

Philosophy of Religion

PHL - 204

Instructor: Chris Cayton

REQUIRED TEXT(S)

The World's Religions

Huston Smith

ISBN-13: 9781305584495

Harper Collins 1991; ISBN – 0-250811-3 (pbk.)

(Previous editions are acceptable.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Modern culture tends to separate philosophy and religion into domains of interest that sometimes don't have much to do with each other. However, throughout history there has always been a very close relationship between philosophy and religion. Indeed, at one time in history they were indistinguishable. When philosophers study religious experience they want to know the origin and the nature of the experience and the ideas they inspire. They want to know how those ideas become belief systems that inspire so much allegiance. Philosophers try to examine religious phenomena from an objective point of view that leads to the understanding of fundamental principles.

Because religious expression has taken so many different forms throughout human history, it will be necessary to study some of the major religious traditions of the world. It is impossible to know anything about any of these religions without studying the history of their traditions. It is important to know how some religious traditions have evolved out of other traditions and how they have influenced each other.

Thus, the approach we will be taking to the study of religion will be historical-critical, comparative and philosophical.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of the course students should be able to:

- **Articulate key philosophical arguments in the field of philosophy of religion.**

The “key philosophical arguments” refer to the responses to the various issues that arise in the study of philosophy and religion.

Some of the issues we will be dealing with in the coming weeks are:

- What is the value of mystical experiences that are at the heart of all religious experience?
- What is the relationship between religion and violence?
- What is the relationship between religion and morality?
- What is God? And does that concept have any objective reality?
- Is there life after death? What can we say about it?
- How should religious literature be understood?

These are just a few of the issues we will be dealing with throughout the course, in our weekly assignments.

- **Identify the influence of culturally based perspectives, values and beliefs to examine how diverse philosophical perspectives affect human experience.**

Everyone knows that there are many different religions and religious cults that have developed in different parts of the world. To fully understand those religious philosophies we must be familiar with their historical and cultural background. This course will familiarize students with the historical and cultural environments that gave rise to the major religions of the world.

- **Construct and respond to arguments dealing with the philosophy of religion using critical reasoning to identify and investigate philosophical theses and evaluate information and its sources.**

An argument consists of statements (premises) in support of a conclusion, which is itself a response to an issue such as those listed above. Critical thinking involves the use and evaluation of argument based on the flow of logic and the reliability of sources used.

INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH

This course is arranged chronologically and employs a modular design. Each week, students should complete all assignments listed in that week's lesson module. These modules will appear directly on the homepage during the week they are due, and are also available by clicking "Content" on the course navigation bar.

Due dates for each week's assignments will be listed within the module itself, as well as in the "course calendar" which is also available on the Content page. Assignments within the modules may direct students to use many of the tools contained in Desire2Learn, including the Assignment Dropbox, Discussions, and Quizzes. These tools will be accessible both from within the weekly content modules, as well as from the course navigation bar.

Except for finals week, the work week for this course starts each Monday (12:00 am) and ends the following Sunday (11:59 pm). The learning modules and assessments or assignments for each week will become available by Monday morning of the week in question. All assigned weekly activities should be completed by Sunday at 11:59 pm each week to insure consideration for full credit. This includes Discussion Board activities. Students are responsible for keeping track of due dates. Each week, students should refer to the Course Calendar for a quick checklist of responsibilities and due dates.

Finals week will end on Friday (). All final exams should be submitted by that time.

COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

Communicate by using the Desire2Learn e-mail system which can be accessed from the course navigation. You can use Desire2Learn e-mail to send a private e-mail to your instructor and/or classmates. I will be checking email in Desire2Learn daily on weekdays. Email sent on weekdays will be answered within 24 hours. Email sent over the weekend will be answered the following Monday.

If your question or comment would be of interest to other students, please post it to the "General Discussions" area. This way other participants can help answer questions, and all participants will benefit from the answers. Please refer to the information on "netiquette" in the introductory module for guidelines governing the content of written communications. Your first communication assignment is to introduce yourself in the discussion topic "Introductions."

COURSE PREREQUISITES

Good reading and writing skills are needed for succeeding in this course. **WR 115**, **RD 115** and **MTH 20** or equivalent placement test scores.

REQUIRED TEXT(S)

The World's Religions, Huston Smith; Harper Collins 1991; ISBN – 0-250811-3 (pbk.)

This book is available at the Sylvania Campus Bookstore. Previous editions are acceptable.

PARTICIPATION EXPECTATIONS

Students in this course are expected to enter the course at least 2 times a week to work on assignments, check email, and participate in discussions. Prompt participation in discussions is especially important since others in the class are depending on your input. Each time you log into the course be sure to check for any new announcements, email and discussion messages, and calendar postings.

This online course will require students to be well-disciplined, regular participants in class discussion forums. Students will be required to post multiple messages in the Discussion Board Area in response to an assigned prompt posted by the instructor. When you enter the discussion area you will see the discussion topic that you are to respond to. You can post an initial response to the prompt by clicking on the "Start New Thread" tab in the blue band at the top of the page. **Initial responses must be posted by noon on Saturday of each week** in order to give other students a chance to dialogue with you (late postings graded down 1 point each day). Your initial posting should be between approximately 100-500 words long.

You then need participate in the discussion by posting replies to other students, **on at least two separate days of the week**. **Four responses** to other students (not including the initial response) is considered full credit. The purpose of these discussions is not to chit chat. You must engage in substantive dialogue with other students. (See criteria for "substantive" below.) If done correctly, these weekly discussion assignments are easy points. Take advantage of them.

EVALUATION OF ASSIGNMENTS/ASSESSMENTS

Grades are based on the quality of your discussion assignments, quiz and exam results. I will send feedback on assignments and post grades **within one week** after the assignment due date.

You can see feedback on weekly discussions by clicking on "Grades." To see feedback comments on quizzes, click on "Quizzes." Scroll down to the quiz in

question and over on the right hand side click on the icon for "submissions." Then once in submissions view, you can click on attempt 1. Then under each of your responses click "view feedback."

Final grades will be determined by the number of points received throughout the quarter. The number of points a student receives will be determined by his or her performance with regard to midterm and final exams, two quizzes, and discussion board assignments. As the following table below indicates, the total number of points possible throughout the quarter is 140, which includes extra-credit opportunities. The midterm and final exams are worth 20 points each. The two graded quizzes are worth 10 points. Please see Course Calendar for discussion and quiz schedule.

Grading Criteria:

| Activity | Points each | Total |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Discussions (4) | 10 | 40 |
| Quizzes (2) | 10 | 20 |
| Exams (2) | 20 | 40 |
| Extra-credit Discussions (2) | 20 | 20 |
| | | 120 |

Practice quizzes are available for the first three weeks of the course to help you understand the fundamental moral theories that you will be learning about. These are only practice quizzes, so the points earned will not count toward your final grade. Discussion Board participation is worth 40 points total, however there are also two extra-credit discussion opportunities that do not require your participation. Due dates for all activities are listed in the Course Calendar on the Content page. Students are encouraged to complete every assignment. Those who need help understanding course content are encouraged to send questions to Mr. Cayton via email. Students may also post questions or comments of interest to other student

Late Work & Make-up Policy

Assignments must be completed on time in order to earn full credit. Late assignments will be graded down on the basis of 10% per day. See discussion grading criteria rubrics below.

Discussion Board Participation

This online course will require students to be well-disciplined, regular participants in class discussion forums. During some weeks of the term, students will be required to post multiple messages in the Discussion Board Area in response to an

assigned discussion prompt. When you enter the discussion area you will see the discussion topic that you are to respond to. You can post an initial response to the prompt by clicking on the "Compose" tab in the blue band at the top of the page. **Initial responses must be posted by Saturday noon of each week.** This is in order to give other students a chance to dialogue with you (late postings graded down 1 point each day). Your initial posting should be between approximately 100-500 words long and must reflect your knowledge of course concepts. You then need participate in the discussion by posting replies to other students, **on at least two separate days of the week.** Four responses to other students (not including the initial response) is considered full credit. The purpose of these discussions is not to chit chat. You must engage in substantive dialogue with other students. (See criteria for "substantive" below.) If done correctly, these weekly discussion assignments are easy points. Take advantage of them.

| Criteria | Number of points possible |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Initial response | 1 |
| • Content of initial response | 3 |
| • Posted on time? | -1pt/day incl. Saturday pm |
| Responses to other students | 4 |
| • Content of responses | 2 |
| • Submitted on separate days? | -1 |
| Total Points Possible | 10 |

What is substantive?

The Discussion Board is intended to be a place for extended dialogue with others in order to formulate a well-thought out answer to the assigned discussion questions using course concepts. The purpose of the weekly discussions is to give you a chance to work with course concepts and to work with other students in learning how to apply those concepts. A substantive response is one that adds something to the discussion. Your responses should not be off the top of your head or superficial; they should reflect your knowledge of course concepts. Your responses to other students must be more than merely saying, "I agree," or "good point." Again, you need to add something to the discussion. Substantive posting is demonstrated through the following:

- It refers to course readings and course concepts. It observes and discusses how fellow classmates are applying the course concepts and discusses those applications with them.

- It encourages additional discussion by asking follow-up questions and encourages fellow classmates to view things from another perspective.
- It shares relevant experience in relationship to the topics being discussed.
- It suggests other ways of looking at issues and constructively disagrees at times.
- It should **always demonstrate your knowledge of course concepts**.

Once you get going, you'll likely find that posting multiple responses is easy. In everything that you do during this course your job is to show me that you have mastered the concepts being covered in this course. However, please keep in mind that the Discussion Board area is not the foundation for course content. Rather, it is like the playground where students can exercise their knowledge of course concepts and help each other out by talking about the ideas being presented. As the instructor, I will join in the discussions as often as I can in order to suggest ideas or different avenues of thought. But students should feel free to question and challenge each others ideas respectfully.

LATE WORK AND MAKE-UP POLICY

Missed discussions cannot be made-up. However, there are two extra-credit discussions planned for after the mid-term (see course calendar); any missed discussions points can be made-up then.

Arrangements can be made for missed quizzes or tests. However, a test or quiz cannot be made up once grades and feedback for that assignment have been published.

EXTRA-CREDIT OPPORTUNITIES

There are three opportunities to earn extra-credit points during the course. After the mid-term exam there will be two extra-credit discussion opportunities (please see the course calendar). You may also submit a report (800-1000 words) on any religion or religious sect we have not covered in class. Please contact Mr. Cayton if interested.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY (RULES ABOUT CHEATING, PLAGIARISM, OR SHARING WORK)

Cheating is against PCC policy. Cheating includes any attempt to defraud, deceive, or mislead the instructor in arriving at an honest grade assessment, and may include copying answers from other students or using unauthorized notes during tests. Plagiarism is a particular form of cheating that involves presenting as one's own the ideas or work of another, and may include using other people's ideas without proper attribution and submitting another person's work as one's own. Violations of the cheating policy will result in a grade of '0' for the assignment in question, and may result in a failing grade for the course at the instructor's discretion. For further information review the institution's [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

PCC is committed to supporting all students. If you plan to use academic accommodations for this course, please contact me as soon as possible to make arrangements. Accommodations are not retroactive, but begin when the instructor receives the Approved Academic Accommodations form from the student (this form may be submitted via email). To request academic accommodations for a disability, please contact a counselor in Disability Services on any PCC campus. Office locations, phone numbers and additional information can be located on the [Disability Services website](#).

TITLE IX/NON-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT:

Portland Community College is committed to creating and fostering a learning and working environment based on open communication and mutual respect. If you believe you have encountered sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, sexual assault, or discrimination based on race, color, religion, age, national origin, veteran status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability please contact the Office of Equity and Inclusion at (971) 722-5840 or equity.inclusion@pcc.edu.