

Graduate Seminar in Religious Studies (RELS 601): **Text and Context**: Fall 2012 - Syllabus

Instructor: Paul Fischer Office: Cherry Hall 321
Office hours: Mon. 1.00-1.50pm + Wed. 2.00-3.00pm + by appointment
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Class times: Mondays and Wednesdays from 9.10 to 11.00am in Cherry Hall 316

Course description:

This graduate course examines the role of textual discoveries for understanding the context of canonical texts in the academic study of religion. The classic texts of world civilization transmit some of the most profound insights on the human condition. They often serve as authoritative sources for cosmology, morality, and self-transformation. But these works were not created in a vacuum, and the narratives conveyed in them have not been transmitted unchanged through time: they have contexts and are read in various ways. In this course we will look at some textual discoveries and analyses that have changed our understanding of some traditional religious narratives. Our survey will include discoveries of manuscripts of received texts containing interesting *variora*, new texts that add heretofore unknown context to the received tradition, and new analyses of old texts that have yielded interesting results. People (and their interpretations) come and go, but the words of great literature are immortal. Or are they?

Goals:

1. Critical thinking: the ability to identify, question, and substantiate or alter assumptions.
(Moving from an “is X true or false?” paradigm to a “let’s weigh the evidence” paradigm.)
2. Information literacy: the ability to locate, filter, evaluate, and use information.
(Knowing how to use relevant data to objectively examine conflicting claims with logic, doubt, and humility.)
3. Objective communication: the ability to make logical, eloquent, and evidence-based arguments.
(Presenting your claims—and any opponent’s claims—as accurately, precisely, and dispassionately as possible.)
4. Social responsibility: the recognition that civil rights naturally entail civic engagement.
(Acting for a peaceful society that strives to ameliorate the greed and exaggerated consumption of capitalism.)
5. *Eudaimonia*; Happiness: the early Greeks and early Chinese both knew it was the product of the mental, moral, and aesthetic self-cultivation that can and should attend a study of the arts.

Grades:

You are evaluated on your demonstrated understanding and commitment. Your grade will be based on your participation in class (20%), two twenty-minute presentations (20%), one forty-minute formal introduction to a course section (20%), and one paper given in a fifty-minute presentation at the end of the course (40%). The emphasis on student presentations in this seminar is designed to give you several opportunities to orally present your research—a crucial skill for modern scholars. For the first two twenty-minute presentations, you will examine two texts (one from the Dead Sea Scrolls and one from Nag Hammadi) then present their content and explain what new context they bring to their respective traditions. The forty-minute presentation is quite different; rather than focusing on a specific text, it requires you to introduce a broad topic (Nag Hammadi, Hinduism, Buddhism, Dunhuang, Confucianism). These introductions are necessary in a course where prerequisite knowledge for students is not specified, and they allow you to give what amounts to an introductory lecture suitable for an undergraduate class. No paper is necessary for these first three presentations, though I do want to see your sources in the form of a bibliography. The fifty-minute presentation is essentially a conference paper. It is to accompany a ten page research paper on a topic of your choice, approved by me. Your papers must examine a textual discovery or recent analysis, not covered in class, that sheds new light on the context of any religious tradition. I hope you will use whatever language skills you have to analyze the discovery (or part of it) in its original language. Such an analysis could be as narrow as a single word or as broad as an entire text, though I suspect most would focus on a few sentences or a paragraph. For the presentation, I hope you will not merely read your paper (though many conference presenters do precisely that) but will present your work to make it as interesting as possible to non-specialists. Visuals are encouraged.

“Participation” is not the same as “attendance.” Details upon request. Regardless of whether or not you study together, all oral and written work must be completely *original*. It is your responsibility to understand what “plagiarism” means and entails. There is no extra credit work available for this course. I reserve the right to change this grading rubric at any time. Illness, with a doctor’s note (with your name, relevant dates, and the doctor’s phone number) for me to keep, is usually the only acceptable excuse for an absence. To help you develop sustained focus, no handheld electronic devices are allowed: please put it away before class begins. In short, you are graded on your responsible participation in the meetings, your critical analysis of the data, and your creative response to both; three things, not coincidentally, that your future employers will likely expect of you.

tl;dr: attendance: 10% + participation: 10% + Dead Sea Scrolls: 10% + Nag Hammadi: 10% + Introduction: 20% + Paper: 40% = 100%

Texts:

I will give you pdf scans of most readings, but you will need to buy two books:

Narayan, R.K., trans. *The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic*. New York: Penguin, 1972. [\$10 on Amazon]
Hakeda, Yoshito, trans. *The Awakening of Faith*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1967. [\$20 on Amazon; other translations for \$10]

Readings:

Week 1: Intro & Judaism: Late canonical

Class 01: 27 Aug 2012

Introduction

Class 02: 29 Aug 2012

Ecclesiastes (c.250bce)

Daniel (c.150bce)

Week 2: Judaism: Apocryphal

Class 03: 03 Sep 2012: Labor Day holiday

No class

Class 04: 05 Sep 2012

Apocrypha introduction in *The New Oxford Annotated (RSV) Bible with Apocrypha* (1962; 1977), xi-xxii

“The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach” (c.180bce) in *Oxford Annotated Bible* (1962; 1977), 128-197

Week 3: Judaism: Dead Sea Scrolls

Class 05: 10 Sep 2012

Dead Sea Scrolls (c.100bce)

Wise, Michael, Martin Abegg, Edward Cook, trans. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*. New York: HarperCollins, 1996.

i. “The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice” (4Q400-407, 11Q17, Masada Fragment); Wise #85, pp.365-377

ii. “The Secret of the Way Things Are” (4Q410, 4Q412-13, 4Q415-21, 4Q423, 1Q26); Wise #88, pp.378-390

iii. “The Coming of Melchizedek” (11Q13); Wise #130, pp.455-457

Class 06: 12 Sep 2012

Student presentations on Dead Sea Scrolls texts (all students choose one text, excluding Wise 85, 88, 130)

Week 4: Christianity: Tradition and Nag Hammadi

Class 07: 17 Sep 2012

Paul’s Letter to the Romans (c.55ce) in *Oxford Annotated Bible* (1962; 1977), 1361-1379

Student introduction to Nag Hammadi (1 of 5)

Class 08: 19 Sep 2012

Meyer, Marvin, ed. *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*. New York: HarperCollins, 2007.

Nag Hammadi (c.200ce): “The Gospel of Thomas” (NHC II,2; P. Oxy. 1,654, 655) in Meyer (2007), 133-156

Week 5: Christianity: Nag Hammadi

Class 09: 24 Sep 2012

Nag Hammadi (c.200ce): “The Gospel of Philip” (NHC II,3) in Meyer (2007), 157-186

Class 10: 26 Sep 2012

Student presentations on Nag Hammadi texts (excluding Gospels of Thomas and Philip)

Week 6: Hinduism: Ramayanas

Class 11: 01 Oct 2012

Student introduction to Hinduism (2 of 5)

Narayan, R.K., trans. *The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic*. New York: Penguin, 1972.

Introductions to the *Ramayana* by Pankaj Mishra and R.K. Narayan in Narayan (1972), vii-xvi, xxiii-xxv

Class 12: 03 Oct 2012

Ramayana chs.1-4 in Narayan (1972), 3-73

Week 7: Hinduism: Ramayanas

Class 13: 08 Oct 2012

Ramayana chs.5-14 in Narayan (1974), 74-157

Class 14: 10 Oct 2012

Ramanujan, A.K. "Three Hundred *Ramayanas*: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation." In Paula Richman, ed. *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, 3-7 [*Ramayana* synopsis], 22-49.

Week 8: Buddhism: Tradition and Mahayana

Class 15: 15 Oct 2012

Student introduction to Buddhism (3 of 5)

Hakeda, Yoshito, trans. *The Awakening of Faith*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1967.

The Awakening of Faith (c.550ce) Introduction and chs.1-2 in Hakeda (1967), 1-30

Class 16: 17 Oct 2012

The Awakening of Faith chs.3-5 in Hakeda (1967), 31-104

Week 9: Buddhism: Dunhuang and Zen

Class 17: 22 Oct 2012

Student introduction to the discovery at Dunhuang (4 of 5)

Broughton, Jeffrey. *The Bodhidharma Anthology: The Earliest Records of Zen*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

The Bodhidharma Anthology (c.550ce) Introduction, Biography, Two Entrances in Broughton (1999), 1-12

Class 18: 24 Oct 2012

The Bodhidharma Anthology First Letter, Second Letter, Records I-III in Broughton (1999), 12-52

Week 10: Ruism: Tradition and Xunzi

Class 19: 29 Oct 2012

Student introduction to Confucianism (5 of 5)

Van Norden, Bryan. *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2011.

Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy ch.1 "Historical Context" in Van Norden (2011), 1-15

Class 20: 31 Oct 2012

Ivanhoe, P.J. and Bryan Van Norden. *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001; 2nd ed. 2005.

Xunzi (c.250bce) excerpts in Ivanhoe & Van Norden (2005), 255-307

Week 11: Ruism: Xunzi and Guodian

Class 21: 05 Nov 2012

Goldin, Paul. "Xunzi in the Light of the Guodian Manuscripts." *Early China* 25 (2000): 113-146.

[re: 郭店 (c.300bce/1993): 成之間之, 尊德義, 性自命出, 六德]

Class 22: 07 Nov 2012

Cook, Scott. "'San De' and Warring States Views on Heavenly Retribution." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 37 supplement (2010): 101-123. [re: 上博 (c.300bce/1994) vol.5: 三德 & 荀子]

Week 12: Daoism: Laozi and Guodian

Class 23: 12 Nov 2012

Introduction to Philosophical Daoism

Laozi (c.400bce) in Ivanhoe & Van Norden (2005), 161-203

Class 24: 14 Nov 2012

Harper, Donald. "The Nature of Taiyi in the Guodian Manuscript *Taiyi sheng shui*: Abstract Cosmic Principle or Supreme Cosmic Deity?" *Chūgoku shutsudo shiryō kenkyū* 中國出土資料研究 5 (2001): 1-23.

Week 13 Daoism: Guodian

Class 25: 19 Nov 2012

Puett, Michael. "Theodicies of Discontinuity: Domesticating Energies and Dispositions in Early China." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 37 supplement (2010): 51-66. [re: 郭店 (c.300bce/1993): 五行, 性自命出, 太一生水]

Class 26: 21 Nov 2012: "Thanksgiving" holiday

No class

Week 14: Student papers

Class 27: 26 Nov 2012

Student presentations: 1-2 of 5

Class 28: 28 Nov 2012

Student presentations: 3-4 of 5

Week 15: Student papers & MWD banners

Class 29: 03 Nov 2012

Student presentation: 5 of 5

Introduction to the Mawangdui banners

Class 30: 05 Nov 2012

Wang, Eugene. "Ascend to Heaven or Stay in the Tomb? Paintings in Mawangdui Tomb 1 and the Virtual Ritual of Revival in Second-Century BCE China." In Amy Olberding and Philip Ivanhoe, eds., *Mortality in Traditional Chinese Thought*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2011, 37-84.

As Confucius said: "I will not open the door for a mind that is not already striving to understand, nor will I provide words to a tongue that is not already struggling to speak. If I hold up one corner of a problem, and the student cannot come back to me with the other three, I will not attempt to instruct him again." *Analects* 7.8 [子曰不憤不啓不排不發舉一隅不以三隅反則不復也]