Philosophy 3320: Religions of the World  
Instructor: Tom Pynn  
MW 5-7:45, Summer 2010

Office Hours: SO 2008. MW 2-4:45 (first four weeks), 12-1:45 (second four weeks), and by appointment.

E-mail address: tpynn@kennesaw.edu to be used only for communication purposes. If you use the email on Georgia View, there is a strong chance that I will not respond for days. You are to use my KSU address. Exams submitted electronically without authorization will be deleted.

If we take the world’s enduring religions at their best,  
We discover the distilled wisdom of the human race.  
--Huston Smith

Course Description: Philosophy 3320 presents the student with an opportunity to engage in a guided philosophical examination of the different questions, texts and concepts developed by religious thinkers and traditions from both Western and Non-Western cultures. The focus of this course is on the significance of World Religions rather than on particular traditions as such. The student reads primary works of religion and religious philosophy and engages in thoughtful discussion about the ideas raised by and in these works. Students take essay examinations, develop a journal of concepts important to the philosophical study of religion, engage in class discussion, and view documentaries. All in-class and out-of-class activities focus on elevating the student’s critical ability to read religious and philosophical texts, comprehend religious and philosophical concepts and conceptual frameworks of the thinkers and traditions we study, and apply the ideas we study to their own self-understanding, other-understanding, and understanding of the world they live in by speaking in class discussions and composing exam essays.

Required Texts
Henry Rosemont, Jr. Rationality and Religious Experience
Huston Smith, The World’s Religions, 50th Anniversary Edition
Gianni Vattimo, Belief
Kitaro Nishida, Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview
Philip Zaleski, The Best Spiritual Writing, 20120
Misc. Selections posted on Georgiaview

Highly Recommended: W. L. Reese, Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion: Eastern and Western Thought

Evaluation: The student will demonstrate performative competence in communicating (through writing and speaking) his/her understanding of the course material. Each exam emphasizes a close reading of the texts we study. The student will not use outside sources or secondary sources whether Internet, World Wide Web, journal, or book. If you want to use a text in addition to the ones required for this course you must have it OK’d by the instructor. Failure to cite outside sources on the exams and/or suggesting that they are, known as
plagiarism, will result in an “F” for the exam with the student having to retake the exam. Continued plagiarism will result in your being brought before the school judiciary. See Academic Integrity Statement below. All exams are due when class begins. I will allow late exams only if the student contacts me about the absence at least one week prior to the exam date and/or if the student finds himself/herself in dire straits; e.g., giving birth, comatose, hospitalization for an extended period of time, and, of course, being dead. A student may email me their assignment(s) only if prior arrangements have been made with me. See section E-mail address. The student must complete and turn in all exams in order to receive credit for the course.

- 4 exams (80%): I will offer five exams. You will choose any four of the five. Each exam reiterates what is done in class: lecture, journal, class discussion, and documentaries. The take-home essay exams are given out one week prior to the due date. The exams emphasize close reading of texts, reasoning acuity, and composition skills. No outside or secondary sources other than those studied in class are to be used.

- Journal of Concepts (10%): See GeorgiaView for the handout on concepts for Phil 3320. You must complete at least 70% of the list in order to qualify for the 10%. No partial credit.

- Class participation (10%). Class participation is willingly and spiritedly engaging in reading aloud, asking questions and freely participating in discussion of the topics at hand with other students and instructor. Attendance is neither rewarded nor punished; however, students who miss class do not perform as competently as students who attend class on a regular basis.

Extra credit: You may acquire extra credit, but all exams must have been turned in to receive extra points. Extra credit is obtained by completing a 500-word response to any philosophically and or religiously relevant film. See GeorgiaView for an explanation of what I want to read in a response. Each response you complete and submit is worth up to 5 points. Extra credit points will be added to the exam closest to the turn in date of your summary. There is no limit to the amount of responses one can turn in. All extra credit must be turned in no later than July 14, 2010.

You may elect to complete a fifth exam which will be averaged with the other exams.

*Nota Bene: All course work is to be typed in Times New Roman at 12 point, double-spaced, and in standard margins. I will not accept handwritten assignments. No covers or jackets or folders, please. The student must complete and turn in all exams in order to receive credit for the course. In each exam essay I am looking for: accurate presentation of the author’s ideas; use of relevant vocabulary items; your critique of the author’s ideas; accuracy of grammar; and college-level reasoning and composition skills.

Academic Integrity Statement: Every KSU student is responsible for upholding the provisions of the Student Code of Conduct, as published in the Undergraduate Catalogs. Section II of the Student Code of Conduct addresses the University’s policy on academic honesty, including provisions regarding plagiarism and cheating, unauthorized access to University materials,
misrepresentation/falsification of University records or academic work, malicious removal, retention, or destruction of library materials, malicious/intentional misuse of computer facilities and/or services, and misuse of student identification cards. Incidents of alleged academic misconduct will be handled through the established procedures of the University Judiciary Program, which includes either an informal resolution by a faculty member, resulting in a grade adjustment, or a formal hearing procedure, which may subject a student to the Code of Conduct's minimum one semester suspension requirement.

Absence Policy: There are no excused absences in college. Students are responsible for making up class by conferring with classmates (i.e. getting notes, discussing the main topics of conversation). Instructors are neither expected to, nor encouraged to repeat class lectures for student convenience. The student will neither be punished for absence, nor rewarded for presence; however, the student is responsible for material covered: all readings, lectures, and documentary presentations. I will allow late exams only if the student contacts me about the absence at least one week prior to the exam date and/or if the student finds himself/herself in dire straits; e.g., giving birth, comatose, hospitalization for an extended period of time, and, of course, being dead. A student may email me their assignment(s) only if prior arrangements have been made with me.

Plagiarism Policy: See student handbook. If you are unsure of what constitutes plagiarism, please visit the writing center or see me during office hours. See Academic Integrity Statement.

Expected Outcomes: By the end of the semester the student will

- be familiar with the religious concepts of the various philosophers and religious traditions we have studied;
- understand how the study of world religions differs from the study of a particular tradition;
- be able to write philosophically on a variety of religion-related topics;
- understand contemporary events within the purview of a philosophical and religious perspective;
- be able to apply the ideas we study to his/her life;
- understand the different contexts and criteria for the philosophical study of religion;
- have an understanding of the relation of philosophy to religion and of religion to a variety of (sub)cultures;
- be offered the opportunity to glimpse, as Huston Smith phrases it, “Another world to live in.”

Schedule of Events

May 26: Introduction to Phil 3320; “A Personal Philosophy” (Documentary); Conceptions of religion. Selected readings from GeorgiaView. Smith “Point of Departure”, 1-11 and 402-431.

June 2-7: Selected readings from GeorgiaView; Rationality and Religious Experience.

Exam I: June 14, 2010

Exam II: June 23, 2010


Exam III: July 7, 2010


Exam IV: July 19, 2010


July 14: Zaleski, ix-86
July 19: Zaleski, 87-174
July 21: Zaleski, 175-240

Exam V: July 28, 2010

NOTE: Schedule of events subject to change by Fate, the insightful awareness of the instructor, and/or the collaboration between students and instructor.

Summary of Grading Percentages and Grading Scale
Four Essay Exams: 80%
Journal of Concepts: 10%
Participation: 10%

A: 90-100; B: 80-89; C: 70-79; D: 60-69; F: 59 and below

Important Dates
• Last day to withdraw with a W: June 25, 2010
• Memorial Day Holiday: May 31, 2010
• Independence Day Holiday: July 3-5, 2010
• Extra Credit Due: July 14, 2010
• Last Class: July 21, 2010