Philosophy 2110 is a survey course on some of the great world religions. The course is divided into four major sections: The Story, The Word, The Wheel, and The Way. The Story explores the mythological religion of selected primitive cultures including the religion of early Greek and Roman civilizations. The Word section investigates the desert religions of the Abrahamic tradition: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In The Wheel, we direct our attention to the South Asian traditions beginning with Hinduism (the Vedic Hymns, Brahmans, Upanishads, Bhagavad-gita, and Yoga) and end with Indian Buddhism. The course concludes with The Way where we shift to the East Asian traditions of China and Japan. In this section, students are introduced to the way of “the human,” Confucianism, and the way of nature, Daoism. The Way also introduces the student to Zen Buddhism, a Japanese syncretism of Daoism and Chinese Buddhism through the lens of Shinto, the indigenous Japanese religion. The “The Story, The Word, The Wheel, and The Way” is predicated on a discussion of the meaning of religion, ways of interpreting religion, and the religious dimension. In this course, we will address critically the relation of human spirituality and the natural environment.

Course Format

Classroom sessions will be both interactive/informal lecture and discussion with the emphasis placed on lecture. Students are encouraged and expected to ask questions and must be prepared to discuss the content, problems, and issues of the readings and lectures on a daily basis. Occasionally, there may be slides, videos, and films on the various religions studied.

Grading

- Participation and attendance (3 points will be deducted for each missed class)
- Mid-Term Exam on “Primal Religions” and The Story/Word and a comprehensive final. (50 points each)
- Class participation is crucial and can elevate grades by one letter grade.

90+ = A, 80-89 = B, 70-79 = C, 60-69 = D

There is no provision for extra credit and make-up examinations in Philosophy 2110. Late work will not be accepted. All outside work must be word-processed. No audio or visual taping of class is permitted without the instructor’s approval.

Course Objectives

1. To develop a working knowledge of the “major” religions of the world.
2. To develop an understanding of the religious experience and various responses to that experience throughout the world.
3. To develop an appreciation and tolerance for other cultures and their religions.
4. To develop the necessary skill to characterize the various types of religions and an appreciation for their differences & similarities.
5. To develop the necessary critical skills when dealing with religious problems on a personal, social, and global basis.
6. To incorporate the religious perspective into one's personal life.
7. To develop the “whole person”—one who is not narrowly defined—through the study and development of the religious dimension of life.

Text

Publisher: HarperOne
ISBN-978-0-066342-1

*Books should be available at the General Book Store as well—highly recommended.

Introduction – May 30
A. Sacred Mysteries: definitions of and approaches to religion
B. Structure of the Sacred: taxonomy of symbolic forms
   1. Scripture
   2. Myth
   3. Ritual
   4. Dogma
   5. Institutions
C. Structure of the Sacred: taxonomy of symbolic forms
Vessels of the Sacred: Primitive, Semitic, South Asian, & East Asian traditions
Read “Introduction” in The World’s Religions, 10-28

II. THE STORY
Mythic/Primitive Religions – May 31-June 4
A. Participatory modes of being in the world: totemism, animism
B. Types of religion: polytheism, monotheism, transcendent, immanent (Homer's Iliad)
C. Gender in early Greek religion/mythology: Hesiod's Theogony
D. The Sacred in Herakleitos
E. The Story as explanation
Read Chapter Eight on Primal Religions, Handouts, and self-investigate the phenomenon of religion

III. THE WORD
The Abrahamic Traditions – June 5-12
A. Introduction to Abrahamic traditions: In the beginning was Silence, and then the Word
B. Judaism: then the Word was made Law
C. Christianity: then the Word was made Flesh
D. Islam: then the Word was made Book
E. Mystical Trends: the Word as Love
Read Chapter Five on Judaism
Read Chapter Six on Christianity
Read Chapter Seven on Islam

IV. THE WHEEL
The South Asian Traditions – June 13-18
A. Vedic Religion: The Wheel of Fire
B. Hinduism: The Wheel of Creation & Destruction
Read Chapters One and Two on Hinduism and Buddhism

V. THE WAY
The East Asian Traditions – June 19-21
A. Chinese Religions: The Way of Heaven
B. Buddhism: The Way of the Buddha
   1. Indian Buddhism
   2. East Asian Buddhism
C. Confucianism: The Way of Man and Woman
D. Daoism and Zen: The Way of Nature
Read Chapters Three and Four on Confucianism and Daoism (Taoism)

VI. THE JUDGMENT
Final Exam – June 27