

SOC/PH 305 <sup>40</sup> Sociology and Philosophy of Religion  
Chaminade University of Honolulu  
5:30 - 9:40 p.m. Thursdays

WE '01  
Winter Term 2001  
Ft. Shafter  
January 8 - March 21

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**Required Text:**

David Stewart, *Exploring the Philosophy of Religion*, 4th ed., 1998  
Linda Arthur, ed., *Religion, Dress, and the Body*, 1999

**Course Description:**

Individual and collective forms of spiritual expression and beliefs in the realm of the supernatural are found universally. This course surveys the forms, functions, and expressions of religions as observed in global contexts. We will begin by examining classic historical philosophical analyses of religious rituals, practices, symbols, mythologies, and meanings.

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.

We will conclude with Arthur's study of modern religious ideologies, emphasizing codes of dress and how these required forms of dress signify and embody beliefs and values of the sacred and profane, simultaneously expressing the personal and social identities of the wearer and enabling forms of social control of behavior.

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 humans? 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>
<b>January</b>		
13 Sat class 1	Introduction to this course Please review and read assigned readings (instructor will be on Mainland; class time will be rescheduled)	
20 Sat class 2	Sociological and Philosophical Perspectives Religion, Knowledge, and Experience	Stewart Intro. & Ch. 1 Arthur Intro.
<b>February</b>		
03 Sat class 3	Existential Questions: Theology, Ontology, and Cosmology	Stewart Ch. 2
10 Sat class 4	Faith and Reason: Logic, Truth, and Belief	Stewart Ch. 3
17 Sat class 5	Religious Language: The Literal and the Metaphorical	Stewart Ch. 4
24 Sat class 6	Evil and Omnipotence <b>Exam One</b>	Stewart Ch. 5
<b>March</b>		
03 Sat class 7	Destiny, Death, and Immortality in Today's World	Stewart Ch. 6
10 Sat class 8	Functions and Meanings of Religious Dress Codes	Arthur Chs. 2 - 6
17 Sat class 9	Religion, Community, and Social Control <b>Exam Two</b>	Arthur Chs. 7 - 11
24 Sat class 10	Student Presentations – Final class!	