Course Description: Introduction to basic ideas and issues of contemporary religious thought related to the question: “What is the meaning of existence?”

1. INTRODUCTION.
   a. History and Nature of the Course.

2. WHAT IS RELIGION?
   a. The Depth Dimension.
   b. Primary Relationships.
   c. Religion and Ethics
   d. Passionate Commitment

3. BELIEF.
   a. Probability and Emotional Relevance
   b. Origins of Belief
   c. Religion and Belief
   d. Ethical Implications of False or Unfounded Beliefs

4. ABSOLUTISM AND NIHILISM.
   a. Order and Chaos
   b. Meaning and Relativism
   c. Security and Insecurity

5. THE DEPTH DIMENSION AND THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE.
   a. What is Myth?
   b. Identity Projection
   c. Memory and Meaning
   d. The Genesis Mandate: Ethics and Autonomy.

6. CULTS AND HERETICS.
   a. Institution vs. Spirit.
   b. Authority vs. Freedom.
   c. Belief or Faith.
7. THE GRAND INQUISITOR.
   a. Authority
   b. Miracle
   c. Mystery

8. TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS APPROACHES TO THE MEANING OF EXISTENCE.
   a. Catholic Meritocracy.
   b. Protestant Experiencialism.

**MIDTERM**

9. THE REBEL: SYNTHESIS AND RECONCILIATION?
   a. The Rebel and the Revolutionary.
   b. Job
   c. Judas
   d. Sisyphus

10. THE CRISIS OF COMMUNICATION.
    a. Lying
    b. Alienation and Suffering
    c. Morality or Honesty

11. CLOWNS AND SAINTS.
    a. Who are the Clowns?
    b. The Fate of the Saint
    c. The Irony of Romance: The Friend-Lover Paradox

12. THE PROBLEM RESTATEted.
    a. Sports as Metaphor
    b. Games and Play
    c. Anticipation and Reality

13. THE PROSPECT OF REBELLION.
    a. Despair or Courage
    b. In Praise of Failure
    c. Some Interesting Things
14. SCIENCE, ETHICS, AND THE FUTURE OF RELIGION.


FINAL EXAM


Requirements: 1. Two exams of equal worth and each covering approximately one-half of the course. 2. A Journal. Students will be expected to keep a written account of their thoughts, views and opinions regarding class discussions and readings. (See additional comments for Writing Intensive Class).

Office: Bldg. 7-623
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SLO: Student Learning Opportunities.

Upon completion of the course a student should be able to:

1. Through written interpretive analysis, extrapolate religious stories (myths) into explanations of religious teachings and meanings.
2. Write on a sufficiently abstract level so as to be able to integrate outside material (e.g., other classes, cultural) into the course content.
3. Analyze universal questions and problems in application to specific religious tradition responses.
4. Apply rational thinking to beliefs driven by emotional relevance.
5. Demonstrate an ability to convey “subjective” ideas, views and opinions without “personalizing” the material by referencing one’s own experiences.
6. Identify differences between religious and secular (e.g., philosophical) values and ethical traditions.

Writing Intensive Requirement: In order to fulfill the Writing Intensive Requirement for this class, you will have to complete an extended assignment. This assignment involves the keeping of a Journal. The Journal is to consist of your thoughts, ideas, and opinions regarding class lectures, discussions, and readings. In addition to the class content, you may also include material from outside sources such as other classes, movies, newspapers etc. However, you should always try to tie outside material into course content.

I neither expect nor desire your journal to be personal other than as a reflection of your ideas. A Journal is not a diary. Its intent is to force you to develop thinking and
writing on an abstract level. We all have beliefs and assumptions, prejudices and presuppositions. I want you to examine these aspects of your intellectual life in terms of the course material.

The minimum requirement for a Writing Intensive Class is 16 double-spaced type written pages.

The student will have the responsibility of submitting written material on a periodic basis. After receiving this material, I will edit for grammar and style and in most cases will expect you to re-write material. You may submit your journal as often as you like. The journal will not be graded for content. You should feel free to disagree with the instructor in expressing your own thoughts.

I will not be grading the journal each time you submit it. It will be graded at the end of the semester when you turn in your final draft. This is not a difficult assignment if you keep up with the work.

The journal will comprise 50% of your final grade.

The instructor for this class makes two basic assumptions:

1. Students are adults, and as such, are prepared to take responsibility for their education.
2. There is life outside of Rel. 151. Many of you have jobs, children, other classes etc. In addition, life is not always predictable.

With these assumptions in mind, I allow you the utmost freedom with regard to when and how often you submit your journal entries. The more often you give me material to edit, the more feedback you receive. Be advised that your final writing intensive component grade will in part be reflective of your diligence and resolve in this matter.

Some Simple Rules:

1. No single journal entry should be more than three pages long.
2. Not more than one journal entry to be submitted at a single class session.
3. Journal entries must be submitted at class (not at my office, no e-mail).

E-FOCUS: Religion 151 is an option for the Ethics Focus Area requirement. In this class we will discuss many of the varied religious and non-religious ethical systems. We will look at various ways in which the question of the meaning of existence can be addressed within the context of Ethics as well as a broader system of values. Practical contemporary and traditional approaches to modern day ethical problems will be discussed.

Specific ethical issues discussed in class will probably vary from semester to semester, and even from class section to class section. However, it is the instructor’s conviction that students best facilitate their own ethical deliberations, not so much from analyzing specific problems, as much as from engaging in critical thinking, rationally based, and with an obligation to make sense. The more one does this, although here practice never makes perfect, the better chance one has of getting through life with less rather than more regret.