

# Lecture One

Sunday, 10 July 2016 9:04 PM

## Unit Chair and Lecturer

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Consultation times: Wednesdays 10.00-12.00

One lecture and one seminar per week

11 lectures : an introduction, two weeks on each religion.

## Assessment

- Essay: 40% - 1500 words. Due date: Wednesday August 31 (11.59 pm) Topics released on CloudDeakin.
- Online program: 20% five short-answer 200 word questions – one for each religion. Due dates and questions on CloudDeakin.
- Two-hour online test/exam 40% Short answer questions, one for each religion and one comparative question.

## Today's Lecture

What is religion?

The dimensionality of religion

The approach we will take: broadly comparative, cross-cultural, phenomenological

## Philosophical Questions

Metaphysical question – a question about the nature of reality: What is real?

Ontological question – a question about being: Who am I? or What am I?

Epistemological question – a question concerning knowledge or how we know things: How do we come to know something? How do we know we know?

Ethical and moral questions - What is the right thing to do? What is good?

And more broadly, the speculative - What is the meaning of life? Why am I here?

## World Religions

Hinduism: India Before 2000 BCE (tradition says before 5000 BCE)

Buddhism: India Siddhartha Gautama (560 – 480 BCE)

Judaism: Before 2000 BCE with the Prophets Abraham & Moses

Christianity: Jesus of Nazareth (6 BCE – 34 CE)

Islam: Muhammad (570 CE – 632 CE)

## What is Religion?

Religion is...

- ... a path towards God
  - ... a belief system
  - ... a way of life
  - ... something human-made
  - ... something supernatural
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- ... a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and human life (Frazer)
  - ... the belief in an ever-living God, that is, in a Divine Mind and Will ruling the Universe and holding moral relations with mankind (Martineau)
  - ... the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of our life (Tillich)

## Differences and Non-Belief in Religion

Hindus call Hinduism : sanatana dharma – the eternal law or way

Buddhists call Buddhism – the dharma – teaching, path

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, a scholar of religion, warns us to be wary of “...isms”

As Taylor (2007) notes, non-belief only becomes a ‘live’ option for people in the last few centuries, and even then this is not a ‘subtraction’ story (in which we just divest ourselves of religious belief) but rather a change in the ‘constellations’ of belief.

You might also want to think about the fairly modern distinction between “religion” and “spirituality”.

## What is religion all about?

- God
- Supernatural beings
- Salvation/Liberation
- Nature of ultimate reality

- What is Religion?

We tend to think that religion as is “commonly” understood – theistic, based on faith and belief and so on– is a universal phenomenon, found in all cultures.

Some (e.g. Cantwell Smith, 1962), however, argue that “religion” is a modern, western concept, and that we cannot bring non-Western religions under this concept without distorting them. (Many languages did not have an equivalent word for ‘religion’ until recently).

### **Ninian Smart's Dimensions of Religion**

1. **Doctrines and philosophies** - intellectual expression of the meaning and implications of religious narrative, rationale for practices and ideas [orthodoxy – right belief]
2. **Myths** - worldviews conveyed in stories
3. **Rituals** - observable activities – prayers, worship, offerings, ceremonies, rites of passage [orthopraxy – right practice]
4. **Religious experience** - hope, contact with a transcendent realm or reality, awe
5. **Ethical dimension** - rules about behaviour and how to live
6. **Social and institutional dimension** - religious communities and social settings, power relations and responsibilities
7. **Material and artistic dimension** - architecture, sacred places, music, art, symbols

### **Phenomenological definitions – defining religion in terms of human activity, phenomena**

**Functional** - the functions it performs in social and individual life (belonging through orthodoxy, orthopraxis, rites and customs, ethics etc)

**Structural** - faith, tradition (communal, cultic, creedal, ethics and conduct)

**Aspectival** - ceremonial, regulational, educational, devotional, organisational

**Operational** - actions, concepts, social groups, psychological states

### **Comparative approach**

One benefit of comparative philosophy lies in the way that it forces reflection on the most deeply entrenched and otherwise unquestioned agendas and assumptions of one's own tradition.

### **Cross-cultural approach**

Virtues of our inquiry:

“the practice of empathy: namely, the imaginative participation of the observer in the spiritual and cognitive world of the religious tradition under scrutiny”

John Clayton (2006)

### **Questions to hold close**

- “How do the ‘insiders’ of this religious tradition understand/explain the concept in question?”
- “How is the concept in question explained in the key texts?”

“How does this concept “fit” with other key claims? Do they “cash out” in their own terms?”

### **What we Want to Avoid**

#### **Descriptive chauvinism**

is that fault which consists in recreating the other tradition in the image of one's own. This is reading a text from another tradition and assuming that it asks the same questions or constructs responses or answers in a similar manner as that one with which one is most familiar.

#### **Normative chauvinism.**

On the opposite end, but still an example of a kind of chauvinistic vice, is what Nussbaum calls normative chauvinism. This is the tendency found in many philosophers to believe that their tradition is best and that insofar as the others are different, they are inferior or in error. Ideally, philosophers should hold those views that are most defensible and credible. But the very criteria for making this decision may be tradition-dependent.

### **Philosophy of Religion**

- Philosophical study of the meaning and nature of religion and the themes and concepts central to religious traditions
- Examination of religious beliefs, claims, arguments, terms, concepts, practices
- Analytic tradition – emphasis on clarity and precision in arguments and analyses
- Continental tradition – rejection of the view that the natural sciences are the best or only way to understand, conditions of possible experience are at least partly determined by factors like culture or time, human agency can transform or liberate

### **Analytic study of religion**

Generally speaking, it deals with the God hypothesis – concerned with arguments that prove or disprove the existence of God. Little discussion of alternative conceptions of God and non-Western religions

### **Continental or European Approach**

- not concerned with proving or disproving the existence of God
- emphasis on liberation and social transformation

### **Branches of philosophy**

- Metaphysics (explains the fundamental nature of being and the world) - What is there? What is real? What ways can the world be?
- Ontology (studies the nature of being, becoming, existence, reality) - What exists? What categories of things are there? What constitutes the identity of a given object?
- Epistemology (theory of knowledge) - What is knowledge? What is truth? When is belief justified?
- Ethics - What is the best way to live? Which actions are right and wrong? What should I do? What must I do?

### **Our Approaches to Philosophy**

#### **Non-confessional**

- Not assuming the truth of any particular faith, standing back from any personal faith commitment, agenda or assumptions
- Broadly anthropological in studying people's beliefs, behaviours and institutions rather than assessing the truth of beliefs or doing theology

#### **Phenomenological [Edmund Husserl (1859-1938)]**

- Epoche – investigation of phenomena or a mode of consciousness while 'bracketing' our commitments, suspending judgment about truth or existential status of objects... entering the "thought world" of the believer, as opposed to believing

- What it is like from the observer's point of view?
- What does it mean or signify from the participant's point of view?

### **Philosophical phenomenology**

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938): founder of philosophical phenomenology

Provides one of the theoretical frames for the phenomenology of religion

A method for describing subjective or first-person experiences (such as perceptions, emotions, valuations).

Phenomenology of religion treats Religion as a distinctive phenomenon

### **An Emphatic approach**

- Phenomenology of religion places emphasis on interpretation in the sense that it looks for empathetic understanding
- Philosophical understanding seeks to understand and evaluate philosophical ideas within their contexts and then make comparisons

### **Objectivity**

- Aim is to gain knowledge, rather than to engage in apologetics, and to this end it is necessary to employ the method of 'bracketing' (Epoche)
- studying religion in a detached, impartial way by 'bracketing' one's beliefs, suspending belief and disbelief, excluding judgments of truth or value
- aim is to describe or understand what has been presented, not pass personal judgment on it

### **History & Philosophy of Religion**

As well as phenomenology, we will also be doing some history of religion (how religions arose and developed), and philosophy of religion (critically discussing and exploring the concepts encountered in different religions – for example, considering how the doctrines of rebirth and annata, 'no self,' are compatible in Buddhism, or whether a feminist Christology is conceptually possible).

### **For next week**

- Read Study Guide week 2 Hinduism 1: History, beliefs and practices
- Read the 4 set e-Readings (see Study Guide) -Focus on the concepts of karma, caste, dharma, the stages of life and moksha
- Write notes on the reading and reflection questions in week 2 of the Study Guide
- Write an answer to the the journal question in week 2 of the Study Guide

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## ***HINDUISM/ASSESSMENT***

Religion is somewhat a modern construct - "religions" was not common until roughly the nineteenth century

The Hindus and Buddhists did not have a word for "religion" or "philosophy" - Hindus call Hinduism *sanatana dharma* - the eternal law or way, while Buddhists call Buddhism the *dharma* - teaching path

Wilfred Cantwell Smith warns us to be ready for '...isms' - no religion is just one thing

People would rather be spiritual than religious - the dogma of religion

Taylor (2007) says that non-belief only becomes a 'live' option for people in the last few centuries, and even then this is not a 'subtraction' story (in which we just divest ourselves of religious belief) but rather a change in the 'constellations' of belief

## **Ninian Smart's Dimensions of Religion**

- Doctrines and Philosophies
- Myths
- Rituals
- Religious experience
- Ethical dimension
- Social and Institutional dimension
- Material and Artistic dimension

## **Hinduism**

### Main Gods

Brahma (the Creator)

Vishnu (the Preserver)

Shiva (the Destroyer)

A Hindu may be a theist, a pantheist, atheist, communist and believe whatever he likes, but what makes him into a Hindu... (is) what he does - Frits Staal

### Key Terms

*Dharma* - the way, the law, the right way of living

*Karma* - action, principle of causality where intent and actions can influence future consequences for an individual (rebirth)

*Moksha* - liberation, release, freedom from the cycle of death and birth

*Samsara* - The cycle of death and birth

*Atman* - 'real' self, essence that is ultimately identical with absolute reality

*Brahman* - absolute impersonal reality - in 'truth', all things are identical to brahman

*Maya* - illusion or delusion

### ***Do Not Confuse***

Brahma - a major god (Brahma the Creator)

Brahmin - the priestly caste - highest caste

Brahman - the impersonal absolute - worshipped as a God in early Hinduism but not in Upanishadic thought. All of the major Hindu philosophical schools attempt to define the relationship between self (*atman*) and absolute/ultimate reality (*brahman*)

### How Karma Works

*Natural/Nontheistic View* - Law of Karma (a moral law) operates like a law of nature; impersonally and automatically - no body pulling the strings (good action will automatically trigger a good response)

*Personal/Theistic View* - A divine agent (God) oversees the operation of the law of Karma by linking the actions in one life with those in another. The law may depend on divine will (God can change it) or God may be subordinate to the law (thus God cannot intervene)

### Four Varnas

*Brahmins* - priestly or scholarly caste

*Kshatriya* - marshal or royal caste

*Vaishyas* - merchant caste

*Sudras* - labour caste

- Each caste has many sub groups
- One must fulfil the duties of the caste **(karma and dharma very closely connected - must carry out actions selflessly)**

### **KARMA AND DHARMA IN THE GITA**

Reconciles the goal of *moksha* (liberation) with that of dharma

Stresses the need to fulfil your own according to your duty or caste

Krishna's solution to the problem of the conflict with *dharma* and *moksha* involve doing one's duty with a strong consciousness, which attends to duty for duty's sake, not for its rewards

Therefore, action should be **desireless and selfless**

### Great Sayings

- *Tat Tvam Asi* - That You Are
- The 'real' you (*atman*) is identical to absolute impersonal reality (*brahman*)
- We don't realise this because of the workings of *maya* (illusion, delusion) and the impurities of *karma*
- *Moksha* is fully understanding and realising this identity relationship
- This realisation is the way out of *samsara* (the cycle of death and birth)

### Thou Art That - Son to Father

1. "Throw this salt in the water, and sit with me on the morrow." So he did. He said to him: "Well, bring me the salt that you threw in the water last night." He looked for it, but could not find it as it was dissolved.

2. "Well, taste the water on this side. – How does it taste?"

"Salty."

"Taste it in the middle. – How does it taste?"

"Salty."

"Taste it at the other end. – How does it taste?"

"Salty."

"Take a mouthful and sit with me." So he did.

"It is always the same."

He said to him: "You cannot make out what exists in it, yet it is there.

3. "It is this very fineness which ensouls all this world, it is the true one, it is the self. *You are that, Śvetaketu.*" – *Chāndogya Upanishad* VI.13.1-3

Respond to the question and do not digress