

RELS 298 Nature, Mind, and Spirit

Fall 2007

Dr. Lee Irwin

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Religious Studies Department

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Office Hours: Mon, Tues & Weds 2:00-4:00 PM

(or by appointment)

Course Description: This course will explore the topic of human relationships to the natural world as an important aspect of human spiritual identity. How do human beings related to nature and cosmos? How is the relationships between nature, body, and physical life related to concepts or mind, spirit, and the sacred? What spiritual traditions support a positive view of nature? How have religious teachings described the relationship between body, soul, and mind in relationship to the natural world? The focus of the course will be on the esoteric Hermetic traditions related to Christianity and Judaism; but we will also look at related themes in Buddhism, Taoism, and other traditions. In the contemporary sense, we will also study feminist writings on nature, relationships to animals, various ecological writing, and issues in contemporary cosmology and science. All these issues will be problematized as exploratory themes in a dialogical process of debate and discussion; students will be encouraged to explore and express their own views on these issues.

Books:

- WH *The Way of Hermes: New Translations of The Corpus Hermeticum and The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius* by Clement Salaman (Translator), Dorine van Oyer (Translator), William Wharton (Translator), Jean-Pierre Mahe (Translator). Inner Traditions, 2004.
- SHH *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus: Hermeticism from Ancient to Modern Times* by Florian Ebeling (Author), David Lorton (Translator). Cornell University Press, June 2007.
- SWC *She Who Changes: Re-imagining the Divine in the World* by Carol P. Christ. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- AG *Animal Grace: Entering a Spiritual Relationship with Our Fellow Creatures* by Mary Lou Randour. New World Library, 2002.
- HHC *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos: Humanity and the New Story* by Brian Swimme. Orbis Books, 1999.
- ET *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community* by Thomas Berry (Author), Mary Evelyn Tucker (Editor). Sierra Club Books, 2006.

Requirements:

Students are expected to attend all classes and participate in class discussions, points may be deducted for absences (three cuts per semester is allowed). There will be 3 response papers (2-3 pages, each 5% = 15%) based on assigned topics; 3 exams (each 20% = 60%); and a final 10-12 page research paper on a topic of your choosing, including a research question with outline and bibliography (5%) and the finished paper (20%). **Students are required to take exams and turn in writing assignments when scheduled** (or receive a severe reduction in grade). Late papers will receive a one letter reduction per missed class, up to three classes, at which time a 50% F will be assigned. No makeups will be given unless there is a valid excuse. Conflicting exams schedules, lack of preparation, misplaced books, oversleeping (etc.) are NOT acceptable reasons for missing tests. Students must make up any missed assignments (or receive an F).

Grading Scale: Letter (or numerical) grades will be assigned as follows: A+ (100-97), **A (96-93)**, A- (92-90), B+ (89-87), **B (86-83)**, B- (82-80), C+ (79-77), **C (76-73)**, C- (72-70), D+ (69-67), D (66-63), D- (62-61), F (60 or lower).

Reading Assignments: Reading assignments must be done **BEFORE** the class for which they are assigned, not after; then you can follow the discussion, ask questions, and we can have an informed dialogue on the reading.

PLEASE BRING THE ASSIGNED BOOK TO CLASS.

- I. Week One: August 22, 24: Problematizing the Nature & Spirit Relationship
 - A. Reading Assignment: Handout #1; SHH (Ebeling) pp. 1-36.
- II. Week Two: August 27, 29 [31]: Hermetic Traditional Cosmology
 - A. Reading Assignment: WH (Salaman) pp. 13-40.
 - B. **Response 1 Handout, August 29**
 - C. NO CLASS AUGUST 31 (I will be at a conference)
- III. Week Three: September 3, 5, 7: The Hermetic Gnosis/Salvation
 - A. Reading Assignment: WH (Salaman) pp. 40-78.
 - B. **Written Response 1, due September 7**
- IV. Week Four: September 10, 12, 14: Medieval and Renaissance Hermeticism
 - A. Reading Assignment: WH (Salaman) pp. 79-87; SHH (Ebeling) 37-90.
- V. Week Five: September 17, 19, 21: Panpsychism and Magical Theory
 - A. Reading Assignment: SHH (Ebeling) pp. 91-141
 - B. **EXAM ONE, SEPTEMBER 21**
- VI. Week Six: September 24, 26, 28: Feminist Process Theology
 - A. Reading Assignment: SWC (Christ) pp. 1-68.
 - B. **Response 2 Handout, September 28**
- VII. Week Seven: October 1, 3, 5: Feminist Process Theology
 - A. Reading Assignment: SWC (Christ) pp. 69-141.
 - B. **Written Response 2, due October 5**
- VIII. Week Eight: October 8, 10, 12: Feminist Process Theology
 - A. Reading Assignment: SWC (Christ) pp. 143-196; ET (Berry) pp. 127-136.
 - B. **Fall Break** (OCT 15, 16)
- IX. Week Nine: October 17, 19: Feminist Process Theology
 - A. Reading Assignment: SWC (Christ) pp. 197-244.
- X. Week Ten: October 22, 24, 26: Animal-Human Relations
 - A. **EXAM TWO, OCTOBER 22**
 - B. Reading Assignment: AG (Randour) pp. 3-74.
 - C. **Response 3 Handout, October 24**

- XI. Week Eleven: October 29, 31, November 2 : Animal-Human Relations
 - A. Reading Assignment: AG (Randour) pp. 75-151.
 - B. **Research Paper Handout, October 31**
 - C. **Response Paper 3, due November 2**

- XII. Week Twelve: November 5, 7, 9: The New Cosmology
 - A. Reading Assignment: HHC (Swimme) pp. 1-54; ET (Berry) pp. 113-125.
 - B. **Paper Outline& Bibliography Due, November 9**

- XIII. Week Thirteen: November 12, 14, 16: The New Cosmology
 - A. Reading Assignment: HHC (Swimme) pp. 55-112.
 - B. **EXAM THREE, NOVEMBER 16**

- XIV. Week Fourteen: November 19: Ecology and Spirituality
 - A. Reading Assignment: ET (Berry) pp. 1-32; 151-169.
 - B. **THANKSGIVING BREAK (NOV 21-25)**

- XV. Week Fifteen: November 26, 28, 30: Ecology and Spirituality
 - A. Reading Assignment: ET (Berry) pp. 33-86
 - B. **FINAL PAPER DUE, NOVEMBER 30**

- XVI. Week Sixteen: December 3: Ecology and Spirituality
 - A. Reading Assignment: ET (Berry) pp. 137-141, 145-150.