Note: This is not a complete syllabus, but only an orientation letter. The complete syllabus will be available within Canvas at the start of the semester.

PHILOS 220 ON-LINE: INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE RELIGION

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Note: Although students should usually contact me through the Canvas messaging feature contained within the course, should problems arise please contact me at andrew.jones-cathcart@canyons.edu. This e-mail can also be used for messaging me prior to the start of the semester.

(WHEN SENDING E-MAIL TO MY CANYONS.EDU ADDRESS, MAKE SURE YOU SPECIFY YOUR NAME, CLASS, AND SECTION NUMBER SOMEWHERE IN YOUR E-MAIL OR SUBJECT LINE.)

Course Description

This course introduces students to the study of comparative religion, which is an attempt to analyze, compare and contrast the key themes and ideas found in the religious traditions of different cultures, historical periods, and ethnic groups. Examples of these traditions include Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zen, Shinto, Zoroastrianism, and the native traditions of Africa, Australasia, and the Americas. In addition to exploring the religious beliefs of these traditions, we will also study the philosophical implications and assumptions found within them. Questions addressed in this course typically include

- What is religion? How does religion differ from other concepts and practices such as science, philosophy, and culture?

- How does myth function within religion? How does myth differ from logos?

- What is sacred space? How does it differ from profane space?

- How do life circumstances, such as historical setting, economics, language, and culture, shape—and, in turn, get shaped by—religious practices and beliefs?

- What is religious experience? How do religious experiences differ from non-religious ones? How, if at all, is it possible to know whether one's religious experiences are "true"?
- What evidence might be used to support belief in the divine? What evidence might be used to weaken such beliefs? What are miracles? Is there any good evidence for or against the existence of miracles?

- What are the many ways in which the divine can be understood? To be religious, must one believe in only one god? Must one believe in any god at all? Must there be only one "right" path to god? Or can the divine be approached equally well through a diverse number of faiths?

- What is the relation between morality and the divine? Can one be moral without god?

- How do the various religions of the world--including so-called bygone religions that are no longer practiced--compare and contrast with one another? What beliefs and practices overlap in different religious traditions? What differences exist among different religious traditions? How does each tradition understand the natural world and human nature? How does each define concepts such as "soul," self, the afterlife, the divine, morality, and so on?

- What are the main scriptural and historical sources for the religions of the world, e.g. the Koran, the Bible, the Vedas, etc.?

- How does the presence of evil in the world affect our perspectives on the divine? Would an all-good, all-powerful god allow evil to exist? Why or why not? (The problem of evil)

- If god exists, can humans still have free will? Or would the existence of such a being make free choice an impossibility? (The problem of free will)

- Given the sheer diversity of religious beliefs and practices in the contemporary world, does enough common ground among these traditions exist to allow humans to live in peace with one another, respecting a shared sense of moral values, including a respect for the sacredness of life? Or does religion by its nature lead to inevitable conflict and violence? Is tolerance in a religiously pluralistic world possible or even desirable?

**Student Learning Outcome**
Analyze and assess differing religious viewpoints in relation to how well they address the underlying religious-philosophical problems of reality, self, knowledge, religious experience, ethics, and death.

Objectives
At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to
1. Explain the origin, practices, worldview, and goals of each religion studied;
2. Compare and contrast the different religions studied with regard to historical development, view of God or the Divine, and how each religion's view of what is ultimate about reality informs its teachings, doctrines, and practices; and
3. Analyze and assess differing religious viewpoints in relation to how well they address the underlying religious-philosophical problems of reality, self, knowledge, religious experience, ethics, and death.

Required Text