

Philosophy 525: The Nature of Religious Experience

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Instructor: Dr. Pamela Hood
Class: T/TH 9:25-10:50am
Classroom: HUM 109
Office Hours: T/TH: 2-3:30pm

Email: hood.religion@gmail.com (preferred)
SFSU Email: phood@sfsu.edu
Dr. Hood's Office: HUM 359
Office phone: (415) 405-3790
Dr. Hood's fax: (866) 861-2541

Websites

iLearn: <https://ilearn.sfsu.edu/login/index.php>
PHIL 525 Course web: <http://profpam.com/religion/525>
Dr. Hood's religion blog: <http://profpam.com/religion>
Dr. Hood's main web: <http://profpam.com>

Course Description

What is a religious experience? How does one explain the phenomenon of religious experience? Can a person tell if someone is having a religious experience? Does it make sense to look for criteria for what counts as "religious experience"? Are there different standards for believers or a non-believers when they are judging the matter? Does it make any difference whether religion or the religious is actually "true" or not? How would one determine this anyway?

In this course we will contemplate these and other questions while we study various academic, as opposed to religious, accounts of religion. This isn't a course *in* Religion. It's a philosophy course *about* Religion. We will spend most of our time exploring how theorists from an array of academic disciplines within the humanities and social sciences explain the nature of religion and religious experience.

Along the way we will observe very deep divisions between the theorists. Some argue that religious belief is a sign of mental illness; others contend that religious belief is absolutely rational. Some will argue that there's really no "*there there*"; others argue that there *is a there there*. Some argue that there is nothing supernatural and that anything having to do with religion is just a product of the human imagination and social forces; some will say that what is fundamentally real just *is* the religious and the divine. Our challenge is not to resolve the disputes. Our duty is to *understand* them, the key players, and their arguments. We will enter into dialogue with them, with our peers, and probably even with ourselves as to the nature of religious experience.

Course Objectives

Thus, the objectives of this course are: (1) to investigate the meaning of religious experience; (2) to consider various scholarly, cultural, and scientific approaches to the study of religion, (3) to compare the apparently similar features in different religious expressions and traditions to determine significant commonalities and characteristic differences, and (4) to prepare for and to engage both oral and written discussions in accord with the above objectives.

Learning Outcomes

(1) Students will be able to describe and distinguish a variety of accounts of religious experience. (2) Students will demonstrate an awareness of a diversity of Western and non-Western religious traditions from different historical periods. (3) Students will be able to categorize and identify various influences (philosophical, psychological, social, historical) on scholarly accounts of religious experiences. (4) Students will be able to apply the course concepts to an enhanced understanding of diverse accounts of religious experience. (5) Students will demonstrate their knowledge of concepts related to the study of religion through thoughtful, carefully crafted written work (at least 15 double spaced pages) and online written work, evaluated for both content, composition and discussion designed to meet learning objectives.

Prerequisites & G.E. Policies

The prerequisites for Philosophy 525 is the successful completion of English 114 or its equivalent.

To receive GE Segment III credit for this course students must:

1. Begin their Segment III course work during or after the semester in which they achieve upper division junior standing (i.e., 60 semester units), but NOT before.
2. Begin their Segment III course work only after completing all GE Segment I requirements.

All Segment III courses include writing assignments equaling at least 2500 words in total (approximately ten, double-spaced, typed pages) of analytical writing evaluated on the basis of content, composition, style, syntax, and grammar. We will exceed these page limits.

Required Books

1. Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*
2. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*
Note: Any edition is fine. Reading assignments will be given by *Lecture*, not page number.
3. Pals, *Seven (or Eight!) Theories of Religion*
Note: We will not be reading the "eighth" theorist so the *Seven Theories* text is perfectly acceptable.
4. Phillips, *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation*
Note: A digital edition is available from Cambridge and is less expensive than the paper format. The downside is that you'll need to bring your laptop to class in order to read the books. You only may print off a limit number of pages from the digital edition.
5. Other readings will be required as well. These will be posted online or found through one of the Library's online databases (e.g., JSTOR or EBSCO).

Required Materials

The course requirements are such that you will be posting to the class forum on iLearn, posting to your personal blog, and working collaboratively on an online wiki. So excuses such as "My computer crashed" or "Buffy stole my laptop" or "My DSL was out all weekend" are simply not acceptable. If for some reason you don't have access to a computer or the Internet please contact me immediately.

1. You must have easy, dependable access to a computer and the Internet.
2. In addition to computer and Internet access, you should invest in a USB flash drive for backing up and storing your coursework.

3. You also should consider getting a free Google or Apple account so that you can save documents online.

Recommended Books and Materials

1. A style manual suitable to your major. I prefer MLA or the Chicago Manual of Style, but please use the style guide appropriate to your major.
2. A good pocket collegiate dictionary.

Course Requirements and Grading

Written diagnostic (P/NP) 0%

1. Wiki work (course glossary and wiki entries) 10%
Our class wiki is located at <phil525.pbwiki.com>
2. Personal learning journal blog 20%
3. Class iLearn Forum posts 10%
4. 3 Take-home exams of approx 5-6 pages each/15-18 total pages 50%
5. Take-home final exam 10%

All five graded elements are required in order to pass the course.

Individual Workload

To get the most out of this course students should expect to devote approximately 6–8 hours per week for reading, study, and collaborative work (forum, blog or wiki posts).

Reading Responses: Blog, Forums, and Wikis:

To facilitate class preparation and discussion, students are required to answer discussion questions posted in the class forum on iLearn and to post reading responses on the theorists listed where indicated on the syllabus. What it is that you blog about is up to you; who it is that you blog about is indicated on the syllabus. These responses reflect student reading and comprehension of the reading assignments. In addition to the assigned blogged reading responses, you may also make separate blog posts on anything else that is related to the coursework.

Your blogged reading responses are to include the following: First, summarize in 100 words (max) the key ideas or arguments of the reading, second, provide one question for class discussion based on your reading, third, offer your own critical reflections on the reading(s). For example, you might discuss how the reading builds on or contradicts other readings, or how the reading agrees with and/or contradicts your personal experience or understanding.

Blog, Forum, and Wiki Criteria

Try to get your assigned blog posts done in a 24 hour time frame. I will usually leave 10 minutes at the end of the class for you to make notes for your blogs. Your iLearn forum posts are due no later than 9pm Wednesdays and 9am Mondays. While the rhetorical standard for blog, forum and wiki work is not always as rigorous as is expected for academic essays and paper, remember that we are involved in an *academic* endeavor. All your written work should represent your best effort. Posts strewn with

grammatical and spelling errors will be severely penalized. Proofread your work before clicking that "submit" button.

All assigned posts will be graded collectively each week on the basis of a) percentage of assignment completed, b) comprehension level, and c) critical reflection. The points possible for each week are as follows: exemplary (5 points), acceptable (3 points), or sub-standard (1 point).

Essay and Paper Grading Criteria

Essays are worth 100 points each. The grades will be issued along the following scale:

A	98-100	C+	80-83
A-	94-97	C	75-79
B+	90-93	C-	70-74
B	86-89	D+	67-69
B-	82-85	D	65-66
		F	0-64

A grade of "A" is assigned to essays and papers that demonstrate a thorough command of the material covered in lectures, readings, or independent research for papers. They are excellent in every way and show creative insight into the material.

A grade of "B" is assigned to essays and papers that demonstrate a command of the material covered in lectures, readings, or independent research for papers. They are well organized and have few grammatical or spelling errors. However, these papers and essays generally do not show the insights that are evidenced in superior or "A" work.

A grade of "C" is assigned to essays and papers that show an acquaintance of the material covered in lectures, readings, or independent research for papers, but may reveal some problem in comprehension of the material. The organization and writing style is adequate at best.

A grade of "D" is assigned to essays and papers that reveal poor comprehension of the material covered in lectures, readings, or independent research for papers. They typically have significant problems either in understanding the assignment, comprehension of the material, or in organization and writing style.

A grade of "F" is assigned to essays and papers that fail to demonstrate any knowledge of the material covered in lectures, readings, or independent research for papers. They usually demonstrate an inability to understand the assignment, or comprehend the material. The organization and writing style is sub-standard and unacceptable.

Course Policies and Expectations

Second Day Drop: If you do not attend class on the second day of class I will automatically drop you. If for some reason you cannot attend class on the second day, you must email before the second session.

Attendance: There will be an attendance roll each day so be sure to sign in. I will not grade on attendance, but missing class will adversely affect your grade as you will be unable to makeup in-class quizzes unless you supply documented proof of illness or other emergency. Each student is responsible for obtaining class notes and assignment details. Always check our various class websites for the current class schedule, assignments, and other details. You do not need to contact me to tell me that you are ill or unable to attend class.

Gator Honor Code: Don't cheat. Don't plagiarize. Plagiarism occurs when you misrepresent the work of someone else as though it were your own. It includes using the ideas, sentences, or any text of someone else without giving appropriate acknowledgement. It may also include allowing someone else to write your work for you and you then submitting that work as though it were your own. I have a zero-tolerance policy on this. I will issue an "F" for any assignment which I determine to have been plagiarized. I will report the incident to the University Judicial Affairs Office for action (adapted from the University policy which may be found here: <http://www.sfsu.edu/~collhum/plagiarism.html>)

Cell phones & pagers: Please set these to OFF or Vibrate. *Note: I don't care where you place your device when it is on "vibrate". I just don't want to hear sounds from it or you while it is activated.*

Reasonable accommodation: If you need accommodation to improve your experience or access to this course, please contact me or the Disability Resource Center (338-2472) as soon as possible.

Respect for others: My guess is that many of you have different views as to the nature of religion and its value. You each come with your particular experiences and ideas about religion. That's a good thing as it will add tremendously to the exchange of ideas and our joint learning. For our time together to be effective, however, I must insist that there be no disrespectful comments about a person or their beliefs, especially their beliefs about religion. This also extends to your written work. Whilst in this classroom do not use profane language in your speech. You are also not to use such language in your written work.

The open, academic exchange of ideas: I am keenly interested in your *thoughts* about what we'll be reading and discussing. What I will be looking for in your exam essays is not whether you agree or disagree with me, a particular religious or non-religious position, or any of the theorists we'll study. Instead, I expect evidence of your sustained, reasoned engagement with the material. You will have the opportunity to engage the material and each other on a more personal level in your personal wiki or blog, and in your forum posts.

Assignments and Reading Schedule

How much to read: Since we probably will be using different editions of several of the books for the course I have not listed exact page numbers for the reading assignment. Most assignments will extend over two or more days. I suggest that you look at the entire chapter or portion assigned and map out how much you'll need to read by each class. The reading assignments below indicate what should be read *after* that particular class session. So for class on Thursday, 28 August, I'll expect that everyone will have read Pals' *Introduction* and about half of his chapter on *Tylor & Frazer*.

Class Schedule

Social Media Homework = SMH. *Note:* Additional reading assignments may be added. These will be announced in class, iLearn, and the class website.

Week One

8/26

In class: Review syllabus; distribute diagnostic exam; brief tour of websites

Homework:

- SMH: Log on to (i) [iLearn](#), (ii) [Create your blog](#), (iii) Request access to the [course glossary wiki](#),
- Do [Diagnostic exam](#) (pdf) (due 8/28)
- Reading: Pals, *Introduction*; Pals, *Tylor & Frazer*

8/28

In class: Delving into the vocabulary; Discussion of Tylor & Frazer

- SMH: (i) Start on the [course glossary wiki](#)*, [*The glossary wiki is a semester long project. Keep working on it.], (ii) begin [Participatory Media Literacy Exercises](#), (iii) email me the url of your blog and sign the release form (provided in class) granting me access to it for the course's digital portfolio.
- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on Tylor and Frazer,
- Reading: Pals, *Tylor & Frazer*

Week Two

9/2

In class: Discussion of Tylor & Frazer

Homework:

- SMH: Finish [Participatory Media Literacy Exercises](#)
- Answer [iLearn](#) 2nd Forum question on Tylor and Frazer
- Reading: Pals, *Freud*; begin Freud, *Illusion*; James, introductory front matter; Lecture I *Religion and Neurology*

9/4

In class: Social media review, review substantivism, functionalism, hermeneutics, brief intro to James

Homework:

- Reading: Pals, *Freud*; begin Freud, *Illusion*; James, introductory front matter; finish Lecture I *Religion and Neurology*; begin Lecture II *Circumscription of the Topic*

Week Three

9/9

In class: Discussion of Freud; Tylor & Frazer, Freud essay exam distributed. Due 9/18.

Homework:

- SMH: Start blogging on Freud and James
- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on Freud
- Reading: Pals, *Freud*; Freud, *Illusion*; James, Lecture II *Circumscription of the Topic*

9/11

In class: Discussion of Freud;

Homework:

- SMH: Start blogging on Freud and James
- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on Freud
- Reading: Pals, *Freud*; Freud, *Illusion*; James, Lecture II *Circumscription of the Topic*

Week Four

9/16

In class: Discussion of Freud

Homework:

- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on James
- Blog on Freud and James
- Pals, *Durkheim*; James, Lecture III *The Reality of the Unseen*; [very optional: James Lectures IV–VIII]

9/18 Tylor & Frazer, Freud exam due.

In class: Discussion of Durkheim. Homework:

- SMH: Blog on Durkheim and James
- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on Durkheim
- Reading: Pals, *Durkheim*; James, Lectures XI–XIII *Saintliness*

Week Five

9/23

In class: Discussion of Durkheim and Marx

Homework:

- SMH: Blog on Durkheim and James
- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on Marx
- Reading: Pals, *Marx*; James, Lectures XI–XIII *Saintliness*

9/25

In class: Discussion of Marx and James

Homework:

- SMH: Blog on Marx and James
- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on Evans-Pritchard
- Reading: Pals, *Evans-Pritchard*; James, Lectures XIV–XV *The Value of Saintliness*

Week Six

9/30 Durkheim, Marx, Evans-Pritchard Exam distributed. Due 10/7

In class: Discussion of Evans-Pritchard and James.

Homework:

- SMH: Blog on Evans-Pritchard and James
- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on Pals' *Conclusion*
- Reading: Pals, *Conclusion*; James, Lecture XVI–XVII *Mysticism*; Phillips, *Religion in Wittgenstein's Mirror*

10/2

In class: Discussion of James

Homework:

- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on Phillips, *Religion in Wittgenstein's Mirror*
- Reading: James, Lecture XVIII *Philosophy*; Phillips, *Religion in Wittgenstein's Mirror*

Week Seven

10/7 Durkheim, Marx, Evans-Pritchard Exam due

In class: Discussion of Wittgenstein.

Homework:

- SMH: Blog on Phillips and James
- Answer [iLearn](#) 2nd Forum question on Phillips, *Religion in Wittgenstein's Mirror*
- James, Lecture XX *Conclusion*; Phillips, *Religion in Wittgenstein's Mirror*

10/9 James essay exam distributed. Due 10/16

In class: Discussion of Wittgenstein.

Homework:

- SMH: Blog on Wittgenstein and James
- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on Phillips
- Reading: James, *Postscript*; Phillips, Preface–Ch. 1 *Hermeneutics*

Week Eight

10/14

In class: Discussion of Phillips

Homework:

- SMH: Blog on Phillips* [**Blog on Phillips (and his interlocutors) for the rest of the semester.*]
- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on Phillips
- Reading: Phillips, Preface–Ch. 1 *Hermeneutics*

10/16

In class: Discussion of Phillips. James essay exam due

Homework:

- Reading: Phillips, Ch. 2 *Bernard Williams*

Week Nine

10/21

In class: Discussion of Phillips/Williams

Homework:

- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on Phillip Ch. 2
- Reading: Phillips, Ch. 2 *Bernard Williams*

10/23

In class: Discussion of Phillips/Hume

Homework:

- SMH: (i) Remember to keep blogging on Phillips and interlocutors; (ii) keep up the wiki work.
- Reading: Phillips, Ch. 3 *Hume*

Week Ten

10/28

In class: Discussion of Phillips/Hume

- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on Phillip Ch. 3
- Reading: Phillips, Ch. 3 *Hume*

10/30

In class: Discussion of Phillips/Hume

Homework:

- Reading: Phillips, Ch. 3 *Hume*

Week Eleven

11/4

In class: Discussion of Phillips/Feuerbach

Homework:

- Reading: Phillips, Ch. 4 *Feuerbach*

11/6 Phillips Exam #1 (Ch. 1–4) distributed. Due 11/20

In class; Discussion of Phillips/Feuerbach.

Homework:

- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on Phillip Ch. 4
- SMH: (i) Remember to keep blogging on Phillips and interlocutors; (ii) keep up the wiki work.
- Reading: Phillips, Ch. 4 *Feuerbach*

Week Twelve

11/11

NO CLASS Veteran's Day

Homework:

- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on Phillip Ch. 4
- Reading: Phillips, Ch. 4 *Feuerbach*

11/13

In class: Discussion of Phillips/Feuerbach

Homework:

- SMH: (i) Remember to keep blogging on Phillips and interlocutors; (ii) keep up the wiki work.
- Reading: Phillips, Ch. 5 *Marx & Engels*

Week Thirteen

11/18

In class: Discussion of Phillips/Marx&Engels

Homework:

- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on Phillip Ch. 5
- Reading: Phillips, Ch. 6 *Tylor & Frazer*

11/20 Phillips Exam #1 (Ch. 1–4) due. Phillips Exam #2 (Ch. 6, 8–13) distributed. Due 12/11

In class: Discussion of Phillips/Tylor&Frazer, Freud.

Homework:

- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum questions on Phillip Ch. 6 and 8
- Reading: Phillips, Ch. 7 *Marett* (skim); Ch. 8 *Freud*

Week Fourteen

11/25–11/27 FALL RECESS

Homework:

- Reading: Phillips, Ch. 9 *Durkheim* and Phillips, Ch. 10 *Levy-Bruhl*

Week Fifteen

12/2

In class: Discussion of Phillips/Durkheim and Levy-Bruhl

Homework:

- SMH: (i) Remember to keep blogging on Phillips and interlocutors; (ii) keep up the wiki work.
- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on Phillip Ch. 9 and 10
- Reading: Phillips, Ch. 11 *Berger*

12/4

In class: Discussion of Phillips/Berger

Homework:

- SMH: Do final edits on glossary wiki
- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on Phillip Ch. 10 and 11
- Reading: Phillips, Ch. 12 *Winch*

Week Sixteen

12/9

In class: Discussion of Phillips/Winch

Homework:

- SMH: Do final edits on glossary wiki
- Answer [iLearn](#) Forum question on Phillip Ch. 12 and 13
- Reading: Phillips, Ch. 12 *Winch* and Ch. 13 *Understanding*

12/11 Last class session Phillips Exam #2 (Ch. 6, 8–13) due. Final Exam distributed. Due 12/16

In class: Discussion of Phillips.

Week Seventeen Finals Week

12/16 Final Exam and Personal Learning Journals due *

**Your Personal Learning Journal is your blog. Just provide me (once more) with the link to your blog. Please keep your blog "live" until the day grades are due, January 6, 2009. Archive your blog on your computer and/or jump drive.*