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Comparative Mysticism in World Religions
Summer 2009
TESP 72

Course Description:

This is a second level course designed to provide students with a historical, intellectual, and practical/experiential over-view of the tradition of mysticism within four different religious traditions: Judaism, Catholicism, Buddhism, and Islam. The class will hinge around debates within the study of mysticism such as essentialism versus empiricism. Thus, students will be debating whether or not there is an essence to all religious mystical practices that can be found in each religion, or whether each mystical practice is so context-dependent that it cannot be compared to other traditions. Thus, we will focus on how to compare these traditions and if in fact it is at all possible. Respect for all of these traditions and for each other is imperative for understanding in this course.

In addition, students will work on developing paradigms for comparison, beginning with a four-tiered paradigm of awareness, presence, asleep/awake, and liberation from suffering or freedom. Beginning with this paradigm, students will build up data from the various traditions and ultimately decide on basic similarities and differences that result from viewing the traditions in this way. For each tradition studied, the primary question will be "How is this mysticism Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, or Buddhist, and the secondary question will be "How are they all similar?" Finally, students will critique and modify the paradigm based on their findings.

Course Goals:

1. Identification of the different elements of the religious traditions that are involved in mysticism.
2. Demonstration of knowledge of diverse ways to compare mystical traditions and the pros and cons of each.
3. Ability to analyze representative writings from each tradition from both an insider's and outsider's viewpoint.
4. Critical evaluation of the different approaches to union with God and/or experience of ultimate/direct reality.
5. Critical evaluation of themes and readings of the class through writing both on exams and in the writing assignments
6. Development of individual and collaborative critical thinking skills.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

The World's Religions, Second Edition by Huston Smith
Thomas Merton: Essential Writings edited by Christen M. Bochen
Thich Nhat Hanh: Essential Writings edited by Sister Annabel Laity
Be Still and Get Going by Alan Lew
Living Presence by Kabir Edmund Helminski

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Every student has to take 2 exams, participate in group discussions, hand in notecards on the readings, POSSIBLY take randomly administered pop quizzes, and write one eight to twelve page comparing two traditions. **Grading for each exam, writing assignment, pop quiz, and group discussion** will reflect the quality of a student's work as follows: A+ (100-98 = outstanding), A (97-94 =exceptional), A- (93-90 =excellent), B+ (87-89 = very good), B (86-84 = solid performance), B- (80-83 = more than adequate), C (adequate), D (barely passing), F (not passing). The grades A, B, C, and D may be modified by (+) or (-) suffixes, except that the grade of A may not be modified by a (+) suffix when it comes to the over-all class grade. **Grading for ALL WRITING, BOTH ON THE EXAMS AND ON THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT** will be based on both content and writing ability.

GRADING POLICY: In addition to the grading policy listed above, the schema for the (+) and (-) system for **over-all, final** class grades will be as follows:

1. NO A + (FOR OVER-ALL GRADE—THIS IS UNIVERSITY POLICY)
2. A is equivalent to 94 and above to 100.
3. A- is equivalent to 90-93.
4. B+ is equivalent to 87,88,89.
5. B is equivalent to 84, 85, 86
6. B- is equivalent to 80-83
7. C+ is equivalent to 77,78,79
8. C is equivalent to 74,75,76
9. C- is equivalent to 70-73.
10. D+ is equivalent to 67,68,69
11. D is equivalent to 65,66
12. F is equivalent to 64 and below.

I DO NOT DISCUSS GRADES OVER EMAIL OR BY PHONE. I WILL ONLY DISCUSS GRADES IN PERSON DURING OFFICE HOURS.

Exams

Exams will consist of short answers and two essay questions. Short answer is worth 1/3 of the exam grade and the essays are worth 2/3 of the grade. The second exam is not comprehensive. Make-ups are at my discretion.

First exam -- -- -- -- --Wednesday, August 12th in class.

Second exam is TAKE HOME-- -- -- -- --Due Friday, August 28th by 5 pm in my mailbox in the RS office, Kenna 323. This exam is NOT COMPREHENSIVE.

Pop Quizzes

If it appears that students are not reading, pop quizzes might be administered. If administered, they will be factored into the exam grade.

Writing Assignment: Each student will be required to do an eight to twelve page paper which will analyze and compare two traditions. **ACCEPTANCE OF LATE PAPERS IS AT MY DISCRETION. TEN POINTS PER DAY WILL BE DEDUCTED FOR LATE PAPERS. EMAILED PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. DIRECTIONS AS FOLLOWS: 5 POINTS OFF FOR MISSING CITATIONS; 10 POINTS OFF FOR PAPERS THAT ARE TOO SHORT; 5 POINTS OFF FOR MISSING WORKS CITED PAGES, AND ADDITIONAL POINTS TAKEN OFF FOR NOT FOLLOWING OTHER FORMATTING STIPULATIONS.**

Turn in the papers to my mailbox in the RS office, Kenna 323 by 5 p.m. on Aug. 21st. IF YOU HAND IN A PAPER AFTER THE DUE DATE AND TIME WITHOUT MY EXPRESS PERMISSION, THE DATE I FIND IT IN MY BOX IS THE DATE IT WAS HANDED IN, REGARDLESS OF WHEN YOU ACTUALLY HANDED IT IN. THEREFORE, IF A PAPER IS LATE, YOU SHOULD GET THE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT TO INITIAL AND DATE IT BEFORE YOU PUT IT IN MY BOX.

Paper due in my mailbox in the RS office, Kenna 323, by 5 p.m. on Friday, August 21st.

Attendance and Discussion (Presence and Participation):

Students will be graded on participation and effort in the groups and in regular class lectures. Students receive one grace absence. Written documentation is required for excused absences. (Doctor's notes, etc.) Because we will be meditating at the beginning and end of class once training begins, you will not be excused for meetings, trainings, etc. that conflict, only for documented emergencies.

NO TOLERANCE POLICY FOR CELL PHONES AND PDA'S:

IF YOU WISH TO BE IN THIS CLASS, YOU MUST TURN OFF AND PUT AWAY ALL CELL PHONES AND PDA'S. ANY USE OF CELL PHONES OR PDA'S IN THIS CLASS (IN YOUR LAP, ON THE DESK, ETC.) WILL LOWER YOUR PARTICIPATION BY ONE FULL GRADE OR MORE REGARDLESS OF THE REST OF YOUR PARTICIPATION IN CLASS. IF YOUR CELL PHONE/PDA IS OUT AND ON, EVEN IF YOU ARE NOT USING IT, YOU RISK LOSING CREDIT FOR CLASS PARTICIPATION THAT DAY, IN ADDITION TO LOWERING YOUR OVER-ALL PARTICIPATION GRADE. THEY CANNOT BE IN YOUR LAP, ON THE DESK, OR OUT IN ANY WAY. THEY MUST BE PHYSICALLY TURNED OFF AND IN A BAG. THE SAFEST MEASURE IF YOU WISH TO EARN A GOOD PARTICIPATION GRADE IS NOT TO BRING THEM TO CLASS.

PARTICIPATION CONTINUED.

Students will be graded on participation and effort in the groups and in regular class lectures.

At the beginning of every class for which there is scheduled reading, students must bring in an index card with the following on it:

1. What was easiest to understand about the reading. One to three sentences per each part.
2. What was hardest to understand about the reading. One to three sentences for each part. **THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART.**

THESE ARE NOT QUIZZES. THEY ARE SIMPLY TO SHOW EVIDENCE THAT YOU HAVE READ AND TO HELP FOCUS LECTURE. THEY WILL BE FACTORED INTO YOUR PARTICIPATION GRADE.

YOU WILL HAND THESE CARDS IN AT THE END OF CLASS.

Students receive one grace absence. Persistent tardiness and early departure from class will hurt your grade. Sleeping in class, not paying attention, chattering or whispering to fellow students during lecture or when others are answering or asking questions of the professor and other behavior that demonstrates the student is not participating will hurt your grade. Consistent disruption of class by talking to fellow students outside of group discussion periods will hurt your grade.

IF YOU PERSIST IN WHISPERING TO SEAT-MATES OUTSIDE OF GROUP DISCUSSION, I WILL ASK YOU TO MOVE DURING CLASS. WHEN ASKED, PLEASE RISE AND MOVE TO ANOTHER SEAT. IF YOU ARE TEMPTED TO WHISPER TO YOUR SEAT-MATE, SIT NEXT TO SOMEONE YOU DO NOT KNOW.

Please note that it will be difficult for you to do well on exams if you are not present during class discussion. If you do not make the effort to make up the material, even one absence can radically affect your ability to do well on the corresponding exam.

USING YOUR CELL-PHONE OR ANY PDA DURING CLASS IN ANY WAY WILL ALSO LOWER YOUR PARTICIPATION GRADE BY ONE FULL GRADE OR MORE REGARDLESS OF THE REST OF YOUR PARTICIPATION.

Attendance in this classroom will be closely monitored. This not only helps me learn your name, but alerts me in time to pre-empt avoidable problems with absenteeism. Numerous unexplained absences are not acceptable. Stuff happens, but I want to know about it. **If you miss class, you are responsible for getting the notes and hand-outs from a fellow student who is part of your "buddy" group. Only if you have contacted all team members and no one has responded to you should you ask me for the material.**

Participation will be graded in the following manner:

PHONES AND ALL PDA'S MUST BE OFF AND PHYSICALLY PUT AWAY DURING CLASS. STUDENTS WHO TEXT OR CHECK THEIR MESSAGES DURING CLASS (IN YOUR LAPS, ON THE DESK, ETC.) OR USE THEIR PHONES OR PDA'S IN ANY WAY DURING CLASS WILL NOT GET AN A IN PARTICIPATION. NO QUESTIONS ASKED. IF YOU PREFER TO TEXT DURING CLASS, THIS IS NOT THE CLASS FOR YOU.

PLEASE NOTE THAT WHISPERING OR CHATTERING TO FELLOW STUDENTS OUTSIDE OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND USING ANY ELECTRONIC DEVICES (CELL-PHONES, ETC.) WILL AFFECT YOUR GRADE BY ONE FULL GRADE LEVEL EVEN IF THE REST OF YOUR PARTICIPATION IS AT THE A, B, C, ETC. LEVEL.

GRADING OF PARTICIPATION CONTINUED:

A: Regular attendance and regular contributions and regular notecards.

The A student *displays that he or she has done the reading, references the reading in contributions*, DOES NOT CHATTER OR TALK TO FELLOW STUDENTS DURING LECTURE OR WHEN OTHER STUDENTS ARE ASKING OR ANSWERING QUESTIONS OF THE PROFESSOR, **DOES NOT TEXT-MESSAGE OR USE ANY ELECTRONIC DEVICES DURING CLASS** and answers questions and asks questions regularly in class.

B: Regular attendance and regular notecards and occasional contributions.

The B student answers questions when asked point-blank, attends class regularly and hands in all participation assignments, **DOES NOT TEXT-MESSAGE OR USE ANY ELECTRONIC DEVICES DURING CLASS**, DOES NOT CHATTER OR TALK TO FELLOW STUDENTS DURING LECTURE OR WHEN OTHER STUDENTS ARE ASKING OR ANSWERING QUESTIONS OF THE PROFESSOR.

C: Too many absences or too little contribution or too few notecards. The C student cannot answer questions when asked, or when asked reflects that he/she has not done the reading. The C student does not take the participation assignments seriously. The C student disrupts class by chattering to fellow students outside of group discussion and does not pay attention AND/OR USES ELECTRONIC DEVICES DURING CLASS.

D: Too many absences or too little contribution or too few notecards. Doesn't pay attention and chatters to fellow students outside of group discussion and ignores class-room protocol. Texts, uses PDA's during class, has cell-phone, PDA, out and on.

F: Serious problems

BUDDY GROUPS:

If you miss class, you are responsible for getting the notes and hand-outs from a fellow student who is part of your class team/discussion group. Only if you have contacted all team members and no one has responded to you should you ask me for the material.

In order to calculate your **final grade for the semester**, each component of the course requirements will be weighted as follows:

EXAMS:	55 percent of your final grade.
WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:	25 percent of your final grade.
PARTICIPATION:	20 percent of your final grade.
TOTAL:	100 percent.

Academic Honesty:

Cheating in any way will not be tolerated. If you are caught cheating on an exam or quiz, you will fail the entire course. If you are caught plagiarizing material, you will receive no credit for the assignment.

Respect in the Classroom:

The atmosphere in the classroom will be one of respect. Open discussion is taken for granted, but disruption will not be tolerated. If you are disrupting the class, I will give you a first warning. A second warning might include a request for you to leave the classroom. A third warning will entail your departure from the classroom.

Cell Phones and other Electronic devices, including computers: Cell phones are to be turned off during class. The use of computers is not allowed unless you have a special need confirmed by the Drahmman Center.

Cell phones and all electronic devices are to be turned off during class. If you use your cell phone or any other electronic device during class in any way (answering it, text-messaging, playing games, etc.) it will be confiscated and kept by me until the end of class. **PERSISTENT USE WILL AFFECT YOUR PARTICIPATION GRADE.**

COURSE OUTLINE: How can we compare the mystical experiences of these four different traditions?

PLEASE ALWAYS BRING TWO BOOKS TO EVERY CLASS: YOUR WORLD RELIGIONS BOOK AND THE MYSTIC WHO IS REPRESENTATIVE FOR THAT WORLD RELIGION.

FIRST WEEK

July 27th	Introduction	What is mysticism? How can we compare traditions? MOVIE: <i>Enlightenment Guaranteed</i> What is ultimate reality? What is union with God? How do these four traditions differ?
July 29th	Christianity What is union with God? How is it possible? What is the essence of Catholic Christianity? What is the essence of Protestant Christianity?	<i>World's Religions</i> , Chapter 8

SECOND WEEK

Aug. 3rd	Thomas Merton What is contemplation? How is his mysticism Catholic and Christian? What is the connection between mysticism and action?	Merton, pp. 15-72; pp. 104-134; pp. 165-185.
Aug. 5th	Buddhism What is ultimate reality for Buddhism? What is a mystical experience for Buddhism? What are its similarities and differences with Catholicism?	<i>World's Religions</i> , Chapter 3

THIRD WEEK

BRING A LARGE BLUE OR GREEN EXAM BOOK TO CLASS.

Aug. 10th	Thich Nhat Hanh What is zen? How is TNH Buddhist? How is he a mystic? How can we compare him to Thomas Merton?	Hanh, pp. 1-51. Review
Aug. 12 th	FIRST EXAM Two hours.	

FOURTH WEEK

- Aug. 17th Judaism *World's Religions, Chapter 7*
What is Jewish meditation?
What is union with God for
Judaism?
What are mystical practices
for Judaism?
How can we compare this
to Buddhism and Catholicism?
- August 19th Rabbi Lew *Lew, Chapters 1-4.*
How is his mysticism
Jewish?
How focused is it on
sacred story?
What is union with God
for him?
How does he compare
to Merton and TNH?

PAPER DUE IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES DROP-OFF BOX BY 5 P.M. IN MY MAILBOX IN THE RS OFFICE, KENNA 323 ON FRIDAY, AUGUST 21st.

FIFTH WEEK

- August 24th Islam *World's Religions, Chapter 6*
What are the mystical
practices of Islam?
What is union with God/
Allah for Islam?
What is its essence?
How does it compare to
our other three traditions?
- August 26th One Sufi's Path *Helminski, p.viii-p. 56
and Review.*
What is a Sufi? How
is Helminski's mysticism
Islamic? How does it relate
to the Koran? How can we
compare him to Merton, TNH,
and Lew?

SECOND EXAM (TAKE HOME—NOT COMPREHENSIVE): Due Friday, August 28th by 5 pm in my mailbox in the RS office, Kenna 323. This exam is NOT COMPREHENSIVE.