**Religion Core Sequence**

**Winter Quarter Readings**

**Course Description:** During the Fall quarter, we discussed how religious descriptions of the universe and our place in it are inscribed in power relations that are fundamentally social in nature. Building on that, this course asks: How do societies conceptualize the nature of suffering and evil? According to different religions, what can be done about suffering and evil on individual and collective levels? How do individual practices like meditation and collective practices like war reflect different diagnoses of what is wrong with the world? In this course, students compare scholarly efforts to theorize human finitude with religious parables, poetry, and practices aimed at surviving or overcoming pain, anxiety, and even death. We pay particular attention to the social dimension—is it true that “we’re all in this together” or is it true that “everybody dies alone,” and how do these beliefs reflect and sustain socio-political structures?

For many of the texts, we will only be reading selections, which will be scanned and posted as PDFs available on Canvas.

**Reading Schedule:**

**Week One:** Freud and the Psychological Roots of Religion

* Class One – Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*
* Class Two –Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*(continued)

**Week Two:** Individual and Collective Existence: Finitude, Futility, Meaning

* Class One –Plato, *Phaedo*
* Class Two – *Bhagavad Gita*

**Week Three:** Individual and Collective Existence:Skepticism and Meaning

* Class One – *Book of Changes,* Hexagram 1 and 2, 11-12, 63-64; *Huainanzi,* Ch 7
* Class Two – Al-Ghazali, “Deliverance from Error”

**Week Four:**Suffering and the Divine

* Class One – The Book of Job in the Hebrew Bible
* Class Two – Paul’s Letter to the Romans in the New Testament

**Week Five:** Suffering and the Law

* Class One – Augustine, *Confessions*
* Class Two – Franz Kafka, *Before the Law /* Bava Metzia 59a–b: The Oven of Akhnai / Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, Preface

**Week Six:**  Suffering: Social and Political

* Class One – *Zhuangzi*, Chapters 4, 5, 8–11, 29
* Class Two – Nyantiloka, *The Word of the Buddha* / Santideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, chapters 2, 6

**Week Seven:**  Suffering: Social and Metaphysical

* Class One – Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*
* Class Two –Santideva, chapters 3–4, 7–8 / Huainanzi 2 / *Pratyatpanna Samdhi Sutra*

**Week Eight:** Suffering and Collective Practices

* Class One – Rule of St. Benedict // Athanasius, *The Life of St. Antony* // John Cassian, *Institutes*
* Class Two – Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots* / Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess* / *Popol Vuh* (translated from Mayan text)

**Week Nine:**  How do we cope?

* Class One – *Zhuangzi*, chapters 2, 3, 6, 17, 19, 22
* Class Two – Wallace Stevens, “Sunday Morning”/ Louise Glück “Hyacinth” and “Celestial Music” / Robert Hass, “Meditation at Lagunitas” / Emily Dickinson, “Because I could not stop for death” // Ali Shariati, *Martyrdom: Arise and Bear Witness*