

Introduction to World Mysticism

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Office Hours: 10-11 MWF, Armitage 464

Fall 2010
MWF 11:15 a.m. – 12:10 p.m.
Religion 396
Classroom: CS 110

In this class, we will survey mysticism across religions, and also seek to understand the nature of this experience. What is the definition of mysticism (and is there such a thing at all)? How can we understand the often paradoxical language adopted by many mystics in describing their experience? Is there a single phenomenon that can be called mysticism, and is there anything that all mysticism shares in common? Can it be described in scholarly or rational terms, or to a person who has not had such an experience? What is the role of the mystic in their religious culture? And what is the relationship between mysticism, mystical experience, and mystical literature?

Our study of this topic will involve looking at writings by and about mystics stemming from across the range of world religions, Eastern and Western, in order to appreciate the range and diversity of this phenomenon. In addition, we will look at and evaluate the scholarly positions taken with regard to mysticism. Students will gain a familiarity with a range of mystics, as well as with the range of approaches taken by academics toward mysticism, and will evaluate those approaches in terms of the primary material they study.

Classes will include lecture, but will primarily involve discussion. Students are expected to come to class familiar with and prepared to discuss the assigned reading.

The following texts are recommended for the course, as large sections will be put on line. They can be purchased either at the Rutgers bookstore, at most other new and used bookstores, or online. Please get the exact translation or edition listed below so we all can use the same page numbers.

Ram Dass, The Only Dance (Anchor 1974)

Thomas Merton, New Seeds of Contemplation

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

1. *Class Participation.* Because the purpose of this course is to help you apply and analyze theories of mysticism to specific cases, class participation is a major portion of your grade. Class time is your opportunity to try out ideas, practice responding to the ideas of others, and generally advance understanding and discussion. Class participation is graded on a combination of (1) frequency of class attendance, (2) frequency of class contributions, and (3) quality of those contributions. You will receive a poor grade for participation if you are disruptive to the class (for example, whispering to a neighbor, putting down someone else's point of view, or repeatedly arriving late). Class absences can be excused in the case of an emergency, provided you inform the instructor beforehand.
2. *Small Group Discussions.* On many days throughout the semester, we will break into small groups lasting for about half an hour to examine a concrete contemporary issue related to the readings for that week. You will be periodically responsible for (1) leading a small group of classmates in discussion, and (2) making a short, informal presentation to the class of your group's findings. You are *not* graded for this. However, if you fail to lead a group and make a presentation, your grade for the course as a whole will be reduced by one full letter (for example, from A to B).
3. *Quizzes.* There will be a number of quizzes on the assigned reading. You are responsible for completing the assigned reading by the first class session of each unit. It is a good idea, when you read, to take notes on the major points, so that you will better retain the information both for the quizzes and for class discussion.
3. *Papers.* There is one 5-6 page midterm paper and one 10-12 page final paper. Their relative values for the course grade are listed below. Papers will be handed in on the course Sakai web site (<https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal/site/mysticism>). Log in using your Rutgers user id (the first part of your Rutgers email address) and password, and go to the "Drop box" on the side.

Cheating and plagiarism will likely result in an F for the course and disciplinary action by the University.
4. *Exam.* There is a final exam for the course. The exam will cover your knowledge of the mystical approaches we have discussed in class as well as of the scholarly approaches and categories (e.g. definitions and typologies of mysticism). It will also ask you to analyze a mystic we have learned about in light of the scholarly theories we have learned, and also to think critically about the scholarly categories themselves.

GRADING

Criteria for final grades are as follows:

A (90 points or higher): Engages accurately and creatively in the scholarly conversation.

B+ (85 points) or B (80 points): Logical, accurate with facts & citations, refers directly to primary and secondary sources.

C+ (75 points) or C (70 points): Satisfactory understanding of topic of course.

D (60 points) or F (fewer than 60 points): poor or failing work

The final course grade is based on the following:

Class participation: 20 points

Quizzes: 10 points

Short Paper: 20 points

Exam: 25 points

Final paper: 25 points

SCHEDULE

Unit 1: Introduction: What is mysticism? 9/1,3, 8

No class 9/6 (labor day)

Shamanism

Reading: Labarre 17-20; 29-40; 97-104; Harner 40-56; Walker 83-87

Week 2: peyote, shamanistic healing, dream quests 10/8

Unit 2: Indian Religion

9/10 (Rosh Hashanah): videos: meditation

*bring comfortable clothes & cushions; this will be an experiential session.

week 3:Yoga 9/13, 15,17

Reading: Eliade 17-24; 46-89

week 4: ram dass 9/20,22

reading: The Only Dance There Is, pp. 6-8; 13-23; 26-32; 36-41; 45-48; 60-75; 82-85; 89-91; 113-114

9/24 (Sukkot) videos: kirtan (sacred chant)

week 5: Thich Nhat Hanh 9/27,10/4

reading: Sun My Heart 3-5; 14-19; Being Peace 3-9,23-28, 45-74; Creating True Peace 89-91

10/1 (Simhat Torah) videos: whirling dervishes

Short Paper Due 10/2

Unit 3: Islam

Week 6a: Aristotle, Neoplatonism and Pantheism 10/18-20

Happold 182-189

“Greek Philosophers” document (in “Resources” section)

Week 6b: ibn Arabi 10/22

Lewis 21-29

Al Arabi, 71-81

Paradox 10/25

Keshavarz 30-31; 41-45; 52-66

Week 7: Rumi 10/27-10/29

Lewis 345-346; 352-357; 362-364; 461-463

Ellwood 88– 99; 119-135

Unit 4: Jewish Mysticism

Visionary mysticism and Sefer Yetzirah 11/1

Ezekiel

Dan, 55-73

Zohar 11/3, 5, 8

Matt 1-17; Scholem 1-30, 34-37

week 10: Hassidism 11/10, 12

http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/145202/index/true/showall/1/jewish/Tzava-at-Harivash.htm selections tba

Unit 5: Christianity

Week 11: Meister Eckhart 11/15, 17

Reading: College & McGinn 30-61; 172-185; 203-205

Sells, Mystical Languages 149-153

Week 12: Theresa of Avila 11/19, 22

Reading: Kavanaugh 1-8; 12-29; 115-132; 172-182

Happold 40-50; 62-3; 73-77

Long paper Due 11/22

11/24-11/26 *No Classes- Thanksgiving*

Week 13: Ignatius of Loyola 11/ 29, 12/1, 12/3

Reading: Ignatius 15-45; 101-112

Fleming 108-114

Week 14: Thomas Merton 12/ 6, 8

Reading: Merton 6-20; 52-63; 84-89; 112-130; 142-149; 156-157

Conclusion/summary: Is it helpful to talk about mysticism? (and: preparing for final exam) 12/10, 13

Final: 12/21, 9-12

Bibliography

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