

**RELG 398, 001 (Call # 9782) – SPECIAL TOPICS IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES: Mysticism & Mystical Experience**

**Instructors: John D. Turner, Steven Lahey, Yaroslav Komarovski**

**Day/Time: MWF, 0230-0320**

**Place: CBA 118**

**Description:** The immediate or unmediated experience of foundational or ultimate reality has long been an important component of religious traditions throughout the world. This course will introduce the student to significant writings from several religious traditions—primarily Graeco-Roman Platonism, Christianity, and Buddhism—that describe or explore this experience—often called “mystic” or “mysticism”—and the techniques for attaining it, as well as conflicting theories that attempt to interpret it. Understanding of the commonalities and differences between several forms of mysticism will contribute importantly to the student’s grasp of the manner in which these religious traditions envision the nature of the human self, the nature of ultimate reality, and the means and techniques by which the former can encounter the latter.

In the first part of the course, we will study the Hellenic mystical tradition from Plato to Plotinus, the late antique Gnostics and the Mystical Theology of the Pseudo-Dionysus, with special attention to the stages of visionary and contemplative ascent, negative and paradoxical theology, learned ignorance, self-annihilation, and union with the divine.

In the second part of the course, we will study the Christian mystic tradition as it developed in the Latin Middle Ages, with special attention to several important topics, including foundations of mystical practice, aspects of mystical consciousness, and divine vision.

In the third part of this course, we will focus on the topic of unmediated mystical experience, analyzing how some scholars of religion use it in their support or denial of a common core of mystical experience. In particular, we will read seminal Buddhist texts which provide descriptions of and techniques for inducing such mystical experiences as realization of ultimate reality and enlightenment. In the process, we will question the very nature of the Eurocentric debate over the question of (un)mediated mystical experience and its applicability to mystical experiences in Buddhism and other religious traditions that developed alternative models of mind and experience.