

REL 300 - Research, Writing, Thinking in Religion & Applied Ethics

ASUW - Spring 2009 - Wednesdays 4:40 PM - 7:30 PM - Sands 204

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If the question of finding a good, happy, and meaningful life could be answered exhaustively in terms of social justice and moral life, then would there be a distinct role left for religions to play? Or, if religious life in its great variety has no bearing on striving for a community of human flourishing, then would we be better, happier, and freer without “religious” questions? Yet what if the very human condition is defined by religious questioning? Wouldn’t a life dedicated to idols of the ultimate – and great religions agree with critical thinkers that religious and secular idols are equally blinding – be a misspent life? The aim of this course is to spend some time researching, writing, and thinking about these questions. We will carefully examine the relationship among the spheres of unexamined, ethical, and religious existence.

Required Texts

Mircea Eliade. *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987. 0-15-679201-x

Abraham Joshua Heschel. *The Sabbath*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975. 0374512671

David Lodge. *Therapy*. Penguin Books, 1996. 0140249001

Rudolf Otto. *The Idea of the Holy*. Oxford UP, 1958. 978-0-19-500210

Blackboard essays assigned on the syllabus.

Films to be Viewed as Part of the Course

Baraka. Ron Fricke. Mark Magidson Films Inc., 1992.

Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter . . . and Spring. Kim Ki-Duk. Korea Pictures, 2003.

Read for the first class meeting on January 21, 2009:

Peperzak, *Philosophy Between Faith and Theology*. Notre Dame Press, 2005, ch. 6, “Philosophy-Religion-Theology.” This essay is available for registered students under “readings” on the “blackboard” for this course.

Requirements

1/ Two take-home written assignments: *Midterm and final essay* valued at 300 and 400 points respectively (maximum total 700 points). In addition to the main topic-areas for each essay (see below), there will be specific questions assigned for each written exercise. You must devote more or less equal time and space to your discussion of each assigned texts plus the film or other media discussed in the segment of the course related to your essay. *The midterm essay will have 6 pages and the second 8 pages of actual text* (double spaced, one-inch margins), an extra title-page with your paper-title and your name, and an extra page for your bibliographical references or endnotes for all materials you cite or paraphrase in your paper. Use either Endnotes and/or Works Cited, but make sure that you correctly follow one of the formal style sheets. Paginate all pages except the title page. Proofread your work: Poor grammar and form can affect your grade.

General topic areas:

- **Midterm essay**
Topic areas: Otto & Eliade: Seeking *barakah/berakhah* in lived space and time
Specific question will be assigned on February 18; paper will be due on March 4 in class and also before class electronically in the Blackboard assignments.
- **Final essay**
Topic areas: Heschel, Kierkegaard & Lodge: Seeking to live and love free of despair
Specific question assigned on April 8; essay due on May 7, noon; submit electronically in the Blackboard assignments.

Late midterm essay is accepted with penalty of minus 30 points per each additional (missed) class period, but it cannot be submitted later than on the last day classes. The due date for the final essay is final = your final exam.

Plagiarism = presenting (uncited, without a proper reference, or purchased from an on-line paper store) as your own work somebody else's writing or ideas will earn you F= failing grade for the course. Don't even think about it! The teacher has access to the same web sites as you do, papers you can purchase on the web site sites will not be able to address the specific questions formulated for this class, so don't waste your mind and money! Write your own work.

2/ Ten variable assignments: select and submit for grading up to *twelve* exercises from various options available during semester. While more than ten variable exercises are offered, *only ten best scores will be counted*. Thus, there are no substitutions for a missed exercise, there is also no other attendance policy for class. You are self-responsible for your education, and know how often you can afford being absent before you hurt your own progress in the course. I will automatically drop two worst variable scores if twelve are graded (30 points maximum per each exercise, total 300 points maximum). Here are your options for your "top ten":

- *Eleven* in-class or take-home questions will be assigned for the syllabus readings in weeks II-XIV.
- *At least one* presentation is available to each student (depending on the number of students taking the class, you may present either on the midterm or the final essay topic, if space is available possibly on both). Your presentation should summarize the salient features of your paper and stimulate discussion).
- *One creative project* displayed on the day of either midterm or final essay. Make a creative design to accompany your essay, or write an original poem, or record a song, or shoot a video or series of photos. Match one of these visual media of your choice with two or more short citations from the assigned texts as well as a short paragraph from your essay. All citations must be visibly attributed to their sources by author's name, title, year, page. Designs are not limited to a standard page-size.

WEEK	SUGGESTED TOPIC AND/OR READING		ASSIGNMENTS
I 1/21	Philosophy and/or religion? <i>mysterium tremendum & fascinans</i>	Peperzak, <i>Philosophy Between Faith and Theology</i> . Notre Dame Press, 2005, ch. 6 “Philosophy-Religion-Theology”	Get the Blackboard essay: print, read, bring to class
II 1/28	The numinous in sacred texts	Otto. <i>The Idea of the Holy</i> , chaps. I-XII, pp. 1-108.	
III 2/4	The religious as the holy and the wholly other	Otto. <i>The Idea of the Holy</i> , chaps. XIII-XXI, pp. 109-178.	
IV 2/11	Sacred spaces	Eliade. <i>The Sacred and The Profane</i> , chap. I, pp. 1-65	
V 2/18	Sacred times	Eliade. <i>The Sacred and The Profane</i> , chap. II, pp. 68-113	
VI 2/25	Sacred & profane life	Eliade. <i>The Sacred and The Profane</i> , chaps. III-IV, pp. 129-147, 151-159, 162-213	
VII 3/4	Fruits of the works of love: The first student harvest	Student mid-term project presentations, possibly with a break and extended class time for all student presentations	Papers due in class and also before class electronically in the Blackboard assignments
VIII 3/8-15	SPRING BREAK	No class	
IX 3/18	Philosophies and stages of existence	Lodge. <i>Therapy</i> , One, pp. 1-129 & Kierkegaard’s stages of existence	Get the Blackboard chart: print, read, bring to class
X 3/25	Anxiety & despair	Lodge. <i>Therapy</i> , Two, pp. 133-198 & Kierkegaard’s “The Sickness Unto Death”	Get the Blackboard essay: print, read, bring to class
XI 4/1	Stages on love’s way	Lodge. <i>Therapy</i> , Three, pp. 201-282 & Kierkegaard’s “Works of Love”	Get the Blackboard essay: print, read, bring to class
XII 4/8	Architecture of time	Heschel. <i>The Sabbath</i> , ONE, pp. 1-32	
XIII 4/15	Architecture of space	Heschel. <i>The Sabbath</i> , TWO, pp. 34--62	
XIV 4/22	Gifts of space and gifts of time	Heschel. <i>The Sabbath</i> , THREE & Epilogue, pp. 65-101	
XV 4/29	Fruits of the works of love: The second student harvest	Student final project presentations, possibly with a break and extended class time for all student presentations (Lodge. <i>Therapy</i> , Part Four, not discussed in prior classes, must inform the final written project)	
XVI 5/6	Reading day	Note that there is no Wednesday class scheduled, and so we have taken the missing week of classes by adding class time in weeks VII and XV	<u>Papers due 5/7, noon:</u> submit electronically in Blackboard assignments

Grade-to-point conversion scale (1000 points maximum)

The maximum points *per assignment*

Mid-term essay	300
Final essay	400
10 variable graded assignments (each valued 30 points)	300
Total points possible	1,000

	1000		
	10(0)	20(0)	30(0)
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A	900 - 1000		
A	9(0) – 100	18(0) - 20(0)	27(0) - 30(0)
B	800 - 890		
B	8(0) - 89	16(0) - 17(9)	24(0) - 26(9)
C	700 - 790		
C	7(0) - 79	14(0) - 15(9)	21(0) - 23(9)
D	600 - 690		
D	6(0) - 69	12(0) - 13(9)	18(0) - 20(9)
F	590 - 0	11(9) - 0	17(9) - 0
F	5(9) - 0		

To get an “A” in the course, students must receive at least 900 points, for “B” at least 800 points, for “C” at least 700 points, and for “D” at least 600 points. There are no make-ups for missed opportunities. Points reflect a qualitative grade; hence maximum points are not given automatically for simply completing an assignment.