

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER

Course Syllabus

PHIL 5399: Independent Study: Comparative Religious Philosophy

Fall 2025

Meeting Time: T/Th 11:00-12:20

Room: BEP 215

Credit Hours: 3

Instructor: Gregory L. Bock, Ph.D.

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Office Hours: T/Th 9:15-10:45

Required Textbooks:

Readings in Philosophy of Religion: East Meets West, by Andrew Eshleman

Catalog Description:

A study of traditional categories of the philosophy of religion with reference to such religions as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity

Course Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to...

1. articulate a basic understanding of the importance of philosophy
2. list the central questions of the philosophy of religion
3. present the views of a religious tradition other than their own
4. compare and contrast different religious perspectives
5. compare and contrast Eastern and Western philosophical ideas
6. discuss the relationship between faith and reason
7. analyze issues in the study of religion
8. evaluate a philosophical argument

Grading Scale Percents:

A=90-100%, B=80-89%, C=70-79%, D=60-69%, F=less than 60%

Grading:

Initiator Posts (5@20 points each) = 80 points (lowest dropped)

Response Post Assignments (5@10 points each) = 40 points (lowest dropped)

Essay = 100 points

Project 1 = 200 points

Project 2 = 200 points

Attendance = 50 points
TOTAL = 670

Assessment:

Discussion Board Assignment: You'll make a minimum of six contributions to each discussion board: 1 initiator post + 5 response posts = 6 total posts (minimum). The posts must be spread out over three days, for example 1 initiator post on Friday night, 3 response posts on Saturday, and 3 response posts on Sunday. In other words, you will be active on the board at least three different days.

INITIATOR POSTS: You'll write one initiator post for each discussion board. An initiator post is one that starts a thread based on the discussion prompt on the discussion board. A good post will offer a clear point of view and support it with material from the textbook, including direct quotes (at least three).

If you only use course material, quotation marks and parenthetical citations are enough, for example: "yada, yada" (Eshleman, 35). If students use even one outside source – like the excellent [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) – a reference list for *all* sources must be included at the end of the post and must follow Chicago Manual of Style (CMS). See [here](#) for CMS examples, and see how proper citations affect the grade in the rubric below. *I expect at least three citations in your post to the Eshleman textbook.*

The post must be at least 500 words. There's no maximum word count, but keep in mind that grades are not based on quantity of words but on demonstrated comprehension and critical thinking. The grading rubric below shows exactly what is expected.

The due dates for initiator posts can be found on the discussion boards.

You must post first in order to view other posts. The edit function will be disabled. If you want to edit after posting, you may reply in the thread with corrections or request that I delete the post. There must be a very good reason for deletion. For grading purposes, I consider your first post to be the initiator post even if it is blank or incomplete.

Late initiator posts can be turned in for a lower grade before the board officially closes. A late penalty of half a letter grade per day applies in each case unless accompanied by a valid excuse (e.g. a doctor's note that indicates a serious illness). *Connectivity issues are not valid excuses for late work unless they are the university's fault.*

DISCUSSION BOARD RUBRIC (INITIATOR POSTS)	
0-35 points	Point of view is clear and well-defended.
0-35 points	Connections made to the textbook. You must include and engage at least three direct quotes from the textbook.
0-15 points	It conveys respect for other points of view even if it takes a contrary position.
0-15 points	The grammar is polished, and citation style conforms to Chicago Manual of Style.

RESPONSE POSTS: In addition to the initiator post, you'll write at least five response posts for each module (for a total of 6 contributions: 1 initiator post + 5 response posts = 6). A response post is one that replies to a classmate's post and continues the conversation. One that ends the conversation or just says "I agree" in so many words does not qualify as a response. Good posts carry on the conversation in an interesting and relevant way and draw other students into the discussion. The minimum requirements for receiving credit for a response post are the following:

1. The post is 50 words.
2. The post is relevant to the thread.
3. The last sentence is a question.

Posts under 50 words don't count toward the required number of response posts. If you happen to post a few that are under 50 words, just make sure to post a few extra posts that are 50 words.

If some of your posts don't end in a question, a deduction of **1 point** will be applied to the response post grade.

The penalty for not posting on three separate days will be applied to the response post grade as a **3-point** deduction.

If you are very active on the discussion board and exceed the minimum requirements, you will receive extra credit. Extra credit will be earned for extra response posts (up to 5) that meet the minimum requirements above.

Response posts are due after you post your initiator post and before the board closes.

Late response posts will not be accepted. Once the board closes, there are no further opportunities to complete the assignment, so it's advisable to post early to avoid unforeseen events such as last-minute technical problems. Encountering technical issues is not a valid excuse for late work, unless the issues are the university's fault.

Cases of plagiarism earn an automatic zero and a possible F in the course. Plagiarized posts may be sent to UT Tyler Judicial Affairs to receive additional consequences. In short, do your own work, and be careful to give credit to the original author when you quote or even paraphrase.

Essay

For online students, this assignment requires writing a 2000-3000 word term paper, which can either be in the mode of interpretive, persuasive, or compare/contrast essay. Be sure to discuss your topic with the instructor before beginning work.

PAPER/PRESENTATION RUBRIC (100 POINTS)	
0-35 points	Are the ideas in the paper/presentation well-supported or well-argued? The paper makes its case, is well-organized, carefully researched, and contains clear reasoning or evidence.
0-35 points	Are connections made with readings in the course? Student makes multiple, relevant connections (with citations) to the textbook. It must include three direct quotes from the textbook with proper citations. Outside research is encouraged but is not a substitute for the minimum citations to the textbook.
0-15 points	Does the paper demonstrate clear and deep understanding of philosophy? Careful philosophical thinking is demonstrated throughout the essay, showing that the student comprehends the readings.
0-15 points	Is the paper well-written? Grammar is polished, and citation style conforms to Chicago Manual of Style . Also, the paper meets the thesis statement and topic sentence requirements in the instructions and is a five-paragraph essay organized in the way described above.

General Requirements

- 2000-2500 words
- Five-paragraph essay
- Double-spaced
- No cover page
- Name and title at the top center of first page
- Page numbers on the bottom right of each page
- Standard twelve-point font (e.g. Times New Roman)
- One-inch margins
- .docx, rtf, or pdf file formats only
- The introduction should be no more than half a page.
- The conclusion should be no more than half a page and only review the main points.
- No inflammatory or disrespectful language

Additional points will be deducted for late papers and papers that don't satisfy the "basic requirements" above. Cases of plagiarism earn an automatic zero and a possible F in the course. Plagiarized papers may

be sent to UT Tyler Judicial Affairs to receive additional consequences. If you use A.I. to research your paper, you must explain how in a footnote. The paper must be in your own words.

If you receive help from the Writing Center on an early draft and use the information to revise your paper, I will award you five extra credit points in the extra credit column, which amounts to half a letter grade on the paper. In order to receive extra credit, you must opt in to “email instructor” when you visit the Center. If I don’t receive an e-mail from the Writing Center, you will not receive credit. The Writing Center is often busy, so you must plan ahead and make an appointment. No exceptions will be made if you are too late in making your appointment.

Project

The end-of-semester project will be either an in-class presentation or a second essay, following the same instructions and grading rubric above.

Attendance

At the start of the semester, each student has fifty points for attendance and one free unexcused absence. Each unexcused absence after the first is penalized five points per day against the attendance grade up to fifty points. Excused absences will not count against the fifty points but need to be accompanied with documentation (e.g. a doctor’s note). This documentation must be submitted when the student returns to class and no later. After losing fifty points, no further points will be deducted even if there are more absences. Students may not see points deducted in the grade book immediately or even until the end of the semester, so it is the student’s responsibility to be aware of the number of attendance points remaining and make sure that the attendance sheet is accurate on a weekly basis.

Course Policies:

Late work policy: Assignments must be submitted in Canvas by the deadline. A penalty of half a letter grade per day up to two letter grades will be assessed for late assignments. This penalty will be waived only under special circumstances (e.g. a serious illness accompanied by a doctor’s note). Late discussion board posts are not accepted after the discussion board closes.

Communication policy: The best way to communicate with the instructor is through UT Tyler e-mail or in Canvas. Students can expect replies within 48 hours excluding weekends and holidays. Students who do not receive a reply within this timeframe should attempt to contact the instructor again.

Class conduct policy: The subject matter of this class can make some people hot under the collar. This said, all comments and behavior must be classroom appropriate. What does “classroom appropriate” mean? It does *not* mean that students cannot express unpopular opinions. It means practicing reasoning and logical argumentation. It means being civil and listening with respect. Insults, snide comments, name-calling, cutting someone off, derogatory tones, sarcasm,

ridicule, cussing, vulgarity, personal attacks, racial slurs, misogynistic remarks, etc. will not be allowed. If you are unsure about what counts as disrespectful, consult the instructor or the Golden Rule. The instructor will act as the final word on what is or is not classroom appropriate. Violators may be ejected from the class.

Cell phone (distraction) policy: Mobile devices can be used during class if it is related to what is going on in class. If you have an electronic textbook or plan to take notes on your device, please let me know early in the semester. They are permissible as long as they don't distract you or your classmates from the lesson.

Arriving late (tardy) or leaving early policy: Arriving on time can sometimes be challenging, but it is better to be late than never. However, late arrivals and early departures can be disruptive to others in the classroom. For this reason, please don't make a habit of it.

Extra credit policy: Extra credit can be earned on the discussion board and at other times during the semester when the occasion arises. Extra credit is never given upon request of the student.

"It is what it is" final grade policy: Grades are final once the final grade percentage has been posted in Canvas at the end of the semester. No changes will be made unless the instructor has made a mistake. Grades are not bumped up unless the student is within .5% of the next letter grade. For example, an 89.5% is an A. An 89.4% is a B. No extra credit opportunities will be given during finals week or the week prior. The conditions for an "incomplete" are stated in the university handbook: "(a) the student has been making satisfactory progress in the course; (b) the student is unable to complete all course work or final exam due to unusual circumstances that are beyond personal control and are acceptable to the instructor; and (c) the student presents these reasons prior to the time that the final grade roster is due." The terms and deadline for satisfying an "incomplete" will be set by the instructor.

UT TYLER HONOR CODE

I embrace honor and integrity.

Therefore, I choose not to lie, cheat or steal, nor to accept the actions of those who do.