

**College of Charleston**  
**Department of Religious Studies**  
**FALL 2013**

**RELS 101: APPROACHES TO RELIGION**  
**MWF 2-2:50 in ECTR 103**

Instructor: Dr. Elijah Siegler  
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Office Hours: Tues 1-3 and Fri 10-12 or by appointment

This class approaches religion through the category of **experience**. What does it mean to have a religious experience? How can religious experiences be classified? Where do they come from? Do religious experiences take place in the body or the mind? Is experience the basis of all religious traditions? Are all religious experiences the same, no matter what tradition they derive from? How are religious experiences different from other kinds of experiences?

The cornerstone of this class will be a close reading of a classic of religious studies and one of the great works of American literature, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, by William James. We will read it slowly, and discuss it extensively.

To supplement James' own examples of religious experience, we will focus on four religious traditions as they are practiced today, and figure out what each can tell us about religious experience. (They were selected because they each have different ways of conceiving of experience.) These traditions are **Pentecostalism** (we will also learn about related terms such as Protestantism, Evangelicalism, Methodism, and revivalism), **Gnosticism**, **Daoism** (or more precisely, a practice derived from it: **qigong**), and **Zen Buddhism**. After some general background reading on each tradition, each particular brand of religious experience will be explored through novels and films.

This course will fulfill the **General Education Student Learning Outcomes**:  
Student Learning Outcome #1: Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture.  
Student Learning Outcome #2: Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments.

These two learning outcomes will be assessed in the essay portion of the final exam, which will ask students to interpret James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, a principal primary source in the field of religious studies (worth 10% of total grade.)

There are three required texts, available at the campus bookstore:

1. *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Barnes and Noble Classics Series) by William **James** (ISBN-13: 978-1593080723)
2. *Valis* by Philip K. **Dick** (ISBN-13: 978-0679734468)
3. *The Way of Qigong* by Ken **Cohen** (ISBN-13: 978-0345421098).

There are also required short E-Readings, numbered ER # 1-11 in the schedule of classes, online at OAKS. Please print these out at the library.

Please bring the relevant book or printout to class.

**Assignments:**

- \* Attend class regularly and on-time, ready to discuss the assigned reading: **5%**
- \* Submit a 5-6 page term paper which analyzes a personal experience that could count as religious: **30% (First draft due Oct 23; final paper due Nov 22)**
- \* Take 7 “surprise” quizzes (which will be announced the class before), of which the best 5 will count:  $5 \times 5\% = 25\%$
- \* Take a midterm on Oct 11: **15%**
- \* Take a final exam on Dec 9: **25%**

We will review and discuss each assignment before it is due. There may also be various opportunities to gain bonus marks by attending relevant lectures and writing short papers about them.

Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when identified, are investigated. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a XF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. Students can find a complete version of the Honor Code and all related processes in the Student Handbook, available online.

**Grading Scale:** A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72; D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; D-: 61-62 F: 60 or below.

**SCHEDULE OF CLASSES**

**Part I: Introducing Religious Experience: James and the Science of Religion**

Wed 8/21: What is this class about?

Fri 8/23: How and why do we study religion?

Read: [www.studyreligion.org](http://www.studyreligion.org)

Mon 8/26: Who is William James?

Read: James ix-xvii

Wed 8/28: What is “pragmatism”?

Read: James 16-27; 33 (from “To pass now...”)-34

Fri 8/30: How does James define religion?

Read: James 36-39 (to "... ecclesiasticism at all") plus 42 (the long middle paragraph)

Mon 9/2: How real is the "Unseen"?

Read: James 57-77; you may skim (not skip) all examples

Wed 9/4: What is an "Out-of-Body Experience"? (Special Guest: J. Denosky)

Read: [www.spiritualtravel.org](http://www.spiritualtravel.org)

Fri 9/6: What is "Neurotheology"?

Read: ER #1, ER #2

Mon 9/9: What is "Healthy-Mindedness"?

Read: James 78-80; 86-91

Wed 9/11: What is the "The Sick Soul"?

Read: James 119-120; 124-129 (to "...the sepulchre surrounds it"); 145 (from "The worst kind...")-150

## **Part II: Constructing Experience: The Case of Pentecostalism**

Fri 9/13 What is Revivalism?

Read: ER #3

Mon 9/16: What is Pentecostalism?

Read: ER #4

Wed 9/18: How does James Define "Conversion"?

Read: James 171-174; 179-180; 188 (from "To state it...")-189

Fri 9/20: What is Premillennialism?

Read: ER #5

Mon 9/23: Film Screening: *Hell House* (First Half)

Wed 9/25: Film Screening: *Hell House* (Second Half)

Fri 9/27: Discussion of *Hell House*

Mon 9/30: What is Saintliness?

Read: James 236-242 (end of page); 287-288; 293-298; 320-327

### **Part III: Questioning Experience: The Case of neo-Gnosticism**

Wed 10/2: What is Gnosticism?

Read: ER #6

Fri 10/4: Film Screening: *The Matrix*; *Blade Runner* (Excerpts)

Mon 10/7: What is Christian Mysticism? (Special Guest: Dr. J. McDaniel)

Read: James 351-359

Midterm Exam Review Handed Out

Wed 10/9: How does James define “Mysticism”?

Read: James 328-333; 335 (from “Nitrous oxide...”) -340 (to “inflowing tide.”); 346 (from “We have now seen...”) -348 (to “...than the Christian.”)

Fri 10/11: **MIDTERM EXAM**

Monday 10/14: FALL BREAK

Wed 10/16: Who is Philip K. Dick?

Read: Dick 6-119; [www.philipkdick.com](http://www.philipkdick.com)

Friday 10/18: Discussion of *VALIS*

Read: Dick 120-189

Mon 10/21: More Discussion of *VALIS*

Read: Dick 190-241

Wed 10/23: Is Mysticism Authoritative?

Read: James 362 (from “This overcoming...”) -371; 372-379; 392 (from “What religion reports”) -394

Fri 10/25: What is Nature Mysticism? (Special Guest: Dr. Todd LeVasseur)

Read: ER #7

Mon 10/28: Catch-Up Discussion **FIRST DRAFT OF PAPER DUE**

Wed 10/30: Do Psychedelic Drugs Provide a Religious Experience?

Read: ER #8

### **Part IV: Cultivating Experience: The Case of Qigong**

Fri 11/1: What are the Daoist Roots of Qigong?

Read: ER #9; Cohen xvii-xix, 3-21, 79-85, 341

Mon 11/ 4: How is the Chinese Body Experienced?

Read: Cohen 30-41, 148-156, 306-307, 317-319, 232-237

Wed 11/6: Can Standing and Breathing be Religious Experiences?  
Read: Cohen 86-96, 106-108, 111-117, 124-125, 128-129, 133-143, 156-157

Friday 11/8: How Do We Practice Qigong?  
Read: Cohen 162-164, 165-166, 180-182, 194-199, 214, 270-278  
Recommended: 265-269

### **Part V: Deconstructing Experience: The Case of Zen**

Mon 11/11: What is Zen?  
Read: ER #10

Wed 11/13: Is Zen Just Pure Experience?  
Read: ER #11

Fri 11/15: Why is Qigong So Popular? (Special Guest: Dr. D. Palmer)  
Read: Cohen 21-29, 42-47, 55-56; ER #12  
Recommended: 47-54; 57-75; 223-232; 237-241

Mon 11/18: What is it like to live in a Zen monastery?

Wed 11/20: Do Experiences Exist?  
Read: ER #13

Fri 11/22: What are James' Conclusions? **FINAL PAPER DUE**  
Read: James 435-444

Mon 11/25: Catch-Up Discussion  
Read: TBD

Wed 11/27 & Fri 11/29: Thanksgiving

Mon 12/2: Where do we go from here?  
Read: James xvii- xxix  
Final Exam Review

**Final Exam: Monday Dec 9, 12- 3 pm**

### **Tips on Reading William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience***

This classic, first published in 1902, has been called the second greatest American non-fiction book of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is clearly written and well thought-out, but it takes time and effort to read.

- READ the helpful endnotes prepared by the editor
- TAKE NOTES
- DO NOT read James' footnotes
- PAY ATTENTION to the schedule of readings on the syllabus; each day's reading is consistent and reasonable and emphasizes the most important points
- MAKE USE of the Table of Contents (pp. 7-12); it works as a handy "cheat sheet"
- USE a dictionary

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Note: Students with documented disabilities who have been approved to receive accommodation through SNAP should feel free to discuss this during office hours. For more information, contact Disability Services at 953-1431.

The Center for Student Learning has writing labs and can arrange individual tutoring for these particular assignments at <http://www.cofc.edu/~csl/> or 953-5635.