

SGBH 202: Theology: Structures of Meaning
Spring 2021
MWF 3:05-4:15, Online

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Office: Virtual office hours, by appointment only

Course Description

Together, humans face a common set of ultimate questions: Why do we suffer? What happens when we die? What is our place in existence? And though answers to these questions have varied widely, all seek to make our experiences meaningful. We examine major religious and artistic answers to such questions in particular, with special attention to first person accounts of varying beliefs and the practices that enact them, along with major architectural monuments that have shaped those practices in major religious traditions across historical time and space.

Course Objectives

Course-specific

- Show a basic understanding of religious thought and practice .
- Engage fellow students regularly in collaborative examination of course materials in class discussions.

Gen Ed Area: Humanities

- Explain how humanities scholars ask and answer questions about human experiences or the nature of being human.
- Identify ways in which human cultures have developed and interacted over time.
- Use methods common to the humanities to analyze texts, objects, events, and/or ideas in context.

Course Readings

The Dhammapada, trans. Mascaró (Penguin Classics). ISBN: 978-0140442847

Buddhist Scriptures, ed. Lopez (Penguin Classics). ISBN: 978-0140447583

Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Sheed (Hackett). ISBN: 978-0872208162

Anselm of Canterbury, *The Major Works* (Oxford World's Classics). ISBN: 978-0199540082

The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali, trans. Watt (OneWorld). ISBN: 978-1851680627

The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila by Herself, trans. Cohen (Penguin Classics). ISBN: 9780140440737

Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Kaufmann (Touchstone). ISBN: 978-0684717258

Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, revised ed. (Orbis). ISBN: 978-1570751585

Sophocles I: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus. (Chicago) ISBN: 9780226311517

Students will also need a Bible for this course. The one listed on the bookstore website is a good reference Bible that will serve you well for many years to come, but you may use any Bible you wish (as long as it is not the King James Version). Other texts and materials will be distributed via Blackboard and are marked on the schedule as follows: (**)

Assignments and Grading

Courses in the Shimer Great Books Program are heavily discussion-based and student-driven. Accordingly, class participation counts for a much higher proportion of student grades than in

most courses: 60%. In addition, students will write two essays, which will each count for 20% of their final grade (or 40% total).

Class participation presupposes careful and thorough preparation and serious intellectual involvement in class discussion. Students should come to class not only having read the text through, but having underlined, taken notes, and scanned over the marked text at least one additional time after the initial reading. On the basis of such preparation, students should be prepared for an intensive discussion focused on the texts or artworks assigned for that day.

You must also come prepared to class, and that means having the course text in front of you, along with annotations or notes. Hard copies are strongly preferred, especially for assigned books available from the college bookstore, but if electronic copies are used, you should plan to mark them and/or take notes as you read.

My expectation for class participation is that every member of class will be able to contribute with remarks and citations that are on-topic and reflect solid preparation for class. A student who meets that baseline will receive a grade in the **B range** for their participation portion. Students whose contribution is notably lacking—for instance, those who speak very little, who give no evidence of having done the reading carefully, who consistently change the topic in a disruptive way, or whose primary contributions are jokes or personal anecdotes—will receive a participation grade in the **C or D range**. Students who distinguish themselves through some particular service—such as consistently contributing new topics that shape the discussion, serving as a resource for navigating the text, or making a special effort to draw in quieter classmates—will qualify themselves for a participation grade in the **A range**.

Given the limitations of the online format, the professor reserves the right, in dialogue with students, to vary the format of class with the goal of building up the group's rapport or comfort level with the software interface. If such experiments deviate significantly from the norm of open-ended group discussion, the expectations will be specified ahead of time, in consultation with students.

All students will be required to have a one-on-one meeting with the professor around the middle of the semester. The purpose of this conference will be an open-ended discussion of the student's performance and any ways that their experience in class can be improved. Failure to schedule and attend this meeting by the deadline specified below will result in a penalty to class participation points.

The baseline condition for class participation is of course attendance at our meetings. Absences not only affect the individual student, but the entire group, and the same is true of habitual lateness. Lateness will count against a student's participation for that session, and in extreme cases will be treated as the equivalent of an absence. During a normal semester, absences would result in a series of increasing grade penalties, and absences equaling more than 20% of class sessions would be grounds for failing the course. Given the realities of the pandemic, I am loosening that policy to the extent that all excess absences can be made up and there is no automatic trigger of failure.

There is no need to make up your first two absences. (If students miss fewer than three classes, however, then in cases where a student is at the threshold between two grades, the professor will go with the higher one.) After that point, students must carry out a make-up activity per absence in order to get the participation points corresponding to that session. Absences will normally require watching a recording of the class session in question and either (1) writing a half-page, double-spaced response addressing at least two specific lines of conversation from the class or (2) scheduling a meeting of at least ten minutes with the professor to discuss the reading in light of the recorded session.

Students who do a make-up will receive participation points proportionate to their average participation grade for the two weeks leading up to the missed class—this is to make sure that you cannot actually improve your grade by skipping class and doing individual make-ups.

If multiple students miss the same class, I encourage them to schedule a group make-up discussion with the professor in order to better approximate the experience they missed. If the format of the class missed differs significantly from an open discussion, please check with the professor on how best to make up that session.

Summaries must be completed and emailed to the professor **within one week** of the absence being made up, by class time. In-person meetings must be scheduled **within two weeks** of the absence being made up. In emergency circumstances (such as extended illness), these deadlines may be extended. Grades of incomplete (“I”) are also possible in such cases.

Students requiring additional accommodations are urged to discuss this matter with the professor as early as possible in the semester and to devise a formal written plan in consultation with the relevant institutional offices. In line with the Shimer School’s policies on attendance, accommodations will be made with the aim of allowing a student to attend at least 80% of class sessions synchronously and without placing undue burdens on either the accommodated student or the faculty member.

Written work will take the form of two essays, one around midterm and the other at the end of the semester. Of the two, one must compare two different textual traditions, and one must compare text within a single tradition. Students may choose which paper to do first. Both papers must be 4-6 *full* pages in length, double-spaced with standard margins.

All written assignments must be turned in on Blackboard by the due date listed on the course schedule below; in case of technical difficulties with Blackboard, you may submit the paper via email for the sake of meeting the deadline, but the paper must be posted on Blackboard as soon as possible in order to receive comments and a grade. Students submit ***all written work*** in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) format; in case of technical difficulties submitting in the required format, you may use another format for the sake of meeting the deadline, but must resubmit in the required in order to receive comments and a grade. **Unless otherwise stated, the deadline is always the beginning of class time on the date in question.** Papers turned in within 24 hours of the deadline will receive a 5% grade penalty on the assignment; papers turned in within a week of the deadline will receive a 10% grade penalty, with an additional 10% penalty for each additional week (or portion of a week) the paper is late.

Students may rewrite both essays, provided that a draft of some form is submitted by the stated deadline. Rewrites of the midterm essay are due within *two weeks* of the time the professor posts grades and comments on Blackboard (which will be established via the Announcements feature). The final essay may be rewritten if an early draft is turned in by the deadline listed below. In emergency scenarios such as protracted illness, all submission and rewrite deadlines may be extended; as noted above, a grade of incomplete may also be possible depending on the exact circumstances.

Grading Criteria for Essays

A: The paper demonstrates excellent competence in all areas: imaginative choice of material; excellent thesis clearly stated and supported with persuasive evidence and reasoning; well-organized ideas that unify the paper; good transitions between ideas and between paragraphs; clear and logical development of discussion; the paper is virtually free of errors in usage, grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

B: The paper demonstrates above-average competence in all areas: appropriate choice of material; good thesis clearly stated and supported with good evidence and reasons; overall unity but some disjointed paragraphs and vague transitions; ideas sometimes out of sequence, and discussion occasionally hard to follow; clear and readable language that may at times be too general, vague, or inappropriate. It is comparatively free of errors in the use of English.

C: The paper demonstrates average competence in all areas: predictable, overly general, trite or obvious thesis supported with some irrelevant material; basic organization showing that the paper follows a logical plan; some paragraphs may be disunified or misplaced, containing abrupt shifts in ideas; wander off topic at times, becoming difficult to follow; sentences sometimes awkwardly constructed with wordy, imprecise, or trite language; mechanical errors that are distracting.

D: The paper demonstrates below-average competence in all areas: vague or carelessly thought-out thesis supported with inappropriate material; lack of overall unity, poor organization and development of ideas with some illogical transitions and weak conclusions; confusing sentences or passages whose meaning is unclear; poorly chosen language with numerous mechanical errors.

F: The F paper usually indicates failure to state and develop a main idea. It may also contain serious errors in logic, grammar, spelling, punctuation, documentation, and sentence structure.

Note on Institutional Policies

Please note that the college-wide policy on plagiarism holds for this class and that student assignments may be run through plagiarism-detection software at the professor's discretion. Plagiarism is a very serious academic and ethical offense that can lead to failure of the assignment or course—or, after multiple instances, expulsion from college. Please consult the Student Handbook for more details of the plagiarism policy. All other institutional policies apply equally, including those related to accommodations for students with learning disabilities or differences and Title IX protections. More details on those policies are available in the Student Handbook, and students are encouraged to approach the professor with any questions or concerns they may have.

Class Schedule and Readings

*This calendar provides the schedule for assignments and readings for our time together this semester. Students should be aware that the schedule may change. All students will be alerted as soon as possible via email and Blackboard announcement. **Failure to check email regularly is no excuse for missing these updates.***

Monday	January 25	Bible: Exodus 1-4; 1 Samuel 1-3; Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 1, 16, 25-27; Ezekiel 1-5, 12, 33, 37:1-14
Wednesday	January 27	Bible: 1 Kings 16:29-22:53; 2 Kings 1-2, 4:1-8:15, 9, 13:14-21
Friday	January 29	Bible: Daniel 1-6; Jonah; Esther
Monday	February 1	<i>Buddhist Scriptures</i> , chs. 1-3, 60 (pp. 3-33, 540-548)
Wednesday	February 3	<i>Buddhist Scriptures</i> , chs. 13-15, 21, 24 (pp. 101-128, 185-192, 212-220)
Friday	February 5	<i>Dhammapada</i> , chs. 1-14 (pp. 35-63)
Monday	February 8	<i>Dhammapada</i> , chs. 15-26 (pp. 64-93)
Wednesday	February 10	<i>Buddhist Scriptures</i> , chs. 26-27, 29 (pp. 230-261, 269-277)
Friday	February 12	<i>Buddhist Scriptures</i> , chs. 37-40, 43, 59 (pp. 343-369, 388-393, 531-539)
Monday	February 15	Bible: Gospel of Matthew
Wednesday	February 17	Bible: Gospel of John
Friday	February 19	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , Books 1-2
Monday	February 22	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , Books 3-4
Wednesday	February 24	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , Books 5-6
Friday	February 26	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , Book 7
Monday	March 1	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , Books 8-9
Wednesday	March 3	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , Book 10
Friday	March 5	Anselm, <i>Why God Became Man</i> (in <i>The Major Works</i>), Preface; Book 1, sections 1-16 (pp. 261-290)
Monday	March 8	Anselm, <i>Why God Became Man</i> , Book 1, section 17 through Book 2, section 7 (pp. 290-321)
Wednesday	March 10	Anselm, <i>Why God Became Man</i> , Book 2, sections 8-22 (pp. 321-356)
Friday	March 12	NO CLASS—Spring Break
Monday	March 15	Anselm, <i>On the Virgin Conception and Original Sin</i> (pp. 357-389)
Wednesday	March 17	<i>Life of Muhammad</i> , pp. 3-4, 67-87 (skip poetry sections), 104-121 (**)
Friday	March 19	<i>Life of Muhammad</i> , pp. 130-131, 142-145, 155-159, 181 (starting at heading “The Night Journey and the Ascent into Heaven”)-187, 540-556 (**)

Deadline for mid-semester conference

Monday	March 22	Mid-term paper due Sunday, March 21 by noon Selected visuals of places of worship (**)
Wednesday	March 24	Al-Ghazali, <i>Deliverance from Error</i> (in <i>The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali</i>), pp. 17-56
Friday	March 26	Al-Ghazali, <i>Deliverance from Error</i> (in <i>The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali</i>), pp. 56-92
Monday	March 29	Al-Ghazali, <i>The Beginning of Guidance</i> (in <i>The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali</i>), pp. 95-130
Wednesday	March 31	Al-Ghazali, <i>The Beginning of Guidance</i> (in <i>The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali</i>), pp. 130-168
Friday	April 2	NO CLASS—Good Friday
Monday	April 5	Teresa of Avila, <i>Life</i> , chs. 1-3, 8-11, 14
Wednesday	April 7	Teresa of Avila, <i>Life</i> , chs. 16-21, 37-38, 40
Friday	April 9	Buber, <i>I and Thou</i> , First Part (pp. 53-85)
Monday	April 12	Buber, <i>I and Thou</i> , Second Part (pp. 87-122)
Wednesday	April 14	Buber, <i>I and Thou</i> , start of Third Part (pp. 123-153)
Friday	April 16	Buber, <i>I and Thou</i> , rest of Third Part and Afterword (pp. 153-182)
Monday	April 19	Cone, <i>God of the Oppressed</i> , chs. 1-2
Wednesday	April 21	Cone, <i>God of the Oppressed</i> , ch. 6
Friday	April 23	Cone, <i>God of the Oppressed</i> , chs. 7 and 10
Monday	April 26	Early Draft of final paper Sunday, April 25 by noon (if rewriting) Williams et al., <i>Radical Dharma</i> , Preface, Intro, Section IV (**)
Wednesday	April 28	Sophocles, <i>Antigone</i>
Friday	April 30	Judith Butler, <i>Antigone's Claim</i> , ch. 3 (**)
Friday	May 7	NO EXAM SESSION—ALL WRITTEN WORK DUE BY NOON