Duquesne University
Psychology and Spirituality (PSYC 673-01)
Spring 2014

Teacher: Will W. Adams, Ph.D.
Office: College Hall 544B
Office Hours: Monday 2-3; Friday, 9:25-9:55 & 1:00-1:30; and by appointment.
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Class meets Wednesdays, 3:00 – 5:40, in College Hall 545

Course Description and Purpose
This course is an exploration of the mutually complementary relationship between psychology and spirituality. Our overall thematic focus will be on psycho-spiritual life as an ongoing process of engaged inquiry, transformation (of consciousness and culture), and loving ethical service in day to day life. In class we will develop a collaborative, participatory seminar based upon textual study, experiential activities, and shared conversation. I will provide lecture and commentary on key themes from the texts in order to set up discussion among all participants. Much of each class will be comprised of discussion emerging from our readings, including themes of special interest to each student. Experiential exercises will help bring key concepts to life in a direct and vivid manner.

While considering key concepts from various spiritual traditions, we will emphasize the life-enhancing, transformative potential of direct spiritual experience and practice, these being the primary sources of the world’s great spiritual ideas and texts. Contemplative, mystical, transpersonal, and nondual spirituality will be our central focus, because the mystics were among the world’s great psychologists long before psychology emerged as a distinct discipline. These contemplatives were devoted to personal experiential inquiry as a transformative path of understanding and compassionate service. Inspired by this perennial path, you will be introduced to and participate in a variety of awareness practices: meditation, contemplative prayer, lectio divina (sacred reading), yoga, intimate relationship, attunement with nature, etc. According to your interests, you will select one particular practice to explore across the semester. In addition we will consider the disturbing fact that, across humankind’s history, some of our most loving and creative actions as well as some of our most atrocious ones have been done in the name of religion. Along with ways of practicing religion that sponsor health, we will reflect on ways that tend to be constraining and oppressive. Freud’s powerful critique of religion will provide useful insights here (yet we will also discuss the significant limitations of his theory).

Our study will be oriented by the following major themes:

I. Course Introduction
II. Suffering, Death Awareness, and Death Dread
III. Spirituality As Experiential Inquiry, Transformation, and Ethical Responsivity: Love, Understanding, and Engaged Practice
IV. Freud’s Critique of Religion: Insights and Limitations
V. Reading the Mystics: Fresh Encounters With Classic Spiritual Texts
VI. Contemplative Practice and Psychotherapy
VII. Engaged Spirituality for Social/Ecological Justice:
Ecopsychology (Spirituality & Nature)
While these themes are mutually informative, they will be explored in sequence over the course of the semester, with each theme building upon the previous ones.

As this syllabus makes clear, this course will not be a general survey of the psychology of religion. Instead, we will focus on aspects of spirituality that are directly relevant for psychology and spirituality conceived as transformative and ethically responsive practices (in the therapy office, qualitative research setting, social/ecological communities, and everyday relationships). We will study classical spiritual texts (The Heart Sutra, The Bible, The Upanishads, etc.) and the writings of renowned mystics (Eihei Dogen, Meister Eckhart, Marguerite Porete, etc.) as well as (more-or-less) contemporary writings (Thich Nhat Hanh, Thomas Merton, John Caputo, Sigmund Freud, Ernest Becker, Ken Wilber, Joanna Macy, John Welwood, David Loy, David Abram, etc.). Along the way we will ponder key psycho-spiritual concerns such as ethics, relationality, the self, the other, consciousness, development, suffering, death, impermanence, time, fear, anxiety, embodiment, community, responsibility, well-being, beauty, love, service, etc.

Teaching/Learning Procedures and Objectives
We will work by way of interactive lecture/dialogue, textual study, written assignments, and experiential exercises. I strongly encourage you to participate actively in class through commentary, questioning, and conversation, and out of class by engaged reading, contemplative practice, and social involvement. In order to optimize your learning it is important that you read and reflect on each assignment prior to the class meeting in which it will be studied. This preparation will help you develop a deeper understanding of the material, formulate questions to pose, and engage more fully in class discussions.

The learning objectives for the course are as follows:
+ Students will cultivate an in-depth, complex, and subtle appreciation of key psycho-spiritual themes, concerns, and practices;
+ Students will cultivate their own, distinctive critical stance toward these themes, concerns, and practices;
+ Students will discern and develop their sense of the complementarity (or lack thereof) between psychology and spirituality, both theoretically and in actual everyday life;
+ Psychology students will begin to explore their own unique ways of making this course relevant in their actual practice of psychotherapy and research. Non-psychology students will do the same in relation to their own discipline and future vocation.

Required Readings
Class will be structured on the assumption that each student has read the assigned text(s) prior to the class meeting. The following books are required for the course. They can be purchased at the University bookstore or via online sources. For these six books, sure to get the exact same edition as those below so we'll literally be on the same page. Becker, E. (1973) The denial of death. New York: Free Press.

We will also study selections from the texts below. Some may be omitted and/or others added, depending on students’ special interests and the development of the course over the semester. I will provide PDFs on Blackboard.


**Assessment Process**

"Have I found a way to make this course relevant for my training and practice in psychotherapy and qualitative researcher, my future professional work in psychology, and my everyday life?" Or, for non-psychology students: "Have I found a way to make this course relevant for my training and practice in my academic discipline, my future
professional work, and my everyday life?” In my view, your response to this question is the preeminent criterion by which your participation in the course should be evaluated. Obviously, this is a self-assessment, one which I cannot evaluate directly. I will formally assess the quality of your work on the following assignments:

1) Weekly Structured Reflections (1 page each): A concise description of a single theme that intrigued you from the assigned readings for the present week, including an articulation of some question (about this theme or a different one) that you would like us to explore further in class. Submit one copy by email to Dr. Adams by 9 a.m. on Wednesday, and keep one copy to refer to during class. (10% of your final grade)

2) Awareness Practice Paper: You will select one psycho-spiritual awareness practice to explore experientially throughout the semester. As part of this process, you will interview someone who is experienced in your chosen practice. Interviews are to be conducted in early February, by February 12 at the latest. You will write a 5-6 page paper on your practice. This is a structured reflection paper, not a formal academic research paper. The paper will include reflections and quotes from your interview; your understanding of the particular practice’s theory and method(s) of transformation – i.e., how does the practice foster change, growth, development, healing, well-being?; and your sense of the relevance of this practice for your life and vocation. Paper due: April 2 in class. (20% of grade).

3) Classic Spiritual Text Paper: You will write a paper based upon your study of a significant spiritual text. You will select a relatively short text or portion of a text, for example, something from a renowned mystic/contemplative or a classic sacred text. Choose this reading with your later “scholarly paper” in mind, such that your reflections on this text will provide support for your larger paper. The 7-9 page paper will consist of your reflections on two or three themes in the text. For this paper you will not draw from any other literature, neither secondary sources or other works. The paper should include some discussion of your text’s relevance for alleviating suffering and fostering well-being. As part of your study of this text, you will engage in a modified version of lectio divina. Paper due: March 12, in class. (20% of your grade)

4) Scholarly Paper: You will write a scholarly paper on a theme of your choice (12-14 pages), incorporating insights from at least four different textual sources. Note that you should include the one you studied in your earlier paper, but draw upon four others as well. Paper due: April 16, in class. (30% of your grade)

5) Symposium Presentation: You will present some of your work from this course in a year-end symposium. For example, you could share a version of your scholarly paper (including your reading of the classic spiritual text), your awareness practice paper and interview, or some combination of these. Invitations to attend the symposium will be sent to psychology and theology students and faculty. (10% of your final grade)

6) Overall Course Participation: Attendance; timely completion of all assignments; quality and consistency of engaged participation in class. (10% of grade)

All assignments and activities will be described thoroughly in class. All written work for the course is to be typed, double-spaced, with 12-point font, in APA style. Plus and minus grading will be used for final grades: A = 92-100; A- = 90-91; B+ = 88-89; B = 82-87; B- = 80-81; C+ = 78-79; C = 70-77; D = 60-69; F = below 60. Attending every meeting of class is required, since this is necessary for individual success and for a
successful course overall. If an extraordinary circumstance makes it impossible for you to be in class, please notify me as soon as you can.

Academic Integrity, Special Accommodations, and Encouragement to Consult

I expect you to act with academic integrity in this course (just as I trust you are cultivating a life of integrity). To be aware of Duquesne’s formal policies, please consult the Academic Integrity PDF on our course Blackboard site, or on the University web site. In today’s Google/YouTube/Facebook/Twitter/etc. culture, it is easier than ever to violate a policy, perhaps without being fully aware that you are doing so. However, even an unintentional breach of integrity is subject to sanctions. I will not tolerate academic dishonesty of any kind. This refers to cheating, plagiarism, and all other types of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, using material from the web, another person’s work, or from books or articles without properly acknowledging the source. If I suspect that you have violated a policy I will follow the investigation and sanction procedures outlined by the University. I strongly encourage you to speak with me if you have questions about issues regarding academic integrity.

The course as described in this syllabus may be revised during the semester according to the needs and interests of the class. If you need accommodations for a disability or other special need, please speak with me. You may also contact the Office of Special Student Services in 309 Duquesne Union (412-396-6657). Please speak directly with me if you have any questions about the syllabus or about anything else regarding your participation in this course.

I look forward to our work together this semester!

~ Will W. Adams