

# PHILOSOPHY 23: Philosophy of Religion (Section 2774)

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Santa Monica College

Spring 2010, T/Th 12:45-2:05, HSS 154

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**Course Description:** This is an introduction to traditional and contemporary ways of understanding and thinking carefully about issues related to religious experience and belief. We will begin with a phenomenology of religious experience and a wider phenomenology of human meaning from which religious meaning arises. During the course we will examine some of the major religious traditions of the world and examine such issues as the existence and nature of God, the problem of evil, problems in non-theistic belief and mysticism, the rationality of religious belief, the relationship between reason and revelation, the difference between religious, scientific, and philosophical understanding, and the viability of any scientific and/or philosophical understanding of religion. Since this is a course in philosophy, here is a brief attempt at an account of philosophy.

**What is Philosophy?** Philosophy cannot be simply defined but it involves the activity of very carefully and rigorously questioning our most basic assumptions, habits, and beliefs in order to either better understand things for its own sake, or in order to live a better life. In this sense, philosophy can be seen either as the pursuit of truth for its own sake or the pursuit of importance and meaning that makes a difference in human life. For most philosophers it was both. Philosophy (from Greek) literally means love (philos) of wisdom (sophia). It is reflection on the value and importance of our engagements in life. It is the activity of thinking very carefully and critically about such fundamental issues as self, society, reality, truth, meaning, value, reason, and philosophy itself. It is a passion for wisdom that engenders humility by revealing our ignorance. As Socrates tells us, the beginning of wisdom is the recognition of one's own ignorance. Wisdom is not knowledge, but as the word wisdom indicates, "seeing," in the metaphorical sense of seeing into things. Philosophy is typically divided into these areas: 1) Metaphysics (theories of reality), 2) Epistemology (theories of knowledge and truth), 3) Axiology (theories of value, including moral philosophy or ethics, and aesthetics) 4) Logic (study of the properties of consistent inference). Philosophy can also be divided according to topics, such as, philosophy of... art, religion, science, language, politics, etc. All labeling is for convenience and no label is precise or fully adequate. Any philosophical question in some way presupposes or implies many others.

**What is Religion?** How one should define *religion* is a matter of great controversy. The term itself (from Latin *re*: back or again, *ligare*: to connect) can indicate the attempt to reconnect to something that we might refer to as the *sacred*. Understanding the terms "religion" and "sacred" will be among the central goals of the course.

**Grading:** The course will not presuppose any background other than college level ability to read and write. Reading assigned material will be presupposed for each class. Attendance will be required for a grade. An incomplete (I) will only be given with good attendance and emergency circumstances. Possible scantron quizzes. Writing: Two or three take home essay exams. A total of 7-10 essays. Of these, 3-5 will be graded, including your best work. Papers turned in ON TIME will be returned with a grade and comments normally within 2 weeks. Late papers may be turned in any time prior to the end of the semester and will be graded without penalty, but may not be returned. Papers may be rewritten but will not be returned with comments the second time.

**Note:** A) If you drop the class, do so officially or you could receive an F. **Drop Deadlines:** 3/8 w/o W, 4/11 w/W, 5/9 w/approval  
B) You are subject to exclusion if you miss more than 4 hours. Following an absence, find out what you missed.  
C) Late arrival or early departure: sit near the door. After arriving, do not leave and re-enter class except for emergencies.  
D) **Beepers/cell phones** should be turned off **before** entering class.  
E) Please see me first for help or complaints.

## Course Texts/Reading:

1. Eliade, M., *The Sacred and the Profane*. (S&P) (Bookstore) (\$14.00)
2. Pickard, D., *The Eros Of Wisdom*: (Eros) see [www.deanpickard.com](http://www.deanpickard.com)
3. Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom*. (DPOW)(Bookstore) (\$12.95)
4. Pickard, D., *The Sacred and the True, The Mystery and Gift of Love*. (Love) (webpage [www.deanpickard.com](http://www.deanpickard.com))
5. Miller, Jerome, *In the Throe of Wonder* (ITOW)(Bookstore/online) (\$23.95)
6. Miller, Jerome, *The Way of Suffering* (WS) ([www.deanpickard.com](http://www.deanpickard.com))
7. Taliaferro, C., *Philosophy of Religion*, (POR) Oneworld/Oxford, 2009. (\$10.17)
8. Siderits, M., *Buddhism as Philosophy*, (BAP) Hackett, 2007. (\$15.25)

**Resources:** Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy <http://www.iep.utm.edu/> (see [www.dean.pickard.com](http://www.dean.pickard.com) for extensive list)  
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy <http://plato.stanford.edu/>  
MIT <http://classics.mit.edu/>

Date	Topic	Reading
2/16	Religions, Approaches to Religion, Religion/Science/Philosophy, the Sacred	
2/18	Eros of Wisdom, Phenomenology of the Sacred	<i>Eros, S&amp;P, Internet Readings on Religions</i>
2/23, 2/25	Parmenides: Healer, facilitator, philos as therapy: "to die before you die?"	<i>DPOW</i>
3/2, 3/4	World Religions	POR 1 (Taliaferro), Internet
<b>FIRST ESSAY EXAM DUE 3/9 &amp; 3/23</b> (Essays on S&P, DPOW)		
3/9, 3/11	World Religions, The Concept of God	POR (Taliaferro), Internet
3/16 (3/18 no class)	Concept of God	POR Ch 2
3/23, 3/25	In the Throe of Wonder	<i>ITOW</i> Pref, Ch 1-2
3/30, 4/1	In the Throe of Wonder	<i>ITOW</i> Ch 3-4
4/6, 4/8	In the Throe of Wonder	<i>ITOW</i> Ch 5-7
<b>ESSAY DUE 4/20</b> (Essay on ITOW)		
4/13, 4/15	Spring Break	
4/20, 4/22	Analytic Phil of Religion: <i>Theistic Arguments, Problem of Evil</i> ,	POR Ch 3-4
4/27, 4/29	Miracles, afterlife, redemption	POR Ch 5
<b>ESSAY DUE 5/4</b> (Essay on POR)		
5/4, 5/6, 5/11	Buddhism as Philosophy	<i>BAP</i> Ch 1-6, POR Ch 6
5/13, 5/18, 5/20	Buddhism as Philosophy	<i>BAP</i> Ch 7-10
5/25, 5/27	Religious Experience and Truth: Analytic vs Hermeneutical Accounts	TBA
6/1	Science vs Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity	TBA
6/3	The Contemporary God Debate: Dennett, Hutchins, Dawkins VS Eagleton	POR 7, <a href="http://www.iep.utm.edu/n-atheis/">http://www.iep.utm.edu/n-atheis/</a>
6/8	<b>FINAL EXAM 6/8:</b> Mandatory	

**FINAL ESSAYS DUE: 6/15**

**This outline is subject to revision. Carefully follow announcements in class.**