FYS 015 (CRN 6515): MYSTICAL JOURNEYS

Drake University
Fall 2014
T/R 12:30-1:45pm
Meredith 201

INSTRUCTOR
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- Office Hours (in 203 Medbury): T/R: 9:00-11:30am, or by appointment

DESCRIPTION
- In many different places and at many different times religious practice and maturation have been metabolized as a journey. This class seeks to understand not only why this is so but also how we metaphorize our own lives (religious or otherwise) as journeys. We begin by considering the importance of "mystical" experience to the practice and study of religion in the modern West. We then spend the majority of our time examining the use of journey metaphors in three different religious traditions where the "destination" is a state of mystical union: ancient Christian mysticism, medieval Muslim mysticism (Sufism), and modern Zen Buddhism. And we end by briefly reflecting on the plausibility of such "journeys" in general and their applicability to our own lives.

COURS GOALS/OBJECTIVES
- To gain a basic understanding of the religious traditions of Christian mysticism, Muslim mysticism (Sufism), and Zen Buddhism
- To examine the nature and role of journey-metaphorized religious practice in the religious traditions of Christian mysticism, Muslim mysticism (Sufism), and Zen Buddhism
- To critically examine the importance of mystical experience to the practice and study of religion in the modern West
- To reflect upon the contemporary plausibility and relevance of mystical journeys
- More broadly, to learn to read texts closely and critically through a variety of reading assignments, to learn to write papers cogently and cohesively through a variety of writing assignments, and to learn to engage ideas and others in a seminar setting through presentation and participation

REQUIRED TEXTS

DISCLAIMER
- With your consent (popular vote), I reserve the right to revise this syllabus should I deem it in your best educational interest.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS/GRADING

- Ten Reading Responses (20% total; 2% each)
  o Student is responsible for writing and posting to Blackboard a total of 10 reading responses (out of 19 opportunities), each of which must be for a different reading assignment. Reading responses are due by one hour prior to the beginning of class (11:30 am). They should engage the reading material, citing therefrom. And they should also contain a topic or question for class discussion (which the student will be responsible for raising in class, time permitting). They should be written in response to one of the reading threads created by the professor. And they should be approximately one, double-spaced page in length. They will be graded as check-plus (2 points) or check (1.5 points) or check-minus (1 point) based on their accurate understanding of and thoughtful engagement with the reading material. Reading responses will only be accepted for classes that you actually attend.

- Four Papers (60% total, 15% each)
  o Student is responsible for writing four papers, each approximately four pages in length (double spaced) with proper citations and bibliography. Student is also responsible for presenting these papers in class on their due dates. (Failing to do so will result in the loss of a letter grade.) Paper questions will be distributed approximately one week prior to their due dates (though you’re more than welcome to negotiate paper topics with me earlier than that). Papers will be graded in three categories: accuracy of content (6 points), strength of argument (6 points), and clarity of expression (3 points). Except in the case of extenuating circumstances, late papers will be penalized by one point per day.

- Overall Class Contribution (20%)
  o Student is responsible for contributing to course in general. Although this encompasses a number of things, it primarily involves engagement and participation in the classroom. Note that this means more than just coming to class and doing the reading responses—it means actually contributing to the well-working of the course. Still, it is strongly recommended that students attend each and every class. Reasonably excused absences (e.g., religious observances, medical appointments, interview trips, and athletic and musical trips) will be permitted, provided that you notify me about them, provide documentation (when appropriate), and make up any work that you miss. You are responsible for everything that occurs during classes that you miss.

FIRST YEAR SEMINARS AND WRITING

- First year seminars, as you already know, are designed to facilitate your adjustment to intellectual life at Drake. More elaborately, they “are intended to provide an optimum environment for promoting intellectual inquiry and growth among first year students by fostering a sense of community among class members, encouraging active participation and collaboration in the conduct of the class, and fostering the development of skills in creative thinking, critical analysis, and effective communication.”
- If you would like more info on FYS, go to: http://www.drake.edu/dc/aboutfys/studenthomepage/.
- If you would like more help with your writing, please make an appointment at the Writing Workshop on the 2nd floor of Howard Hall: http://artsci.drake.edu/writersworkshop/wwshop.html.
- You may want to purchase a writing guide such as Keith Hjortshoj’s The Transition to College Writing.
- As for citations, it does not matter to me which format you use, just as long as you are consistent in doing so. I myself usually use Chicago style (usually with footnotes but sometimes also with parenthetical citations). Thus, I recommend The Chicago Manual of Style, which is distilled in the invaluable and classic writing guide of Kate Turabian: A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (which is now in its 8th edition).
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- There are too many good resources for the study of religion in Cowles (in stacks, reference, and e-books) to list them all. You really need to check them out for yourself! So, here I'll just make three brief comments:
  - *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (Lindsay Jones, ed.) contains a vast number of entries on many different aspects of the world’s religions written by leading scholars of religion. (And the other encyclopedias of religion in the reference section are probably useful too.)
  - I don’t know of a credible on-line encyclopedia or dictionary of religion. Both the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (iep.utm.edu) and Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (plato.stanford.edu) sometimes provide scholarly articles on religious philosophers and philosophies. Please exercise caution when using websites that are not written by identified scholars or are written by partisan practitioners.
  - Cowles subscribes to the ATLA Religion Database, the premier index of articles and books written in the discipline of religious studies. ATLA will allow you to search all the books and articles ever written on any given subject matter pertaining to religion. (Philosopher's Index will do the same for philosophy.)

BLACKBOARD

- This course will utilize Blackboard in at least four ways: (1) students *will* post reading and dialogue responses to the “discussion board” (see above) (2) students *may* post informal (and, if desired, anonymous) course evaluations to the “discussion board” (see below); (3) professor *will* post grades to the “gradebook;” (4) professor *will* post reading hints to the “announcements” (see below).

STUDYING RELIGION

- The academic study of religion is not the confessional practice of religion. When we study religion in the (secular) university, we do so from a perspective that is as impartial and objective as possible. This involves, in my opinion, an attitude of critical empathy—empathy in that it attempts to understand and appreciate religious beliefs and practices from the perspective of the practitioner, but also critical in that it attempts to understand and appreciate these beliefs and practices as objectively as possible.

READING RELIGION (READING HINTS)

- Reading about culturally and historically distant ideas and practices can be difficult, particularly when unfamiliar, technical terms are involved. To ease your pain, I will post reading hints under the “announcements” section of Blackboard that should help focus your reading of the assignments. Still, these readings will still require time and attention. Budget your time and determine your reading space accordingly.

COURSE FEEDBACK

- I am teaching this course for you. This means that if something about it is not “working” for you in such a way that significantly hinders your learning experience, I want to know about it so that I can at least try to fix it. To this end, I will do two things: (1) invite you to write informal evaluations in class from time to time; (2) invite you to post informal evaluations to the discussion board of Blackboard anytime you so desire. Both may be done anonymously.

DISABILITY STATEMENT

- If you have a disability and will require academic accommodations, please see me. Accommodations are coordinated through Student Disability Services. Please contact Michelle Laughlin, Director of Student Disability Service at 281-1835 or michelle.laughlin@drake.edu.
ACADMIC CONDUCT: PLAGIARISM

- Plagiarism will be taken very seriously in this class. Plagiarized papers will be automatically failed. Second offenses will result in failure of the course and may result in academic probation or expulsion.

- My own rule (regarding when to cite): If you use an author’s ideas, whether verbatim or not, cite that author. If those ideas are “common knowledge,” there is no need to cite—unless those ideas are copied word-for-word. If those ideas are not common knowledge, then you must cite.

- The A&S Policy (http://www.drake.edu/dos/handbook/academic/):
  - Academic dishonesty is an all-encompassing term involving any activity that seeks to gain credit for work one has not done or to deliberately damage or destroy the work of others. It includes plagiarism (the misrepresentation, either by intent or negligence, of another’s ideas, phrases, discourse, or works as one’s own); cheating (the act, or attempted act, of giving or obtaining aid and/or information by illicit means in meeting any academic requirement, including examinations); fabrication (intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic sense in any academic exercise); and facilitating academic dishonesty (intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic dishonesty). Examples of such cases include, but are not limited to:
    1. copying from the Internet and representing it as one’s own thoughts or work;
    2. copying from another student’s paper, laboratory report, or other report, or computer files or listing and representing it as one’s own thoughts or work;
    3. using, during a test or laboratory experiment, material and/or devices not authorized by the instructor in charge;
    4. without the instructor’s permission, collaborating with another, knowingly assisting another or knowingly receiving the assistance of another in writing an examination or in satisfying any other course requirements;
    5. incorporating into written assignments materials written by others without giving them credit, or otherwise improperly using information written by others (including that which might be stored on computer disks or other technological devices), or submitting commercially prepared papers as one’s own;
    6. submission of multiple copies of the same or similar papers without prior approval of the several instructors involved;
    7. claiming as one's own work that which was done by tutors or others with no mention of credit to or the assistance of those persons;
    8. deliberately damaging or destroying another's laboratory experiments, computer work or studio work;
    9. knowingly obtaining access to, using, buying, selling, stealing, transporting, or soliciting in its entirety or in part, the contents of a test or other assignment unauthorized for release;
    10. substituting for another student, or permitting another student to substitute for oneself, to take a test or other assignment or to make a presentation;
    11. intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise;
    12. forgery, alterations, or misuse of University documents;
    13. falsifying information submitted or failure to reveal relevant information in any University application form or offering any false information in any University disciplinary proceeding.
SEMINAR SCHEDULE

PART I: RELIGION AND MYSTICISM

- 08.26 (T): Introduction

- 08.28 (R): James' Varieites of Religious Experience 1
  - Readings (1): Lecture I: Religion and Neurology
  - Exercise: How study religion?

- 09.02 (T): James' Varieites of Religious Experience 2
  - Readings (2): Lectures II-III: Circumscription of the Topic; The Reality of the Unseen
  - Exercise: What is religion?

- 09.04 (R): James' Varieites of Religious Experience 3
  - Readings (3): Lecture VIII: The Divided Self, and the Process of Unification
  - Exercise: Why journey metaphors?

- 09.09 (T): James' Varieites of Religious Experience 4
  - Readings (4): Lectures XVI-XVII: Mysticism
  - Exercise: Why mysticism?

- 09.11 (R): James' Varieites of Religious Experience 5
  - Readings (5): Lecture XX: Conclusion
  - Exercise: Secular as sacred?

- 09.16 (T): Discussion Day

- 09.18 (R): PAPER 1 DUE

PART II: SACRED JOURNEYS IN (ORTHODOX) CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM

- 09.23 (T) Introduction to Christian Mysticism
  - Readings (6): Fanning, Mystics of the Christian Tradition, pp. 1-35 (to be distributed)

- 09.25 (R): Christian Mystical Journeys 1

- 09.30 (T): Christian Mystical Journeys 2

- 10.02 (R): Christian Mystical Journeys 3
  - Readings (9): The Ladder of the Divine Ascent, pp. 261-290

- 10.07 (T): Discussion Day

- 10.09 (R): PAPER 2 DUE

- 10.14 (T): No Class: Fall Recess
PART III: SACRED JOURNEYS IN ISLAMIC MYSTICISM (SUFIISM)

- 10.16 (R): Introduction to Islam
  - Readings (10): “Islam” (from *Living Religions*) *(to be distributed)*
  - *Library Trip*

- 10.21 (T): Introduction to Sufism
  - Readings (11): *An Introduction to Islam*, chs. 12-13 *(to be distributed)*

- 10.23 (R): Islamic Mystical Journeys 1

- 10.28 (T): Islamic Mystical Journeys 2

- 10.30 (R): Islamic Mystical Journeys 3
  - Readings (14): *The Conference of the Birds*, pp. 219-245

- 11.04 (T): Discussion Day

- 11.06 (R): **PAPER 3 DUE**

PART IV: SACRED JOURNEYS IN BUDDHISM

- 11.11 (T): Intro to Buddhism
  - Readings (15): "Buddhism" (from *Living Religions*) *(to be distributed)*

- 11.13 (R): Intro to Zen
  - Readings (16): *Asian Philosophies*, ch. 22 *(to be distributed)*

- 11.18 (T): Zen Buddhist Mystical Journeys 1
  - Readings (17): *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, pp. 9-49

- 11.20 (R): Zen Buddhist Mystical Journeys 2
  - Readings (18): *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, pp. 51-90

- 11.25 (T): No Class: American Academy of Religion annual conference

- 11.27 (R): No Class: Thanksgiving Break

- 12.02 (T): Zen Buddhist Mystical Journeys 3

- 12.04 (R): Discussion Day

- 12.15 (W): Finals Week: **PAPER 4 DUE**