

# Huston Smith

Point of Departure

# Basics about Philosophy and Religion

- Philosophy is broken into 5 major categories:
  - Metaphysics: What is there?
  - Epistemology: How do I know?
  - Ethics: What should I do?
  - Aesthetics: What is beautiful and valuable?
  - Logic: How can I make sure my answers to these questions are consistent and rational?

# Basics about Philosophy and Religion

- Philosophy tries to provide answers to these questions:
  - Answering these questions causes the scope of philosophy to shrink
  - Example: Psychology used to be part of philosophy. Biology used to be part of philosophy.
    - Psychology and Biology have their own field of study
- Philosophical Question: What is Religion?
  - Tries to answer many of the same questions which Philosophy tries to answer.

# Basics about Philosophy and Religion

- Questions about the supernatural - God or Gods:
  - Is there something which exists outside of space and time? Metaphysical question
  - If something does exist outside of space and time, how would I know it? Epistemic question
  - How can I act in harmony with the supernatural? Ethical question
  - These are questions we find asked within the various religions of the world
- Answering these questions helps us understand the various aspects of different religions
  - Fails to answer the question “What is religion?”

# Basics about Philosophy and Religion

- Google:
  - A particular system of faith and worship
  - A pursuit or interest to which someone ascribes supreme importance
    - Notice both of these definitions leave out the reliance upon the supernatural
      - In Buddhism and Confucianism there is no reliance on the supernatural
      - According to some Catholic philosophers, the supernatural is beyond our scope of knowledge

# Basics about Philosophy and Religion

- Merriam-Webster:
  - The state of a religious: “a nun in her 20th year of *religion*”
    - The service and worship of God or the supernatural
    - Commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance
  - A personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices
  - Scrupulous conformity
    - Doing something *religiously*
  - A cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith

# Basics about Philosophy and Religion

- Origins
  - Religions have origins and *origin stories*
    - Difference between how a religion came to be and how a religion says the world, people, societies have come to be
    - Many times the origin of a religion comes about long after the founding figure is gone
      - Church of Buddhism
      - Church of Confucianism

# Basics about Philosophy and Religion

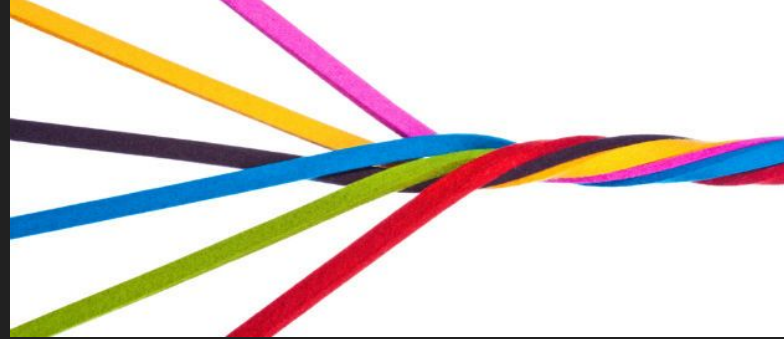
- No Answer?
  - We still lack a complete answer for what a religion is





# Basics about Philosophy and Religion

- Some features:
  - Involved with people and groups of people
  - Set of common beliefs
  - Attempts to answer loaded questions
  - Has some type of historical origin story
  - Can be supernatural or non-supernatural
- Smith believes there are 6 “pillars” of religion
  - Some religions have more pillars than others
  - We will get to these pillars later in the semester



# Huston Smith: Difficulties studying religions

- Religions have numerous sects, denominations, and variations
  - Too many differences in each variation to give a definitive picture
  - Example: Catholics believe in transubstantiation whereas many other Christians do not.
  - Example: Theravada Buddhism - “Small Raft” - focus on the individual.  
Mahayana Buddhism - “Big Raft” - focus on society.
    - Within “Small Raft” and “Big Raft” sects of Buddhism there are further differences.
    - These differences are not only geographical, but temporal.
      - We can’t possibly note every difference

# Huston Smith: Difficulties studying religions

- Dates and events themselves are very inaccurate - so this book is small on history
  - We can only get so exact with dates - they are at best approximations
    - Relative dates show us how a religion evolved
  - Buddha was born approximately 563 BC dies 480 BC
    - Buddhist Churches arrive around 402 AD - quite a long while between the death of Buddha
  - The followers of Jesus waited 3 hundreds years until constantine's edict that Catholicism would be the official religion of the Roman Empire.

# Huston Smith: Difficulties studying religions

- Sometimes interesting occurs after the death of a venerable and spiritual leader/figure
  - The wandering followers create a system of dedication towards their leader figure - over time, we develop large scale religions.
  - Sometimes they are intense:



# Huston Smith: Difficulties studying religions

- Sometimes they are scary: Jonestown Massacre



# Huston Smith: Difficulties studying religions

- We can't and shouldn't focus on the maleficent aspects of religion.
  - We are trying to focus on what is good and positive
  - The bad eggs are marred with psychotic and narcissistic tendencies.
    - Under the impression that they are a "CHOSEN ONE"
- Religion is a sensitive subject:
  - Polarizing. What? You don't believe in X Y Z ?
- What is a soul? This is such a difficult question
  - Material or Immaterial ?

# Huston Smith: Difficulties studying religions

- Have become governing forces over people
  - Systems of moral beliefs are very powerful
  - MLK: Natural Law
  - Marx: Religion is the opiate of the masses

