

Religious Experience

Wesley J. Wildman — Boston University — Fall, 2008 — STH TT974

Seminar Description

The primary aim of this seminar is to help participants construct a comprehensive and sensitive interpretation of religious experience. A wide range of disciplinary perspectives will prove useful, including those of evolutionary theory, sociology, psychology, neuroscience, phenomenology, history, literature, philosophy, and theology. The subordinate aim is to make participant learning beneficial for others by enriching the Religious Experience Resources website (http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/exp/exp_resources.htm).

“Religious Experience” (STH TT974) is a research seminar for doctoral students. Advanced masters students can seek the permission of the instructor to participate. Classes will meet once a week on Wednesdays from 8-11. Each class will be conducted in the seminar discussion format with presentations by students and mini-lectures given by the instructor as needed or requested by the class.

The phrase “research seminar” indicates both that the goal is creative research and that the students participating are invited to structure the seminar as they see fit. While the instructor proposes a schedule of readings and topics (see below), it is expected that students at this level should introduce new readings and challenge prevailing perspectives of the class, as they see fit.

Seminar Requirements

The main product of the seminar will be a creative piece of research, presented in the form of a paper of about 4,000 words. Students are encouraged to target this paper, in respect of both content and formatting, for a journal close to their home field. This may or may not entail actual submission of the paper for publication, depending on the quality and originality of the work. If a student is willing, the paper not otherwise submitted for publication, can be posted in the “Interpretative Research Essays” section of the Religious Experiences Resources website. The paper is due by email to the instructor prior to the beginning of the last class meeting on 12/10.

Students will produce four short reviews of books or articles for the Religious Experiences Resources website, one pertinent to each of the four sections of the course. Each review will be at least 500 words in length and formatted according to the site’s style. The length of the items reviewed should be roughly balanced among seminar participants; we will discuss what this means in detail in seminar meetings. The four reviews are due by email to the instructor, and in paper format to the class, at the beginning of the assigned class meetings, and in any case no later than the class meetings on 9/17, 10/15, 11/5, and 12/10. Students will also read all existing reviews on the site prior to the class meeting on 9/17.

Students will visit all existing links on the Religious Experiences Resources website and then generate five new links, annotated and rated according to the site’s style. The link visits, and the generation of five new links, are to be completed prior to the second class meeting on 9/10. The new links are to be submitted by email to the instructor. The seminar’s CourseInfo website will be used to avoid duplication of links.

Acquaint yourself with rules about plagiarism and follow them scrupulously. Incompletes are not given except in extraordinary circumstances; paperwork is required.

The seminar grade will be calculated as follows:

- Research paper: 35%
- Four resources reviews: 8% each, for a total of 32%
- Five annotated and rated web links: 8%
- Quality of seminar participation and presentations, including attendance and timeliness: 25%

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Seminar Readings

The seminar adopts a multidisciplinary approach to religious experience, which involves learning about rich literatures in several disciplines. This poses a significant problem for teaching and learning, which we will address in the following ways.

- The instructor will furnish participants with a large and indefinitely expandable bibliography (see below). Students are expected to become acquainted with the breadth of literature it contains, using as a guide the seminar outline, which lists all of the books and articles in the bibliography.
- Reading and contributing to the Religious Experience Resources website will help students penetrate the diversity of relevant literature.
- Participants are expected to develop a specialized knowledge of the aspects of the literature germane to their research papers.
- Certain readings will be read in common by the entire seminar each week.
- The requirement of four resource reviews will bring into the seminar distributed knowledge of supplementary readings for each class session. These reviews will be due on specific seminar meeting dates and presented in hard copy to the class. Each reviewer is expected to introduce their knowledge about the books they review into the seminar conversation as appropriate.

In order to constrain the seminar's work to manageable proportions, readings in the vast literature concerning the physical and mental health effects of religious experience will not be dealt with here.

Proposed Seminar Schedule

The instructor will provide the Wildman 2008 text (not yet published) and the McNamara volumes (prohibitively expensive). A number of shorter readings will be on the seminar's CourseInfo website. The instructor will also loan books that are difficult to find, if he has them. **Students need to gain access to James, Hesse, Cardena, Hood, Berger, Salzman, Hanson, and Alston.** Items for student reviews should be selected from the supplementary readings listed for each week or else proposed to the instructor as review items. NOTE: Items marked with an asterisk are already reviewed and should not be reviewed again unless a student considers the existing review to be seriously deficient (this certainly is possible).

Part I: Phenomenology

- 9/3 Introduction to the Seminar
- Required: Wildman 2008 chs 1-2; read prior to first class if possible, afterwards otherwise.
- Literature: Poetics of religious experience*
- Required: Rilke (explore at <http://www.geocities.com/Paris/LeftBank/4027/> and <http://picture-poems.com/rilke/>; we will read Mark Burrows' translations of poems from *The Book of Hours*, posted on the seminar's CourseInfo site). We will also listen to Rumi (see <http://www.lovedrunk.com/> and link from there to MySpace for "Love Said to Me" and "I Saw Goodness Getting Drunk" music and lyrics); texts and audio provided in class.
 - Supplementary resources that don't fit the categorization below: *Chopra, *Fiddes, *Finney, *Ford, *Hanh, *Merton, *Neumann, *Percy, *Quinn & Meeker, *Smart, *Taylor
- 9/10 Phenomenology I: Anecdotal collections and analyses
- Required: *James
 - Supplementary: *Al-Ghazālī, *Augustine, Bonaventure, Brinton, *Eliade, *Feuerstein, *Gilkes, *Johnson, Kapstein, *Kazantzakis, Kierkegaard, *Laozi, Masson, Maxwell, *Merton, *Petroff, Teresa, Tillich, Van der Leeuw
 - Optional exercise: Write your own account of a religious experience for the seminar

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- 9/17 Phenomenology II: Systematic analyses
- Required: Wildman 2008 chs 3-4
 - Supplementary: Fischer, *Hardy, *Häring, Kristeller 2004, Kristeller 2007, Kukla, Otto, Pekala, Revonsuo, Stark, Twiss & Consser, *Tymieniecka, Wildman & Brothers, Wildman 2002
- Part II: Social Psychology**
- 9/24 *Literature: The social contexts of religious experience*
- Required: Hesse
- 10/1 Social Psychology I: Anomalous experiences
- Required: *Cardeña et al.
 - Supplementary: Baetz, Bailey, Brown & Caetano, George, Gilovich, *Greeley, Griffin, *Harrison, Haynes, Kason, Kildahl, *MacDonald, Mills, Pearson, Randi, Samarin, *Schwarz, Shermer, *Shiloh, *Strieber, *Thalbourne 1994, *Thalbourne 1999, Ullman, Vyse
- 10/8 Social Psychology II: Psychology of religious experience
- Required: Hood 1995, McNamara 2006c
 - Supplementary: Ames, Currie et al., *Deikman 1963, *Deikman 1966, Fowler, Freud 1920, Freud 1927, Freud 1930, Freud 1939, *Fromm, *Hood 1970, *Hood 1975, *Hunt 1984, *Hunt 1985, *Maslow 1964, *Maslow 1968, Maslow 1971, McNamara 2002, Meissner, Moacanin, Moehle, Rizzuto, *Schachter & Singer, Spilka et al., *Wilbur, *Wilson
- 10/15 Social Psychology III: Individual experience and social function
- Required: Wildman chs 2008 5-7, *Berger 1967
 - Supplementary: Batson, Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, *Berger 1979, Bloch, Durkheim, Frazer, Iannaccone, Jaynes, Rappaport, Schaeffer, Shariff & Norenzayan, Tyler, Watson et al., Weber
- Part III: Neurobiology**
- 10/22 *Literature: The neurology of religious experience*
- Required: Salzman
- 10/29 Neurobiology I: The neurology of religious experience
- Required: McNamara 2006b
 - Supplementary: Alper, Andresen, Ashbrook, *Ashbrook & Albright, Austin, Azari et al., Beauregard & O'Leary, Booth et al., d'Aquili & Newberg 1993, d'Aquili & Newberg 1998, *d'Aquili & Newberg 1999, Dewhurst & Beard, Granqvist et al., Granqvist, Hamer, Holmes, *Krishna, McKinney, Newberg et al. 1997, Newberg et al. 2001, *Newberg & d'Aquili 2001, Newberg & Iversen 2003, Newberg et al. 2006, Persinger 1983, Persinger 1987, Persinger 1994a, Persinger 1994b, Persinger 1994c, Persinger & Healey 2002, Persinger & Koren 2005, Porush, Ramachandran et al 1997, Ramachandran & Blakeslee 1998, Russell, St-Pierre & Persinger, Teske, Tsang et al., Tucker et al.
- 11/5 Neurobiology II: Evolution, cognitive science, and religious experience
- Required: McNamara 2006a
 - Supplementary: Andresen & Forman, Atran, Boyer, Giovannoli, Hefner, Irons 1996, Irons 2001, Murphy, Pyysiäinen, Sosis 2003, Sosis 2004, Sosis & Alcorta, Sosis & Ruffle 2003, Sosis & Ruffle 2004, Sperber, Varela et al.
- Part IV: Philosophy, Theology, Ethics: Classic Debates**
- 11/12 *Literature: Evaluating religious experience*
- Required: Hanson

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- 11/19 Classic Debates I: Perennialists versus contextualists
- Required: Forman 1999, *Katz 1978
 - Supplementary: Bagger, Forman 1990, Huxley, *Katz 1983, *Katz 1992, *Katz 2000, Proudfoot, Schuon, *Smith 1992, *Stace, Zaehner
- 11/26 No Class: Fall Recess
- 12/3 Classic Debates II: Cognitive Reliability
- Required: Alston, Barrett & Wildman, Byrne
 - Supplementary: *Bucke, Callahan, Dawkins, Dennett, Donovan, Gale 1994a, Gale 1994b, Gellman, Griffith-Dickson, Hardwick, Harris, Hitchens, Hook, Sagan, Schleiermacher 1893, Schleiermacher 1928 (Introduction), Stenger, Swinburne, Szára, Yandell
- 12/10 Classic Debates III: Entheogenic plants and chemicals and the future of religious experience
- Required: Wildman 2008, chs 8-9
 - Supplementary: *Leary, Pahnke, Smith 1999, Strassman 1996, Strassman 2001, Wasson
- Conclusion: Fragments on the way to nowhere and nothing?**

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