

Religious Studies 353 W2025 Dark Self East & West: Comparative Conceptions CRN 25103

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MW 2:00-3:50 p.m. PLC 072; Remote Office Hours: Mondays: 4:30-5:15 p.m.; Tuesdays: 1:00-1:45 p.m.

Office Hours-Zoom: Mon: <https://tinyurl.com/34rmyb4s> Tues: <https://tinyurl.com/2t4zmcht>

This course on comparative religious and philosophical thought examines selected Asian and Western thinkers and conceptions of the self, with a special focus on the dark side of the self. Although comparisons are often made between ultimates - God, Buddha, Dao, and the like - it is often overlooked that they are responses to what religions define as the fundamental problems or dark sides of the inner life. Through comparing views of the dark side including sin in Christianity, karmic evil and delusion in Buddhism, disharmony in Taoism, and psychic suffering in psychology, it will become evident that there are both significant similarities and deep differences among diverse religious and philosophical views.

In the latter part of the course, films together with readings will be used to explore the dark side through various cultural themes including racism, gender discrimination, and war. In turn, possible responses to these issues from various thinkers in the first half of the course will be considered. This is an intermediate-level course with a lecture/discussion format. Some meetings will be entirely in lecture format. Others will involve a combination of lecture and discussion.

Requirements

1. Attendance: This is a lecture/discussion format course. This is a lecture/discussion format course with required attendance. You can have two unexcused absences. Any absence without a prior excuse will result in a half-grade deduction from the course grade.
2. Short exams: There will be two short, exams administered through Canvas, based on materials from the readings, lectures, and course web site. The first exam will also contain questions on writing papers.
3. Short papers: Students will write three short papers based on topics that will be provided by the instructor.
4. Final paper: Each student will hand in a medium length final paper of 5-7 pages double-spaced. Suggested topics will be provided. Students may choose to create their own topics with the consent of their section leader. In the case of the latter, a one-paragraph description of the topic must be submitted by email to the instructor one week prior to the due date.
5. Late policy on written assignments: Three grace days total will be allotted excluding the medium-length final paper for which no extensions will be given. For all other assignments, a cumulative total of three late days will be allowed without penalty. Thereafter, each late day will result in a two-point deduction from the course grade. Weekends are not counted against the grace days.

Submit all papers to Canvas only.

Learning Outcomes In this course students will:

- A. Develop their paper writing skills through regular feedback on papers and an exam containing questions regarding the process and elements of writing university essays.
- B. Develop a sophisticated understanding of how diverse religions and philosophies define the dark or problematic dimensions of human existence.
- C. Acquire tools for the study of comparative religion through the examination of the philosophical anthropology (views of human nature) as characterized by diverse strands of religious and philosophical thinking, using primary sources and secondary scholarly literature.
- D. Learn to identify and analyze thematic presentations of the dark or problematic dimensions of human existence concerning diverse factors of human culture such as gender, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, and class.
- E. Have their work assessed through exams, papers, and class discussion.

Grades*

Short Paper I - 10%; Short Paper II - 15%; Short Paper III - 15%

Short Exam A - 10%; Short Exam B - 10%; Final Paper - 30% Attendance and Participation - 10%

*Note: You must complete all assignments in order to receive course credit.

Required Texts

Shinmon Aoki, *Coffinman: The Journal of a Buddhist Mortician* (Anaheim, CA: Buddhist Education Ctr, 2002).

Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (NY: Beacon Press, 2006).

Cheryl Strayed, *Wild* (NY: Penguin, 2013).

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (NY: Mariner Books, 2003).

Burton Watson, trans., *Zhuangzi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

Mark Unno, ed., *REL 353 Course Packet* (online: Canvas course site: Files).

Weekly Schedule REL353 Dark Self East & West

(Reading assignments are to be completed by the date under which they are listed.)

CP = Course Packet; RT = Required Text; Optional Readings are marked "optional."

Week 1 INTRODUCTION; KIERKEGAARD AND SIN

1/06 Introduction: The Dark Side of Human Existence: Contrasts and Comparisons

Reading: Suzy Hansen, "Ordinary People, Extraordinary Evil" (CP1); Hilde L. Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*, 1-35, 176-188 (CP2); Chris Hedges, "American Psychosis," <https://vimeo.com/293802639>. Accessed 1-9-2024.

1/08 Reading: Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 5-23; 34-53 (CP3); *The Sickness Unto Death*, 13-21, 29-47 (CP4); Emily VanDerWerff, "A Trans Christian Minister Came Out in a Sermon." Vox.com, June 26, 2020 (CP4a).

Paper I: submit to Canvas by 12 noon.

Week 2 JUNG'S PSYCHOLOGY & THE SHADOW; INDIAN PHILOSOPHY: KARMA AND NEITHER/NOR

1/13 Reading: Robert Aziz, Jung's Psychology of Religion and Synchronicity, 9-49 (CP5); Henry Shukman, "Light and Dark: Koans and Dreams," 15-23 (CP6).

1/15 Reading: "Hymn on Creation from the Rig Vedas," 206 (CP7); *The Bhagavad Gita*, vii-xxiv, 3-29, 61-75, 145-149 (focus pages: vii-xii, xiv-xvi, xx-xxi, 16-29, 70-73, 147). (CP8)

Week 3 EXISTENCE : MEANING & MEANINGLESSNESS

1/20 (No class. MLK Jr. day)

1/22 Reading: Viktor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning, (focus pages: 3-96, 101-102, 110-116) (RT).

Reading: Peter Schneider, "Saving Konrad Latte," 52-57, 72-73, 90, 95 (CP9).

Week 4 LOSS, RECOVERY, DISCOVERY OF SELF: NATURE, BODY, AND THE SACRED

1/27 Reading: Chery Strayed, *Wild*, 1-173 (RT). Carolyn Lumsden, "Cheryl Strayed's 'Wild'" (CP11); [Writng, Hiking, and Liberation with Cheryl Strayed](#) (web link - recommended)

1/29 Reading: Chery Strayed, *Wild*, 174-311 (RT).

Special Guest Lecture: Steve Wehmeier

Reading: "The Bill Wilson - Carl Jung Letters," 1-5 (CP10-optional); [Roger Ebert, "My Name is Roger ..."](#) (online-optional).

Week 5 DAOISM: ZHUANGZI WANDERING THE DAO

2/03 Reading: *Zhuangzi*, 1-30, 31- 88 (focus pages: 31-49, 62-63, 78-81) (RT). **Paper II: submit to Canvas by 12 noon.** (For your convenience, *Zhuangzi* excerpts are in the Course Packet [CP12]).

Reading: P.J. Ivanhoe, "Zhuangzi on Skepticism," 639-654 (CP13-optional).

2/05 Reading: *Zhuangzi*, 89-140 (focus pages: 94-95, 126-140) (RT). **Exam A on Canvas by 12 noon. Feb 10.**

Week 6 PURE LAND BUDDHISM: SHINRAN & COFFINMAN

2/10 Reading: Mark Unno, "The Original Buddhist Rebel - Shinran," 1-16 (CP14)

Reading: Tannisho: A Shin Buddhist Classic, 4-9, 14, 32-33 (CP15);

Reading: "The Borderline between Buddhism and Psychotherapy," 139-158 (CP16-optional).

2/12 Reading: *Coffinman*, xiii-xvi, 3-111 (RT).

Week 7 MYSTICISM & THE QUESTIONING OF REALITY

2/17 Film: Jacob's Ladder. Sandy Gunther, "An Alternate View of Reality ... in Jacob's Ladder," 1-10 (CP17)

2/19 Reading: Michael Morton, *Getting Life: An Innocent Man's 25-year Journey*, 142-170 (CP18).

Week 8 SEXUALITY, EROS & SPIRIT: A WOMANIST ACCOUNT

2/24 Film: *Antonia's Line*

Reading: Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (RT).

Paper III: submit to Canvas by 12 noon.

2/26 Reading: Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," 53-59 (CP19).

Week 9 BUDDHIST KARMA, EXISTENTIAL ABSURDITY

3/03 Film: *Perfect Days*

Exam B on Canvas by 12 noon.

3/05 Reading: Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus," 88-91 (CP20).

Week 10 MANY SELVES, ONE SELF, NO SELF; CONCLUDING BEGINNINGS

3/10 Reading: Robert Akeret, *Tales from a Traveling Couch*, 19-57 (CP21); Beatrice Wood, "An Artist Seeking Her Own Way," (CP22-optional); "The Ten Oxherding Pictures," 26-45 (CP23-optional);

3/12 Concluding lecture and Discussion.

March 14: Final Paper: submit to Canvas by 11:59.

1. Suzy Hansen, "Ordinary People, Extraordinary Evil," Salon.com 08/21/2002.
2. Hilde L. Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 1-35, 176-188.
3. Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 5-23, 34-53.
4. Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 13-21, 29-47.
- 4a. Emily VanDerWerff, "A Trans Christian Minister Came Out in a Sermon." Vox.com, June 26, 2020. Accessed 12-29-2021.
5. Robert Aziz, *C. G. Jung's Psychology of Religion and Synchronicity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990) 9-49.
6. Henry Shukman, "Light and Dark: Koans and Dreams," *Spring: A Journal of Archetype and Culture*, vol. 89, 15-23.
7. Ralph Griffith, trans., "Hymn on Creation from the Rig Vedas" (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973) 206.
8. Laurie Patton, trans, *The Bhagavad Gita* (NY: Penguin Books, 2014) vii-xxiv, 3-29, 61-75, 145-149.
9. Peter Schneider, "Saving Konrad Latte," *The New York Times Magazine* (February 13, 2000) 52-57, 72-73, 90, 95.
10. "The Bill Wilson - Carl Jung Letters," 1-5.
11. Carolyn Lumsden, "Cheryl Strayed's 'Wild': A Journey of Truth, Healing, Change," *Hartford Courant*, 03/06/2015.
12. Burton Watson, trans., *Zhuangzi: Basic Writings* (NY: Columbia University, 1993), 1-7, 31-41, 44, 61-62, 114-117, 128-129.
13. P. J. Ivanhoe, "Zhuangzi on Skepticism, Skill, and the Ineffable Dao," *Journal of the AAR*, LX:4 639-654.
14. Mark Unno, "The Original Buddhist Rebel - Shinran," *Tricycle* (Winter 2017), 1-16.
15. Taitetsu Unno, trans., *Tannisho-A Shin Buddhist Classic* (Honolulu: Buddhist Study Center, 1996), 4-9, 14, 32-33.
16. Mark Unno, "The Borderline between Buddhism and Psychotherapy," in *Buddhism and Psychotherapy Across Cultures*, ed. Mark Unno (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 139-158.
17. Sandy Gunther, "An Alternate View of Reality: Understanding Mystical Experience in Jacob's Ladder," Unpublished Paper 1-10.
18. Michael Morton, *Getting Life: An Innocent Man's 25-year Journey from Prison to Peace* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2015), 142-170.
19. Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," *Sister Outsider* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984) 53-59.
20. Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus," in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (NY: Random House, 1955), 88-91.
21. Robert Akeret, *Tales from a Traveling Couch* (NY: Norton, 1996) 19-57.
22. "The Ten Oxherding Pictures," in *How to Practice Zazen, Institute for Zen Studies*, 26-45.
23. Beatrice Wood, "An Artist Seeking Her Own Way," *U.S. News & World Report, Special Issue*, 8/26-9/1/1995, 94-95.