Religion and the Sciences

Instructor: Prof. Sthaneshwar Timalsina, Ph. D.
Time and Venue: TTh 12:30-1:45 PM   EBA 439
Office: Arts and Letters 638
Office Hours: TTh 2:00-3:00 PM
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Email: timalsin@mail.sdsu.edu

[This is a course on the scientific study of religion. Our approach will be analytical and what we discuss in class may not align with your faith affiliation. If you are unwilling to analyze the issues openly and critically, I strongly recommend that you attend the seminary classes of your faith, and this may not be the class for you.]

Course Description:
There are two diametrically opposed tendencies regarding religion and science: one posits these two disciplines as contradictory and struggling to nullify each other, and the other attempts to reconcile differences. Even within the tendency to reconcile differences, there has been the emergence of a pseudo-religion and pseudo-science, where reductionist-physicalist theories are presented as religion and intelligent design, or similar other hypotheses are presented as science. Rather than describing the limits of these two disciplines, or even trying to reconcile differences, this course examines the limits to which the discipline of religion can work with the discipline of science. It would be wrong to say that everything science brings to light is against religion and vice versa. Our objectives are to explore the venues within which the two disciplines can work together, and investigate the possibility of developing a comprehensive discipline that encompasses the both.

The focus for this semester is consciousness and its states. For both religion and science, what it means to be human is a prominent question. Consciousness is an enigma for the sciences, as there are many questions in the area of the brain and consciousness that are yet to be answered. Altered states, samādhi experiences, near-death experiences, dreams, and similar other conscious states compel us to explore beyond what is understood and explained by sciences today.

Learning Objectives:
1. To comprehend the delicate relation between religion and science,
2. To rationally analyze religious claims,
3. To investigate the nature and role of religious traditions and experiences in our lives,
4. To identify and use a "vocabulary" for discussing religious experience academically,
5. To develop critical and analytical approaches to reading religious texts and traditions,
6. To utilize a critical perspective concerning the role of religion in the modern world,
7. To be able to recognize a shared humanity in all forms of religious experience and expression.

**Required Texts:**


In addition to these two books, I will be referring to essays from popular magazines, science blogs, and Facebook postings. Any link provided in class or posted on the Blackboard will be considered a text-material. It is mandatory that you read those postings or blogs just like the textbooks.

In addition to these books, postings on the blackboard and handouts distributed in the class are considered as a part of the text, if not specified otherwise.

**General Guidelines and Expectations:**

- Demonstrated completion of required readings
- Effective Classroom participation
- Internet access; unless specifically directed otherwise, you must submit your papers electronically.
- You must ensure that your correct address is on Blackboard

**Computer and Internet Access Requirement**

You are required to have an active, working email account. Please note that HOTMAIL accounts are NOT compatible with BLACKBOARD, and you should create a university ROHAN account. See:

http://rohan.sdsu.edu/raccts.html
Table 1: List of course components and their assessment values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Course Weight</th>
<th>Your Mark</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>In class discussion papers (4 x 25 = 100)</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>= 1,000 words or 4 pages per discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Final Term Paper (3,500 words)</strong></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Two short pop-quizzes in class on the discussed materials</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100%</td>
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**Deadlines:**
Response Paper 1 (1,000 words): Dalai Lama, *TUSA*: February 16
Response Paper 2 (1,000 words): Thompson, Chapters 1-3: March 3
Response Paper 3 (1,000 words): Thompson, Chapters 4-6: March 17
Response Paper 4 (1,000 words): Thompson, Chapters 7-10: April 12

**Specific Guidelines for the Response Papers:**
I grade only the response papers that are presented in class or given to me during the presentation time. There is no late submission for response papers, as these are supposed to be in-class-presentations! For the final term paper, 10% of the grade depends on your presentation skills.

**Response Paper # 1:**
There is a new spiritualism emerging that seeks to combine scientific claims with religious belief systems. I want you to very closely read the Dalai Lama’s book, *The Universe in a Single Atom*. There is an equal amount of skepticism in this franchise of a *religion-science-cocktail.* I want your open-minded analysis. You will read your response paper in class.

**Response Papers # 2-4:**
Thompson’s book, “*Waking, Dreaming, Being,*” is an insightful work that attempts to bridge areas of science with spirituality. Based on three first chapters (“Seeing,” “Waking,” and “Being”), you are expected to write a 1000-word response paper. You are encouraged to use additional materials from scholarly writings. Response paper # 3 involves reading and responding to the successive three chapters (“Dreaming,” “Witnessing,” and “Imagining”). The final response paper #4 based on this book relates to the remaining chapters (“Floating,” “Sleeping,” “Dying,” and “Knowing”). You will present all your response papers in class.
Specific Guidelines for the Term Paper:
There is a proverb in Sanskrit: āmrān pṛṣṭaḥ kovidārān ācaṣṭe, which is similar to saying, when asked for the price for a mango, he starts giving the price for an orchid (!). There are great many things to write about, but this class is on Religion and the Sciences, and you are expected to write a paper on something relevant. If you are not sure, just ask me (or one of your classmates).

1. You have to read at least two additional books or five research articles for the final paper.
2. Papers that develop an argument receive higher credit than do merely descriptive papers.
3. Your essay must include footnotes and references at the end of the essay.
4. You have to follow the Chicago Manual of Style.
5. Your essays need to be original. Consequences for plagiarism follow SDSU rules and regulations.

Rubric:
The following list indicates the essential qualities I am expecting to see in your writings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>___ thesis statement provided</td>
<td>___ good introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ argument developed in paper</td>
<td>___ clearly and concisely written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ evidence, examples supplied</td>
<td>___ course materials integrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ adequate and accurate citations</td>
<td>___ grammar, spelling doublechecked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ insights gained from class included</td>
<td>___ coherency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ own thesis examined</td>
<td>___ vividly written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ other positions analyzed</td>
<td>___ organized, transitions used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ synthesis</td>
<td>___ clear summary conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Grading Guidelines:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimum Grade</th>
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<td>95</td>
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<td>74</td>
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<td>82</td>
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<td>79</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>55</td>
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<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>C+</td>
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- During the course of the semester, you will be able to see your grade by checking the GRADEBOOK section on BLACKBOARD.
- I will issue an Authorized Incomplete only (I) when a small portion of required coursework has not been completed due to unforeseen, but fully justified reasons. You must complete the required work within one calendar year immediately following the end of the term in which it was assigned. If this is not done, you will receive an IC-Incomplete Charged Grade that will count as an F for GPA computation.
- A grade of "WU" for "Withdrawal Unauthorized" (formerly "U") indicates that you enrolled in a course, did not officially withdraw from the course, and failed to complete course requirements. For purposes of GPA computation, this grade is equivalent to an "F". If you attend a portion of a course and then, after receiving a failing grade, stop attending without officially withdrawing, you will receive a final grade of "F" rather than "WU".
- **If you require any accommodations, you must contact Student Disability Services at Calpulli Center (Suite 3101), telephone: 619.594.6473, or visit [http://go.sdsu.edu/student_affairs/sds/](http://go.sdsu.edu/student_affairs/sds/).**

Computer and Internet Access Requirement
You must have an active, working email account as much of our material will be distributed on line through BLACKBOARD, and I reserve the right to administer tests/quizzes via Blackboard. You should create a university ROHAN account through: [http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/newstudacct.shtml](http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/newstudacct.shtml).

- For an orientation to how to use Blackboard or for Blackboard help, go to: [http://its.sdsu.edu/blackboard/student](http://its.sdsu.edu/blackboard/student)
- “Like” our department on Facebook to get updates on extra credit opportunities, etc. ([https://www.facebook.com/pages/Religious-Studies-Department-San-Diego-State-University/590391471043594](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Religious-Studies-Department-San-Diego-State-University/590391471043594))
• **How can I ensure that I will get course-related Email?** Check and update your Email address at [SDSU Web portal](https://sunspot.sdsu.edu/portal/), as this address will be used automatically by Blackboard.
Lectures and Required Reading Assignments

Week One (January 21, 2016):
  Course Introduction
  Documentary: The Power of Thought
  http://documentaryaddict.com/films/the-power-of-thought
  Introduction to Panpsychism
  Introduction to a blog:
  http://jonlieffmd.com

Weeks Two-Four:
  The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality

Week Two (Jan 26 and 28, 2016):
  Prologue (pp. 1-6)

  Chapter 1: Reflection (pp. 7-14)

  Chapter 2: Encounter with Science (pp. 15-40)

  Chapter 3: Emptiness, Relativity, and Quantum Physics (pp. 41-70)

Week Three (Feb 2 and 4, 2016):

  Chapter 4: The Big Bang and the Buddhist Beginningless Universe (pp. 71-94)

  Chapter 5: Evolution, Karma, and the World of Sentience (pp. 95-116)

  Chapter 6: The Question of Consciousness (pp. 117-138)

Week Four (Feb 9 and 11, 2016):

  Chapter 7: Toward a Science of Consciousness (pp. 139-162)

  Chapter 8: The Spectrum of Consciousness (pp. 163-184)

  Chapter 9: Ethics and the New Genetics (pp. 185-202)
Week Five (Feb 16 and 18, 2016):
Response to Dalai Lama’s Book: Response paper size 1,000 words.

Week Six-Thirteen:
*Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy*

Week Six (Feb 23 and 25, 2016):
Lecture: Thompson, Chapter 1
‘Seeing,’ pages 1-20.

Lecture: Thompson, Chapter 2
‘Waking,’ pages 21-66

Week Seven (March 1, 2016):
Lecture: Thompson, Chapter 3
‘Being,’ pages 67-106

March 3, 2016:
Response Paper Presentation (Thompson, Chapters 1-3)

Week Eight (March 8 and 10, 2016):
Lecture: Thompson, Chapter 4
‘Dreaming,’ pages 107-138

Lecture: Thompson, Chapter 5
‘Witnessing,’ pages 139-166

Week Nine (March 15, 2016)
Lecture: Thompson, Chapter 6
‘Imagining,’ pages 167-202
March 17, 2016:
Response Paper Presentation (Thompson, Chapters 4-6)

Week Ten (March 22 and 24, 2016):
Lecture: Thompson, Chapter 7
‘Floating,’ pages 203-230

Lecture: Thompson, Chapter 8
‘Sleeping,’ pages 231-272

March 28-April 1 Spring Recess

Week Eleven (April 5 and 7, 2016):
Lecture: Thompson, Chapter 9
‘Dying,’ pages 273-318

Lecture: Thompson, Chapter 10
‘Knowing,’ pages 319-366

Week Twelve (April 12, 2016):
Response Paper Presentation (Thompson, Chapters 7-10)

April 14, 2016: TBD

Weeks Thirteen and Fourteen: Ethical Issues

April 19, 21, 26, and 28, 2016: Working towards wisdom and compassion (Moral Frankenstein: Issues on Science and Morality):

I will post on the Blackboard select articles and links and you are expected to further your research beyond the links provided in the class. Central concern will be animal and plant
consciousness, and animal self-awareness. Any relevant research to counter *Dr. Frankenstein* is appreciated.

The list below is selective but not limited for the discussions to unfold during these final two weeks of the semester:

**Moral Frankenstein: Issues on Science and Morality**

http://www.nanotechnologyworld.org/#!Scientists-Teach-Bacterium-a-New-Trick-for-Artificial-Photosynthesis/c89r/568acc640cf2e866691c8488


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqKHDz7OBjI

https://aeon.co/essays/do-we-really-want-to-fuse-our-brains-together


https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn25894-meet-the-electric-life-forms-that-live-on-pure-energy/


http://www.collective-evolution.com/2014/05/01/scientific-study-shows-meditators-collapsing-quantum-systems-at-a-distance/

Select Issues on Life and Consciousness:
http://jonlieffmd.com

May 5, 2016: Finals paper presentation (in class)

A Few Suggested Topics For Your Term Papers:

1. Religion, Science, and Rationality
2. The Religion/Science Conflict
3. Beyond Physics: Metaphysical Issues in Light of Modern Science
4. Evolution in the Post-Scientific World: Human Dilemmas
5. Religious Experience and Psychology
6. Religious Experience and Cognitive Science
7. Dream and Mysticism
8. Near Death Experiences
9. Pure Consciousness
10. Altered States of Consciousness
11. Methods of Induction of Altered States of Consciousness
12. The Structures of Consciousness
13. On the Phenomenology of Mysticism and Ecstasy
14. Experience, Meditation, and the Body
15. Limits of Materialism (Physicalism)
17. Darwin and the God: Rhapsody of Being
18. Intelligent Design and the Limits of Human Rationality
19. Determinism, Free Will, and God
20. Is Life Real?
21. Do Animals have self-awareness?
22. Do Animals Feel?
23. Do Plants Feel?
24. Panpsychism
25. Cooking Dogs and Other Moral Dilemmas