

Philosophy 2600  
World Religions  
Summer 2005

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#### REQUIRED TEXTS

Smith, Huston. *The World's Religions*, Harper Collins  
Hoff, Benjamin. *The Tao of Pooh*, Penguin Books

#### OPTIONAL TEXTS

Eastman, Roger. *The Ways of Religion*, Oxford  
Van Voorst, Robert E. *Anthology of World Scriptures*, Wadsworth

#### RECOMMENDED TEXTS SPECIFIC TO RELIGIONS DISCUSSED

Hinduism: *Bhagavad Gita*  
Buddhism: *The Teachings of the Buddha*  
Taoism: *Tao Te Ching*  
Christianity: *The New Testament*  
Islam: *The Quran*

#### COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course we shall undertake to discover the basic doctrines and world-views of five of the most influential religions in the world today. Our focus will be on understanding what it would be to believe as devout followers of each of these religions believes. We shall thus attempt to see each religion 'from the inside' rather than examining a potentially 'alien' way of life from our own 21<sup>st</sup> Century Western perspective. This means that the chief prerequisite for the class must be an open mind: the ability to suspend both belief and disbelief in order to determine what each belief system is actually saying. It is necessary that you be able to distance yourself from your own beliefs and to discuss each religion we study critically, objectively, and dispassionately. No proselytizing or special pleading will be tolerated and each religion will be accorded the respect that it deserves. Likewise, no attempt will be made to change your beliefs, which remain sacrosanct (i.e., 'your own business') and will be treated as such. We shall not be concerned with whether each religion is objectively true, but rather with what the world would

be like if its teachings were true. In the process we may well discover that there are many more ways to be sane, intelligent and devout than we have previously imagined.

## GRADING

There will be three midterms and a final, each of which will be an open-book, open-notes, take-home essay exam. **Students are expected to have read the appropriate section of the required texts before the beginning of each lecture.** Quizzes on the readings may be administered at my discretion. The main exams will be based primarily on the material presented in class; therefore regular attendance, while not mandatory, is most strongly recommended. Students are reminded that this is a course in philosophy as well as a survey of world religions and that their grade is based not only on their understanding of the basic doctrines of each religion we study but also on their mastery of the fundamental philosophical notions introduced in class. There are no academic prerequisites for the course; however it is recommended that you possess at least basic skill in writing consecutive sentences in the English language. The problem in each exam will be to demonstrate what you have learned in the portion of the course covered by the exam. In general, the criteria of your grade will be: 1) organization of your thought (its 'flow' from start to end). 2) accuracy of presentation (the facts), and 3) mastery of the material (how complete, incisive and perspicuous is your analysis). Higher grades will be based chiefly on the degree of fulfillment of criterion 3.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of the class is to foster a deeper understanding of each of the religions we study as a viable and self-consistent form of human life. In so doing we may help promote not merely passive tolerance but active appreciation of the beliefs of our fellow human beings in a 'shrinking' world that often seems even more dangerous and strange. But, as a course in philosophy, our goal is also to foster a critical understanding of the various 'worldviews' presupposed by each religion. In so doing we may come to better understand and appreciate that it is possible to be an intelligent, moral and efficacious human being without being necessarily

committed to the largely capitalist, scientific and Judeo/Christian ideas that inform our way of life.

#### TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

[Note: The following schedule is subject to revision at any time. It is intended mainly as a preliminary guide to the curriculum and most likely will be changed during the course of the semester. It is important that the student attend class to determine the actual schedule.]

1. May 16, 18, 20: Introduction & Hinduism
2. May 23, 25, 27: Hinduism
3. May 30; June 1, 3: Hinduism (**Exam 1 Due Friday**)
4. June, 6, 8, 10: Buddhism
5. June 13, 15, 17: Buddhism
6. June 20, 22, 24: Buddhism (**Exam 2 Due Friday**)
7. June 27, 29; July 1: Taoism
8. July 4, 6, 8: Taoism (**Exam 3 Due Friday**)
9. July 11, 13, 15: Christianity
10. July 18, 20, 22: Christianity/Islam
11. July 25, 27, 29: Islam
12. August 1, 3, 5: Islam (**Final Exam Due Friday**)