

**Department:** Philosophy

**Course No:** 106

**Credits:** 3

**Title:** Non-Western and Comparative Philosophy

**Contact:** Donald Baxter

**Content Area:** CA1-Arts and Humanities

**Diversity:** CA4 International

**Catalog Copy:** PHIL 106, Non-Western and Comparative Philosophy, fall or spring, 3 credits. No student may receive more than 6 credits for PHIL courses 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106. Classic non-Western texts on such problems as the nature of reality and of our knowledge of it, and the proper requirements of social ethics, along with comparison to classic Western approaches to the same problems.

**Course Information:** The readings will be in paperback editions of philosophical classics, such as the Bhagavad Gita, the Analects of Confucius, and John Stuart Mill's On Liberty. Major topics will be the nature of reality and the desirable form of a social ethics. The goal will be to understand the philosophical basis for what is said, and also to see how it is rooted in a cultural context and is connected to a recommended way of life. Essay examinations will test understanding of the readings, not only of what is said but also of why it is said. There will be a number of in-class writing assignments in which students will be presented with a philosophical issue (contained in the readings), one on which reasonable people can disagree, and will be asked to take a position and give one argument for it.

**Meets Goals of Gen Ed:** This course will help students to develop intellectual breadth and versatility, especially in the handling of cross-cultural materials. It will call for, and strengthen, critical judgment. By exposing students to radically different social ideals, it will promote awareness of their era and society and of the diversity of human culture and experience. Because most of the readings center on recommendations on how to live, students will be naturally drawn to examine their own life possibilities from a variety of perspectives.

**CA1 Criteria:** This course gets students to develop skill in the analysis of meanings and assumptions, and of patterns of argument in philosophical theories. The course also exposes students to texts of great philosophical merit that are foundational to the cultures of countries such as India, China, and Japan as well as to western texts. Thus it meets the second group 1 requirement of being an inquiry into philosophical theory.

**CA4 Criteria:** This course exposes students to texts that are foundational to the cultures of countries such as India, China, and Japan, and through comparisons gives them a sense of the particularity of their own culture. One of the contrasts that emerges in the course is between the questions that are central to classical Indian and Chinese ethical philosophies and those that are central to much Western ethical

philosophy, and also between those central to Indian and Chinese accounts (as opposed to most Western ones) of the nature of reality. Virtually all classical Indian and Chinese ethics centers on questions of what is the best kind of person to be (and on how one can become such a person). Much recent Western ethical philosophy centers instead on choices made on particular occasions, and on the rational justifications that can be given for certain choices. In addition a work like *On Liberty* places great emphasis on maximum freedom of choice as a social value. This can be contrasted with the Confucian claim that to become a really good person is to be on a path on which few important things remain a matter of choice. There is a similar contrast between visions of the world central to Hindu, Buddhist, and Daoist philosophies, on one hand, and Descartes' *Meditations*. The former emphasize the interrelatedness (or in the case of Hinduism, unity) of what we experience; Descartes in contrast is concerned to focus on elements of experience, and our knowledge of particular claims about these. This contrast connects well with the empirical claims of a recent book by a psychologist, Richard Nisbett (*The Circle and the Line. The Geography of Thought*), which contrasts East Asian and Western modes of experience. In these respects Philosophy 106 meets the first two criteria for membership in Group IV. It emphasizes the variety of human experiences, perceptions, thoughts, values, and modes of creativity. It also emphasizes the way in which philosophies are interpretative systems that grow out of a culture, and then ground the development of the culture.

International: By focusing on contrasts between European and Asian philosophies, the course focuses on groups outside the United States.

**Role of Grad Students:** Graduate students will take discussion sections. Besides general philosophical preparation they will have taken a seminar on Classic Texts of Asian Philosophy. They will be supervised in group consultations by the primary instructor.