

# Philosophy 350: World Philosophies

University of Massachusetts Lowell

Department of Philosophy

Fall 2013

**Professor:** Bassam Romaya, PhD

**Office Location:** Dugan Hall 200E

**Email:** bassam\_romaya@uml.edu

**Office Phone:** (978) 934-4236

**Meeting Times:** Mon & Wed 2:00PM-3:15PM

**Course Location:** Health & Social Sci 130-SC

**Course Number:** 11241

**Office Hours:** Mon & Wed 12:30PM-1:30PM

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**I. Course Description:** A course in world philosophy examines a broad range of philosophical traditions in a twofold sense; it is a course focusing on philosophical issues and various perspectives *about* the world, and *throughout* the world. Course material will be organized geographically and thematically across a variety of key philosophical areas including ethics, philosophy of mind and self, epistemology, metaphysics, and philosophical theology. Our course readings feature ancient and contemporary traditions including (but not limited to) African, Chinese, Greek, Indian, Latin American, and various theological perspectives within Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Hindu, and Islamic traditions. Attempting to cover the discipline of philosophy in its entirety, on a vast and grandiose scale, stemming across various civilizations and time periods, is an ambitious task, neither possible nor pedagogically feasible in a given semester. To this end, we will at times make omissions along the way. Our focus will range from an emphasis on individual figures, movements, school/s of thought, and sometimes, both key figures and their respective philosophical systems. Ultimately, we will develop connections between diverse philosophical traditions that illustrate both similarities and differences as we navigate the vast terrain of world philosophy.

**II. Course Objectives:** The course invites you to be intellectually challenged, to think open-mindedly about new and traditional philosophical problems that we will examine throughout the term. Additionally, you will be expected to “do philosophy” in the course; this entails practicing its methods of critical thought, reflection, analysis, and argumentation. The aim is to: 1) broaden your theoretical presuppositions about the world we inhabit by critically examining the open and free-exchange of ideas that world philosophers and other practitioners have contributed throughout the ages; 2) invite you to draw your own informed and well-reasoned conclusions about general philosophical problems of human life; 3) encourage you to further explore your own place in the world by guiding you along on your own philosophical journey in search of truth, meaning and personal understanding.

**III. General Advice With Non-Western Traditions and World Philosophy:** In itself, most people find philosophy to be a difficult subject to study. However, in confronting world philosophy, the reader faces multiple challenges. Granting this possibility, it is relatively simple to ascertain why so-called non-Western traditions are generally more difficult to study. Of course, among the greatest obstacles will be language. This is partly due to the uncontrollable nature of an extensive range of critical languages used (i.e., Sanskrit, Farsi, Aramaic, Arabic, Chinese, Hebrew, Greek, etc.) but also due to differing cultural, religious, cosmological, theoretical or philosophical conceptions. The great majority of philosophical traditions we will be considering were not communicated, expressed, or written in the English language. What’s

more, even philosophers conventionally associated with the so-called Western tradition (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Sartre, etc.), did not write in English nor did they possess a proficient knowledge of the English language. This does not mean that it is impossible for us to gain working knowledge, insight, and appreciation for their work, but only that language remains a well-recognized, though at times minimal, obstacle to grasping the traditions in question. Despite the shortcomings of an introductory study, I am certain that you will discover that its merit exceeds the effort.

**IV. Course Format:** The course format consists in a combination of lectures, discussions, weekly readings, in-class presentations, take-home assignments and in-class examinations. On occasion, we may include other media (such as film, artwork, etc.) with special significance to course content or we may invite guest speakers to contribute to our class discussions. Weekly lectures and in-class discussions will not be made available outside of class.

**V. Course Text:** In addition to the following required course texts, supplementary instructional material will be made available as needed.

a) Anonymous, Laurie L. Patton, ed., trans., and intro., *The Bhagavad Gita (Penguin Classics)* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2008). ISBN: 978-0140447903.

b) Daniel Bonevac and Stephen Philips, eds. *Introduction to World Philosophy: A Multicultural Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). ISBN: 13-9780195152319.

c) Laozi, Benjamin Penny, intro., Edmund Ryden, trans., *Daodejing (Oxford World's Classics)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). ISBN: 978-0199208555.

**VI. Course Requirements and Grading Procedure:** Your grade for the course is based on the total number of points accumulated from 1 midterm exam, 1 final exam, 1 term paper, an attendance and participation score, and a brief in-class presentation. The *approximate* grading scale used to assess your final course grade is modeled upon the following grade point system:

94-96 % = A	80-83 % = B-	67-69 % = D+
90-93 % = A-	77-79 % = C+	64-66 % = D
87-89 % = B+	74-76 % = C	60-63 % = D-
84-86 % = B	70-73 % = C-	57-59 % = F

Exams administered during the term will be writing-intensive/essay-based format, conventional in most philosophy courses; hence, there will be no “multiple choice” questions or “fill-ins” on any exam. Detailed instructions on how to write an essay for a philosophy exam will be provided several weeks before the first exam is given. The breakdown for 5 sections that constitute your overall course grade is detailed below:

#### **VI.1 Attendance and Participation: 10%**

Regular attendance is essential for succeeding in this course. Attendance and participation constitutes (fully awake) physical presence and active in-class participation; this involves speaking up and contributing to our in-class discussions. The weekly lectures will assume that students have done the assigned readings (and thought critically about them) before coming to

class; therefore, please be prepared to discuss the material *enthusiastically*. In the event that you are unable to make it to class, please remember that you are nonetheless responsible for obtaining and knowing any material covered during your absence (absences do not absolve you from accountability). Each absence is penalized at 2 points per class meeting; students who come to class late will not receive credit after attendance has been taken. Excessive absences will very likely impact your understanding of the material, thereby preventing you from succeeding in the course. What's more, information such as weekly reading assignments, handouts, and current announcement of exams, is often made during class. Lastly, *please make sure you have a current Umass Lowell email account and check it frequently (at least daily). I often email students course updates and other pertinent announcements as new information becomes available.*

### **VI.2 Midterm Exam: 25%**

A three part midterm exam will test knowledge base acquired in the first half of the term. The basic format is 2 long essays and 1 short essay. The midterm exam is worth 25 points total; the long essays are worth 10 points each and the short essay is valued at 5 points. You may also attempt an extra credit question at the end of your exam which may boost your overall exam score (see section VII on extra credit).

### **VI.3 Term Paper: 25%**

The term paper assignment asks you to explore an issue or theme in world philosophy. You may write on any topic that interests you from our course readings; it is also possible to write on related material that we may not be studying directly. Recommended length for these papers is 6-8 pages. More detailed information on the term paper assignment will follow.

### **VI.4 Final Exam: 25%**

A final exam will be administered at the end of the term. The final will be very similar to the midterm in format, though it will cover knowledge base acquired in the second half of the term. It is not a *comprehensive* exam, which means that it will not cover everything we learned since the first week of class, but only material acquired in the second half of the semester.

### **VI.5 Class Presentation: 15%**

Each student is required to conduct an in-class presentation. This may involve presenting one of the readings for the course (excluding introductions, prefaces, forwards, or short excerpts), research material from your term paper, an in-class dialogue of a philosophical text, or other possibilities. Student presentations run approximately 10-15 min each, depending on content, complexity of material, and classroom dynamics. Students may present material individually or in pairs. Presentations are assessed for strength, clarity, originality, and engagement with course content. Students should arrange to discuss their presentation ideas with me well in advance of their proposed presentation date. *Presentations may not be conducted during the final lecture week of the semester.*

**VII. Extra Credit:** While there are no formal assignments made for the exclusive purpose of gaining extra credit points, students have the opportunity to earn “extra credit” on both the midterm and final exams. Please keep in mind that extra credit exam questions may not come directly from the text and might be more challenging than ones contained in the body of the exam. Generally speaking, extra credit problems are set to a higher degree of assessment.

**VIII. Make-Up Exams and Late Work Acceptance Policy:** Please make every effort to take the midterm and final exam during their regularly scheduled time. Make-ups may only be administered in the event of serious and compelling reasons beyond the student's control; this includes but is not limited to immediate family emergencies, documented medical reasons, or other university-approved exemptions. You must notify me in advance of your impending emergency and schedule a mutually-convenient appointment time for any make-ups. Please submit all written work on time, late work is penalized at 10 points per day after the due date.

**IX. Snow Emergencies and Unexpected Class Cancellations:** In the event of an unexpected campus wide emergency due to inclement weather or other unforeseen circumstances that result in class cancelation, I will contact you (by email) with specific instructions on how the emergency impacts any exams, papers, or other assignments scheduled for the day/s in question. Depending on where we are at in the semester, I may postpone your exam, convert it to a take-home, or make other arrangement for you to complete the assigned course work.

**X. Class Conduct and Miscellaneous Policies:** A successful learning environment is generated by respect, professional courtesy, and kind consideration of others. Please refrain from eating (drinks are fine), sleeping, talking privately, texting, and using any and all electronic equipment (i.e., cell phones, iPods, Blackberrys, personal stereos/headphones, recording devices, scientific calculators, laptops, etc.) while in class. *Please be sure you understand that the use of cellular/mobile phones as well as laptops is not permitted in class at any time (or in my office hours).* If it is imperative that you use your phone, please conduct your business outside of class as quickly as possible and disable your phone before returning to class. For special or personal circumstances, please see me in advance about any exceptions to the prohibition on the use of electronic devices in class. In addition, please do not bring young children or non-human animals/pets (unless pre-approved by the university) to class. Finally, if you have any questions or concerns with respect to grades or your specific course performance, please contact me personally. As a general rule, your grades (among other educational records) are confidential, thus I am *not permitted nor required* to discuss your course performance with anyone else on your behalf. The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (also known as FERPA) prohibit me from discussing your educational records with other parties. In brief, please conduct yourselves appropriately and adhere to commonsensical, mutually beneficial, classroom etiquette.

**XI. Special Circumstances and Students with Disabilities:** Please do not hesitate to meet with me in the event that you encounter difficulties of a personal nature that may hinder your ability to succeed in this course. Students with documented disabilities (physical, learning, etc.) which may impact course performance, should contact me immediately so that I may accommodate your needs as early on as possible in the term. If you would like to request accommodations or review the university's policies governing disability disclosures, please contact the Office of Disability Services at (978) 934-4574 or visit their office located at One University Avenue, Cumnock C4, Lowell, MA 01854.

**XII. Tentative Course Outline:** (Subject to revision as needed)

- Week 1: 9/4: Introduction to Philosophy and World Philosophy
- Week 2: 9/9, 9/11: Chinese Philosophy Ch. 2 (pp. 38-65), Ch. 13
- Week 3: 9/16, 9/18: *Daodejing*, Introduction, Part I: The Way (pp. 3-77), Part II: The Life Force (pp. 80-167)
- Week 4: 9/23, 9/25: Greek Philosophy, Ch. 3, Ch. 9
- Week 5: 9/30, 10/2: Greek Philosophy, Ch. 19 (pp. 429-441 & pp. 446-447), Ch. 14 (pp. 334-343)
- Week 6: 10/7, 10/9: Indian Philosophy, Ch. 1 (pp. 3-5, pp. 9-16 & pp. 31-37), Ch. 7 (pp. 205-223)
- Week 7: 10/14 (No Class: Columbus Day), 10/16: *Bhagavad Gita*, Introduction, First to Ninth Discourse (pp. 3-110)
- Week 8: 10/21, 10/23: *Bhagavad Gita*, Tenth to Eighteenth Discourse (pp. 111-205), **Midterm Exam**
- Week 9: 10/28, 10/30: Indian Philosophy, Ch. 12 (pp. 309-314), Ch. 18 (pp. 423-428)
- Week 10: 11/4, 11/6: Buddhist Philosophy (pp. 16-31), Zen and Chinese Buddhism, Ch. 8
- Week 11: 11/11 (No Class: Veterans Day), 11/13: African Philosophy, Ch. 6
- Week 12: 11/18, 11/20: African Philosophy, Ch. 11, Spanish and Latin American Philosophy, Ch. 17
- Week 13: 11/25, 11/27: Spanish and Latin American Philosophy, Ch. 22
- Week 14: 12/2, 12/4: Medieval Arabic and Islamic Philosophy, Ch. 24
- Week 15: 12/9, 12/11: Medieval Philosophy, Ch. 4 (pp. 98-119), **Term Papers Due**
- Week 16: **Final Exam**