Los Angeles Mission College Fall 2013

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Office IA 29, hours: T 3:50-6:50; W 1:45-4:45 Philosophy 33: Comparative Survey of World Religions 3276 Thursday, 6:50-10:00 P.M. INST 2004

Course Description: Philosophy 33 provides students with an opportunity to learn, appreciate, and critically evaluate the teachings and practices of the world's great religions. Readings, discussions, group projects and presentations will cover Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The course will also investigate the following questions: What is religion? Why are humans religious? What is spirituality? What are the implications of religious diversity? How do different religions describe the nature of ultimate reality? How do different religious traditions account for evil? What is the relationship between religion and morality? Is religious belief rational in a scientific age? Do religious institutions contribute to women's oppression?

Course Objectives: The aim of Philosophy 33 is to expose students to the teachings of the world's great religions and to engage them in philosophical analysis of religious belief. Students who successfully complete the course will acquire a greater understanding of the nature and significance of religion, the similarities and differences between eastern and western religious concepts, and the problems and paradoxes that a critical analysis of religion reveals. Students will sharpen their skills of critical analysis, interpretation, and evaluation by fulfilling course requirements. Additionally, the study of world religions produces an increased appreciation of cultural diversity.

Text: Schmidt, Sager, Carney, Muller, Zanca, Jackson, Mayhall, Burke: <u>Patterns of</u> Religion. 2nd ed. Thomson Wadsworth, 2005.

Packet of Handouts available in the college bookstore and on my LAMC web page Course Requirements: Reading of assigned texts; participation in class discussions; completion of individual presentation assignments; group presentation on religion and the modern world; one critical essay (defend a thesis on a teaching or issue discussed in the course, 3-5 pages); two exams (essay, short answer type).

Evaluation:	Class participation and attendance:	10%
	Critical essay:	20%
	Midterm Exam:	20%
	Individual presentation:	15%
	Final Exam:	20%
	Group Presentation	15%

Exams must be taken when scheduled unless prior arrangements are made with the instructor. Students absent more than two sessions will be dropped from the course. Arriving late or leaving early counts as an absence on the second occasion.

SCHEDULE

8/29 Course introduction and requirements.

9/5 Definitions of *religion*; approaches to the problem of religious diversity; ancient religious traditions; the evolution of religious belief. Read pp. 3-31.

9/12 Hinduism. Read pp. 121-173.

9/19 Buddhism Read pp. 175- 223

9/27 Confucianism and Taoism. Read pp. 225-301

10/3 Exam review; exam 1

10/10 Judaism. Read pp. 303-355

10/17 Christianity, origins Read pp. 357-405.

10/24 Christianity part 2

10/31 A history of Satan in Judaism and Christianity; occult religious traditions.

11/7 Islam. Read pp. 407-447. ***Critical essay due***

11/14 Group presentations

11/21 Group presentations

12/5 New religious movements

12/12: Final Exam: 8-10 P.M.

Course Standards: Los Angeles Mission trusts each student to maintain high standards of honesty and ethical behavior. All assignments submitted in fulfillment of course requirements must be the student's own work. All assignments other than those designated as "group" are meant to be individual efforts. Group efforts are meant to be equal efforts of all group members. All documents are to be typed and prepared in MLA format.

The Master said, there may well be those who can do without knowledge; but I for my part am certainly not one of them. To hear much, pick out what is good and follow it, to see much and take note of it, is the lower of the two kinds of wisdom. Confucius.

Believe nothing merely because you have been told it, or because it is traditional, or because you yourself have imagined it. Do not believe what your teacher tells you merely out of respect for your teacher. But whatsoever, after due examination and analysis, you find conducive to the good, the benefit, the welfare of all beings, that doctrine cling to it and take it as your guide. Buddha.

Learn to be detached and to take joy in renunciation. Do not get angry or harm any living creature, but be compassionate and gentle; show good will to all. Cultivate vigor, patience, will, purity; avoid malice and pride. Then, Arjuna, you will achieve your divine destiny. Bhagavad Gita, 16: 2-3.

He who is naturally in sympathy with man, to him all men come. But he who forcedly adapts, has no room even for himself, still less for others. Chuang Tzu.

Religion lies not in the [yogi's] patched garment, nor in his staff, nor in besmearing the body with ashes. Religion lies not in suspending large rings from split ears, nor in shaving the head, nor in the blowing of horns. To live uncontaminated amid worldly temptations is to find the secret of religion. Religion lies not in empty words. He who regards all men as equal is religious. Guru Nanak (founder of Sikhism).

You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of you own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.... When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. Leviticus, 19:18, 33f.

As you wish that men would do to you, do so to them. Luke 6:31.

No man is a true believer unless he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself. Muhammad, <u>Hadith</u>.

Christianity has to be seen as one among several great world faiths. And because we are today irreversibly aware of this, we have to do our theological thinking consciously in the presence of our Jewish and Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian, and also our immediate post-Christian and humanist neighbors. This means that instead of taking for granted inherited beliefs that strike those neighbors as groundless, arbitrary, or arrogant (or indeed all three at once!), we have to ask ourselves if we have good grounds on which to hold them; and if so, whether the ways in which they were formulated centuries ago in a very different intellectual world are still appropriate today. John Hick.

Individual Presentations

Each student will select a topic relating to one of the eight major religious traditions studied in the course or a smaller religious group that is not explicitly covered in the course. The topic could be an issue in the religion or a biography of a significant figure within the religion. Topic will be selected on 9/5.

Group Presentations: Religion and the modern world.

Groups of 4-6 students will select a religion and prepare a presentation on issues this religion faces in the modern world, including conflicts with other religions. How has the modern world influenced the religion and how has the religion influenced the modern world? The presentation should consist of 12-15 power point slides with a minimum of five sources. Groups will be formed on 9/12.

Student Learning Outcomes for Philosophy 33

- 1. Demonstrate knowledge of the history and beliefs of the 7 major religious traditions.
- 2. Apply the historical/critical method to analysis of the 7 major religious traditions.
 - 3. Explain philosophical problems that arise within each religious tradition.

<u>Cheating</u>- unauthorized material used during an examination (including electronic devices), changing answers after work has been graded, taking an exam for another student, forging or altering attendance sheets or other documents in the course, looking at another student's paper/scantron/essay/computer or exam with or without their approval is considered cheating. Any student caught cheating will receive a zero for the assignment/exam and referred to the Department chair and/or Student Services for further disciplinary action.

<u>Plagiarism</u>- Plagiarism is defined as the act of using ideas, words, or work of another person or persons as if they were one's own, without giving proper credit to the original sources. This includes definitions found online on Wikipedia, materials from blogs, twitter, or other similar electronic resources. The following examples are intended to be representative, but not all inclusive:

- failing to give credit by proper citations for others ideas and concepts, data and information, statements and phrases, and/or interpretations and conclusions.
- failing to use quotation marks when quoting directly from another, whether it be a paragraph, a sentence, or a part thereof
- Paraphrasing the expressions or thought by others without appropriate quotation marks or attribution
- Representing another's artistic/scholarly works such as essays, computer programs, photographs, paintings, drawings, sculptures or similar works as one's own.

First offense, you will receive a zero for the assignment in question. Any further offenses may result in expulsion from the class, as determined by the disciplinary action from the Office of Student Services.

<u>Recording devices</u> in the classroom- Section 78907 of the California Education Code prohibits the use of any electronic audio or video recording devices, without prior consent of the instructor. (including cell phones, laptops, MP3 players, and more)

<u>Reasonable Accommodations</u>: If you are a student with a disability and require accommodations, please send me a private email. The sooner I am aware of your eligibility for accommodations, the quicker I will be able to assist the DSP&S Office in providing them. For students requiring accommodations, the DSP&S Office at Mission College provides special assistance in areas like: registering for courses, specialized tutoring, note-taking, mobility assistance, special instruction, testing assistance, special equipment, special materials, instructor liaisons, community referrals and job placement.

Suggestions for writing critical essays on world religions

- 1. Choose a topic that interests you, but it is usually best not to write an essay about your own religious beliefs. The essay needs to be objective, impartial, and critical; most people find it difficult to subject their own cherished beliefs to critical scrutiny.
- 2. In academics the term *critical* has a special meaning. It does <u>not</u> mean to find fault with. Rather, a critical essay is one that carefully analyzes the claims it discusses and clearly defines the concepts it covers. (See point 7 on **Writing Philosophy Papers**.)
- 3. You are encouraged to choose your own topic, but for those who are having trouble coming up with a topic, here are some suggestions.
- a. Evaluate the doctrines of Samsara and Karma in Hinduism or Buddhism. What evidence is offered to support these theories? What conceptual difficulties do the theories face? What factual evidence seems to conflict with them? Evaluate the ethical consequences of the theories.
- b. Compare the Christian and Islamic doctrines of salvation. What assumptions does each view make? How does each draw on Jewish tradition in different ways? What conceptual and ethical difficulties does each view face?
- c. Provide an evaluation of Taoist ethics by applying it to some contemporary moral or social issue.
- d. Discuss the role of women in a particular religious tradition. Evaluate arguments that are used to justify denying women the same opportunities as men. How would the religion change if women were allowed to assume roles that are now open only to men?
- e. Compare Buddhist ethics with Christian ethics. What are the most important similarities and dissimilarities? How do their different theological or doctrinal assumptions affect their ethical teachings?
- f. Evaluate the dispute between Mencius and Hsun Tzu on human nature. What arguments does each offer? Who seems more right to you and why?
- g. Discuss the humanistic theory of virtue found in Confucius. Which of the Confucian virtues is most important for modern people? How, if at all, would you revise Confucian ethics for a modern audience? What are the most important lessons that contemporary people could learn from Confucius?
- h. Discuss the importance of the concept of the *chosen people* in Judaism. What role does this concept play in Jewish theology and worship?
- i. Research and discuss one or more of the parables of Jesus.

Writing Philosophy Papers*

- 1. The point of a paper is to <u>state and defend some thesis</u>. The thesis may be critical (The Hindu belief that souls reincarnate is problematic because ...), interpretive (when Jesus says *you won't be able to observe the coming of God's kingdom.... On the contrary, God's Kingdom is right there in your presence* what he means is ...), or substantive (Morality is independent of religion). This is a special kind of expository writing. One kind of expository writing (text books, newspapers) is designed to convey information, and another is designed to prove a point. Philosophy papers of the first sort are generally not acceptable.
- 2. The <u>thesis of the paper should be stated somewhere in the first paragraph</u> of the essay. Your reader needs to know what you are arguing for.
- 3. Some attempt should be made, either at the beginning or the end of the paper, to say why the thesis is interesting or important.
- 4. It is often helpful to include a strategy paragraph before the actual argumentation begins, explaining how you plan to defend your thesis.
- 5. By making reference to the strategy paragraph, or to an outline, you should be able to point to any paragraph in the essay and say just what it is supposed to contribute to the defense of the thesis.
- 6. If you cannot defend your thesis adequately, perhaps a weaker version of your thesis can be defended. Then you can say what would need to be done in addition to what you have done to defend the stronger version.
- 7. A large part of the point of philosophical writing is to bring <u>precision and clarity</u> to abstract, vague, and slippery issues. If you sense your discussion becoming overly general or vague, you're on the wrong track. Start over. It is better to oil one small wheel than to utter incantations over the whole machine.

Grading Criteria (in order of importance.)

- 1. **Relevance.** If you write something down, the assumption is that you think it is relevant. Papers containing material irrelevant to the thesis defended have poor prospects.
- 2. <u>Coherence.</u> This takes practice. A well defended false thesis is better than an ill defended true thesis
- 3. <u>Accuracy.</u> Be careful not to misrepresent or grossly misinterpret the text (if there is one).
- 4. <u>Originality.</u> Originality is not essential. More important is how you put the ideas to use. If you use material (ideas, strategies, whatever) that is not your own, identify that source properly.
- *Based on a handout by R. Cummins (U of Arizona) and Frank Lewis (USC).