





# Philosophy (PHIL) 380

## Introduction to Eastern Philosophy (Revision 1)

**Status:**

Replaced with new revision, see the [course listing](#)  for the current revision 

**Delivery mode:**

Individualized study online 

**Credits:**

3

**Areas of study:**

Arts or Humanities

**Prerequisites:**

None (It is highly advisable to have taken Phil 231 or other course in philosophy)

**Precluded:**

None

**Challenge:**

PHIL 380 is not available for challenge.

**Faculty:**

[Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences](#) 

## Overview

To study Eastern philosophical thought involves opening one's perspective to the ways that Eastern thinkers address the same types of moral dilemmas as Western philosophers—and related questions about the nature of reality, what counts as knowledge—but using different approaches. Eastern philosophy often appears contradictory and intentionally opaque, especially in Buddhism and Taoism, where poetic and narrative writing inspire a deeper depth of understanding.

We read and study Eastern philosophy in this course, however, not for its poetic or other aesthetic values, but to comprehend propositions (for example, claims about what is true) and to assess them in a process of developing coherent and defensible criticisms and positions. *Philosophy 380* focuses on the arguments either explicit or implicit in Eastern philosophical texts and emphasizes careful reading of these texts. Careful reading involves constructing interpretations or expositions of the texts, followed by systematic comparisons between them in an effort to disclose the meaning(s) of the works studied. Lastly, it involves developing criticisms of the four philosophical traditions.

## Outline

- Unit 1: The Bhagavadgītā
- Unit 2: The Tao Te Ching
- Unit 3: Mencius
- Unit 4: Ch'an or Zen Buddhism

## Objectives

Eastern philosophy presents a distinct challenge. *Philosophy 380* emphasizes the comprehension through mindful reading of the four texts. This task involves careful interpretation or exposition of texts, followed by systematic comparisons between them, in an effort to disclose the meaning(s) of the works studied. The emphasis here is on expositing primary texts, which means that you should not rely on secondary sources for interpretations. Although secondary sources can be used, they are not to be treated as

authorities. Even the Study Guide should not be taken as the final word on interpretation, because it is written with the aim of helping you engage the primary text, not to be an authority on what the text means.


Once you master this skill, the next step is to work out a critical response to what the philosophers are trying to say. If you have taken a philosophy course previous to this, you will understand the nature of criticism. For purposes of this course, you are looking for a weakness in the argument or position. Criticisms come in various forms. The Study Guide provides examples of these forms. These two skills, interpretation and criticism, are the foci of evaluation for the course. How well you do each determines how well you do in the course.

While specific objectives are listed at the beginning of each unit in the Study Guide, you will be expected to achieve the following general objectives:

1. Describe the particular and significant features of the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical theories discussed in or illustrated by the text and be able to explain how those theories can be justified.
2. Identify the ethical principles that these thinkers argue should guide action and to examine those principles in light of the different views encountered in the course.
3. Explain how particular actions and situations would be judged by those who hold to the principles and theories that are discussed.
4. Identify the various forms of arguments used by the different philosophers (you are expected to distinguish premises from conclusions, differentiate deductive arguments from inductive arguments, and construct arguments of your own).
5. Critically assess each philosopher's reasoning and position.
6. Recognize how ways of formulating ideas and arguments affect or influence our understanding or acceptance of ideas.
7. Identify problems associated with interpretation by comparing and critically assessing various interpretations.

## Evaluation


Your final grade in *Philosophy 380* will be based on the marks you achieve on five written assignments. The first four written assignments for credit are worth 15 percent each, and the final assignment is worth 40%, for a total of

100 percent. Each assignment will be graded out of 100 percent. You will need to obtain a cumulative grade of **D (50 percent)**  in order to pass this course. There is no final examination.

The general instructions for the four assignments are the same. Write an essay of approximately 1000 words on the topic you choose. You will be graded on how clearly and thoroughly you explain what the text says and what the text means. Your final assignment involves more comparison and analysis. You are graded on, how well you are able to identify and analyze the various arguments that are made, and how well you are able to analyze assess and evaluate the claims presented by the readings. You are expected to have and to demonstrate a sound grasp of the mechanics of writing. This means your assignments should be well organized, clearly written, and properly cited. They should be free of grammatical and spelling mistakes.

Each of the first description oriented assignments are designed to prepare students to write the more comparative/critical final assignment. To receive credit for PHIL 380, you must complete and submit every piece of written work and achieve a course composite grade of at least “D” (50 percent). There is no final examination. The weighting of the composite grade is as follows:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Weight</b>
Assignment 1	15% (1000 words)
Assignment 2	15% (1000 words)
Assignment 3	15% (1000 words)
Assignment 4	15% (1000 words)
Assignment 5	40% (2500 words)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>


To learn more about assignments and examinations, please refer to Athabasca University’s **online Calendar** .

## Materials

*The Bhagavad Gita*, trans. by Juan Mascar , Penguin, Toronto, 1962.  (Print)

*Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu, trans. by Stephen Addiss and Stanley Lombardo,  
Shambhala, Boston, 2007.  (Print)





*Mencius*, trans. by D.C. Lau(revised ed.), Penguin, Toronto, 2003.  (Print)

*Zen Sourcebook: Traditional Documents from China, Korea, and Japan*, ed.  
by Stephen Addiss, Stanley Lombardo, and Judith Roitman, Hackett,  
Indianapolis, 2008.  (Print)

## Other Resources

Students will access all other course materials online.

## Important links

- › [Academic advising](#) 
- › [Program planning](#) 
- › [Request assistance](#) 
- › [Support services](#) 

Athabasca University reserves the right to amend course outlines occasionally and without notice. Courses offered by other delivery methods may vary from their individualized study counterparts.

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