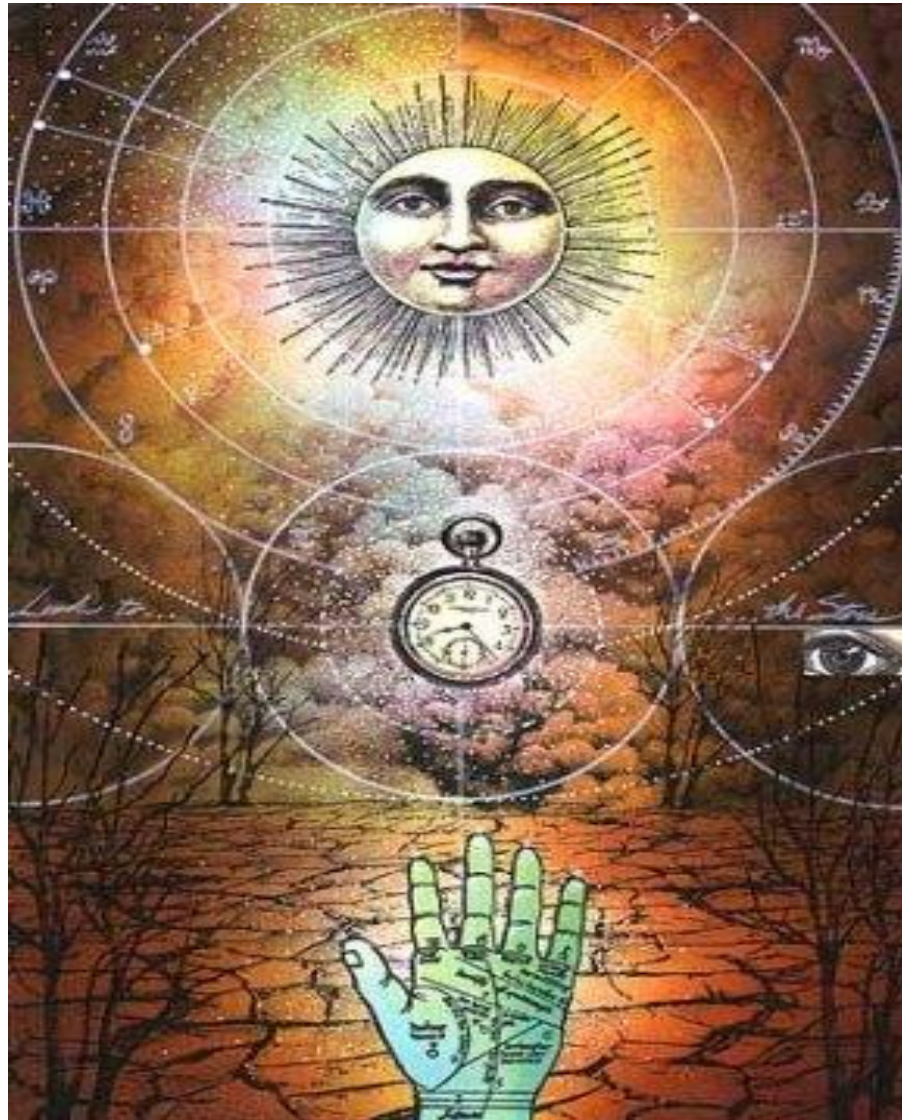


**RELI 286**

**MYSTICISM, SPIRITUAL MAPS AND REALITY**



**SCHOOL OF ART HISTORY, CLASSICS & RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

**VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON**

**Trimester 1, 2009**

## RELI 286

### MYSTICISM, SPIRITUAL MAPS AND REALITY

**Course co-ordinator:** Dr Art Buehler,  
HU 116, tel: 463 7409  
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**Where and when:** Lectures: MY 220  
Monday 1:10 –3:00 pm

**Course Dates:** Tutorials: Monday 4:10 – 5:00 pm in a room TBA  
Commencement: March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009  
Mid trimester break: April 13<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> 2009  
End of teaching: June 5<sup>th</sup> 2009  
University Examination Period: June 8<sup>th</sup> – July 1<sup>st</sup> 2009  
Mid year break: July 2<sup>nd</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> 2009

The programme Administrator, Aliko Kalliabetsos, is in room HU 318 (ext 5299). **Notices regarding the course or any information on changes will be posted on the notice board outside the programme administrator's office.**

**Office Hours:** The main office is open Monday - Friday, 9.30am – 12 noon and 2:30 - 3.30pm. Dr Buehler usually has office hours on Monday 10-12 am; Friday 12-7 pm,; and by appointment. Appointments are highly recommended since these office hours can be interrupted by meetings and other events.

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### *Course outline*

#### 1 The course and its Learning Objectives:

##### **By the end of the course you will:**

- Appreciate the diversity of mystical experience across cultures and religious traditions.
- Develop key skills in reading texts – both in terms of concepts but also cultural factors.
- Be able to analyze subjective mystical experience using various methodologies.
- Have exposure to various models of spiritual development for comparative analysis.
- Demonstrate an understanding of how mysticism has a place in the contemporary world and the relationship between mysticism and religion.

## 2 **Assessment requirements**

**RELI 286 is internally assessed** by means of written assignments and a take-home exam, weighted as follows:

- **Essay one - 2500** words due **3 April at 5 pm** and is worth **25%** of the final grade. Late fee is 2% per day including weekends and holidays.
- **Essay two - 3000** words due **22 May at 5 pm and is worth 30%** of the final grade. Late fee is 2% per day including weekends and holidays.
- **A final takehome test worth 30%** of the final grade due **2 June 4:00 pm. No tests accepted after noon, 16 June.** Late fee is 2% per day including weekends and holidays.
- The final 15% of the grade will be on the basis of short quizzes given in class. There will be ten quizzes, one each week except the first week. Some will count double (the last class of every month). Out of these “thirteen” the top nine grades will be averaged.

## 3 The assessment of this course relates to the course objectives in the following ways:

**The quizzes** reward students who have read the material before the lecture and who are regular in class attendance. Lectures are interactive and assume prior exposure to the material through the readings. Such a preparation will facilitate students achieving course objectives.

**The essays** will encourage students to pursue their own interests in the subject through formulating their own research question(s) in an exploration of primary and secondary sources. In the essays, students will be exposed first-hand to the issues raised in scholarly analysis and will develop the knowledge and the skills necessary to critically evaluate scholarly studies of materials they have studied for themselves.

**The takehome test** allows students to demonstrate their grasp of the material covered in the course and their understanding of the themes addressed, and creates an opportunity to review and reflect on what they have learned in the course as a whole.

## 4 **This course is delivered through a combination of lectures and tutorials.**

The **lecture programme** introduces new material that incorporates and complements the reading assignment. Generally students will be provided with an outline of the lecture at the beginning of each lecture. This is to encourage thinking and interaction during the lecture instead of writing copious notes and tuning out. The lecture programme does not cover the entire course content; lectures are complementary to the students’ reading and to tutorial discussions. Tutorials are an opportunity for discussion and fuller participation in their learning experience. Students are expected to attend each tutorial. In cases of justified absence, satisfactorily written assignments (750 words per tutorial) or other alternative projects related to the material (film reviews) will substitute for attendance.

## 5 **The mandatory requirements** for this course are 1) the submission of two essay and the final takehome test and 2) attendance at 80% of the lectures and 100% of the tutorials. Attendance will be recorded by quizzes for lectures and by signature at tutorials.

- 6 **Required texts:** There is a course reader available at the Victoria Book Store.
- 7 **Taping of Lectures:** All students in the School of Art History, Classics and Religious Studies are welcome to use audio-tapes to record lectures. If you want to do this, please see your lecturer, tutor or the relevant programme administrator and complete a disclaimer form which advises of copy right and other relevant issues.
- 8 **Work-load: (recommendation of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences):** For 200-level 22 points one trimester courses, the working party on workloads and assessments recommends 15 hours per week. An average student should spend 12 hours per week for preparation, reading and writing in addition to attendance at lectures and tutorials.

[200 – level                      1 trimester                      22 points                      15 hours]

9 **General University Statutes and Policies**

Students should familiarise themselves with the University's policies and statutes, particularly the Assessment Statute, the Personal Courses of Study Statute, the Statute on Student Conduct and any statutes relating to the particular qualifications being studied; see the Victoria University Calendar or go to the Academic Policy and Student Policy sections on:

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/policy>

This website also provides information for students in a number of areas including Academic Grievances, Student and Staff conduct, Meeting the needs of students with impairments, and student support/VUWSA student advocates.

10 **Academic integrity and plagiarism**

Academic integrity means that university staff and students, in their teaching and learning are expected to treat others honestly, fairly and with respect at all times. It is not acceptable to mistreat academic, intellectual or creative work that has been done by other people by representing it as your own original work.

Academic integrity is important because it is the core value on which the University's learning, teaching and research activities are based. Victoria University's reputation for academic integrity adds value to your qualification.

The University defines plagiarism as presenting someone else's work as if it were your own, whether you mean to or not. "someone else's work" means anything that is not your own idea. Even if it is presented in your own style, you must acknowledge your sources fully and appropriately. This includes:

- Material from books, journals or staff
- The work of other students or staff
- Information from the Internet
- Software programs and other electronic material
- Designs and ideas
- The organization or structuring of any such material

Find out more about plagiarism, and how to avoid it, on the University's website:

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/plagiarism.aspx>

- 11 Use of Turnitin:** Student work provided for assessment in this course *may be* checked for academic integrity by the electronic search engine <<http://www.turnitin.com>. Turnitin is an online plagiarism prevention tool which identifies material that may have been copied from other sources including the Internet, books, journals, periodicals or the work of other students. Turnitin is used to assist academic staff in detecting misreferencing, misquotation, and the inclusion of unattributed material, which may be forms of cheating or plagiarism. *At the discretion of the School, handwritten work may be copy typed by the School and subject to checking by Turnitin.* You are strongly advised to check with your course coordinator if you are uncertain about how to use and cite material from other sources. Turnitin will retain a copy of submitted materials on behalf of the University for detection of future plagiarism, but access to the full text of submissions will not be made available to any other party.
- 12 Manaaki Pihipihinga Maori and Pacific Mentoring programme (FHSS & FCA)**  
Academic Mentoring for Maori and Pacific students studying at all levels in the above Faculties. Weekly sessions for an hour with a mentor to go over assignments & any questions from tutorials or lectures. Registered students can use the facilities study rooms & computer suite, at any time, at Kelburn & Pipitea. There is a mature student and Post grad network. If you would like to register as a mentor or mentee please contact or pop in & see the coordinator, Melissa Dunlop, Programme Coordinator, 109 D, 463 6015, Email: [Maori-Pacific-Mentoring@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Maori-Pacific-Mentoring@vuw.ac.nz), 14 KP: back courtyard
- 13 Class representatives:** Class representatives are elected in the first week or two of term. They are supported by the VUW Students' Association, and have a variety of roles, including assistance with grievances and student feedback to staff and VUWSA. Contact details for your class rep will be listed on the Religious Studies notice board.
- 14 Supplementary Materials:** A website of materials related to **RELI 286** is being maintained in Blackboard. You can find it by visiting <http://blackboard@vuw.ac.nz>.
- 15 Student Learning:** Support Services: A range of workshops, drop-ins and other assistance is provided by SLSS, covering such things as study techniques, essay writing, exam preparation and note taking skills. They are at Level 0 Kirk Wing, Hunter Courtyard.
- 16 Aegrotat regulations apply** to internally assessed courses. Students who cannot submit or complete the course requirements due to illness or some other impairment should visit the Faculty's Student Administration Office, or go to Student Health or Student Counseling who also have the application form and information about aegrotats. To be eligible for an aegrotat the affected items of assessment must be required to be submitted not earlier than three weeks before the day on which lectures cease for the last trimester of the course. Please see Aegrotat policy at <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/fhss/student-administration/aegrotats.aspx>
- 17 Evaluation:** This course will be evaluated by **UTDC**.

## Lecture Programme

**Lecture Programme and required readings:** The required readings are essential background for the lectures/tutorials and should be completed **before each lecture**. Dates with \*\* are those with tutorials. The tutorial readings are all optional readings that you can use for the final takehome exam as you see fit.

### **2 March Lecture 1: Introduction to the Course**

In this class we will discuss the course outline, approaches to mysticism, and the rationale used to study mysticism. The lecture will clarify more precise terms for the types of experiences commonly known as mystical experiences, e.g., transpersonal and transrational.

### **\*\*9 March Tools of Transpersonal Psychology**

Inner or subjective experience has not been generally recognized as a valid form of knowledge in the modern West because of a) a monological focus on *objects outside* of us and b) the tendency to equate only the “real” with rational thinking. The lecture will discuss 1) different levels of consciousness (sometimes called “The Spiral of Development”) and the realities produced by those different levels, including the postmodern level (which is the default academic perspective in the humanities in the West); 2) the four quadrants or the four ways of knowing something; and 3) the relationship between interpretation and validity or truth claims. This is an introduction to an integral approach (to everything).

### **16 March Contemplative practices**

Contemplative practice is the disciplined methodology, which is comparable to a laboratory practice in chemistry or biology. Its purpose is to go beyond the mental chatter of consensus reality and experience the oneness of reality. Each contemplative tradition has its own specific vocabulary and “maps” for the journey from the duality of the mind to the experience of non-duality. These practices and paradigms are the result of thousands of years of cumulative subjective experience. This lecture will discuss some of the common principles across traditions, different types of meditation, and impediments to meditation.

**23 March      Essentialism: First Approaches to the Study of Mysticism and the Perennial Philosophy' (Guest Lecturer)**

This week we discuss the early approaches to the study of mysticism, including some renowned classical works that have remained influential in the field. Amongst these works are the writings of William James, Evelyn Underhill, and W. T. Stace. The lecture will focus on their attempts to identify the characteristics of mystical experience. One outcome of these attempts was an argument for a common core in mystical experience, often called the "Perennial Philosophy." [PP] According to this view the heart of all mystical experience is a universal condition which is everywhere the same, independent of time, place, culture or any other factors.

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## Mid Trimester break (13<sup>th</sup> April – 26<sup>th</sup> April 2009)

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### **27 April      The Via affirmativa and the via negativa (Guest Lecturer)**

There is some justification for generally characterising Buddhism as a tradition characterised by an emphasis on (1) salvation by special knowledge, and (2) language expressions saying what something is not (apophatic expression) in its basic tendencies. Within the large framework of this comparative generalisation, however, there were also periods in Buddhist doctrinal history in which the tradition understood itself to be more or less strongly apophatic (where language described what something was not). This lecture will explore some of this history of Buddhist doctrine, and in doing so, will take the Buddhist examples as a case study to convey to students the more general concept of apophasis or the "via negativa" (path of negation) as a strategy for articulating notions of (or relations with) the divine. We will also pay attention to some comparisons, especially with Christianity.

### **\*\*4 May      Mystical Physiology and Subtle Bodies**

One way of explaining contemplative practice is that it cultivates the various subtle human bodies. Once these subtle bodies are "activated" then a person can travel in the various realms described by mystics. This class will examine various systems experimentally verified by mystics over the centuries.

### **\*\*11 May      Gurus: What is the source of authority in spiritual development?**

The consensus in contemplative traditions is that spiritual development for the vast majority of people requires some kind of mentor who can serve as an example and provide/provoke the experiences necessary for the aspirant to get beyond the ego, i.e., the self-created idea of separateness, I-ness. Disciples often find gurus that satisfy their projections of what a guru should be – these are often projections of their dark side – power, sex, money. We will see a film clip in class with actual Indian gurus and discuss the issues involving the master-disciple relationship.



**\*\*18 May Pathologies in Spiritual Practice**

Like other realms of human experience, there are pathological manifestations in spiritual practice. Some of these are dysfunctional, manipulative relationships discussed in the previous lecture. In addition, individuals can have many types of spiritual emergency on their own, including the well-known phenomenon of spontaneous “kundalini awakenings,” which can put one’s physical body and everyday life into disarray for years. Using material from Transpersonal Psychology, this lecture will outline some of the better known types of spiritual pathologies.

**25 May Contemporary mystical practice**

This lecture will include examples of sufi practice in New Zealand and involve watching some DVDs of contemporary masters, including Ken Wilber (who is a self-professed pundit and *not* a guru).

**1 June No lecture as it is Queen’s Birthday weekend and the university is closed.**

**2 June Take-home test due**

## Tutorial Programme

Week beginning

**2 March**

No tutorials

**9 March**      **Tutorial on Wilber's ideas**

**16 March**

No tutorials

**23 March**

No tutorials

**30 March**    **Tutorial on Constructivism**

**6 April**      **Tutorial on Compatibilism**

**Mid Trimester break (13<sup>th</sup> April – 26<sup>th</sup> April 2009)**

**27 April**

No tutorials

**4 May**        **Tutorial on Mystical Physiology and Subtle Bodies**

**11 May**      **Tutorial on Gurus**

**18 May**      **Tutorial on Pathologies in Spiritual Practice**

**25 May**

No tutorials

**1 June**

No tutorials

## Essays

- 1** **Essays** must be placed in the locked essay box located near the programme administrator's window (HU 318) and students must date and sign the essay register when submitting an essay. **No responsibility will be taken for work pushed under doors, or for which there is no record.** Students should keep a copy of all their work until it is returned.

**The first essay is to be submitted by 3 April 5:00 pm**  
**The second essay to be submitted by 22 May 5:00 pm.**

Please put your name on the **BACK** of the last page of the assignment only. No cover sheets are necessary.

- 2** **Penalties for late essays / assignments:**
- 2 percent per 24 hours will be deducted for late essays up to a maximum of 14 days, after that essays will count towards course requirements but will receive 0%.
  - Essays submitted more than two weeks late will not be accepted for assessment unless prior written arrangement has been made with the course coordinator.
  - Essays submitted late due to medical reasons must be given to the programme administrator accompanied by a doctor's or other appropriate certification.

**3** **Essay Guidelines: How to do well in writing essays**

- 1.** You should already have been thinking of a topic – when you have a topic make sure there is sufficient material to do your research. By 16 March (for essay one) or 8 May (for essay 2) you should have a topic, a possible thesis, and sufficient sources. Please email all of this to me to confirm or better yet, give it to me in class on paper. **Not doing this in a timely manner will result in a five-point reduction in the essay grade.** Then please start writing.

The thesis should be clear, provocative if possible, and followed by a synopsis of your argument – ideally all on the first page. Take a stand.

Please make sure your essay is polished – at least two rewrites are necessary. Have your flatmate or friend give you feedback. This is how one improves writing. Rushing at the last minute is counterproductive.

**2. Formatting Errors**

- 1.5 spacing in MSWORD – 28 lines per page INDENT 5 spaces for each paragraph and keep 1.5 spacing.
- Use CE not AD -- that changed 30+ years ago as did inclusive gender language
- NO italics for quotes ever -- if the quote is 3 or more lines then indent 5 spaces and single space the quote. More than a few quotes is usually too much – try to avoid quotes.

**3. Other**

- Do not be afraid to use subheadings to organise your essay – easier to write and easier to read
- For my correction marks – a long squiggly line with a circle in it means omit
- Rew = reword
- Checks mean good – more checks more good.
- Use Ibid. and pay attention to footnote and bibliography format

## Essays

In devising an essay topic remember that an essay should answer a clearly defined question and develop an argument. An essay must offer a consistent interpretation of a specific issue, sustained by appropriate evidence and it must be presented in accordance with the departmental guidelines. Please put your name on the BACK of the last page of the essay.

### Essay 1

Essays will consist of a thoughtful investigation of a question or problem. Sources, scholarly and primary, both written and virtual, should be consulted and discussed in the essay. The emphasis should be on your own analysis and interpretation of your sources. **The essay should focus on a question dealing with issues presented before 20 March.** It should present the results of the investigation of the question and have a sufficient number of sources. Please, please take careful note of the format guidelines given in the course outline. You should consult with the lecturer about an individually chosen question. You are to be the scholar for the essays! Please do not forget to submit your topic, what you will argue, and a preliminary bibliography by March 16 at the latest.

NOTE: The optional readings and the tutorial readings are provided to give resources for essay topics.

### Topics:

1. Pick one or two concepts/frameworks from Ken Wilber's writing and use them to explain something of interest to you in religion/mysticism/the transrational. For example: Science's neglect of the subjective aspect of knowledge has had serious implications. *Or* Human development does not end with intellectual development. *Or* Spiritual development is different for men and women (see Deida for this).
2. What is mysticism? Incorporate as many aspects as you can and argue for a set of "family resemblances" or "necessary characteristics."
3. Use Ken Wilber's integral approach to examine something of interest to you – showing how there can (or cannot) be an "applied mysticism" that is of practical use. Examples in the optional reading include medicine and business.
4. Look at Ken Wilber's DVDs *Integral Life Practice Starter Kit* and see how one can (or cannot) incorporate these practices with the readings on meditation.
5. Is there a mystical text that interests you? Find one and discuss one aspect of it using the tools of transpersonal psychology or another approach. This will involve close reading of the texts.
6. Postmodernism has expanded/limited our perspectives.
7. In mysticism there is the Way of Love and the Way of Knowledge (in yoga represented by bhakti and jnana). Investigate one of these paths in a specific tradition.
8. How is it that mystics state that words cannot communicate the fragrance of the mystical experience, yet these same mystics have written so many thousands of books over the centuries?
9. Take a mystical tradition, sufism or Tibetan Buddhism for example, and discuss how their practices help one to develop and the effects that this development can have on one's life.
10. Find a topic in transpersonal psychology (not one that is discussed in the second part of the course) and argue a point.
11. Both William James and Evelyn Underhill have discussed many aspects of mysticism. Go to their books and find a topic to investigate.

**Essay 2 [the topics for Essay 1 are OK as long as Essay 1 + 2 topics are substantially different]**

1. Take mystical texts (involving emptiness for example in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition or *neti neti* in the Upanishads) and investigate how the *via negativa* works.
2. The *via affirmativa* in the Western traditions is often called “union with God.” Investigate some aspect of this path and its presuppositions.
3. How are symbols used for contemplative practice?
4. What role do visions play in mystical experience? How does one know whether they are “real” or hallucinations?
5. Topics on mystical physiology and subtle bodies is possible though the source material is scarce.
6. Does one really need a guru? Why or why not?
7. Why are there so many scandals with gurus and their students. What are the issues?
8. The western study of transpersonal psychology can assist in contemplative practice.
9. Contemplative practice can assist in the practice of psychology.
10. What is “dark night of the soul”? How does it fit into the spiritual path and human development?
11. Kundalini blowouts – what causes them and are they a spiritual pathology or a spiritual emergency?

**Take-home Exam:** There is one question in two parts. Please hand in BOTH parts stapled together WITH page numbers. 1.5 spacing if you use MSWORD. NO cover sheets.

Please put your name on the BACK of the last page of the exam.

Use *only* class materials (including optional and tutorial readings) in your answer and avoid quoting unless absolutely necessary. No footnotes are necessary, but if you want to reference you can use the following format: (Forman, *Pure Consciousness*, page number).

Please label: **Question 1** Part 1 Part 2

**Question 2** Part 1 Part 2 Part 3

**Question One** (750-1000 words total)

Is mystical/posstrational experience the same for all individuals regardless of each person’s religious-cultural background?

Please answer the question in the following manner:

**Part One:** In your own words succinctly summarize the three basic positions discussed in class [perennialist, constructivist, and compatibilist], along with their presuppositions.

**Part Two** Succinctly summarize the arguments that each of these positions would use to counter the other two positions. a) perennialist vs. constructivist and compatibilist; b) constructivist vs. perennialist and compatibilist; and c) compatibilist vs. perennialist and constructivist.

[Parts one and two should be together 750-1000 words]

**Question Two** (1000-1500 words total)

Which position (or modified position from the three explained above) do you think is the most valid?

Please answer the question in the following manner:

**Part One** Using rational arguments, like a philosopher, argue your position. Be sure to anticipate how the other positions would counter your argument and address those issues (like a lawyer). You can assume that the reader knows what you have written in Question 1 Part 2. This part goes beyond what you have written there.

**Part Two** In one sentence restate your position given in Question 2 Part 1. Choose one or more of the actual religious texts given in the tutorial assignments and in the quotes after the Wikipedia blurb below. Using as many of these texts as is necessary, justify your position. This is the creative, open-ended part of the assignment. Please use abbreviated format, i.e., (Muktananda, 245) or (Test Quotes #3).

Be very clear in your presentation so that I can understand your argument.

### **On Wikipedia –**

Wikipedia's founder, Jimmy Wales, says he wants to get the message out to college students that they shouldn't use it for class projects or serious research.

Mr. Wales says that he gets about ten e-mail messages a week from students who complain that Wikipedia has gotten them into academic hot water. "They say, 'Please help me. I got an F on my paper because I cited Wikipedia'" and the information turned out to be wrong, he says. But he said he has no sympathy for their plight, noting that he thinks to himself: "For God sake, you're in college; don't cite the encyclopedia."

The sources cited in Wikipedia, however, can be of use – so you can use it as a bibliographic source to lead you to other sources, which you can then critically examine.

### **Test Quotes for the Final Takehome Exam**

1. Brahman is where reason comes to a stop. There is the instance of camphor. Nothing remains after it is burnt – not even a trace of ash. By Ramakrishna [Hindu]
2. The third grade of love is when the mind of a person is rapt into the abyss of divine light so that, utterly oblivious of all exterior things, it knows not itself and passes wholly into its God. By Richard of St. Victor [Christian]
3. Many people are afraid to empty their minds lest they plunge into the Void. They do not know that their own Mind is the Void. The ignorant eschew phenomena but not thought; the wise eschew thought but not phenomena. Huang Po [Zen/Ch'an Buddhist]
4. Tao, when put to use for its hollowness, is not likely to be filled *Tao Te Ching* IV [Taoist]
5. Absence of thoughts does not mean a blank. There must be one to know the blank. Knowledge and ignorance are of the mind. They are born of duality. But the Self is beyond knowledge and ignorance. It is light itself. There is no necessity to see the Self with another Self. Ramana Maharshi [Hindu]
6. We maintain, and it is an evident truth, that the Supreme is everywhere and yet nowhere. Plotinus [Greek Philosophical tradition]
7. When a seer sees the brilliant Maker and Lord, the Brahma source. Then being a knower, shaking off good and evil, stainless, he attains supreme reality with Him. Mundaka Upanishad III.i.1 [Hindu]
8. Love came and entered my veins and skin like my very blood until it emptied me of self and filled me with the Beloved. The Beloved seized upon all parts of my being. For me a name of me remains; all the rest is He. Najmuddin Razi, *Mirsad al-'ibad* [Islam]
9. When I (God) love my servant... I become the hearing with which he hears, the seeing with which he sees, the hand with which he grasps, the feet with which he walks, the tongue with which he speaks. Hadith Qudsi from Bukhari 81:38. [Islam]