

30510

SE '02

Chaminade University of Honolulu
RE/SO/PH ~ Sociology and Philosophy of Religions
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Spring / 02

Course Description ~

This course covers both philosophical and sociological approaches to the study of religion. The philosophy of religion raises questions concerning 1) The nature and attributes of God, as God is usually conceived of within the Judeo-Christian tradition, as well as some alternative conceptions of God, 2) Arguments for the existence of God, such as the cosmological and teleological argument, 3) Arguments against the existence of God, including the problem of evil and natural histories of religious belief, 4) Does belief require evidence? We will look at arguments that are offered to justify belief in God apart from compelling evidence that there is a God, 5) What difference does God's existence/non-existence make? We will examine the implications, if any, of God's existence or non-existence for ethics and for one's attitude towards death.

The sociological aspect of the course explores, 1) the way in which the religious impulse has been expressed socially, 2) the role of religion in society, 3) the way in which individuals form and change religious commitments, 4) the various ways in which religious groups have been organized and some characteristic patterns of their organizational evolution, 5) the nature of religious belief as it is expressed collectively and individually, and 6) controversies over the appropriate role of religion in social life.

There will be particular emphasis through the course on the current expression of religion in the United States. There has been a continuing debate over the contemporary relevance of religion and various predictions of its ultimate demise or rejuvenation as a social institution and as a significant element in individual lives. Illustrations from contemporary events will be used both to explore some of the perennial features of religious expression and to address some major religious policy issues and controversies. We will focus on New Religious Movements (NRM), especially nature spirituality and the rise of an ethic of global responsibility.

Course Objectives:

- To reflect upon and come to understand more deeply your own religious perspective
- To appreciate religious perspectives other than your own
- to provide you with tools for analyzing philosophical and sociological problems relating to religion.
- **see the effects of social organization on religious life, and understand the role religions and religious notions play in society at large.**
- gain some skills in dealing with the complexity of religion-- including the relationships between rituals, myths, symbols, ethos, world-view. Each student should also be able to explain how these serve to cause social integration and/or conflict.
- discuss the relationship between religion and mental health and articulate criteria for assessing sick and healthy forms of religiosity.
- explain the importance of institutionalization of religion; elaborate on the processes of routinization; and describe/illustrate the dilemmas of institutionalization.
- explain religious trends in the U.S., including the alternative patterns of religiosity (civil and invisible), secularization, evangelicalism, and the resurgence of nature religiosity in its many guises and aspects.

Format

Class will include lectures on material related to the day's assignment.

Each student will be responsible for:

0. A weekly summary of assigned readings. This is designed to show that you have read the assignment, and to exercise your ability to synthesize information.
0. Two reaction papers (3-5 pages) on the course materials to be handed in before each of the two exams
0. The completion of a mid-term and final exam.
0. An investigative project on any religion (other than your own) with a presence here on Oahu. This will involve a 7-10 page analysis of the religion from – to varying degrees – a sociological and philosophical perspective. The results will be presented at the last class meeting

Grading

The following evaluation criteria is suggested: exams (40%), investigative report (20%), weekly summaries (20%); two reaction papers (10%); class attendance and participation (10%). The scale: 90-100 @ A; 80-90 @ B; 70-79 @ C; 60-69 @ D; 59-0 @ F

The following requirements will be considered in the grading:

- mandatory attendance
- be courteous and professional in class discussions; i.e. take turns in speaking, allowing others to express their ideas without interruption, communicate with positive, constructive verbal and nonverbal language.
- show respect and an open mind to different ideas and opinions of class members.
- complete assignments on time.

Learning Outcome Assessment; All student's work will be evaluated for:

- knowledge of the reading material, class lectures, discussion, videos, and resources from research.
- ability to provide relevant examples to support viewpoints.
- ability to apply the knowledge to understand current issues in society.
- clarity and logical presentation.
- demonstration of having an understanding of the subject matter objectively and from opposing viewpoints.
- demonstration of achieving the objectives of this class.
- ability to analyze, critically review, and compare the issues cross-culturally.

Required Texts

Bruce, Steve

1996 Religion in the Modern World: from cathedrals to cults. Oxford University Press: New York

Sheldrake, Rupert

1994 The Rebirth of Nature: the greening of science and God. Bantam: New York

Schedule

April 5

Introduction: concepts for the philosophical and sociological study of religions.

April 12

Bruce: Chapters 1,2,3

April 19

Sheldrake: Chapters 1,2,3

April 26

Bruce: Chapters 4,5,6

May 3

Sheldrake: Chapters 4,5,6

May 10

Review

Reaction paper due

Exam I

May 17

Bruce: Chapters 7,8,9

May 24

Sheldrake: Chapters 7,8,9,10

May 31

Review

Reaction paper due

Exam II

June 7

Class project presentations