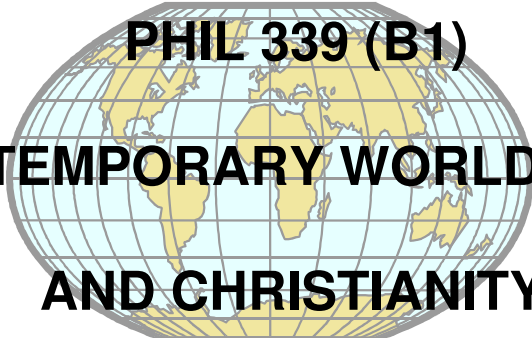


**THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE**

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PHIL 339 (B1)
**CONTEMPORARY WORLD VIEWS
AND CHRISTIANITY**

**WINTER TERM (II) 2011
TR: 12:30 - 13:50**

**Course Reg # 67509
Classroom: SJ 102**

DESCRIPTION

Critical study of Christianity in dialogue with such worldviews as atheism, agnosticism, naturalism, materialism, existentialism, feminism, liberalism, and postmodernism.

OBJECTIVES

The overall objectives of this course are:

- **To explore diverse and contemporary worldviews in relation to the basic beliefs of Christianity.**
- **To assess the compatibility, or conflict, among underlying assumptions of selected worldviews.**
- **To gain an understanding of the philosophical issue of faith vs reason in a contemporary context.**

“Policy about course outlines can be found in Section 23.4(2) of the University Calendar.”

RESOURCES

Worldviews in Conflict and Dialogue. Selected Readings for Phil 339. Compiled by Joseph A. Buijs. University of Alberta Custom Courseware, 2011.

Joseph A. Buijs, *What is Philosophy? A Guide for the Beginning Student.* Xeroxed for Student Use. University of Alberta, 2003.

Students will have access to an eClass/WebCT site with detailed information on topics, assignments, marking, additional resources, office hours, and the like.

EXPECTATIONS (Workload)

In addition to a reflective and critical study of required reading material, students will be expected to complete the following written work:

- Two take-home tests, answering a pre-assigned question
 - ▶ maximum three typed pages; 15% each.
- A critical discussion of any selected conceptual framework (religion, ideology, philosophy, worldview) other than any of the six explored in the course
 - ▶ outline: 5%
 - ▶ maximum eight typed pages; 25%
- A final, take-home exam: 40%

Written work is expected to be the student's own and specifically produced for this course. Any use of resources, whether merely drawing from the views and arguments of others or quoting verbatim, must be properly documented.

“The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provision of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at www.ualberta.ca/secretariat/appeals.htm) and avoid any behaviour which could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University.”

“Whether we know it or not--whether we like it or not – each of us has a worldview. These worldviews function as interpretive conceptual schemes to explain why we "see" the world as we do, why we often think and act as we do. Competing worldviews often come into conflict.”

Ronald H. Nash, *Faith and Reason* (1988): 33-34

PROGRAMME OF STUDY

The course will lead students through a critical discussion of the following themes. The coursepack contains selections dealing with each of these themes and worldviews.

Worldview: the concept, structure and significance

What is a worldview? How is it different from ideologies? What is the structure and significance of a worldview among our belief-systems? What are some examples of conflicting worldviews? How do we assess worldviews? How can we address conflicting worldviews? What is my worldview?

Religious worldviews: Christianan Theism

What is fundamental to a Christian worldview? How does Christianity view the world, the nature of human beings, the meaning and purpose of human life? How does Christianity view the limits or extent of human knowledge? What is the basis, or justification, for these views? What is philosophically plausible about Christian theism? What, if anything, is philosophically problematic?

“Perhaps there are four billion worldviews, since every person has her or his set of values and perspective on life. But there are also major patterns and systems which shape and are shaped by societies, and we give to these such labels as ‘Christianity’ and ‘Buddhism’.”

Ninian Smart, *Buddhism and Christianity: Rivals and Allies* (1993): 1

Religious worldviews: Buddhism

What is fundamental to a Buddhist worldview? How does Buddhism view the world and human life within it? What is the basis, or justification, for these Buddhist views? What is philosophically plausible, or problematic, about Buddhism? How does a Buddhist view compare, or contrast, with a Christian view of reality, human nature, knowledge?

“. . . at least among Western-influenced peoples, Christian theism and naturalistic or secular humanism are the primary options of the day.”

Arthur F. Holmes,
Contours of a World View (1983): 15

Humanism: values and purpose

What is the fundamental focus of humanism? What is the basis of value and meaning in human life? Is “man the measure of all things”? What is philosophically plausible in humanism? What, if anything, is problematic? Are humanism and its varieties compatible with Buddhism? Is a christian humanism possible? In what sense or to what extent?

Naturalism: science and the world

What is fundamental to a naturalistic worldview? What are its ontological, epistemological, and ethical views? How can we adequately explain the moral dimension of human beings? Their mental capacities and experience of consciousness? What are the legitimate scope and limits of science? Must naturalism be necessarily materialistic? Must naturalism be non-theistic? What is philosophically plausible in naturalism? What, if anything, is problematic?

“. . . one theme that underlies nearly all philosophical discussion is the perpetual conflict between *naturalistic* and *nonnaturalistic* world views.”

William H. Halverson, *A Concise Introduction to Philosophy* (4th ed., 1981:): 9

“Postmodernism swims, even wallows, in the fragmentary and the chaotic currents of change as if that is all there is.”

David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989): 44

Postmodernism: meaning and interpretation

What are the origins of postmodernism? What are the fundamental contentions of postmodernism? How does postmodernism understand meaning, truth, reality? Is reality merely a human construct? Is truth made rather than discovered? Is morality conventional rather than universal? What is philosophically plausible in postmodernism? What, if anything, is problematic? Is a christian postmodernism or a buddhist postmodernism possible?

Atheism (agnosticism)

On what basis is atheism or non-theism opposed to theism? Are there significant varieties of non-theism or atheism? What justification can be given for a non-theistic worldview? How does this worldview address the issue of meaning or purpose in life? What is philosophically plausible in atheism or non-theism? What, if anything, is problematic? Is any fruitful dialogue possible between theists and non-theists?

“. . . for somebody living in the twentieth century with a good philosophical and a good scientific education, who thinks carefully about the matter, for such a person it is irrational to believe in God.”

Kai Nielsen, *Does God Exist, The Great Debate* (1990): 48

“People who share one of these [four distinguishable worldviews of Western societies] communicate fairly well with one another, not so well with people of a different worldview.”

Walter T. Anderson, “Four Ways to be Absolutely Right,” *The Truth about the Truth* (1995): 110

Competing worldviews: conflict or convergence?

How can we address the issue of pluralism among worldviews? Is conflict inevitable? Is convergence possible? What are some of the parameters for constructive dialogue among conflicting worldviews? Can faith commitments be integrated into intellectual pursuits?