

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION Syllabus

PHIL 3575 Spring 2012 MWF 2:00-2:50 ADM 312

Dr. Seth Holtzman

office: 308 Administration Bldg, Catawba College
hours: MWF 3-5 TTh 11-12 (if no meeting), 12-1 & by appt.
phones: 637-4229 office; 636-8626 home
email: sholtzma@catawba.edu

Course summary:

This course examines some important philosophical issues in the philosophy of religion. What is philosophy and philosophy of religion? What is the relationship between philosophy, religion and the culture? What is it to be religious? Is the religious self natural? How does religion grow out of the religious self? What are the claims and practices of a religion responsible to? How should we adjudicate religious claims competing claims in other sectors of the culture? What framework of thought does religion depend on? What has happened to religion in the modern era? In what way are religious language, art, and ritual meaningful? Is there truth in a religion and truth to a religion? Does it make sense to speak of religious truth? As these questions suggest, the issues we will treat are quite abstract; be prepared to read and think on a high level of abstraction; you will be required to do so.

The course has five sections. **Section One** is a brief introduction to philosophy that explores the nature of the discipline as well as the relationship between philosophy and culture and between religion and culture. **Section Two** considers the nature of the self and of religious consciousness, leading to the conclusion that one's view of self and of world necessarily shapes one's religious attitude. This section, along with the next section, establishes religion's dependence on a traditional, humanistic world view that has itself been undermined by the development of a new, modern, scientific world view. **Section Three** considers the development of religion out of the religious attitude and considers what religion is responsible to in its development. **Section Four** is a critical comparison of the two world views, paying particular attention to the religious implications of the new world view. **Section Five** is a discussion of the meaning and truth of religious language (and art and ritual).

Do not let the division of the course into sections mislead you. This material in this course is systematically connected; this is no topics course. The course tells one comprehensive and complex intellectual story. Class format will be mostly lecture, with some discussion and presentation.

<u>Expected learning outcome</u> <i>Successful students can demonstrate:</i>	<u>Means of Assessment</u> <i>By being succesful on:</i>
an understanding of philosophy and religion and the place of both of those in the culture	midterm, paper, oral, film, final exam
an understanding that one's conception of self and of world determine one's religious attitude	Short essay, midterm, film, final exam
an understanding of what religion is responsible to in its development	Short essay, midterm, final exam
an awareness that naturalistic philosophical assumptions deep in the culture have undermined religion	Midterm, final exam
an understanding that only a humanistic philosophy is tenable and will support religion	Midterm, final exam
an understanding that religion, conceived humanistically, is a meaningful way of thought that gets at important truths	midterm, film, final exam

Requirements and grading :

1) Attendance is required; you cannot learn the course on your own. In class I will sometimes elicit your grasp of the readings, lecture, and course. Your participation through questions and discussion is important, too. You need to be present, mentally active and prepared. Class participation can raise your final grade by up to 1/3 of a grade.

2) At least twenty-one of the occasional short essays, usually ½ to 1 page each. These essays force you to wrestle with the course and with the readings and help me gauge how much you are absorbing. I will drop your lowest essay. Late essays will not be accepted. Missed essays count as an "F". Together, they count **20% of your grade**.

3) At some point in the course, you will give an oral presentation of 20-30 minutes, after which you lead a discussion of that material. You may choose from among the handout readings, subject to my approval. Your presentation will elucidate for the class the content of that reading: identifying the point of that reading in the context of other readings and the course, revealing the argumentative structure of the reasoning, and introducing and clarifying any concepts that are unclear. Then you will start and lead a 10-15 minute class discussion of it. **10% of your grade**.

4) A take-home, mostly essay midterm, testing your understanding of the readings, issues, and problems in the course. Handed out on March 2nd, due on March 12th. **20% of your grade**.

5) A film that we watch outside of class and that we discuss afterwards in light of course ideas. You will then write 3 pages on it. Early to mid April. **10% of your grade**

6) An 7-8 page paper, on a relevant topic of your choice. Clear the topic with me. I will be happy to work with you on a draft of it. Due April 30th. **15% of your grade**.

7) A final exam, testing your overall grasp of the course, not your memory of specific facts. Exam date: *Thursday, May 3rd from 3:00-6:00pm*. **25% of your grade**.

Requirements for written work include these:

Responsiveness to the Assignment

Writing should fulfill the purpose of the assignment directly and completely.

Content

Writing should reflect an understanding of the subject. Your writing should make good use of the relevant concepts, distinctions, positions, and reasons included in course readings or brought out in lecture or in discussion. Writing should be organized so ideas are arranged logically and clearly. Main points should be supported by substantial and relevant details. Your work should be backed by good reasons. Your claims and reasons should be consistent with each other. You should anticipate and respond to any reasonable objections.

Execution

Writing should use precise words and well-constructed sentences clearly representing the writer's reasoning. Writing should adhere to conventions of grammar, capitalization, spelling, and usage. The writing style should be appropriate to the academy. Your work should be clearly written, its claims precise, its structure clear, its overall direction explicit. It should be intelligible to an interested student.

Citations and Documentation

Writers must clearly differentiate their own material from source material. When writers use material not their own, or not common knowledge, they must document the source of the information using a standardized (i.e., MLA or APA) method or abbreviated method allowed by their instructor.

Other requirements: on time, typed, paginated, tidy (stapled/bound), standard margins and fonts, and dark print. Failure to meet these requirements will hurt your grades. Your paper, but not your essays, should have a cover page with your name, course name and number, date, my name, and a title.

Grading: "A" Superior mastery
"B" Good mastery
"C" Satisfactory achievement
"D" Less than satisfactory achievement
"F" Unsatisfactory achievement; Failure to achieve minimum competency

I use +/- grades, though A+ is not a possible final course grade.

A+	97-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69
A	93-96	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	63-66
A -	90-92	B -	80-82	C -	70-72	D -	60-62

Grades can measure achievement only, not effort.

Texts:

- 1) . Religion and Cultural Freedom by E.M. Adams (**RCF**)
- 2) In the Presence of Mystery by Michael Barnes (**IPM**)
- 3) A coursepack (**CP**).

Our main text is the Adams book; difficult but extremely rich, we will follow it closely. The easy Barnes book is helpful background. The coursepack supplements the Adams book.

Reading and taking notes:

I expect you to do all readings; to do well in the course, you will need to. Some of the material is easy and accessible on your first attempt. Other assignments are quite taxing and will probably require multiple readings. I suggest the following strategy for any difficult reading: read it once quickly simply to get the gist; then read it carefully for details, not worrying about the overall picture; then read it normally, fitting the details into the overall picture.

Lectures can track the readings but also range far afield. Come to class having done the readings. You are responsible for them all; the final exam will assume you have read them. Since lectures cover material not in the readings, this is another reason to attend class.

Most students take sketchy notes. Perhaps they think they cannot both take notes and listen, or perhaps they do not grasp the value of taking notes. Learn to write while you listen; it can be done, and it usually enhances your grasp of what is said. Take as many notes as you can, without losing too much of what is said. Writing down only key terms and definitions is not enough in this class. Your notes are an invaluable resource for understanding the course and for the final exam.

Absences and violations:

I will check attendance promptly at the start of class. If late, you might be counted absent; if late enough, you do count as absent. Avoid tardiness; if you are often late (without good reason), I will choose to count you as absent. Any forms of mental disconnect in class count as an absence.

No absences are excused. After 3 absences, which you need not explain to me, further absences lower your final grade: minus 1/3 grade for 4-6 total absences, minus 2/3 for 7-8 total absences, minus 1 grade for 9-10 total absences. Missing class the day before or after vacation counts double. Missing more than 10 classes for other than an emergency is automatic grounds for an "F" (or perhaps an "I"), regardless of your other grades. Tell me if you are missing class due to emergency or due to required school activities. When absent, you are responsible for missed assignments and classroom material. Get notes from a peer. Contact me if you still have questions.

Respect the people and ideas in our class. I don't care if you bring a drink or sport a hat or wear rags. I care that you pay attention to me and to others (so, no cell phones or activated pagers/beepers/watches), that you are on time and ready to work, that you bring a positive attitude to class even if you are struggling, and that you contribute positively to class.

Cheating, working with others to complete assignments (unless allowed), and falsifying an emergency to skip class or an assignment, all violate the Honor Code. So does plagiarism, employing a writer's ideas (and even words) without giving due credit. See me for help using someone's ideas or words.

Course Topics and Order of Readings:

I. Introduction

- a) The nature of philosophy
ESSAY #1: What is the nature of philosophy?
 - b) The relationship between philosophy and culture
ESSAY #2: What is the relationship between philosophy and culture?
 - c) The nature of religion
ESSAY #3: What is the nature of religion?
 - d) The relationship between religion and culture
ESSAY #4: What is the relationship between religion and culture?
 - e) The relationship between philosophy and religion
ESSAY #5: What is the relationship between philosophy and religion?
 - f) The philosophy of religion
ESSAY #6: What is the philosophy of religion?
- 1) Adams: RCE, Preface
 - 2) Adams: excerpt from "The Mission of Philosophy" (**cp**)
 - 3) Adams: "Philosophical Education as Cultural Criticism" (**cp**)
 - 4) Streng: "Introduction: What is Religion?" (**cp**)
 - 5) Barnes: IPM, pp.1-67

II. The self and religious consciousness

- a) The humanistic self and world
ESSAY #7: How are humans different from animals?
ESSAY #8: Why must we acknowledge a humanistic Ultimate Reality?
- b) Religious consciousness
 - i. Three modes
ESSAY #9: What is religious consciousness, and how is it inescapably human?

- ESSAY #10:** Identify the modes of religious consciousness in some of our short readings.
- c) Religious consciousness as the ground of religion
ESSAY #11: How is religion dependent on religious consciousness?
- d) The religious attitude is dependent upon a world view
- e) Religion, reason, and freedom
ESSAY #12: Why does religion tend to be in tension with cultural freedom?
- 6) Adams: RCE, Chapter 1
- 7) Barnes: IPM, pp.68-149
- 8) Adams: "Human Beings and Society: A Humanistic View" (cp)
- 9) Frankfurt: "Myth and Reality" (cp)
- 10) Mary Douglas: "The Abominations of Leviticus" (cp)
- 11) short pieces illustrating the modes of religious consciousness: (cp)
- Peretz: "If Not Higher"
 - G. Hopkins' poem: "Pied Beauty"
 - al-Qushayri: "Right Conduct on the Way to God"
 - D.T. Suzuki: "Satori"
 - Sri Ramakrishna: "Experience of the Divine Mother"
 - Graham Greene: "A Visit to Morin"
 - Hesse: selection from Siddhartha
 - Wiesel: selection from The Accident
 - Lagerqvist: "Father and I"
 - Neitzsche: from The Gay Science
 - Kafka: selection from The Trial
- 12) Tillich: "Science and Theology: A Discussion with Einstein" (cp)
- 13) Tillich: Dynamics of Faith, pp.30-40 (cp)

III. Religion and Culture

- a) the relationship between religion and sectors of the culture
- i. religion is not beyond criticism
 - ii. when religion can and should yield
 - iii. when the culture can and should yield
- ESSAY #13:** Why is religion subject to critical assessment?
- ESSAY #14:** Discuss an area in which religion and another sector seem to be in conflict.
- ESSAY #15:** When are religious claims accountable to the claims of secular sectors?
- b) extended example of religion and metaphysics
- i. religion adjusting to changes in humanistic worldviews
 - ii. classical arguments for the existence of God
 - iii. religion and the problem of our modern Western metaphysics
- ESSAY #16:** Discuss one of the classical arguments for the existence of God.
- ESSAY #17:** Why can't religion yield to our modern metaphysics?
- 14) Adams: RCE, Chapters 2-3, pp.26-109
- 15) Barnes: IPM, pp. 153-80; 221-244
- 16) Tillich: "Human Finitude and the Question of God" (cp)

IV. Humanistic versus Naturalistic world views

- a) Modern scientific naturalism

- i. Its logical and cultural flaws
 - ESSAY #18:** Why think that the feel of modern life is negative?
 - ESSAY #19:** Why does Adams claim that naturalism is logically impossible?
 - b) A new Humanistic worldview
 - i. implications for metaphysics and epistemology
 - ii. implications for religion
 - ESSAY #20:** Characterize a new Humanistic metaphysics and epistemology.
 - ESSAY #21:** What would be the implications for religion/theology?
- 17) Adams: RCE, Chapter 4, pp.110-129
 - 18) Barnes: IPM, pp.245-347
 - 19) Naturalistic vs. humanistic world views: summary theses (**cp**)
 - 20) Stace: "Man Against Darkness" (**cp**)
 - 21) Jones: Preface, Introduction and Chpt 1 from The Sciences and the Humanities (**cp**)
 - 22) Trilling: "On the Teaching of Modern Literature" (**cp**)
 - 23) poetry by Donne, Blake, Arnold, Lindsay, & Eliot (**cp**)
 - 24) Adams: "Is the Modern Western Mind Deranged?" (**cp**)
 - 25) Adams: "Toward a Humanistic World-View" (**cp**)

V. Religion and Truth

- a) Spirituality and religious spirituality
 - ESSAY #22:** What is spirituality, and what is religious spirituality?
 - b) The sacred and the Holy
 - ESSAY #23:** What is the sacred, and what is the Holy?
 - c) Mythology and the language of religion
 - i. Meaning and truth of religious language
 - ESSAY #24:** What is the role of myth in religion?
 - ESSAY #25:** Can we make sense of the truth of religious myth?
 - d) Religion tested in lived experience
 - i. Fundamental religious truths
 - ESSAY #26:** How can we test the truth of religious myth?
 - ESSAY #27:** What is the role of the theologian when it comes to religious truths?
 - ESSAY #28:** What religious truths can be found across religions? What particular concrete form do they take in (your choice of) a historical religion?
- 26) E.M. Adams: RCE, Chapter 5 and Epilogue, pp.139-78
 - 27) Barnes: IPM, pp.202-220
 - 28) excerpts on religious language (**cp**)
 - 29) Tillich: Dynamics of Faith, pp.41-54 (**cp**)
 - 30) Nels Ferre: "Importance of Prayer for Knowing God" (**cp**)
 - 31) Bruno Betelheim: "Live Divined From Within", in The Uses of Enchantment, pp.23-8 (**cp**)
 - 32) Reinhold Neibuhr: "The Truth in Myths" (**cp**)
 - 33) J. Neusner: "The Mythic Structure of Classical Judaism" (**cp**)
 - 34) Theodore M. Greene: "Man Out of Darkness: Religion Has Not Lost Its Power", pp.65-85 (**cp**)