

RELS 220: Comparative Religious Ethics
FALL 2016

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Course Description:

In Comparative Religious Ethics students will explore and examine the nature of various religious ethical traditions and how these ethical perspectives are grounded in text, culture and tradition. In this course we will utilize a narrative approach—both ancient and contemporary myths and stories—as the point of departure for the study of the ethical traditions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. We will also consider the critical approaches of feminist and womanist religious ethics.

Much has been made recently of the notion of “moral values,” a phrase that many seem to take for granted. What is assumed in the term’s utterance appears often to be the existence of some kind of universal (or at the very least, universal *American*) agreement on what these “values” are or, that there is a meaning inherent within the term itself. What *are* “Christian values” and who gets to name them? How do these resemble or differ from the ethical foundations (or values) of other religious traditions? What are the ethical obligations of Muslims and what constitutes the foundation of these? What are the stories of Hinduism’s “heroes” that exemplify living a noble and virtuous life? Are ethics “genderized?” Are the virtues that define the “good man” different from those of the “good woman?” This course will provide the student with the opportunity to explore these and many more questions and issues that are raised within a comparative study of religious ethics.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes: Students will critically read texts that demonstrate religious ethical perspectives, gain knowledge of the cultural contexts that informed these ethical traditions, think analytically about religion and become knowledgeable of the basic tenets of a variety of religious traditions.

General Education Learning Outcomes: This course also satisfies the General Education requirements for a course in the Humanities, which address these two additional Learning Outcomes: 1) Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture; 2) Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments.

Students will demonstrate successful mastery of the General Education Learning Outcome 1 and 2 by crafting a well-organized, analytical, 3-4 page paper that applies womanist ethical perspectives to the primary source, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker.

Required Texts:

Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach to Global Ethics, Darrell J. Fasching and Dell deChant and David Lantigua, 2nd edition.

The Color Purple, Alice Walker

Selected electronic readings in OAKS

Course Requirements:

3 Exams (300 points)

Three 2 page critical reflections on ** readings (100 points)

One 3-4 page paper (Signature Assignment) (100 points)

Note: Reflection papers are indicated on the syllabus according to subject and due date by two asterisks (**).

Grading:

Each set of 100 points will be worth 20% of the final grade.

Numerical and letter grades will be based upon the following scale:

	A	100-92	A-	91-89	
B+	88-86	B	85-82	B-	81-79
C+	78-76	C	75-72	C-	71-69
D+	68-66	D	65-62	D-	61-59
F	-58				

“You always said people don't do what they believe in, they just do what's most convenient, then they repent. And I always said, ‘Hang on to me, baby, and let's hope that the roof stays on.’” Bob Dylan, *Brownsville Girl*

Course Schedule and Assignments:

08/24 Introduction and Methodology

08/29 Methodology 3-26 (Fasching)

No, It's Not Your Opinion, You're Just Wrong by Jef Rouner (OAKS)

08/31 Religious Ethics and Storytelling 30-36 (Fasching)

Sacred Society and Holy Community

Why Study Religion in the 21st Century? by William A. Graham (OAKS)

The Religious Quest and the Birth of Ethics: ***“Now everything's a little upside down, as a matter of fact the wheels have stopped. What's good is bad, what's bad is good, you'll find out when you reach the top, you're on the bottom.”*** Bob Dylan, *Idiot Wind*

09/05 *The Epic of Gilgamesh* 85-99 (Fasching)

**** 09/07 Reflection Paper #1 *****The Apology* (OAKS)

The Socratic Religious Experience 100-109 (Fasching)

Hinduism: ***“Any conduct that is contrary to truth and ahimsa is to be eschewed and any book that violates these principles is not a shastra [sacred scripture].”*** Mohandas K. Gandhi

09/12 Hindu Stories: *The Bhagavad-Gita, Chapters 1-11* (OAKS)

The Song of God: The Bhagavad-Gita 137-148 (Fasching)

09/14 *Life Story: Mohandas K. Gandhi* 148-163 (Fasching)

09/19 Film: *The Early Years: Gandhi*

09/21 First Exam

Buddhism: ***“Please call me by my true names, so I can wake up and open the door of my heart, the door of compassion.”*** Thich Nhat Hanh *Call Me By My True Names*

“I don’t possess a bomb, don’t know how to shoot or thrust a sword. All I have is a broken voice, a heart immense with sorrow. But please, please take them, let them be part of this tsunami of chanting, this chant of awakening.” Wang Ping, Tsunami Chant

09/26 *The Life of the Buddha* 165-180 (Fasching)

09/28 *Thich Nhat Hanh and the Way of Mindfulness* 181- 188 (Fasching)

10/03 Poem: *Call Me By My True Names* p. 185 (Fasching)

Video: Oprah Interview with Thich Nhat Hanh

Judaism: ***“Oh God said to Abraham, ‘Kill me a son.’ Abe say, ‘Man, you must be puttin’ me on.’ God say, ‘No.’ Abe say, ‘What?’ God say, ‘You can do what you want Abe, but the next time you see me comin’ you better run.’ Well Abe say, ‘Where do you want this killin’ done?’ God say, ‘Out on Highway 61.’” Bob Dylan, Highway 61 Revisited***

10/05 *Jewish Stories* 205-213 (Fasching)

10/10 *The Story of Job* 213-223 (Fasching)

10/12 *Abraham Joshua Heschel and the Way of Audacity* 223- 231 (Fasching)

From Auschwitz to Hiroshima: ***“No One kneads us anew from earth and clay, no one addresses our dust. No One.” Paul Celan, Poet and Holocaust survivor***

10/17 *From Auschwitz to Hiroshima* 41-72 (Fasching)

****Reflection Paper #2 on ---From Auschwitz to Hiroshima 41-72 (Fasching)**

10/19 Second Exam

Christianity: ***“Raging and raging, it rises from the deep, opening its eyes after twenty centuries, vexed to a nightmare out of a stony sleep by a rocking cradle by the Sea of Galilee.”***

Joni Mitchell, Slouching Towards Bethlehem to be Born

“Ladies and Gentlemen: War may sometimes be a necessary evil. But no matter how necessary, it is always an evil, never a good. We will not learn how to live together in peace by killing each other’s children.” Jimmy Carter, Nobel Peace Prize Lecture, Oslo 2002

10/24 and 10/26 *Christian Stories: Formative Story: Jesus of Nazareth* 234-247 (Fasching)

10/31 *Life Story: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Way of the Cross* 247-257 (Fasching)

AND Reflection Paper #3 on --- MLK, Jr. Letter from Birmingham Jail (OAKS)

Womanism: ***“Rule number one: Don’t ever mess over nobody, honey, and nobody will ever mess over you.”*** Shug, from *The Color Purple*

11/02 *Feminist Ethics: Life Story: Rosemary Radford Ruether* 300 to (top of) 311 and 316-324 (Fasching)

11/07 **No Class Fall Break**

****11/09 Signature assignment on ---The Color Purple**

11/14 *Film: Eyes On the Prize: No Easy Walk 1961-1963 (PART 4)*

Islam: “I could see from this, that perhaps if white Americans could accept the Oneness of God, then perhaps too, they could accept in reality the Oneness of Man-and cease to measure, and hinder, and harm others in terms of their ‘differences’ in color.” Malcolm X

11/16 Islamic Stories, *Formative Story: Muhammad*, 262-275 (Fasching)

11/21 *The Journey of Malcolm X*, 275-286 (Fasching)

11/23 NO Class Thanksgiving Break

11/28 Film: *Islam*

11/30 Just War Theory 286-294 (Fasching)

The Conflict Between Individual and Social Morality, Reinhold Niebuhr, (OAKS)

12/05 Last Day of Class

Third Exam: **Friday 12/09 @ 4:00**

*** The Instructor reserves the right to make changes to this syllabus.**

Additional Course Notes

Attendance Policy: Class attendance and participation in discussions are mandatory. Four absences will be allowed. Five or more absences may result in a lower final grade but MAY be excused with proper medical documentation. Eight absences will result in your being dropped from the class, which will earn you an F for the course. Please note that a memo from CofC Health Services does NOT *automatically* qualify as an ‘excused absence.’ Final determination of an excused absence always lies with the Instructor.

SNAP: If you have a disability that qualifies you for academic accommodation, please present a letter from the Center for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. For more information regarding accommodation and the SNAP program, see: <http://www.cofc.edu/~cds/index.htm>.

Honor Code: The Code of Honor found in the Student Handbook will be strictly enforced. Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated and WILL be reported to the Honor Board.

According to the Student Handbook plagiarism *includes but is not limited to:*

- * The verbatim repetition, without acknowledgement, of the writings of another author. All significant phrases, clauses, or passages, taken directly from source material must be enclosed in quotation marks and acknowledged either in the text itself or in footnotes/endnotes.
- * Borrowing without acknowledging the source.
- * Paraphrasing the thoughts of another writer without acknowledgement.
- * Allowing any other person or organization to prepare work which one then submits as his/her own.

Classroom Code of Conduct

—Selections taken from the Student Handbook, published by the President’s Advisory Committee in cooperation with the Office of the President.

Your professor expects that you as a student:

1. Will be attentive and courteous during class.
2. Will complete the assigned work according to the course schedule.
3. Do not cut classes, come in late, or leave early. If you ever are late for class, enter in complete silence and do not walk between the class and the professor. Never leave during class unless you absolutely must. Leaving for a short break and then returning is not acceptable. The professor is not a TV set, but is a person addressing the class, and it is rude to leave when someone is addressing you.
- 4. Turn off cell phones, pagers, and all other electronic devices.**
5. Visible and noisy signs of restlessness are rude as well as disruptive to others. If you cannot sit still or stay awake, you should not be taking a college class. Do not begin packing your book bag or otherwise indicate that you think it is time for class to come to an end; wait for the professor to dismiss class. If the class period has ended but the professor has not finished and you cannot stay any longer, leave in complete silence.
6. Come to class prepared to work. Your professor expects you to prepare for class by completing reading and homework assignments. If you are unprepared for class, this may prevent you from participating in a class activity. Do not present your lack of preparation as a problem for the professor to solve or excuse.

