



Syllabus for Religions of the World

Course Information

Semester & Year: Fall 2021

Course ID & Section #: PHIL-15-E1958

Instructor's name: Austin Roberts

Day/Time: TTH, 1:15-2:40pm

Location: CA113

Course units: 3

Instructor Contact Information

Zoom Office hours or chats by arrangement through email request

Email address: austin-roberts@redwoods.edu

Catalog Description

An introductory examination of religious thought, experience, and expression associated with living religions of the world. Religions that may be studied include Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Primal.

Course Student Learning Outcomes *(from course outline of record)*

1. Describe the historical, intellectual, and cultural contexts of various religious traditions and texts.
2. Analyze the philosophical and religious ideas that underlie and are reflected in the practices and sacred texts of various religions, including concepts of nature, ultimate reality, cosmology, and ethics.

Prerequisites/co-requisites/ recommended preparation

None

Accessibility

College of the Redwoods is committed to making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. If you have a disability or believe you might benefit from disability-related services and accommodations, please contact your instructor or [Disability Services and Programs for Students](#) (DSPS). Students may make requests for alternative media by contacting DSPS based on their campus location:

- Eureka: 707-476-4280, student services building, 1st floor
- Del Norte: 707-465-2324, main building near library
- Klamath-Trinity: 530-625-4821 Ext 103

If you are taking online classes DSPS will email approved accommodations for distance education classes to your instructor. In the case of face-to-face instruction, please present your written accommodation request to your instructor at least one week before the needed accommodation so that necessary arrangements can be made. Last minute arrangements or post-test adjustments usually cannot be accommodated.

Religions of the World

Whoever knows one religion, knows none.
–Max Müller

The passion for truth is silenced by answers which have the weight of undisputed authority.
–Paul Tillich

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3

Year and Semester:

Fall 2021

Prerequisites:

None

Day/Time:

TTH, 1:15-2:40pm

Location:

CA113

Instructor Information

Instructor:

Dr. Austin Roberts

Email:

austin-roberts@redwoods.edu

Zoom Office Hours: By appointment

Course Materials

Required Textbook:

God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World, 1st edition (ISBN: 978-0061571282)

Stephen Prothero, HarperOne, 2010.

Purchase used/new from CR or online bookstores (\$6+)

Additional Required Readings: available on Canvas


Computer Requirements:

Internet access and MS Word compatible software

Students can obtain a free Office 365 license with a valid CR

email: <https://www.redwoods.edu/Services/Office365>

Canvas Information:

Log in to Canvas at <https://redwoods.instructure.com>

Password is your 8-digit birth date

For tech help, email its@redwoods.edu or call 707-476-4160

Canvas Help for students:

<https://www.redwoods.edu/online/Help-Student>

Course Description and Objectives

Religious diversity is a fact of modern societies. In our increasingly interconnected world, multiple religious beliefs and practices frequently come into contact with one another. Often, religions peacefully *coexist*—but sometimes they *clash*. At other times, they creatively *combine*. This dynamic situation is reshaping both the private and public spheres of societies. It affects everything from individual beliefs and family interactions, to political institutions and international relations. Moreover, this situation is unlikely to change anytime soon. After decades of thinking that modernity would cause religions to fade away, most scholars now agree that religion will remain a powerful force around the world for the foreseeable future.

This course is designed to enable you to better navigate this dynamic world of religion. It offers a philosophically informed survey of the world's major religions, thereby providing knowledge of myriad spiritual paths, multicultural values, and critical thinking skills. We will consider the different ways in which the world's major religions answer questions about the nature of ultimate reality, how one should live in the world, and the purpose of human existence. The course therefore emphasizes the importance of understanding how *worldviews* shape human culture, society, ethics, and the intimacy of our own personal experiences. Because religions have defined worldviews at their most fundamental level for many centuries, the study of religion provides an excellent focus for the critical examination of diverse beliefs.

However, religions are not just about beliefs. They have important *practical* dimensions as well, and they are shaped by different *histories*. As much as possible, we will therefore explore religions holistically in terms of their *teachings*, *ways of life*, and *historical development*. We will not be assuming the absolute truth of any tradition, nor will we assume that all are really the same. Rather, we will study each of the traditions on their own terms, recognizing differences *and* similarities among them. Today we use the word “religion” to describe a broad range of global traditions—from Christianity and Islam, to Buddhism and many indigenous traditions. We will learn to think critically about the nature of “religion,” and to raise questions about the extent to which it makes sense to call each of these traditions a “religion.”

1. Course Objectives: Upon completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- a. Demonstrate a basic understanding of the world's major religions.
- b. Demonstrate an ability to articulate ideas about religious traditions, rituals, and texts.
- c. Use philosophical methods, assumptions, and principles to analyze religious ideas and arguments.

2. Methods of Instruction: In most of our weekly class meetings, this course will blend lectures, videos, class discussions, and various writing and small group activities.

Course Schedule

This schedule may change depending on time and other factors. Beyond our main textbook (Prothero's *God Is Not One*), additional required readings are on Canvas under Files.

Week One (August 24 & 26):

Topics: *Class Introductions; Introduction to Religious Studies*

Reading: Prothero, Introduction

⇒ Submit Student Survey by August 26th at 1:00pm

Week Two (August 31 & September 2):

Topics: *Theories of Religion; Native American Traditions*

Readings: 1—Brodd, “Invitation to Study World Religions” (excerpt)

2—Brodd, “Indigenous Religions of North America” (excerpt)

Week Three (September 7 & 9):

Topics: *Native American Traditions (cont.); Yoruba*

Readings: 1—Tinker, “An American Indian Cultural Universe”

2—Prothero, Chapter 6 (203-223)

⇒ **In-class Film:** *Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock* (excerpt)

Week Four (September 14 & 16):

Topic: *Hinduism*

Reading: Prothero, Chapter 4

⇒ Reflection #1: Response to *Awake* due by September 14th at 1:00pm

Week Five (September 21 & 23):

Topics: *Siddhartha Gautama & the Beginnings of Buddhism*

Readings: 1—Prothero, Chapter 5 (169-184)

2—“[The Noble Eightfold Path](#)”

⇒ **In-class Film:** *The Buddha* (Part 1 of 2)

Week Six (September 28 & 30):

Topic: *Buddhist Philosophy & Traditions*

Readings: 1—Prothero, Chapter 5 (184-201)

2—Thich Nhat Hanh, “Interbeing”

⇒ Reflection #2: Response to *The Buddha* (Parts 1 & [2](#)) due by September 28th at 1:00pm

Week Seven (October 5 & 7):

Topic: *Religious Philosophies of China*

Readings: 1—Prothero, Chapter 3 (101-118)

2—Prothero, Chapter 8 (279-299)

Week Eight (October 12 & 14):

Mid-Semester Discussion & Review (Tuesday); ONLINE MIDTERM exam (Thursday)

Week Nine (October 19 & 21):

Topics: *Hebrew Bible & the Beginnings of Judaism*

Readings: 1—Two Creation Stories (Genesis 1 & 2)
2—Prothero, Chapter 7 (243-260)

Week Ten (October 26 & 28):

Topics: *Judaism & the Problem of Evil*

Readings: 1—Prothero, Chapter 7 (261-278)
2—Brodd, “God, Evil, and Afterlife”
3—Wiesel, “Night”

Week Eleven (November 2 & 4):

Topics: *The Historical Jesus & the Beginnings of Christianity*

Readings: 1—Brodd, “The Messiah, Jesus, and Early Christian Theology”
2—Ehrman, “Finding the Historical Jesus”

⇒ Reflection #3: Response to “the problem of evil” due by November 2nd at 1:00pm

Week Twelve (November 9):

Topic: *Orthodoxy, Heaven, and the Message of Jesus*

Readings: 1—Prothero, Chapter 2 (64-73)
2—Ehrman, “Diversity of the Early Church”
3—Jesus’ [“Message on the Plain”](#) (Luke 6:20-42)

Week Thirteen (November 16 & 18):

Topic: *Protestant & Catholic Christianities*

Readings: 1—Prothero, Chapter 2 (74-99)
2—Jones, “Liberal Christianity”
3—Ruether, “The Prophetic, Iconoclastic Christ”

⇒ Worldview Comparison due by Saturday, November 20th

Week Fourteen (November 22–26):

FALL BREAK

Week Fifteen (November 30 & December 2):

Topic: *Islam*

Reading: Prothero, Chapter 1

⇒ **In-class Film:** *A Sinner In Mecca*

Week Sixteen (December 7 & 9):

Final Discussion & Review (Tuesday); ONLINE FINAL exam (Thursday)

Week Seventeen (December 14 & 16):

⇒ Reflection #4: End-of-semester reflection due by December 14th

Course Requirements and Grading

Requirements:

- *Participation*: 30%
- *Reflections*: 20%
- *Midterm exam*: 15% (Oct. 14th)
- *Worldview Comparison*: 20% (due by Nov. 20th)
- *Final exam*: 15% (Dec. 9th)

Grading Scale: 95%—100% = A; 90—94% = A-; 87%—89% = B+; 84%—86% = B; 80%—83% = B-; 75%—79% = C+; 70%—74% = C; 60%—69% = D; 59% or below = F

Assignment Details

-Participation: Succeeding in this class will depend significantly on your participation. Classroom participation includes attending weekly classes, actively listening, taking notes, and contributing to discussions through questions and/or substantive comments. *Always come to class with at least one thoughtful question or comment based on the readings.* You may be asked to share a question or comment in class. Anyone who distinguishes themselves by contributing significantly to class discussions with thoughtful questions and comments may receive extra points for doing so. Note that being consistently late or leaving class early will affect your participation grade. You are allowed *two* unexcused absences during the semester, beyond which your participation grade will be negatively impacted. Officially documented medical, legal, or bereavement absences are of course excused. Excused absences allow you to make up missed work.

-Reflections: Students will submit four short (~250-word) reflections on specified topics through Canvas. Writing prompts are provided for all topics, which include reflections on a film about Native American activists, a film about the Buddha, the problem of evil, and an end-of-semester reflection. As noted in the course schedule, these reflections have assigned due dates: 9/14, 9/28, 11/2, and 12/14. Reflections should be thoughtful, well-written, and have the word count listed at the top of the page.

-Exams (Midterm, Oct. 14th; Final, Dec. 9th): There will be two online exams to ensure your understanding of the course material. Both will be primarily multiple choice, and they will be based on the readings and lectures up to that point in the semester. The final will not be cumulative. *Prior to each exam, I will distribute study guides and we will have a review session so that you know what to expect.* You can begin preparing for the exams by keeping up on the readings, taking good notes, and participating in class.

-Worldview Comparison (due by November 20th at 11:59pm): You will need to write one essay (1000-1500 words/~4-6 pages) in which you compare your worldview with one of the religious worldviews that we are studying this semester. Whether you describe your worldview as religious, spiritual, or secular, this assignment provides you with an opportunity to reflect on your beliefs about ultimate reality, the human predicament, life's meaning, ethics, moral exemplars, and other important religious or philosophical issues, and to do so in dialogue with an alternative worldview that intrigues you. For example, if you are a Christian, you might choose Buddhism as the alternative worldview for your essay. If you are an agnostic, or spiritual but not religious, you might engage Taoism as your alternative worldview. The choice is up to you. Questions that you should consider in your essay include: What worldviews are you comparing? Why is the alternative worldview intriguing to you? What are some notable differences between the two worldviews? Do they have anything in common? What spiritual practices (e.g., prayer, yoga, meditation) are associated with these worldviews? Are there aspects of the alternative worldview that you appreciate, that puzzle you, and/or that caused you to question or alter your worldview? Why do you believe what you

believe, rather than the alternative worldview? To develop your comparison, you might incorporate Prothero's four-part approach to religions (Problem, Solution, Techniques, Exemplars), which is outlined on page 14 of the textbook. Your essay should include a concise 1-2 page summary of the alternative worldview, followed by ~2-4 pages of thoughtful comparisons of your worldview with the alternative worldview.

***Essay Format:** 1000-word minimum/1500-word maximum, 12-point font, double spaced, with 1-inch margins. Part of your paper grade will depend on whether you follow these instructions. When you cite sources in your papers, I will accept any professional format (e.g., Harvard, APA, Chicago, MLA). You must include a bibliography (which does not count toward your essay's word count), and you must cite at least 2 scholarly sources beyond our textbook. Wikipedia *cannot* be used as a source. University press publications and academic journal articles are generally good sources.

Disclaimer Regarding Changes: The instructor reserves the right to change or alter this syllabus as necessary.

Course Policies

Attendance:

Students are expected to be punctual and attend all courses in which they are enrolled. Regular attendance is important for satisfactory academic progress. If you are not regularly attending class, this will have an impact on your participation grade. You may be dropped from the class as a result of frequent unexcused absences.

Late Work:

Late work will receive point reductions, and only be accepted from students who have requested to turn work in late *prior* to its due date. Work turned in more than a week late will not be accepted unless the student and instructor have come to an agreement beforehand in verifiable communication. Late essays are immediately lowered 10%. For each successive 24-hour period that they are late, essays will continue to be lowered 10%. Late reflections are lowered two points. I will read late essays and reflections when possible, but students may receive very limited feedback on late work. If you turn work in late, know that I might not be able to read and grade it until much later in the term, perhaps even the last week of the semester.

Exceptions to this late work policy will of course be made for officially documented medical, legal, or bereavement absences.

Student Conduct:

Our classroom should be a safe learning environment. Students are expected to treat the instructor and each other with respect. Please avoid making sarcastic comments in class, which tend to shut down otherwise productive discussions. Student behavior or speech that disrupts the instructional setting will not be tolerated. Disruptive conduct may include, but is not limited to: unwarranted interruptions; failure to adhere to instructor's directions; obscene language; slurs or other forms of intimidation; and physically or verbally abusive behavior. In such cases where the instructor determines that a student has disrupted the educational process, a disruptive student may be temporarily removed from class.

Nondiscrimination Statement:

In accordance with College of the Redwoods Board Policy AP3410, discrimination or harassment based on national origin, religion, age, gender, gender identity, race or ethnicity, color, medical condition, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, or marital status is prohibited in any form. All individuals are to be

respected and treated with dignity and civility. Students are encouraged to participate fully in class discussions and to engage other students and the instructor in a professional and respectful manner.

Academic Dishonesty:

In the academic community, the high value placed on truth implies a corresponding intolerance of scholastic dishonesty. Acts of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to, cheating, tampering, fabricating, plagiarizing, or assisting others in an act of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is defined as representing someone else's words, ideas, artistry, or data as one's own, including copying another person's work without appropriate referencing; presenting someone else's opinions and theories as one's own; or working jointly on a project, then submitting it as one's own. In cases involving academic dishonesty, determination of the grade and of the student's status in the course is left primarily to the discretion of the faculty member. In such cases, where the instructor determines that a student has demonstrated academic dishonesty, the student may receive a failing grade for the assignment and/or exam and may be reported to the Chief Student Services Officer.

Special accommodations statement:

College of the Redwoods complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. Please present your accommodation request at least one week before the first test so that necessary arrangements can be made. No last-minute arrangements or post-test adjustments will be made. If you have a disability or believe you might benefit from disability-related services and accommodations, please email me or contact Disability Services and Programs for Students. Students may make requests for alternative media by contacting DSPS at 707-476-4280. All information and documentation are confidential.

Fall 2021 admissions deadlines & enrollment policies:

- *Classes begin: 8/21/21*
- *Last day to add a class: 8/27/21*
- *Last day to drop without a W and receive a refund: 9/03/21*
- *Labor Day Holiday (all campuses closed): 09/06/21*
- *Census date: 9/07/21 or 20% into class duration*
- *Last day to petition to graduate or apply for certificate: 10/28/21*
- *Last day for student-initiated W (no refund): 10/29/21*
- *Last day for faculty-initiated W (no refund): 10/29/21*
- *Veteran's Day (all campuses closed): 11/11/21*
- *Fall Break (no classes): 11/22/21 – 11/26/21*
- *Thanksgiving Holiday (all campuses closed): 11/24/21 – 11/26/21*
- *Final examinations: 12/11/21 – 12/17/21*
- *Last day to petition to file P/NP option: 12/17/21*
- *Semester ends: 12/17/21*
- *Grades available for transcript release: approximately 01/07/22*

Cell Phone and Recording Policies:

PLEASE TURN YOUR CELL PHONES OFF (OR TO SILENT MODE) DURING CLASS. Use of a cell phone, smart phone, or similar device during class can be considered a classroom disruption and may result in the student being dismissed from the class for the day. If there is an urgent need to have a cell phone or messaging device turned on during class (such as for a medical, family, or child-care emergency), set the device to vibrate and step outside of the classroom to answer the call with a minimum of disturbance to the class. Audio/video recording of lectures is only permitted for students with proper DSPS forms, and for the

student's *individual use only*. Recordings may *not* be shared online. Cameras may not be used during classroom meetings without instructor approval.

Essay Submission Policy:

Essays must be submitted over Canvas. In general, I do not accept printed essays.

Course Withdrawal:

To be dropped from the class, it is the student's responsibility to drop online through WebAdvisor or through the Admissions and Records Office. Do not assume you will be dropped if you stop participating in class. If you stop participating and fail to drop the class by the last drop date (9/3/21), it is possible that you will receive an F in the course.

Community College Student Health and Wellness

Resources, tools, and trainings regarding health, mental health, wellness, basic needs and more designed for California community college students, faculty and staff are available on the California Community Colleges [Health & Wellness website](#). [Wellness Central](#) is a free online health and wellness resource that is available 24/7 in your space at your pace. Students seeking to request a counseling appointment for academic advising or general counseling can email counseling@redwoods.edu

COVID Classroom Protocols

Masks are required for all students in the classroom. A student's refusal to comply with COVID classroom protocols is grounds for dismissal from the classroom. Students may choose to bring their own appropriate cloth face covering or surgical face masks, and these masks must be worn at all times in the indoor classroom, other public indoor spaces, and outdoors when gathering with others in groups of more than four. Bandanas, neck gaiters, or 'buffs' are not effective face coverings. The mask must be worn so as to cover both nose and mouth. The mask should not have an exhalation valve or vent. This is to help prevent spread of respiratory droplets which may carry disease, even if one is asymptomatic. Students should also maximize the amount of physical distance between themselves and other students. If you have been exposed to COVID-19, are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, or have tested positive for COVID-19, you should immediately let me know, self-quarantine, and not attend class sessions. For the sake of heightened classroom hygiene, students should avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth. *This includes no eating in the classroom.* Students should wash/sanitize hands after interactions with others and/or entering or leaving class.