

~~SECRET~~ -- Sociology and Philosophy of Religion
Chaminade University of Honolulu
5:30-9:40pm weekdays; 8am-noon Saturday

Prs
~~Summer Intensive Term 1999~~
Schofield Barracks
June 15 - July 2

Instructor: Dr. Richard Rohde
e-mail: rohde@hawaii.edu

Phone: 732-3992 (home)
Cell/Voice Mail: 228-9470

Required Text:

David Stewart, *Exploring the Philosophy of Religion*, 4th ed., 1998

Course Description:

It is not the purpose of this course to provide a survey of the major religions of the world. That is, we will not directly study Buddhism, Taoism, various forms of Christian religions, Judaism, Islam, or the many indigenous religious systems. Rather, this course develops an interdisciplinary framework through which we can reflect on the common features of religions as a whole. Our task is to gain a greater understanding of the seemingly innate need of humankind to find meaning and make sense of our lives and the world we inhabit.

Stewart's textbook comes explicitly from a philosophical perspective. Philosophers are interested in existential questions: "Who are we?" "Where did we come from?" "Why do we exist?" "Why must we suffer?" "Why must we die?" "What happens to us after we die?" "What is the nature of God (or other deities)?" "What is the nature of reality?" "Can men and women understand the nature of reality?" "What is knowledge?" "How do we know what we know?" "How do knowledge, faith, and belief differ?" "Who has access to the *real* truth?" "Do any of these things *really* matter, or do we just live and die as individuals?" "Who cares?" The development of objectivity and intellectual detachment is crucial in employing a philosophical perspective. We need to approach these issues logically. While Stewart's textbook provides us with insights from some of the world's great thinkers, ultimately we may end up with more questions than answers. But knowing these questions is very important.

The sociological perspective (and those of the behavioral sciences) nicely complements the more abstract approach of philosophy. Sociologists take these same questions and put them into individual and collective contexts. They examine how the spiritual belief systems as expressed philosophically manifest themselves in religious forms and institutions. We will thus address the fact that religions or spiritual practices are found in all human societies; being thus a global human institution, what is the function of religion(s)? Do they serve some intrinsic psychological need of man? Do they promote social solidarity, or social inequality? Do religions vary in size and complexity with the societies in which they are found? Do societies promote social justice, or enable the wealthy and/or the government to justify their privileged status? What is the relationship of politics and religion? How do religions emerge, spread, and sometimes fade away? Who does the media serve to enable the growth of certain televangelists and the religions they represent? Who benefits from these processes?

Throughout this course, we will attempt to stimulate reflection and debate about the meaning of religion by comparing and contrasting philosophical concepts with sociological examples from our familiar world and those from cultures different than our own.

Examinations, Writing Assignments, and Attendance

Two brief examinations (each worth 20 per cent of your final grade) will combine short answer and essay formats. These exams will cover reading assignments, materials such as videos, and the content of classroom debates and discussions. The intent is to enable you to demonstrate your knowledge and analytical skills, not to regurgitate the "right" answers. There are many "right" answers...

An informal essay that briefly describes your position on a topic of particular interest to you is required. The nature of the compressed, interim session is not conducive to a long, formal paper. The purpose of the essay is to facilitate the clarification of your thoughts about a particular issue relative to the course material. Students will be asked to briefly, informally share their conclusions with other students during the final class meeting. This essay (and presentation) will count 30 per cent of your final grade.

The remaining 30 per cent of your grade will be based upon attendance and weekly class participation assignments. Each student will be assigned on a weekly basis the task of preparing a verbal summary of a specific topic (e.g., a section of a chapter, generally 5 to 6 pages) which is part of that week's readings. Students' informal summaries will serve to initiate class discussions about particular topics, and lay the groundwork for examinations of related issues.

Class attendance and participation is very important. Being prepared for class is equally important, that is, having read the assignment prior to class so you can listen and/or participate intelligently. The success of this class depends upon all of us sharing information, and deciding what it all means through discussion. Lectures will supplement, not reiterate, the information within the textbook. Integrated within the class schedule are videos which have been selected to illustrate and reinforce the topics brought forth in the readings and in lectures, and to provide a common basis of discussion.

Grading Scale Your final grade will be based on the following formula:

100 points = A+ // 99-90 = A // 89-80 = B // 79-70 = C // 69-60 = D //

The following schedule lists the topics to be covered in each class, and the respective reading assignments that will be addressed in that class. You will be responsible on the exams for all readings.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading Assignment</u>
June		
15 Tues class 1	Introduction to this course Sociological and Philosophical Perspectives	
17 Thur class 2	Religion, Knowledge, and Experience	Ch. 1
19 Sat class 3	Existential Questions: Theology, Ontology, and Cosmology	Ch. 2
21 Mon class 4	Faith and Reason: Logic, Truth, and Belief	Ch. 3
23 Fri class 5	Religious Language: The Literal and the Metaphorical Exam One	Ch. 4
25 Fri class 6	Evil and Omnipotence	Ch. 5
26 Sat class 7	Destiny, Death, and Immortality	Ch. 6
28 Fri class 8	Reality, Obligations, and Wisdom: Religion and Life	Ch. 7
30 Sat class 9	Cross-Cultural Religious Dilemmas Exam Two	
July		
02 Fri class 10	Student Presentations – Final class!	