Psychology of Meditation
PSYC 7810-07

University of West Georgia

Fall 2014
W 11:00 – 11:52 am
Melson 104

Instructor: Alan Pope, Ph.D.
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Office Hours:
   W 12:00 pm – 5:00 pm
   & by appointment

Bring your syllabus to class!

Course Description

Contemporary mainstream psychology is grounded in natural science methods that privilege a third-person, material reductionist perspective that has never been empirically validated. One alternative methodology is to train the mind to focus in a disciplined way on its own internal states (analogous to using a telescope to explore outer space) and to engage in direct, empirical examination of the very psyche of psychology. We could name such an approach contemplative science. The process of examining one’s own mind necessitates transformation on the part of the scientist-practitioner in ways that are at odds with more familiar (and ultimately futile) attempts to remove researcher bias. As such, this course examines meditation as both a research approach and a transformative practice. We will draw principally from the Buddhist and Christian contemplative traditions. The consensual reports of advanced adepts from these traditions indicate that sustained and disciplined contemplative practice gives rise to a unique view of human psychology, one that radically revisions how we understand the nature of mind, self, other, and world.

The view of contemplative science is at once a theoretical position (i.e., a place from which to see), and an actual, lived experience (i.e., a way of seeing). As such, students will engage a personal meditation practice inside and outside the classroom, synergistically uniting theoretical and experiential understanding. Theoretical topics will include the history of meditation, meditation’s capacity as a tool for scientific investigation, evidence of its capacity to impact neural structure and function, its potential to effect personal transformation, and the particular view of mind, consciousness, and reality that arises from its principled and rigorous application. Meditation exercises will focus on the cultivation of mindfulness, introspective awareness, and direct, perceptual insight. Each week a new facet of meditation practice will be introduced, and students will gain experience in its application.
Course Objectives

- Demonstrate understanding of the basic philosophical principles of meditation and its relationship to psychology.
- Demonstrate understanding of the particular view of the nature of reality fostered by the contemplative traditions, and how they vary from the contemporary view of scientific realism.
- Demonstrate some facility with meditation exercises and ability to relate them to the theoretical material of the course.
- Demonstrate substantive integration of the contemplative view into your own personal understanding of psychology.

Required Texts


Additional required readings will be posted on Course Den (D2L).

Class Format

We will begin each class session with a five-minute meditation period. It is essential that you show up a few minutes early as we will begin immediately at the start of the class period. (If you are unavoidably late, please wait outside until the meditation period is finished.) The remaining class period will explore that week’s topic from theoretical and practical perspectives. We will combine mini-lectures and discussion of the week’s readings with meditation instruction and in-vivo practice. Students are encouraged to bring to class questions on both the theoretical and praxis elements of the course. In addition, we may experiment with using contemplative discussion methods as means for bringing greater awareness and clarity to individual and group process.

Course Requirements

Class Participation & Attendance:
In the service of our seminar format, it is essential that you complete assigned readings on time (see course outline below) and come to class prepared to discuss the material and ask questions. Here are the details:

- We don’t have much time together, so please be a little early to each class so that we can begin promptly on time. If you are unavoidably late and the rest of the class is meditating, kindly wait outside until we are done.
- Please bring the assigned reading materials to class so that we can refer to passages together.
• Because this course is largely participation-driven, you are permitted but one absence (equivalent to one full week of classes) for whatever reason during the course of the semester. Additional absences may result in a lower overall grade.
• You are invited to visit me in my office early in the semester in order to discuss your meditation practice and any questions you may have. Doing so might help us to troubleshoot any difficulties you are having, and it will help me to understand better how everyone is doing with their practice. Advance appointment is helpful.

*Meditation Log:*
You are asked to maintain a daily meditation practice at home. This process is crucial for deepening your understanding of the scientific and transformative potential of these methods and for direct insight into the nature of mind. In conjunction with your practice, you are to keep a meditation log throughout the semester.
• You are requested to meditate as instructed *at least* ten minutes every day without fail, barring extreme circumstances (e.g., illness, accident, and so forth). At least twenty-five minutes is preferable for determined students, but not required. Practicing forty-five minutes or more per day is very good.3
  o You are requested to sign a pledge for the amount of daily time that you choose as a way of making real your commitment. This pledge is due at the beginning of the second class period, *September 3*. As the semester unfolds, you would do well to reflect on your relationship to that commitment, including any negative emotions that might arise. I will be happy to discuss this with you.
• At the end of this syllabus, and on D2L, you will find a sample meditation log that you can use to record your practice. However, this is only a sample, and you are invited to design a log that works best for you. *Keeping the meditation log is not intended to be a time-consuming matter.*
  o If you should miss your meditation session on a given day, please make brief note in your log as to why, emphasizing when possible matters of internal motivation over practical, external factors.
• Your completed meditation log will be submitted at the beginning of each class beginning on September 3. Each week I will read your log and return it to you, with or without comments. Please retain these as you will submit the complete set of meditation logs (with any comments I have made) on the last day of class, December 8.

*Final Reflection Paper:*
On the last class period (*December 8*), you will submit a final paper which coalesces all that you have learned about the Psychology of Meditation throughout the semester. You will be expected to reflect both on the theory of meditation and your own practical experience with it. Please write 3-5 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins all around.
Evaluation

Quality & consistency of class participation: 40%
Meditation log 30%
Final reflection paper: 30%

Administrative Details

Office Hours:
Office hours are posted on the first page of the syllabus. You are advised to make an appointment as my office hours are often claimed in advance.

Technological Resources:
Audio-visual equipment (e.g., computer and overhead projector) will be used for Power Point and other video presentations. Course Den (D2L) will be used as an electronic learning environment. The syllabus, handouts, and other communications will be posted via this means. Any electronic communication regarding grades can and must be had through D2L.

Student Rights and Responsibilities:
Please carefully review the information provided by the following link: http://www.westga.edu/assetsDept/vpaa/Common_Language_for_Course_Syllabi.pdf. This file contains important information pertaining to your rights and responsibilities in this class. These statements are updated as federal, state, university, and accreditation standards change, so you should review this information anew each semester.

Academic Honor Code:
It is essential that you abide by the honor code described in the above document. Academic dishonesty (such as plagiarism) naturally will not be tolerated. Plagiarism is the misrepresentation of another’s words or ideas as your own, whatever the source (e.g., print, electronic, verbal, et al.). All deliberate references to another person’s ideas or words must be appropriately cited. At a minimum, an instance of plagiarism or other form of academic dishonesty will result in failing the course and will be reported to the administration for further disciplinary action.

Special Needs:
Students with special needs should speak with me as soon as possible in order to make necessary arrangements.
Course Outline

Please note:
- The following reading list is subject to revision as the semester progresses. Occasionally additional readings will be assigned and placed on Course Den (D2L).

August 27
Introduction to Meditation
- Syllabus

September 3
Contemplative Psychology & Practice
- De Wit: The Case for Contemplative Psychology (on D2L)
- Wallace, Preface, Chapters 1, 2

September 10
Science and Meditation
- Wallace: Chapters 3, 4

September 17
Mindfulness of Breathing
- Wallace: Chapters 5, 6

DUE: Office visit

September 24
Settling the Mind in its Natural State
- Wallace: Chapters 7, 8

October 1
Mindfulness of Awareness
- Wallace: Chapters 9, 10

October 8
Investigating the Nature of the Observer
- Wallace: Chapters 11, 12

October 15
Meditation, Self, and Rebirth
- Wallace: Chapters 13, 14

October 22
The Mind in Stillness
- Wallace: Chapters 15, 16
October 29
Investigating the Nature of Mind
  • Wallace: Chapters 17, 18

November 5
Investigating the Nature of Matter
  • Wallace: Chapters 19, 20

November 12
Resting in Pristine Awareness
  • Wallace: Chapters 21, 22

November 19
Postmeditation
  • Wallace: Chapters 23, 24

November 26
Thanksgiving Break—No Class

December 3
Integrative Reflection on the Course & Integration with Worldview
  • Wallace: Chapter 25

  DUE: Meditation Logs

December 8 (Monday)
(Final exam period, 11 am to 1:30 pm)
In-class Final Reflection Paper assignment
  • {No readings}

Happy Semester!
Sample Meditation Log

Name:

Week:

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<th>DAY</th>
<th># minutes</th>
<th>Type of meditation</th>
<th>Quality*</th>
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*For quality, please give succinct descriptors (not whole sentences). Please be as precise in your description as possible. Don’t think of these as ‘good’ or ‘bad’. They are simply the factual quality of your practice session. You can elaborate on the week’s experience below.

Additional comments: