**Dr. Adam Wells**

**Wiley 004**

**276-944-6150**

[**awells@ehc.edu**](mailto:awells@ehc.edu)

**Office hours: MWF 10-11 and 12-1**

**Religion 213: Comparative Theology of the Abrahamic Traditions**

As an academic discipline, comparative theology explores theological and philosophical issues from an interreligious perspective. The first part of the course examines the task of “comparing” religious traditions: How do we navigate religious traditions that make competing, mutually exclusive truth claims? If Christianity is true, then must Islam be false? How should we regard our own religious, secular, and cultural commitments when comparing them with those of other traditions? The second part of the course will examine and compare mystical traditions in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: What is mysticism? How does it develop within the Abrahamic traditions? How might mysticism inform and affect comparative theology? Students will demonstrate their understanding of major thinkers and theological topics in the three Abrahamic traditions through in-class discussion, short writing assignments, and exams. Papers and exams will focus on philosophical analysis of the arguments covered in the course.

**COURSE GOALS:**

Upon successful completion of this course,

1. The student will be familiar with the mystical traditions of the three Abrahamic faiths.
2. The student will have an appreciation for the complexity of religious belief and complex task of comparing religions.
3. The student will be able to employ critical thinking skills in evaluating various philosophical arguments.
4. The student will be able to relate the religious traditions he/she studies to his/her own tradition (whether that tradition be religious, secular, or otherwise).

**TEXTS (available at the Merc):**

D’Costa, Gavin. *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Ernst, Carl W. *Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam*. Boston: Shambala, 2011.

Fanning, Steven. *Mystics of the Christian Tradition*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Scholem, Gershom. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism,* 3rd edition. New York: Schocken, 1995.

**SCHEDULE OF LECTURE TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS** \*

\*Readings listed in parentheses after each lecture topic should be read **before** the lecture.

1/9: Intro

UNIT I: Comparing Religions

1/11: D’Costa, Ch. 1

1/16: D’Costa, Ch. 2

1/18: D’ Costa, Chs. 3-4

1/23: D’Costa, Ch. 5

1/25: D’Costa, Ch. 6

UNIT II: Jewish Mysticism

1/30: Scholem, First Lecture

2/1**:** Scholem, Second Lecture

2/6: Scholem, Fourth Lecture

2/8: Scholem, Sixth Lecture; *The Zohar*, selections (**Moodle**)

2/13: Scholem, Ninth Lecture

2/15: **Midterm Exam**

UNIT III: Christian Mysticism

2/20: Fanning, Ch. 1

2/22: Fanning, pp. 22-44; Athanasius, *The Life of St. Antony* (**Moodle)**; Dionysius *The Mystical Theology* (**Moodle)**

2/27: Fanning, pp. 75-94; Gregory the Great, *Moral Interpretation of Job*, sections **(Moodle);** Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 1 **(Moodle)**;

3/1: Augustine, *Confessions,* Books 2-4

3/6: Augustine, *Confessions*, Books 5-7

3/8: Augustine, *Confessions,* 8-10

3/10-17: SPRING BREAK!!!

3/20: Fanning, Ch. 4

3/22: : Fanning, Ch. 5

UNIT IV: Islamic Mysticism

3/27: Ernst, Ch. 1

3/29: Ernst, Ch. 2

4/3: Ernst, Ch. 3

4/5: Ernst, Ch. 4

4/10: Ernst, Ch. 5

4/12: Ernst, pp. 147-169

4/17: Ernst, Ch. 8

4/19: Wells, “A Tree with Many Branches: Abrahamic Approaches to Interreligious Dialogue,” *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* (**Moodle)**

**Final Exam: TBA**

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

**1)** **Participation (10%).** You should try to speak-up regularly! Class discussion is the best way to grapple with the difficult readings, themes, arguments, and ideas that we will cover in the course. I consider class participation an indispensible part of the learning process!

**2) Papers (30%).** Throughout the course, I will assign multiple short writing assignments. These are intended to be low-pressure assignments that help solidfy your knowledge of the arguments and texts covered in the course. You will submit these to me on Moodle.

**3)** **Exams (60%)** (Feb. 15, TBA)

**GENERAL GRADING RUBRIC:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Letter Grade** | **Lower Numerical Cutoff** | **Description** |
| A | 94 | Exceptional work that shows creativity and careful analysis of material. A-level work is sophisticated, well-written, and free from errors in grammar and spelling. |
| A- | 90 | Shows exceptional mastery of concepts, and goes well beyond requirements. |
| B+ | 87 | Work in the B-range is above average. B level work may be excellent work with several small errors or flaws. It is solid work, and shows significant command of concepts. |
| B | 84 |  |
| B- | 80 |  |
| C+ | 77 | Work in the C-range is average and satisfactory. It fulfills the criteria of the assignment, but does not display the same level of analysis, comprehension, and/or creativity as B and A-level work |
| C | 74 |  |
| C- | 70 |  |
| D | 60 | Work in the D-range is substandard. It may have major flaws, or show little mastery of major or minor concepts. |
| F | 0 | Work in the F-range shows no mastery of relevant material. F-level work fails to complete requirements or is otherwise unacceptable. |

\*\*Letter grades are equivalent to a numerical score 1 point above the lower numerical cutoff. For example, an A paper is equivalent to a numerical score of 95

**ATTENDANCE POLICY**:

During your college years, by responsible class attendance you can establish a reputation for reliability that will help your professors to write good reference letters for jobs or programs of graduate study. I value faithful attendance highly, as an indication of your commitment to the course goals.

You are allowed 3 absences with no penalty. Beyond that, each absence will reduce your course average by 5 points. More than 5 absences will result in an automatic F or removal from the course. There are no exceptions to this policy. **Note: I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. Every absence (no matter the reason) counts as an absence!**

**PARTICIPATION POLICY:**

Informed participation is expected. You should be physically and mentally present and engaged in every class! Your learning process will be helped immensely by participating actively in the course, so don’t be afraid to ask questions, or engage your peers (and me) in discussion. Follow the Apostle Paul’s advice: Be bold!

Non-participation (e.g., sleeping, eating your lunch, staring off in the distance for extended periods of time, disruptive behavior and so forth) will negatively impact your course grade.

**COMPUTER AND CELL PHONE POLICY:**

A successful class requires the active participation of everyone involved. Cell phones are distracting and disruptive; they are detrimental to both individual learners and the class as a whole. Consequently, the use of cell phones in class is strictly forbidden. Turn them off before class begins—off, not vibrate! I will give you one warning per semester, after which I will deduct one point from your final grade for every violation of this policy. If I see your cell phone during an exam or quiz, you will automatically receive a ZERO on that exam or quiz.

The use of laptops in class is prohibited unless you receive an accommodation from the Powell Resource Center.

**EMAIL POLICY:**

I will try to return your emails quickly during the workday. If you have a complex question, come see me!

**POLICY ON ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:**

The Emory & Henry College Honor Pledge is as follows:

I understand that Emory & Henry is a community built on trust. Therefore, as a member of this community, I am committed to tell the truth and to maintain the sanctity of other people’s property, including computer data/access. I will abstain from all fraud in academic work. I will neither give nor receive aid on any form of test or assigned work where such aid is prohibited, nor tolerate this conduct in any member of the Emory & Henry Community. I will deal responsibly with such acts when I observe them. By my conduct and influence, I will endeavor to build a high standard of honesty and truthfulness in all academic work.

Any evidence of academic dishonesty will result in a grade of 0 for the assignment or failure of the course (at my discretion). Academic dishonesty includes such acts as receiving improper assistance on tests and quizzes. For writing assignments, academic dishonesty includes plagiarism, which is work copied or paraphrased from another source without proper citation, copied from your own work for other classes, or written or revised by someone else. If you refer to another source, you need to give credit directly to that source when you quote directly and when you paraphrase. Any incidents of academic dishonesty will be reported and dealt with in adherence to the College’s Honor System procedures.

**How to Get the Most Out of This Course**

As with any course, what you invest will determine your return, not simply in the grade you earn but in the knowledge and perspectives you take with you. Things to do, more or less in order of importance, are:

1. **Keep up with the assignments**. There is a good deal of reading in this course, and more than in the ordinary 200-level course. Stay current with the reading assignments. If you fall behind you will have a hard time catching up.

2. **Prepare conscientiously for class discussions**. Read closely the texts assigned, ponder the questions provided, make notes, and be ready to participate in discussion in a thoughtful and well-informed manner.

3. **Take advantage of the office hours of the instructor**. My office hours are for your benefit. They provide opportunities for you not only to ask questions and obtain clarifications, but also to get to know me and to let me get to know you.

4. **Familiarize yourself with the specialized vocabulary of the academic study of religion and philosophy**. There are many technical terms and fifty-cent words: learn what they mean and how to pronounce and spell them. To this end, you should freely and frequently consult online resources such as the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

5. **Make use of resources beyond those required for reading or purchase**. There are many, many commentaries, dictionaries, concordances, etc. Don’t be afraid to consult outside sources!