

COGNITION AND PRAYER: BODY, MIND AND SOUL IN DIALOGUE

SP-1410

Pacific School of Religion
The Graduate Theological Union
Summer Session 2009
July 13-17, 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. daily

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COURSE OVERVIEW

There is a tremendous amount of popular literature about brain research and what it means for the practice of religion and spiritual disciplines. Two major difficulties are presented for persons of faith by this explosion of writing: first, much of what hits the best seller list lacks a reasoned examination of the writer's own worldview. Materialist understandings of science dominate, and many of these are (at best) dismissive of religion and religious practice.

The second difficulty is a problem for Christians specifically, and that is the issue of "translation." The Dalai Lama's wholehearted support of neuro-scientific research, and his encouragement to Buddhist monks to offer themselves as subjects, has meant that most research is focused on Buddhist practices. While helpful in a general way, the results not particularly applicable to Christian prayer practices. A few scientists have researched brain states in persons who engage in centering prayer, contemplative prayer, and speaking in tongues. But these findings are very sketchy; and virtually no work has been done in embodied spiritual practice (labyrinth walking, physical labor) or brain states during daily prayer, worship or social justice work. In addition, little of the work of cognitive linguistics—which can help illuminate the particular ways that practices such as repetitive prayer, examen, or lectio divina change and shape one's thinking—has made its way into the discussion.

This course will attempt to bridge these gaps by bringing into dialogue popular texts on brain research and spiritual practice with the classics of spiritual discipline, supplemented by the findings of cognitive linguistics. These intellectual explorations will be underscored for students by direct experience with different practices. Students will learn basic information about brain configuration and brain changes; how thinking (likely) occurs, and how one can use one's mind to change one's brain and therefore change

one's thinking; the difference between materialist and dualist views of the brain and mind and why this matters; and what may be happening inside our brains during specific prayer practices. Students will also explore how particular prayer and meditation practices suit them personally.

Course Goals: To introduce students (persons working in ministry, M.Div. and M.A. students) to an interdisciplinary discussion between applied brain research and the practice of Christian spiritual disciplines; to help students integrate their faith with reason, and their piety with the critical intellect by learning how—and experiencing the ways in which—prayer practices can change one's thinking, experience of the world, and behavior.

Student Learning Objectives: By the end of this course, students will be able to

- Identify three major issues in the discussion about neuroscience and religious practice;
- Show where and how Christian practice and the neurosciences point to similar findings, as well as points of difference;
- Identify and use four prayer practices that can change one's brain configuration, experience, and behavior.

Course Outline

Monday: The Brain, The Research, and the Debate.

Introduction to structure of the brain. Introduction to the research on meditation, Religious Spiritual Mystical Experiences (RSME's), neural modeling, conceptual blending and frames. The debate between materialists and dualists.

Practice: Claiming and naming RSME's; Lectio Divina.

Tuesday: The Fascination Begins in the Mouth: Mary Gordon, Cassian and Neuroplasticity.

The concepts of and research about neuroplasticity. Mary Gordon's and Cassian's writings on anger. Hebb and habits; neural maps, neural nets, and frames.

Discussion: What's my frame and why does it matter?

Practice: Developing a new neural map for behavior change: repetitive prayer.

Wednesday: Meditation, Me, and You.

Neurological changes associated with mindfulness training; psycho-social effects of mindfulness forms of meditation.

Practice: Mindfulness meditation; Christian mantra meditation.

Thursday: *Ora et Labora*: The Practice of Embodied Spirituality.

Music and the brain; rhythm and physical labor. Intuition and the viscera's neural nets. Physical constraints as spiritual release: the labyrinth and the Benedictine way. Music as double dip.

Practice: Field trip for Labyrinth walk.

Friday: Spiritual Practice as Ground of Social Justice.

Conceptual frames again; Christian community and mystical reality; the Examen and our enemies; sustenance for the work.

Discussion on humility and practice; wrap up.

Practice: Forgiveness meditation; Gratitude meditation.

READINGS

Required readings will include short selections from the following, to be found in the course reader:

A General Theory of Love, Thomas Lewis, M.D., Fari Amini, M.D., and Richard Lannon, M.D. Vintage Press, 2001.

The Spiritual Brain: A Neuroscientist's Case for the Existence of the Soul, Mario Beauregard and Denyse O'Leary. Harper One, 2007.

The Mindful Brain: Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being, Daniel J. Siegel. W.W. Norton, 2007

The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities, Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner. Basic Books, 2003.

The Fascination Begins in the Mouth, Mary Gordon. Kore Press, 1998.

The Conferences, John Cassian; Boniface Ramsey, O.P., editor. Paulist Press, 1997.

The Way of Perfection, Teresa of Avila. Paraclete Press, 2000.

The Practice of the Presence of God, Brother Lawrence (translated by Robert J. Edmonson). Paraclete Press, 1985.

Prayer for Finding God in All Things: The Daily Examen of St. Ignatius of Loyola, Joan Roccasalvo. Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2005.

Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel, Twentieth Anniversary Edition, Thomas Keating. Continuum International Publishing, 2007.

Optional Readings will include selections from:

The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance, Dorothee Soelle (translated by Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt). Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001.

The Cloud of Unknowing. Harper One, 2004.

The Rule of St. Benedict, St. Benedict (translated by Cardinal Gasquet). Dover Publications, 2007.

A Spirituality of Resistance: Finding a Peaceful Heart and Protecting the Earth, Roger Gottlieb. Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

Searching for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain, Antonio Damasio. Harvest Books, 2003.

“Neural Basis of Conscious and Voluntary Self-Regulation of Emotion,” M. Beauregard, in M. Beauregard, ed., *Consciousness, Emotional Self-Regulation and the Brain*. John Benjamins, 2004.

“Neural Correlates of a Mystical Experience in Carmelite Nuns,” M. Beauregard and V. Paquette, *Neuroscience Letters* 405, 2006.

“Changes in EEG and Autonomic Nervous Activity During Meditation and Their Association with Personality Traits,” T. Takahashi et al, *International Journal of Psychophysiology* 55.2, 2005.

“Meditation states and traits: EEG, ERP, and neuro-imaging studies,” B.R. Cahn and J. Polich, *Psychological Bulletin* 132, 2006.

“Mindfulness: Theoretical foundations and evidence for its salutary effects,” K. W. Brown et al, *Psychological Inquiry*, 2007.

The neuroscience of human relationships: Attachment and the developing social brain, L.J. Cozolino. W.W. Norton, 2006.

“Attachment as psychobiological attunement: being on the same wavelength,” T. Field, in *The Psychobiology of Attachment and Separation*, Academic Press, 1985.

“Promoting Resilience in children and youth: Preventive interventions and their interface and neuroscience,” M. T. Greenberg, submitted.

“Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future,” J. Kabat-Zinn. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 10, 2003.

“Meditation and the neuroscience of consciousness,” A. Lutz et al, in *The Cambridge handbook of consciousness*, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

“The development of effortful control,” M. K. Rothbart and R. M. Rueda, in *Developing individuality in the human brain: A tribute to Michael I Posner*. American Psychological Association, 2005.

CREDIT, CEU, or AUDIT?

There are three enrollment options for summer session courses: CEU’s, auditing, and academic credit.

1. CONTINUING EDUCATION UNITS:

CEU students must fulfill attendance requirements to receive CEU credit hours. CEU students who wish to participate in discussion are expected to complete the required readings.

ASSIGNMENTS/EXPECTATIONS

For persons taking the course for CEU’s:

- Attendance at all five class sessions.

While PSR only requires attendance to certify CEU, the instructor surely hopes that those taking the course for CEU’s will complete the reading, and engage in regular and active participation in class sessions as well as active participation in spiritual practices unless otherwise arranged with instructor. It is recognized that practices can be uncomfortable

for some persons; students will be asked to take responsibility for making their own decisions about participation. Any ongoing difficulty engaging in the practices should be discussed with instructor.

2. AUDIT:

Auditing does not result in academic credit or continuing education units. While a record of the course is kept for the auditor, there is not credit of any kind received. Auditors who complete the course successfully receive a grade of "AUD" while those who do not receive a grade of "W" for withdrawal.

ASSIGNMENTS/EXPECTATIONS

For persons auditing the course:

Auditors generally "sit in" on a course and are not expected to meet reading or attendance requirements or submit assignments or papers. Auditors who wish to participate in discussion are asked to complete the required readings, and attend the course regularly.

3. ACADEMIC CREDIT:

On the registration form and on the first day of class, participants taking courses for **academic credit** will be asked to declare whether they prefer a letter grade or pass/fail status. Work will be evaluated by graduate level standards. **Please see the PSR Grading Policy for information on letter grades and pass/fail options.**

Students taking the course for credit will have until three weeks after the last class meeting to complete the academic requirements. Students who do not complete the academic requirements, but who attended class will be changed to CEU status. **PLEASE NOTE: It is PSR policy that grades of "Incomplete" will not be issued during summer session.**

ASSIGNMENTS/EXPECTATIONS

For persons taking the course for credit:

- Attendance at all five class sessions;
- Completion of all required and two optional readings;
- Regular and active participation in class sessions;
- Active participation in spiritual practices unless otherwise arranged with instructor;
- Two short presentations on optional readings during class;
- Submission of a ten-page final paper engaging the writings of one Christian mystic and a specific area of neuro-scientific research.

- **Attendance (15%)**

It is impossible, given the compact time in which the material is presented, for a student to grasp the course content unless attendance is regular. Missing even one course sessions will result in significant impact on final grade.

- **Required readings (20%)**

Students are expected to read the assigned texts carefully enough to discuss them critically in class.

- **Regular and Active Participation in the Class Sessions (15%)**

This includes discussion of assigned texts.

- **Active participation in spiritual practices (15%)**

Active participation includes a willingness to share reflections on one's own practices. The instructor will set out guidelines for these reflections in order to assure emotional safety and confidentiality for participants.

It is recognized that some practices may be uncomfortable for some persons; students will be asked to take responsibility for making their own decisions about participation. Any ongoing difficulty engaging in the practices should be discussed with instructor.

- **Two short presentations (10%)**

Students taking the course for credit will present a short summary to the class of the two optional readings that the student has selected (selection to be made in discussion with the instructor).

- **Final paper (25%)***DUE ON FRIDAY, AUGUST 4*****

In consultation with the instructor, each student taking this course for credit will choose a Christian mystic and an area of cognitive research and bring them into dialogue. Papers should be between 10-15 pages long, double-spaced, 12 point font. Sources must be referenced accurately and according to standard academic practice; plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will result in a failing grade for the paper. If you have any questions about adequate citation or how to avoid plagiarism, don't hesitate to speak to the instructor *before* submitting a paper.

Please read the PSR policy on plagiarism (attached below) for further information.

“Double dipping” (submitting the same paper for more than one course) is likewise not allowed as this would mean receiving double academic credit for the same work.

For the sake of ecological ethics and responsibility, it is perfectly acceptable and even preferred that papers be printed out on *previously used paper*.

While it is preferred that the final papers are given to the instructor by July 17th, students may email final papers to her after the course ends if necessary.

*****FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE NO LATER THAN
FRIDAY, AUGUST 4.*****

Late Work, Documented Disability, and ESL

- Apart from dire circumstances or emergency, late papers *will not be accepted* and the instructor will *not* grant an “incomplete” for this course.
- If students anticipate any trouble in completing the assigned work in this course due to *documented* disability, this should be discussed with the instructor at the beginning of the week.
- Students for whom English is a second language should likewise speak with the

instructor at the start of the week concerning any challenges anticipated in meeting the course requirements in a timely manner. Students taking this course for credit will be expected to write a ten-page paper that dialogues between selected neuroscience research findings and the writings of one Christian mystic. They will also be expected to present two short summaries of optional readings.

PLAGIARISM POLICY FOR PSR

In the United States and many other countries, one of the important markers of high academic standards is proper attribution (giving credit) for someone else's ideas, thoughts, words, or methods of scholarship. Proper credit should be given in both oral and written contexts.

Proper credit is:

- When you use an actual sentence from a published article or unpublished essay, you must put the sentence in quote marks and give a footnote or citation to indicate who said it. The citation should include full bibliographic information. (For further information about correct citation form, see Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*.)
- When you paraphrase or summarize another person's ideas, you must give a footnote or citation to indicate whose ideas they are and where you got them. (Or, in lecturing, make clear from whose ideas you are drawing.)
- When you adopt a significant idea from someone else's work, you must give a footnote or citation to indicate where you got the idea.
- When you use a method developed by someone else, you must give a footnote or citation to indicate the source of the method.

When you fail to do this, it is considered **plagiarism**. Plagiarism can apply both to students and to faculty. Plagiarism is using someone else's ideas, thoughts, words, or methods of scholarship *as if they were your own* and *without giving proper credit to that person*. Plagiarism is considered wrong because (1) it is 'stealing' another person's ideas, methods, etc., and (2) it is 'lying' – representing something as your own when it is not yours. At PSR, as at many comparable graduate-level institutions, plagiarism is considered a serious offense.

- Plagiarism includes failing to give citations in the examples above.
- Plagiarism also includes copying another student's exam or part of an exam or essay.

It is *not* plagiarism when you indicate clearly that you are summarizing someone else's views in order to provide the context for an assessment or critique of those views, or to incorporate them into a larger project. In this case, you must indicate clearly that you are giving the views of someone else – e.g. by starting with "so-and-so argues that...." It is

also *not* plagiarism to use a well-established idea that has been developed in multiple sources – e.g. to claim that God can be called “woman” as well as man is now sufficiently well established that it needs no attribution.

Some phrases – e. g. “the personal is political” – are in such wide usage that sometimes we do not know where they originated; in such cases, it is acceptable to use them without attribution. However, the best scholarship will make every effort to give attribution where possible (e.g. to note that this phrase came from Robin Morgan).

**Procedures and Penalties: Please see PSR’s Student Handbook:
<http://www.psr.edu/plagiarism-policy>**