

1. Which historical tradition contrasts with immanence? In other words, what foil does Deleuze start the essay with to help compare against and define immanence?
2. What are the two movements of immanence? How do they relate to the classic problem of the One and the Many? How might the One and the Many relate to the simultaneity we saw in Sartre between first-person freedom/magic and third-person determinism/mechanism? How might this simultaneity result in identity and difference? Do they determine their meanings in relation to one another?
3. How do horizontality and verticality relate to immanence and transcendence?
4. What two ideas form the basis of an expressionist philosophy, according to Deleuze?
5. How does translation demonstrate the simultaneity between the One and the

Many, between God and the multiplicity of the World?

6. How does Deleuze's re-conception of translation (through Gandillac) offer a notion of the world as linguistic, forming the basis of hermeneutical materialism (that sense communicates to us through originary, shared material communion)?

04.02ii Alphonso Lingis, *Violence and Splendor* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), excerpts.

1. TBD

05.01 Jean-Luc Nancy, "Of Divine Places" [1986], in *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Michael Holland (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 110-50.

1. What are the importances of exposure and destitution in Nancy's argument?

05.02 Western Philosophy Essay Exam, 60min, 900 words.

06.01 Hinduism.

1. How does henotheism synthesize three main Hindu gods with local traditions?
2. What do the three main Hindu deities represent metaphysically, i.e., in Nature?
3. What is henotheism? Do you know of any other major henotheistic religions?

06.02 Jainism.

1. How does eudaimonia mean happiness but not hedonistic/egoistic pleasure?
2. How does "the mean" of virtue allow just action to depend on history/context?
3. What are the three types of friendship, and which type is most ethical/just?
4. What are the roles of habit and practice in the formation of enacted virtue?
5. Why must reason be enacted, and how does this enacted reason relate to a diversity of pleasures unique to each activity, pleasant in the doing itself?

- 07.01 Buddhism.
1. What is nothingness?
 2. How does anatta relate to impermanence and to interdependent origination?
 3. How does nothingness relate to anatta?
 4. What is the middle way?
 5. What are the differences between Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Vajrayana Buddhism?
- 07.02i Confucianism.
1. Why is Confucianism more hierarchical than egalitarian? What is its structure?
 2. Why does Confucianism emphasize adherence to hierarchy, to political order, and to social customs?
- 07.02ii Daoism.
1. How does the Rainmaker anecdote exemplify Daoism, wu-wei, chi, and dao?
 2. Philosophically [not externally socio-politically] why does Daoism emphasize egalitarianism, following one's impulses, ignoring customs/laws, and not trying?
- 07.02iii Shinto.
1. What are the differences between Shinto and Buddhism?
 2. Why is Shinto prehistoric?
 3. Why does Shinto avoid dogma and ritualized beliefs?
 4. What was Shinto's role in state authoritarianism? How might this contradict Shinto's emphasis on anti-dogmatism?
- 08.01-02 Spring Break, March 9-15. No classes.**
- 09.01 Sikhism.
1. How does Sikhism combine elements of both Hinduism (e.g.; reincarnation; karma; interdependent origination; impermanence; immanence) and Islam (e.g.; one indivisible, supreme God; transcendence; submission to God's will)?

2. Is Sikhism an immanent or transcendent religion? Hinduism is immanent; Islam is transcendent; Sikhism is a combination but cannot be both. Write 3-7 sentences.
3. Show the similarities and differences (i) between Sikhism and Hinduism; and (ii) between Sikhism and Islam; but (iii) not between Hinduism and Islam, which are not relevant to the question being asked, about the development of Sikhism.

09.02

Immanent Eastern Religions Essay Exam, 60min, 900 words.

10.01

Western Polytheisms.

1. Explain the symbolic-metaphysical similarities between at least two deities across at least two polytheistic religions.

10.02

Judaism.

1. What are the main ideas of Judaism?
2. What is the relationship between accountability, responsibility, accuracy, integrity, and moral desert, and what roles do these play in Judaism versus Christianity or Islam?

11.01

Zoroastrianism.

1. What are the main ideas of Zoroastrianism?
2. What is the relationship between Persian culture and Zoroastrianism? Between later monotheistic religions and Zoroastrianism?

11.02

Christianity.

1. What are the main ideas of Christianity?
2. What is the relationship between grace, forgiveness, and mercy, and what roles do these play in Christianity versus Judaism or Islam?

- 12.01 Islam.
1. What are the main ideas of Islam?
 2. What is the relationship between divine omnipotence and human submission, and what roles do these play in Islam versus Judaism or Christianity?

12.02 Transcendent Western Religions Essay Exam, 60min, 900 words.

- 13.01i African Traditional Religions, Rastafarianism, and Decolonial Religions.
1. How does the African sense of time differ from European-Christian time?
 2. Are African Traditional Religions truly groupable together? NO.
 3. What is the relationship between Rastafarianism, Ethiopia, and decolonization?
- 13.01i Indigenous Latin American Cosmologies.
1. How do the Mayan, the Aztec, and the Incans differ from one another?
 2. Were these cultures civilized (due to their large-scale administrations)? YES.
 3. What were some of the main technological advancements of each civilization?
 4. What are the three realms and the three sacred animals of the Incan cosmology?
 5. How do they symbolize similar aspects of Hinduism and western metaphysics?
 6. How does the Incan cult of the dead differ from the European-Christian cult of living? What does this mean? Give your own personal examples of each ‘cult.’
- 13.02 Gloria Anzaldúa, “The Coatlicue State,” in *Borderlands / La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012 [1987]), 63-73.
1. Who is *Coatlicue*?
 2. Which other saints and protectors does *Coatlicue* often embody?
 3. What is the *Coatlicue* state?

- 14.01 V.F. Cordova, *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V.F. Cordova*, eds. Kathleen Dean Moore, Kurt Peters, Ted Jojola, and Amber Lacy, foreword by Linda Hogan (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2007), vii-83 [Front Matter (e.g., Foreword, Editor's Introduction, Author's Introduction, Biographical Essay), I. Bridges, II. Windows].
1. Why study Native American philosophy in a course on world religions?
 2. What do bridges represent for Cordova?
 3. How are the two processes of bridges interrelated?
 4. What do windows represent for Cordova?
 5. How do our language, stories, assumptions, and cultural practices determine how we understand the world?
- 14.02 Cordova, *How It Is*, III. What Is the World?, and IV. What Is It to Be Human?, 85-179.
1. What is the world?
 2. How did the world begin?
 3. Of what is the world made?
 4. What is the nature of time?
 5. What is the nature of space?
 6. What is real?
 7. Are there many realities or only one?
 8. What is the human?
 9. How does the human integrate in a complex, interconnecting world?
 10. How might people reclaim the power to define themselves and thus regain the right to shape their own lives?
- 15.01-02 V.F. Cordova, *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V.F. Cordova*, V. What Is the Role of a Human in the World?, 181-232.
1. What is the role of the human in the world?
 2. How do the places of birth and of upbringing inform as well as determine how we ought to act in relation to those places as well as in relation to others who live and who will live and who have lived in those/these places?
 3. How, then, shall we live?
 4. How is it, this beautiful, mysterious, powerful and vulnerable world?

5. Who am I in this world?
6. How shall I then live?

16.01 Reading Day. (No class.)

16.02 **Decolonial Indigenous Religions [Final] Essay Exam, 60min, 900 words.**

Final grades available within two weeks under normal, non-exigent circumstances.