

Brief Course Outline

Course Title:	Asian Philosophy	
Course Number and Section:	PHILOSOP	2111F 550
Instructor Name(s):	Stephen D’Arcy	
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Disclaimer: Information in the brief course outline is subject to change. The syllabus posted on OWL is the official and authoritative source of information for the course.

Course Description:

This course is about an idea widely (although not universally) endorsed in classical traditions of philosophy in Asia, and widely (but not universally) rejected in classical traditions of philosophy in Europe: the idea that the most important and valuable forms of knowledge are non-propositional in character. The course offers a broad overview of some influential strands of Asian philosophy, drawn from East Asia, South Asia and West Asia, ranging over a period of about 2,000 years. But the unifying theme, tying together these very diverse strands, is non-propositional knowledge, including: (1) “know-how,” or competence knowledge, which consists of practical skills (like mental concentration, ritual propriety, and mindful attention) that can be mastered, but not by mere reading or receiving verbal instruction; and (2) non-discursive experiential or acquaintance knowledge, which consists of intimate familiarity with aspects of life that are inexpressible in the form of explicit claims. The question of what it means to know, when what one knows cannot or at least often does not take the form of true beliefs and cannot be communicated by means of straightforward assertions, is central to many of the most important and influential texts in the classical traditions of Asian philosophy, including the Bhagavadgītā and the early-buddhist Pāli Canon (India), Gorampa’s debate with Tsongkhapa (Tibet), Lǎozǐ’s Dào dé jīng and Kǒngzǐ’s Analects [Lúnyǔ] (China), al-Ghazālī’s Deliverance from Error (Persia), Dōgen’s Fukun yūjō (Japan), Jinul’s Secrets of Cultivating the Mind [Susim gyeol] (Korea), and the teaching of “desert mothers” like Macrina the Younger (Anatolia, Turkey).

Learning Outcomes:

students should be able to grasp, appreciate, intelligently discuss and write about some key concepts and texts from several of the classical traditions of Asian philosophy, including early Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Sufism, Desert-Mother asceticism, and Chán/Zen.

Concepts covered include the distinction between “substance” (tǐ) and “function” (yòng); the debate over “sudden” and “gradual” awakening; the contrast between the narrative or discursive mind and the experiential-awareness mind; and the difference between propositional knowledge and both competence knowledge (the cultivation and mastery of practical skills) and intimate-acquaintance knowledge (openness to ineffable aspects of one’s life).

Students should be able to express informed opinions about the course themes and readings, verbally and in writing, and to defend their views in clear and sophisticated ways.

Textbooks and Course Materials:

A series of primary texts in Asian philosophy, made available through the course Brightspace page. No book purchases are necessary, as PDF and EPUB files are available online.

Methods Of Evaluation:

Assignment	Due Date mm/dd/yy	Weight - %
Mid-term Test	10/01/2024	20%
Essay	11/21/2024	30%
Final Exam	Exam period	40%
Participation & Attendance		10%

In solidarity with the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton peoples on whose traditional treaty and unceded territories this course is shared.

Friday, August 30, 2024