What is the nature and goal of human life? What personal and social obstacles stand in the way of achieving this goal? How can these obstacles be overcome through the transformation of individuals and societies? This course will explore how Siddhattha Gotama, Jesus of Nazareth, Karl Marx, and their followers have sought to answer these questions. Special attention will be given to the diversity of ethical perspectives within Buddhism, Christianity, and Marxism on such topics as the good human life and the ideal society; the meaning of liberation and the nature of salvation; the significance of gender; the practice of violence and non-violence and the ethics of war and peace; and issues of wealth, poverty, and the consumer lifestyle.

Course Goals

1. To become familiar with the basic outlines of Christian, Buddhist, and Marxist worldviews and ethics.

2. To learn how religious and secular worldviews provide resources for our efforts to imagine a good human life and a just social order.

3. To analyze the role played by religious and secular worldviews in both the legitimation and the critique of personal lifestyles and social systems.

4. To provide a comparative framework within which to study religious and secular worldviews and value systems.

Required Texts

(Available in the campus bookstore, from online booksellers, and on library reserve)

The Dhammapada, (Translated with an Introduction by Juan Mascaró).

Walpola Rahula, What the Buddha Taught.


Marcus Borg, Jesus: A New Vision.


Erich Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man.

A Course Packet of photocopied materials for RELS 348 (available from Mr. Kopy, 119 Main St. and on library reserve).

Course Requirements

Students will be expected to complete assigned readings and attend class meetings, participate in class discussions, and regularly log-in to the Chico State Portal to access course information and materials through Blackboard Learn (BbLearn). Please put away reading materials not related to this class. Please turn off and stow cell phones and other electronic devices before class begins. Disruptive behavior (texting, tweeting, facebooking, talking, etc.) will negatively impact your participation grade. If you are planning on using a laptop computer, please read To Remember a Lecture Better, Take Notes by Hand. If you are still
planning on using a laptop, please meet with me during the first week of the semester regarding guidelines for computer use during class.

Grades will be based on the following:

Class attendance, participation, and occasional pop quizzes worth 10% of the final grade.

Three objective exams. The first and second exams will each be worth 10% of the final grade. The final comprehensive exam will be worth 15% of the final grade. Study guides will be distributed via the portal.

A mid-term paper of approximately 750 words or three typewritten pages worth 25% of the final grade.

A final paper of approximately 1250 words or five typewritten pages worth 30% of the final grade. Mid-term and final paper topics and due dates will be announced via the portal and discussed in class.

Students with Certified Disabilities:
If you have a documented disability that may require reasonable accommodations, please contact the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) within the first two weeks of the semester for coordination of your academic accommodations: 530 898-5959; http://www.csuchico.edu/arc/ Please note that you may be required to show documentation of your disability.

Academic Integrity Policy
All quotations and paraphrases in your written work must be properly referenced. Evidence of plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course and referral to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs. The University’s policy on academic integrity and other resources related to student conduct can be found at http://www.csuchico.edu/sjd/integrity.shtml The Department of Comparative Religion and Humanities has also established a policy on academic integrity, honesty, and plagiarism. For an explanation of the policy and a tutorial visit: http://www.csuchico.edu/corh/crel/programs/academic-integrity.shtml

By submitting written assignments, you are indicating that you understand and agree to abide by this policy.

CLASS SCHEDULE: TOPICS, READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS
(subject to revision)

I. THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WORLDVIEWS AND ETHICS

1st & 2nd weeks
Topics: “Religious” and “Secular” Worldviews; Multiple “Dimensions” of Worldviews; “Morality” and “Ethics”; Descriptive, Normative, and Comparative Ethics
Readings: Ninian Smart, "Introduction," from Worldviews: Cross-Cultural Explorations of Human Beliefs (BbLearn); Robin W. Lovin, “Moral Theories,” from The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics (BbLearn)
Recommended: Sumner B. Twiss, “Comparison in Religious Ethics,” from The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics (BbLearn)

II. OUTLINES OF THE BUDDHIST WORLDVIEW

3rd & 4th weeks
Topics: Gotama the Buddha: Historical Background, Life, and Teaching; Samsara, Karma, and Nirvana; The Four Noble Truths; The Eightfold Path and the Five Moral Precepts; the Unity and Diversity of Buddhism

Readings: The Dhammapada; Huston Smith, "Buddhism," chp 3 from The World's Religions (photocopy); Walpola Rahula, What the Buddha Taught (especially pp. xi-xvi and chapters 1, 5, & 8);
Recommended: Robert Van Voorst, "Buddhism," from Anthology of World Scriptures (library reserve)
III. OUTLINES OF THE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

5th & 6th weeks

Topics: Jesus the Christ: Historical Background, Life, and Teaching; Creation, Sin, and Salvation; the Double Love Command; Christologies; the Unity and Diversity of Christianity

Readings: The New Testament; Huston Smith, "Christianity," chp. 8 from The World's Religions (photocopy); Marcus Borg, Jesus: A New Vision, (especially the Preface and chapters 1-3, 5, & 10)

Recommended: Robert Van Voorst, "Christianity," from Anthology of World Scriptures (library reserve)

IV. OUTLINES OF THE MARXIST WORLDVIEW

7th & 8th weeks

Topics: Karl Marx: Historical Background, Life, and Thought; Human Nature, Capitalism, Alienation, and Revolution; the Critique of Religion; the Unity and Diversity of Marxism

Readings: Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto (including the Introduction by V. Pozner); Erich Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man, (esp. pp. 1-70); William Schroeder, “Western Marxism” (photocopy)

V. MORAL IDEALS AND SOCIAL-HISTORICAL REALITIES

9th - 15th weeks

(T 11/11 Veterans Day No Class; Thanksgiving Break falls between the 13th & 14th weeks)

Topic: The Issue of Violence and the Ethics of War and Peace


Topic: Images and Roles of Women in Christian, Buddhist, and Marxist Traditions

Readings: Nancy Schuster Barnes, "Buddhism," from Women in World Religions (photocopy); Rosemary R. Reuther, "Christianity," from Women in World Religions, (photocopy); Anne Ferguson, “Why Feminism and Socialism Need Each Other,” from Socialism (photocopy).

Topic: Wealth, Poverty, and Consumerism

Readings: David R. Loy, “Pave the Planet or Wear Shoes?  A Buddhist Perspective on Greed and Globalization” (photocopy); Jim Wallis, “I Shop, Therefore I Am,” “Conversion: The Priority of the Poor,” and “Community: The Moral Foundations of Economics” (photocopies); Erich Fromm, “Consumerism (as a Compensation of Anxiety and Depressiveness) versus the Joy of Life,” (photocopy).

FINAL EXAM: Th 12/18 Noon

PLEASE NOTE DAY AND TIME OF FINAL EXAM (AS LISTED UNDER “CLASS SCHEDULE” ON THE UNIVERSITY HOMEPAGE)

PLEASE DO NOT ASK TO RESCHEDULE THE FINAL EXAM