



· UVIC HUMANITIES ·

— ENRICH · INSPIRE · PROVOKE · ENGAGE —

PHIL 261 (Fall 2023)

Philosophy of Religion



Instructor: Dr. Chris Goto-Jones (he/him) (chrisgotojones@uvic.ca)

Teaching Assistant: Mekhalalati, Salah (salahreyes@gmail.com)

Office Hours: Monday 12:30-13:20 and Thursday 12.30-13.20 TBC (booking link to follow)

Class Information: Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday at 11.30-12.20 (on Zoom)

Course Website: Through Brightspace. <http://bright.uvic.ca>

Readings available through the course website – all available electronically when on campus network.

Links to academic support and other services available through course site.

If you notice any accessibility issues with respect to this class, please let me know. If they are within my power, I will do my best to solve them. In general, though, I would also encourage any students who might benefit from their services to register with the Centre for Accessible Learning (www.uvic.ca/services/cal/), where accommodations and other support can be sought.

Course Description

This course is an introduction to the philosophy of religion today. Although traditional courses of this kind in 'Western' universities have tended to focus almost entirely upon Abrahamic religions and theology, this course will approach 'religion' in a more inclusive and less Euro-centric manner. Hence, the course will consider what the category of 'religion' might actually entail, considering a range of cases from around the world. I make no claims that this course is exhaustive: there are far too many religious traditions in the world for them all to appear in any individual course, although all of them are more than worthy of our attention.

Rather than being framed around the central question of 'God,' this course will consider how the philosophy of religion attends to issues such as belief, faith, reason, experience, and practice. In particular, the course will consider some of the ways in which religious traditions from outside the Judeo-Christian world challenge and perhaps even transform our understanding of these issues and thus of the idea of religion itself. Concretely, this course will introduce some ideas from Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism and others. It will also explore how the European tradition includes voices of mysticism and transcendental practice that don't always 'fit' within the conventional narrative of 'religion.'

By the end of this course, you can expect to:

- Understand the basic contours of the philosophy of religion today;
- Be able to explain how different religious traditions from around the world challenge and contribute to the philosophy of religion;
- Be able to differentiate between questions of faith and reason in the context of religion;
- Understand the significance of argument, text, experience, and practice as resources in the philosophy of religion;
- Demonstrate understanding of key concepts and arguments in a range of religious traditions, especially from Asia.

Course materials

This course is structured around two central books, both of which are available electronically through Uvic library – you should be able to access them both, in full, for the duration of this course. Alternatively, if you'd prefer hard copies, you are welcome to buy them – they're both excellent. Additional materials, including text excerpts and alternative readings will be provided through Brightspace.

- Kevin Schilbrack, *Philosophy and the Study of Religions: A Manifesto*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014. (<https://voyager.library.uvic.ca/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=4255579>)
- Sonia Sikka & Adwani Kumar Peetush (eds), *Asian Philosophies and the Idea of Religion: beyond faith and reason*. London: Routledge, 2021. (<https://voyager.library.uvic.ca/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=5219001>)

Course Logistics

This will be a mostly *synchronous* online course. This means that the classes will be held in real-time online via **Zoom**. In a few cases, pre-recorded videos may be used. Attendance is highly recommended, since interaction and discussion are vital to learning (and teaching!). Most of the sessions will be recorded and made available for the class to review on **Brightspace**. These recordings will remain available throughout the course so that you can refer to them as needed. In some weeks we may have guest teachers from other universities, in which case I hope you will all attend those sessions out of respect for their freely-given time. If you are sick or have other good reason to miss the class, please let me know *in advance of the class* (or as soon as possible thereafter).

Academic Integrity

Everything you will be evaluated on in this course will be fully open book and untimed. All answers to assignments have to be your own written work. This means that you are not allowed to provide answers for someone else, or *vice versa* or even *versa vice*. If you are ever unsure about what constitutes a violation of academic integrity, more information is provided on the University Calendar:

<http://web.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/info/regulations/academic-integrity.html>

Professionalism is expected from all students enrolled in courses in the Faculty of Humanities. As part of professionalism, students, faculty and staff are expected to be familiar with University policies, including the [Tri-Faculty's Standards for Professional Behaviour](#).

Communication and Office Hours

Email is my preferred method of communication, as opposed to *Brightspace* messages or forum posts, especially for any official requests. If you ask me a question over email, you can expect a reply within about 1 working day. If you don't hear back from me within that time frame, feel free to try again in case your message went astray, or in case I'm just snowed under (it happens). Just FYI, if you write to me on Friday night, the first working day will be Monday ... 😊

When you do address me (over email or otherwise), please do so as Chris, because that's my name. If you feel more comfortable with titles, then please use either Professor (Prof.) Goto-Jones or Dr. Goto-Jones. No 'sir' or 'mr,' for various reasons, thanks! If you are ever nervous about sending me an email, or asking a question, feel free to include a funny anecdote, cartoon, or a picture of your pet with your request. This will not affect whether or not I will be able to help you with your request, but it will be much more fun for us all.

Finally, my pronouns are he/him. If you think I am unlikely to know the name you would prefer to be called, or the pronouns I ought to use for you (through the entry that I will see for you through your Brightspace/UVic registration), please don't hesitate to make me aware. It's helpful if you add your pronouns to your Zoom tag.

My default platform for office hours will be Zoom, Mondays and Thursdays 12:30-13:20 am, but if that does not work for you, please feel free to email me in advance to suggest an alternative time and/or platform. Office hours will require pre-booking via Calendly (link to follow). If you don't make an appointment, you are welcome to sit in the Zoom waiting room until I become free, but please keep in mind that all the slots might already be booked. All relevant links will be posted on Brightspace.

Evaluation

You are expected to maintain high standards of respect and academic integrity throughout this course. Discussion is essential to learning in this course, and it relies upon an atmosphere of trust. Everyone present should feel safe to express their views, which also means that everyone present is responsible for ensuring that they exercise academic freedom (rather than merely freedom of speech), treating each other respectfully and supportively.

• Continuous Assessment/Participation: 15%

In this course, your participation will be evidenced by attending and participating in classes and by submitting weekly 'reflections.' These 'reflections' will be short (approx. 150-200 word) responses to excerpts of text drawn from the weekly reading (or from a text adjacent to the reading). Usually, the prompt will be provided during or after class on Wednesday and will be due by 11.59pm on the following Tuesday. The purpose is to demonstrate thoughtfulness and reflection rather than to test your mastery of the material. These reflections are graded simply: 'excellent/satisfactory/fail.'

• Midterm assignment: 35% - deadline: Friday 27 October, 23:59

The midterm assignment will be open-book format. You will receive a list of questions two weeks before the deadline. From this list you will **answer two** with **approx. 750 words each**. The midterm will address topics from the first half of the course.

Your work will be assessed on: its relevance to the themes and materials of the course; its accurate use of sources; its coherence, sophistication and persuasiveness; the convincingness and effectiveness of your argument and writing. Personal reflection and engagement is encouraged.

• **Final assignment: 50% - deadline: Friday 8 December, 23:59**

The final assignment will be open-book format. You will receive a list of potential topics in week 11 (reading break). From that list, you can select one question, which you will address in a more extended and sophisticated manner than in the midterm. I will expect **approx. 1500-2000 words**. The questions will encourage you to focus on topics from the second half of the course, but your answers will benefit from making use of knowledge and context from the whole course.

Your work will be assessed on: its relevance to the themes and materials of the course; its accurate use of sources; its coherence, sophistication and persuasiveness; the convincingness and effectiveness of your argument and writing. Personal reflection and engagement is encouraged.

Grades

Grades will be given as percentile marks.

Per UVic grading rubric, the percentile mark for the course will be converted to a letter grade in the following manner:

A+ = 90 - 100, A = 85 - 89, A- = 80 - 84, B+ = 77 - 79, B = 73 - 76, B- = 70 - 72, C+ = 65 - 69, C = 60 - 64, D = 50 - 59, F = 0 - 49.

- *The A range means exceptional, outstanding and excellent performance.*
- *A grade in the B range means a very good, good and solid performance.*
- *A grade in the C+ or C range means satisfactory, or minimally satisfactory, performance.*
- *A grade of D or D- indicates merely passable or marginal performance.*
- *An F indicates unsatisfactory performance.*

The full UVic grading rubric is provided in the Appendix to this syllabus. In the instance that it differs from this text, the UVic rubric takes precedence.

SCHEDULE

PART ONE: TOWARDS A COHERENT AND MEANINGFUL PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION TODAY

Week 1: Wednesday 6 September – Friday 8 September: *in search of a soul – is god dead?*

There are no set readings for this first, short week, since I don't expect anyone to work on this course before the start of the semester. We'll discuss the course outline, format, assessment regime etc and deal with questions. And then, Friday, we'll consider some of the important ways that philosophers in the modern period have approached the issue of religion, which is often seen as a 'problem' for modernity,

Those of you who are excited to get going might consider this optional reading: Carl Jung, 'The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man.' In *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. New York: Harcourt, 1933/2016, pp.196-220.

Week 2: Tuesday 12 September – Friday 15 September: *for what is philosophy of religion?*

Kevin Schilbrack, *Philosophy and the Study of Religions: A Manifesto*, Ch. 1, "The Full Task of Philosophy of Religion" (1-27)

PART TWO: SOME BIG IDEAS: BELIEF, FAITH, AND REASON

Week 3: Tuesday 19 September – Friday 22 September: *is 'belief' required for religion?*

Schilbrack, Ch. 3, "Must Religious People Have Religious Beliefs?" (53-80)

Optional:

Paul Carelli & Sarah Mattice, "Ruism and the Category of Religion: Or, what to do about the Confucians?" in Sikka & Peetush, Ch. 6 (19 pages)

Week 4: Tuesday 26 September – Friday 29 September: *the exclusion of 'faith' from philosophy?*

Peetush, "Enlightening the unEnlightened: the exclusion of Advaita Vedānta from the Western Philosophical canon," in Sikka & Peetush, Ch. 5 (30 pages)

Week 5: Tuesday 3 October – Friday 6 October: *on the place of faith in 'Western' philosophy*

Catherine Collobert, "Reason and Faith on the path to the transcendent in Plotinus," in Sikka & Peetush, Ch. 10 (16 pages)

Week 6: Tuesday 10 October – Friday 13 October: *considering faith, action, and knowledge*

Bret Davis, "Faith and/or/as enlightenment: rethinking religion from the perspective of Japanese Buddhism," in Sikka & Peetush, Ch. 3 (29 pages)

MIDTERM QUESTIONS ISSUED

PART THREE: PRACTICE, EXPERIENCE, AND MYSTICISM

Week 7: Tuesday 17 October – Friday 20 October: *can 'practice' also be philosophy?*

Schilbrack, Ch. 2, "Are Religious Practices Philosophical?" (29-51)

Week 8: Tuesday 24 October – Friday 27 October: what are mystical and religious experiences?
Jerome Gellman, "Mysticism and Religious Experience," in William Wainwright (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, (28 pages)

MIDTERM DUE – 27 October 11.59pm

Week 9: Tuesday 31 October – Friday 1 November: faith, action, and action that isn't ... action
Julianne Chung, "Faith, reason, and the paradox of *wu-wei* in the *Zhuangzi*," in Sikka & Peetush, Ch. 7 (22 pages)

Week 10: Tuesday 7 November – Friday 10 November: the place of contemplation in philosophy of religion
Erin McCarthy, "Between Faith and Reason: feminist contemplative pedagogy," in Sikka & Peetush, Ch. 12 (18 pages)

PART FOUR: PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION TODAY

Week 11: Tuesday 14 November – Friday 17 November: is there any role for religion today?
Schilbrack, Ch. 6, "Are Religions Out of Touch with Reality?" (148-174)

FINAL ASSIGNMENT ISSUED

Week 12: Tuesday 21 November – Friday 24 November: is religion being replaced by 'spirituality'?
Sikka, "Thoughtful Seekers among the 'spiritual but not religious'," in Sikka & Peetush, Ch. 11 (18 pages)

Week 13: Tuesday 28 November – Friday 1 December: review of main ideas and arguments – manifesto

FINAL ASSIGNMENT DUE – 8 December 11.59pm

Please note that all assignments for this course and all materials posted to Brightspace are the intellectual property of myself and the University of Victoria. Do not circulate this material or post it to note-sharing sites without my permission. Posting course materials to note-sharing sites or otherwise circulating course materials without the permission of your instructor violates the *Policy on Academic Integrity*: (<http://web.uvic.ca/calendar/FACS/UnIn/UARE/PoAcl.html>).

APPENDIX: UVIC GRADING RUBRIC

<https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/index.php#/policy/S1AAgoGuV?bc=true&bcCurrent=14%20-%20Grading&bcltemType=policies>

A primary purpose of evaluation and grading is to further effective teaching and learning. Any practices which assign a predetermined percentage of students a specific grade, that is, a certain percentage get A, another percentage get B and so on, without regard to individual achievement are prohibited.

The table below shows the official grading system used by instructors in arriving at final assessments of student performance. For letter grades authorized for use in the Faculty of Law, see the entry under that faculty.

| Passing Grades | | | |
|----------------|----------------|-------------------|---|
| Grade | Grade Value | Point Percentage* | Description |
| A+ | 9 | 90 - 100 | An A+, A, or A- is earned by work which is technically superior, shows mastery of the subject matter, and in the case of an A+ offers original insight and/or goes beyond course expectations. Normally achieved by a minority of students. |
| A | 8 | 85 - 89 | |
| A- | 7 | 80 - 84 | |
| B+ | 6 | 77 - 79 | A B+, B, or B- is earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student's full engagement with the course requirements and activities. A B+ represents a more complex understanding and/or application of the course material. |
| B | 5 | 73 - 76 | |
| B- | 4 | 70 - 72 | |
| C+ | 3 | 65 - 69 | A C+ or C is earned by work that indicates an adequate comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and/or participating in class activities. |
| C | 2 | 60 - 64 | |
| D | 1 | 50 - 59 | A D is earned by work that indicates minimal command of the course materials and/or minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree. |
| COM | Excluded Grade | N/A | Complete (pass). Used only for 0-unit courses and those credit courses designated by the Senate. Such courses are identified in the course listings. |
| CTN | Excluded Grade | N/A | Continuing . Denotes the first half of a full-year course. |
| Failing Grades | | | |
| Grade | Grade Value | Point Percentage* | Description |
| E | 0 | 0 - 49 | Conditional supplemental. Supplemental examinations are not offered by all departments and the allowable percentage may vary by program (e.g. 35-49). Students will be advised whether supplemental will be offered and if the percentage range varies when assessment techniques are announced at the beginning of the course. |
| F | 0 | 0 - 49 | F is earned by work, which after the completion of course requirements, is inadequate and unworthy of course credit towards the degree. |
| N | 0 | 0 - 49 | Did not write examination or complete course requirements by the end of term or session; no supplemental. |

| Failing Grades | | | |
|----------------|----------------|-------------------|---|
| Grade | Grade Value | Point Percentage* | Description |
| N/X | Excluded Grade | N/A | Did not complete course requirements by the end of the term; no supplemental. Used only for Co-op work terms and for courses designated by Senate. Such courses are identified in the course listings. The grade is EXCLUDED from the calculation of all grade point averages. |
| F/X | Excluded Grade | N/A | Unsatisfactory performance. Completed course requirements; no supplemental. Used only for Co-op work terms and for courses designated by Senate. Such courses are identified in the course listings. The grade is EXCLUDED from the calculation of all grade point averages. |

| Temporary Grades | | | |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------|--|
| Grade | Grade Point Value | Percentage* | Description |
| INC | N/A | N/A | Incomplete. Used only for those credit courses designated by the Senate, to be replaced with a final grade by June 1 for Winter Session courses and by October 1 for Summer Session courses. Such courses are identified in the course listings. |
| DEF | N/A | N/A | Deferred status granted. Used only when deferred status has been granted because of illness, an accident or family affliction. See Deferred status . |
| INP | N/A | N/A | In Progress. Used only for courses designated by Senate, to be replaced with a final grade by the end of the next Winter Session except for TIED courses (identified in the Calendar). In TIED courses the INP must be replaced with a final grade by the end of the subsequent term (including Summer Session) or, where a COOP Work Term, or other activity approved by the academic unit, intervenes, within eight months. If a student fails to complete the second course of a TIED course sequence, then the final grade will be N. |
| CIC | N/A | N/A | Co-op Interrupted Course. See General Regulations: Undergraduate Co-op . |

| Grade notes | | | |
|-------------|-------------------|-------------|---|
| Grade note | Grade Point Value | Percentage* | Description |
| AEG | N/A | N/A | Aegrotat. Transcript notation accompanying a letter grade, assigned where documented illness or similar affliction affected the student's performance or prevented completion of all course work. |
| WE | N/A | N/A | Withdrawal under extenuating circumstances. The WE registration status will replace a course registration or grade when approved by the Dean following a request for academic concession from a student. This registration status is excluded from the calculation of all grade point averages; it will appear on the official transcript. |

* The grading scale for the evaluation of course achievement at the University of Victoria is a percentage scale that translates to a 9 point GPA/letter grade system. The 9 point GPA system is the sole basis for the calculation of grade point averages and academic standing. Standardized percentage ranges have been established as the basis for the assignment of letter grades. The percentage grades are displayed on the official and administrative transcripts in order to provide fine grained course assessment which will be useful to students particularly in their application to graduate studies and for external scholarships and funding. Comparative grading information (average grade [mean] for the class), along with the number of students in the class, is displayed for each course section for which percentage grades are assigned.