

PHILOSOPHERS LOOK AT RELIGION

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Rice University Private,

Liberal Arts, 2800 undergraduate enrollment

What do we mean by religion, philosophy, and the philosophy of religion? Can we reflect critically and cross-culturally upon the meanings of these terms? What do we mean by religious experience? How is the search for the sacred interpreted in selected Western and Asian traditions? What role does language play in articulating religious beliefs and practices? What are the connections between religious traditions and the good life? Responses of Plato, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Hume, selected contemporary philosophers, the Vedanta, Jain and Buddhist perspectives will be considered

Books for Purchase

- *Philosophy of Religion* , Peterson, Hasker et al (Oxford)
- *Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy* , Radhakrishnan and Moore (Princeton)
- Other assigned works will be reserved for this section in Library

Supplementary Readings:

- *Companion to World Philosophies* , edited Deutsch et al

Requirements

Two short papers, midterm exam and take-home final. Familiarity with readings will be expected. Questions will be designed to encourage you to express your views and to argue effectively for them. Classroom discussion of issues raised by the readings is an important part of this course. Your participation is expected.

Schedule

1. Introduction: What, exactly, are we studying when we study the philosophy of religion?
2. Euthyphro's Dilemma: What makes something holy?

Read: Plato, *Euthyphro*

3. What do the gods love and why?

Read: Hymns from the Vedas, *SIP* , pp.3-36

4. The Philosopher and the immortal soul

Read: Plato, *Phaedo*

5. The Sage and the deathless Atman

Read: *SIP* , pp. 37-96

6. Who is God?

Read: *PR* , pp.97-103; 109-115; 121-142

7. Brahman as Ultimate Reality: Samkara's Monism

Read: To be announced (Hereafter TBA)

8. From an idea to God's existence: The Ontological Proof

Read: *PR* . pp. 145-150

9. From world to God: The Cosmological Argument

Read: *PR* . pp.163-176; 198-209

10. The Evolving World: Subject and Nature in Samkhya

Read: *SIP* , pp.424-452

11. MIDTERM EXAM

12. Explaining Religious Experience: From James to Proudfoot

Read: *PR.*, pp.10-40

13. Encounters with the sacred

Read: *PR* , pp.7-10; St. Anthony, TBA

14. Yoga and the goal of spiritual freedom

Read: *SIP* , pp. 454-485

15. Buddhism and the end of suffering.

Read: *SIP* , pp. 273-328

16. Some sceptical arguments: Hume

TP , pp. 235-243; *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (TBA)

17. Materialism and scepticism: Carvaka

Read: *SIP* , pp.227-249

18. Life after Death

19. Knowledge and the everlasting: Jainism

Read: *SIP*, pp. 250-271

20. The Holy Life: St. Francis of Assisi

Read: TBA

21. The Life of the Sage: The *arhat* ideal

Read: TBA

22. The Problem of Evil

Read: *TP* , pp. 229-253

23. Doing right and wrong: the yogas of the *Gita*

Read: *SIP* , pp. 102-169

24 The Gita (continued)

Evaluation

This course was designed 1. to familiarize students with standard Western arguments in the philosophy of religion and in selected Asian schools of thought. 2. To consider the philosophical and religious contexts of these arguments.

In teaching relatively traditional courses, I have often used newsgroups and developed various Internet projects, e.g. breaking up into small groups to consider websites devoted to a theme or thinker, evaluating material and presenting findings in class. The aim of this course was to consider complex arguments best achieved through class discussion and several short papers.

Standard questionnaire showed that course was rated about 1.3 (1 is highest rating), well above the mean. Written comments by students (freshmen and sophomores, perhaps somewhat higher percentage of prospective math and science majors than is the norm) were uniformly enthusiastic.