Los Angeles Mission College PACE, Fall 2012

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Office hours: MW 10:30-12:30; Tues 1=2

Philosophy 33: Comparative Survey of World Religions 6507 Thursday, 8:10-10:10 P.M.; Saturday 12:30-4:30, CSB 205

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.

Course Requirements: Reading of assigned texts; participation in class discussions; completion of weekend conference assignments; ITV internet assignment: one critical essay (defend a thesis on a teaching or issue discussed in the course, 5-7 pages); two exams (essay, short answer type).

Evaluation:	Class participation and attendance:	10%
	Critical essay:	15%
	Midterm Exam:	15%
	Saturday Conference assignments:	20%
	ITV Internet:	10%
	Final Exam:	20%
	Group Presentation	10%

Exams must be taken when scheduled unless prior arrangements are made with the instructor. Students absent more than two sessions may be dropped from the course.

SCHEDULE

10/25 Week I: Introduction to the study of religion; definitions of *religion*; approaches to the problem of religious diversity; ancient religious traditions; the evolution of religious belief. Read pp. 3-31.

11/1 Week II: Hinduism. Read pp. 121-173.

11/3 Saturday 12:30-4:30

11/8 Week III: Buddhism. Read pp. 175- 223

11/15 Week IV: Confucianism and Taoism. Read pp. 225-301. (ITV Internet I due) Take-home midterm exam distributed.

11/17 Saturday 12:30- 4:30

11/22 Thanksgiving Holiday

11/29 Week VI: Judaism. Read pp. 303-355 Midterm Exam Due

12/1 Saturday 12:30-4:30

Study group presentations on the role of women in a religious tradition. Select a world religion and prepare (as a study group) a 15-20 minute presentation that includes: the historical role (and treatment) of women in the religion; the contemporary role of women in the religion; an analysis of how the role of women has changed in the religion; the future prospects for women in the religion; and an analysis of attempts to justify restrictions on the participation of women in the practice of the religion. Each group should submit a one page outline for their presentation.

12/6 Week VII: Christianity. Read pp. 357-405. (Internet II due)

12/13: Week VIII Islam. Read pp. 407-447. ***Critical essay due***

Saturday 12/15: Final Exam: 12:30-4:30 P.M.

Course Standards: Los Angeles Mission College PACE program for adult learners 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.

Drop Dates: 10/27- with a refund. 10/31-without a "W." 12/2- with a "W."

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, Hadith.

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.

Philosophy 33 Internet ITV Assignment

- I. **Finding information on the Web**. There is lots of information available on the Web, but finding reliable information can be a challenge. Using search engines, find information on each of the topics listed below. Indicate whether the information you find seems reliable or not. What role does each of these terms play in your own view of religion? (Due 11/25) Provide URLs for all sites visited.
- Angels
- Reincarnation
- Karma
- The Historical Jesus
- The Historical Critical Method
- The Brights
- II. **Religious leaders.** Use the internet to compose a brief biography of the religious leaders listed below along with their most important contributions. (Due 12/6) Provide URLs for all sites visited.
- Dalai Lama
- Thomas Aquinas
- Zarathushtra
- Mahatma Gandhi
- Dorthy Day
- Thomas Merton
- Robert W. Funk

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.

Further 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.

<u>Grading Criteria</u> (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).