

PHIL 4760/5760: Self and No-Self in Asian and Western Philosophy

Fall 2024 | M/W 1:00-2:15pm | Blegen 220



Instructor:

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Office hours: Wednesdays 11:15-12:05pm; Fridays 1:30-2:20pm

Course Description: Whereas many Hindu philosophers have argued that 'self' (*atman*) is the fundamental reality (*brahman*), Buddhist philosophers have infamously rejected the Hindu doctrine with the thesis that there is 'no self' (*anatman*). This controversy in Asian philosophy has obvious connections to Western thought, especially David Hume's famous argument (and disagreement with Descartes) that there is no self that underlies our experiences. Yet very little has been done to connect these philosophical traditions and create a cross-cultural dialogue on this deep issue – one which Buddhists have suggested should profoundly change the way we live, while Western philosophers have mostly treated it as a marginal ontological issue. – The aim of this course is to draw from each of these traditions in addressing the questions (1) whether any of us has a 'self' and (2) how our answer to that question should affect our ethical lives. Most of the course will survey historical works in each of these philosophical traditions. The end of the course will involve a critical reading of Jay Garfield's recent *Losing Ourselves: Learning to Live without a Self* (2022).

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Students in the course will **understand diverse philosophies and culture within and across societies.**

Addressing the outcome

In this course students will carefully study some of the most influential religious, metaphysical, and ethical perspectives in Asian and Western society. Throughout our discussions, comparisons will be made with perspectives outside those represented in the assigned readings, including the social and cultural realities of the students themselves. The aim will be to enrich our own ethical perspectives by careful attention to the diverse philosophies throughout the world.

Assessment of learning related to the outcome

The learning related to this outcome will be evaluated through regular participation in class discussion, a brief field report where one is required to seek out a traditional practice related to self-discovery, a group presentation, and a research paper in which students will have the opportunity to explore and compare traditions in greater depth.

Required Texts: There are no required textbooks for this course. All readings will be provided on Canvas.

Recommended Texts:

Jay Garfield, *Losing Ourselves: Learning to Live without a Self*,
Princeton University Press, 2022

Course Requirements:

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| 1. Participation | 40% |
| a. Attendance | |
| b. Quality of Discussion Posts | |
| c. Class Discussion | |
| 2. Weekly Discussion Posts | 15% |
| 3. Field Report | 5% |
| 4. Group Presentation | 10% |
| 5. Final Research Paper (8-15 pages) | 30% |

Major Deadlines:

Discussion Posts	Wednesdays by 10am
Field Report	Sat Nov 2 by midnight
Group Presentations	Dec 2 – Dec 11
Final Paper	Thurs Dec 19 by midnight

Description of Requirements

1. Participation: Discussion is the core of this class. That is why participation counts for 40% of your course grade. **You should come to every class prepared to talk about the assigned readings and the course topics.** The participation component of your grade will also factor in your attendance record as well as the regular completion and quality of your discussion posts. Please feel free to check in with your instructor at any point in the semester if you are ever concerned about your participation.

Students should also come to every class with a notebook and writing implement for short writing exercises.

Since students are expected to be *active* and *present* during all our discussions, students are *not* permitted to use electronic devices *unless* this is essential to their notetaking or surveying the reading material being discussed in class.

2. Discussion posts: Each week, students will be required to write a discussion post that responds to the assigned reading for the upcoming class. Responses include (but are not restricted to): questions about the reading, objections to a view or argument found in the reading, a comparison of ideas in the reading with previous ideas from the course or related traditions and ideas outside the course, an explanation of how ideas from the reading touch on aspects of your personal experience, and so on. **The discussion posts will be the (often exclusive) focus of our Wednesday class discussions.** So it is worth being honest, thoughtful, and creative. In general, you should write something that you would be happy to talk about during our class session and that you think would spark interesting conversation with your peers. **Discussion posts can be as short as 1 paragraph, should probably not be longer than 2 paragraphs, and definitely should not be longer than 3 paragraphs.** (This is to help ensure that it is manageable for the instructor and fellow students to read posts before class discussion.)

However, you have the option to EITHER (1) write an original post, or (2) respond *substantively* to a post that has already been written. A response to a peer must be *substantive* in that it must contribute something new and interesting to the discussion. (E.g., you cannot simply write, “Wow, I really like this post and totally agree!”). Even if you do agree, you must elaborate or draw a new connection that was not stated in the previous post. If you disagree, please be respectful. E.g., “Thanks for writing this thoughtful post. But I’d like to explain why I disagree with one of the points you made. ... Curious to hear what others think.”)

Discussion posts are simply graded on completion of a sufficient entry. If one’s post is insufficient (given the above criteria), the instructor will contact you and give you an opportunity for a rewrite.

3. Field Report: Students will be required to seek out a traditional practice related to self-discovery (such as Yoga and/or Meditation) that they have not previously engaged in. The practice should be at/with some public institution/group that specializes in the practice or otherwise demonstrates serious dedication to it. Students will write a brief 1-2 page field report summarizing their experience and may be asked to share it in class.

4. Group Presentation: Students will be assigned to small groups and each group will be responsible for facilitating discussion during one of our final classes (Dec 2-11) on Jay Garfield’s *Losing Ourselves*. The aim will be to invite classmates into critical discussion of an assigned chapter from Garfield’s book. Students not responsible for running the session are nonetheless responsible for engaging with the discussion prompted by the facilitators. Facilitators should not spend much time summarizing the reading material (which risks putting everyone to sleep), but rather should focus primarily on driving a thoughtful conversation about the text with their peers.

5. Final Research Paper: Students will be required to write a final 8-15 page research paper. Students are free choose a topic that interests them most, though the topic chosen must be related to the major themes of the course. Students should consult the instructor at some point during the semester to decide on a worthwhile topic and identify helpful resources.

Note on Auditors or folks “Sitting in”: If one is auditing the course for credit, they are nonetheless expected to attend regularly and be an active participant in class. If one is merely “sitting in”, they are expected to be an active participant in any session they attend. *Neither* auditors nor those sitting in are *required* to write discussion posts, a field report, be part of a group presentation, or write a final research paper. To reiterate: even if one is merely auditing or sitting in on the course, they are expected to be an active participant in discussion, rather than a passive observer.

Course Schedule

* Schedule is subject to change. * Complete readings prior to class.

*Audio/video material is always optional but recommended.

Wed Sep 4 – Introduction, No Reading Assignment

Self and No-Self in Asian Philosophy

Hinduism and *Atman*

Mon Sep 9 – *Upanishads* (Selections)
John M. Koller, “Vedas and Upanishads”

History of Philosophy without Any Gaps (HPWAG) Podcast:
“The Upanishads”

<https://historyofphilosophy.net/upanisads>

HPWAG Podcast: “The Self in the Upanishads”

<https://historyofphilosophy.net/upanisads-self>

Wed Sep 11 – *Bhagavad Gita* (Selections)
John M. Koller, “The Bhagavad Gita”

HPWAG Podcast: “The Bhagavad Gita”

<https://historyofphilosophy.net/bhagavad-gita>

Mon Sep 16 – Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Selections)

HPWAG Podcast: “Advaita Vedanta”

<https://historyofphilosophy.net/advaita-vedanta>

Wed Sep 18 – Ramanuja, *Vedartha Samgraha*, A Summary of Vedic Teachings (Selections)
John M. Koller, “Vedanta”

Mon Sep 23 – Patanjali, *Yoga Sutra* (Book 1), with Vasya’s Commentary
John M. Koller, “Vedanta”

HPWAG Podcast: “Yoga Sutra”
<https://historyofphilosophy.net/yoga>

Edwin Bryant, “The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali” (Presentation to the Vedanta Society of New York)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cp1X-ar76nA>

Buddhism and *Anatman*

Wed Sep 25 – John M. Koller, “The Way of the Buddha”

HPWAG Podcast: “The Buddha”
<https://historyofphilosophy.net/buddha>

Mon Sep 30 – Selection of Core Buddhist Texts

HPWAG Podcast: “The Buddha’s Teaching”
<https://historyofphilosophy.net/buddha-teaching>

Wed Oct 2 – Nagarjuna, *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* (Selections)
Cobra Simile (Raft Metaphor)
John M. Koller, “Madhyamaka and Nagarjuna’s Method”

HPWAG Podcast: “Nagarjuna on Emptiness”
<https://historyofphilosophy.net/nagarjuna-emptiness>

Mon Oct 7 – Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Other Shore* (Trans. of Heart Sutra and Chapters 1-9)

Thich Nhat Hanh, “Emptiness is not Nothingness” (Lecture)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-PWjt04g3M>

Wed Oct 9 – Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Other Shore* (Chapters 10-19)

Self and No-Self in Western Philosophy

Mon Oct 14 – Descartes, *Meditations* 1 & 2

Wed Oct 16 – Descartes, *Meditations* 6
Correspondence with Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia

Mon Oct 21 – Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Selections)

Wed Oct 23 – **Guest Speaker! Discussion post = a question for Prof. Gordon Roth**
Jessica Gordon Roth, “Locke on the Ontology of Persons”

Optional: Jessica Gordon Roth, “Locke on Personal Identity” (SEP)
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke-personal-identity/>

Mon Oct 28 – **NO CLASS**; Recommended Film assignment, *Memento* (Nolan)

Wed Oct 30 – **NO CLASS**; Recommended Film assignment, *The Passenger* (Antonioni)

1-2 page Field Report due Saturday Nov 2 by midnight

Mon Nov 4 – David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, “Of Ideas”

Optional: David Hume, *Treatise*, “Of the Idea of Necessary Connexion”

Wed Nov 6 – David Hume, *Treatise*, “Of Personal Identity”

Optional: David Hume, *Treatise*, “Conclusion to the first book”

Mon Nov 11 – Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Selections)

Wed Nov 13 – Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Selections)

Optional: “Lecture on Ethics”

Mon Nov 18 – Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Blue Book* (Selections)

Wed Nov 20 – Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Blue Book* (Selections)

Optional: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 398ff

Mon Nov 25 – *TBD*

Wed Nov 27 – **NO CLASS**

Garfield on *Losing Ourselves*

Mon Dec 2 – Jay Garfield, *Losing Ourselves*, Ch 1-3 [**Student-led discussion**]

Wed Dec 4 – Jay Garfield, *Losing Ourselves*, Ch 4 & 5 [**Student-led discussion**]

Mon Dec 9 – Jay Garfield, *Losing Ourselves*, Ch 6 & 7 [**Student-led discussion**]

Final 8-15 page Research Paper due Thurs Dec 19 by midnight

Course Policies

1. **Late Work:** Unless special permission is obtained in advance, late papers will not be accepted without grade penalty. The penalty for late papers is 5% for every day the paper is submitted past the official deadline. Discussion posts cannot be made up and must be completed on time for credit.
2. **Grading:** Final grades will be calculated using the following scale.

Letter Grades are translated to the following numerical scores.

A+ = 100	C+ = 78
A = 95	C = 75
A- = 92	C- = 72
B+ = 88	D+ = 68
B = 85	D = 65
B- = 82	F = 50

Final letter grades will be calculated using the following scale.

97-100 = A+	77-79 = C+
93-96 = A	73-76 = C
90-92 = A-	70-72 = C-
87-89 = B+	67-69 = D+
83-86 = B	60-66 = D
80-82 = B-	50 = F

Below is a list of criteria that will be used to evaluate your papers. Note that the %'s only give a *rough* indication of how important these aspects are, and that not all of the criteria will apply equally to each of the different assignments; this is not a mathematical scale. There will be slightly different standards for each of the individual assignments, which I will state when those assignments are announced.

- Quality of ideas (50%)
 - *Range and depth of argument; fair representation of philosopher's position; logic of argument; quality and/or originality of thought; appropriate sense of the complexity of the topic; appropriate awareness of opposing views.*

- Organization and Argumentation (40%)
 - *Clarity of thesis statement in the introduction; logical and clear arrangement of ideas; effective use of transitions; unity and coherence of paragraphs; good development of arguments through supporting details and evidence.*
- Clarity, style, and grammar (10%)
 - *Ease of readability; appropriate voice, tone, and style for the assignment; clarity of sentence structure; grammatically correct sentences; accurate spelling; careful proofreading.*

3. Plagiarism: Plagiarism will result in a final grade of F for the course. If you have any questions about plagiarism or how to properly cite sources, do not hesitate to ask me. According to the UMN Student Conduct Code: “Plagiarism shall mean representing the words, creative work, or ideas of another person as one’s own without providing proper documentation of source”.

4. ChatGPT: (TLDR: You are not allowed to use ChatGPT for any assignment in this course.) The Board of Regents Student Conduct Code states the following in Section IV, Subd.1: Scholastic Dishonesty:

"Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarism; cheating on assignments or examinations, including the unauthorized use of online learning support and testing platforms; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work, including the posting of student-generated coursework on **online learning support and testing platforms** not approved for the specific course in question; taking, acquiring, or using course materials without faculty permission, including the posting of faculty-provided course materials on online learning and testing platforms; ..."

Artificial intelligence (AI) language models, such as ChatGPT, and online assignment help tools, such as Chegg®, are examples of **online learning support platforms**: they can not be used for course assignments except as explicitly authorized by the instructor. The following actions are prohibited in this course:

- Submitting all or any part of an assignment statement to an online learning support platform;
- Incorporating any part of an AI generated response in an assignment;
- Using AI to summarize or contextualize source materials.

If you are in doubt as to whether you are using an online learning support platform appropriately in this course, I encourage you to discuss your situation with one of your instructors.

5. Disability Accommodations: If you have, or think you have, a disability in any area such as mental health, attention, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) <https://ars.unc.edu/> to arrange confidential

discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations. If you are registered with the DRC and have a disability accommodation letter dated for this semester or this year, please contact your TA early in the semester to review how the accommodations will be applied in this course.

6. **Sexual Misconduct.** Sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, and relationship violence) includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such behavior is prohibited in the University setting.

Per the [U of M policy on sexual harassment](#), *I am required to share information that I learn about possible sexual misconduct* with the campus Title IX office. Within the requirements of my job, I will be as responsive as possible to your requests for confidentiality and support. You can also, or alternately, choose to talk with a confidential resource that will not share information that they learn about sexual misconduct. Confidential resources include:

- The Aurora Center 24hr Helpline (612-626-9111)
- Boynton Mental Health (612-624-1444)
- Student Counseling Services (612-624-3323)

7. **Other Useful Resources:**

- Technology resources for remote learning: <https://it.umn.edu/working-learning-campus/get-internet-access-campus>
- University Policies: <https://policy.umn.edu/>
- Student Writing Support: <http://writing.umn.edu/sws/>
- Disability Resource Center: <https://disability.umn.edu/>
- Student Counseling Center: <https://counseling.umn.edu/>
- The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu>
- History of Philosophy without Any Gaps Podcast: <https://historyofphilosophy.net/>
- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://iep.utm.edu/>