

GODS, MYTHS, RELIGIONS IN A SECULAR AGE
840:101 Section 01
Monday/Thursday 10.55am-12.15pm
Douglass Campus, Thompson Hall 206
Fall 2017

Instructor: Hilit Surowitz-Israel

E-mail: hilit@religion.rutgers.edu

Office Hours: Wednesday 11am-12pm, Loree 116 or by appointment

Course Description:

This course introduces students to the academic study of religion by focusing on major theorists of religion, theories of religion, and key concepts and approaches to the study of religion. Among the theories discussed will be the works of E. B. Tylor, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Clifford Geertz. Looking at primary and secondary sources, including visual material, in order to explore the concept of religion, and its' lived practices we will look at the historical and contemporary dynamics, which have constructed various definitions and approaches to the idea of religion. Some topics to be explored are religion and gender, religion and the environment, and sacred space.

This course fulfills CORE requirements:

21st Century Challenges [21Cb]

b. Analyze a contemporary global issue from a multidisciplinary perspective.

This course fits especially well with the 21st Century Challenge Goals b. The comparisons of multiple religious traditions, practices, institutions, and world-views should accomplish 21Ca quite well. The interdisciplinary nature of religious studies also lends itself to 21Cb, as evident below in the readings drawn from the social sciences (especially psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology) as well as from the disciplines of history, cultural studies, and cognitive science.

[AH] Arts and Humanities

o. Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production.

This course fulfills AHo in an especially elegant way. Indeed, the sphere designated as “the religious” has been a primary focus for asking and answering questions about the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, and value. In academic circles today, much of this is treated in departments such as philosophy, history, literature, and the social sciences. And yet for our students—and in popular culture generally—the “religious” continues to serve as a primary space for asking and answering such questions. The study of religion thus offers a natural point of entry into rethinking taken-for-granted norms and values in a critical way.

The **Required Texts** for the course:

Textbooks are available at the Rutgers Bookstore, a Barnes & Noble College Bookstore—One Ferren Mall.

- ❖ *Nine Theories of Religion* 3rd ed. (Oxford, 2014)
- ❖ ALL other articles and primary sources will be available on SAKAI.
- ❖ Other readings or media may be assigned during the course of the semester.
- ❖ ALL reading must be completed prior to the class for which it is assigned

Attendance & Participation

Students are expected to attend each class on time. Attendance will be taken at each class meeting. You are permitted three unexcused absences. Following the third unexcused absence 1/3 of a letter grade will be deducted for each unexcused absence. Students who encounter any extended problem with absences, for example, for medical or family emergencies, or religious reasons, must inform me in writing about the reason and duration of the absence. Decisions on excused absences will be made on a case-by-case basis.

Students are expected to attend all classes; if you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me.

***Student participation is an integral component for the success of this class. Course participants will be expected to arrive to class on time, and prepared to discuss the assigned readings. **Please bring assigned readings to class, as we will frequently consult the text, particularly the primary sources.** Participation not only means asking questions and involving oneself in the classroom discussion, it also means actively listening to others.

*** Students are required to read the materials in advance of our class meetings. Pop quizzes will be given if the instructor feels that students are coming to class unprepared.

Requirements & Grading System:

***Please note, this is the grading scale that I will use for this class:

100-92 A, 91-87 B+, 86-80 B, 79-77 C+, 76-70 C, 69-60 D, 59-below F.

- ❖ Attendance, participation, in-class assignments (5%)
- ❖ Final Paper: Due: December 11th at the beginning of class (must also be submitted via SAKAI) (20%)
- ❖ Exam I (25%) – via SAKAI
- ❖ Exam II (25%) – via SAKAI
- ❖ Exam III (25%) – section 1: December 19th from 12-3pm (via SAKAI)

*** Please make proper arrangements to take the exams during the designated time. There are no make-ups. You have these dates in advance. Please schedule accordingly.

ALL of these components must be met to complete the course

Written work will be graded on the basis of content, clarity of argument, quality of writing, and how well it analyzes the material and answers the questions. Written work, except for that which is a classroom assignment, must be typed (double-spaced, 12 pt. font), and spell-checked. One letter grade per day will be deducted for late papers unless you have a written medical excuse.

Classroom Policies:

- ❖ Plagiarism and cheating will be penalized according to the full extent of University policy. Please consult Rutgers University's *Policy on Academic Integrity for Undergraduate and Graduate Students*: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity>
- ❖ Consult Don't Plagiarize: Document Your Research! For tips about how to take notes so that you don't plagiarize by accident. http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/avoid_plagiarism
- ❖ Students with disabilities who require accommodations should provide me with their "accommodation letter" from the Office of Disability Services as soon as possible so that appropriate arrangements can be made. Please consult the website of the Office of Disability Full disability policies and procedures are at <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>
- ❖ Note that I do not accept assignments submitted by email. All assignments must be submitted in hard-copy on the day that they are due.
- ❖ Evaluations will cover all course material, even if it is not specifically covered in class.
- ❖ Syllabus is subject to change.

•Schedule•

Thursday 9/7

Introduction

- Definitions of Religion
- excerpts of *Flight from Death* in class

Monday 9/11 – Why Study Religion?

- John R. Hinnels, “Why Study Religions?” (pgs. 5-20)

Thursday 9/14 – The Study of Religion: A Historical Perspective

- Eric J. Sharpe “The Study of Religion in Historical Perspective” (pgs. 21-39)
- Gregory Alles, “The Study of Religions: The Last Fifty Years”

Monday 9/18 – Overview of Theories of Religion

- “Introduction” in Pals (pgs. 1-14)

Thursday 9/21 – Animism and Magic

**** (NO CLASS) – GUIDED READING & VIEWING ASSIGNMENT**

- Pals, “Animism and Magic: E.B. Tylor and J.G. Frazer” (pgs. 15-41)

Monday 9/25 – Freud, Personality, and the Psychology of Religion

- Pals, “Religion and Personality: Sigmund Freud” (pgs. 49-70); together in-class pgs. 70-77
- ***make sure that you bring your text to class

Thursday 9/28 – Religion and Society

- Pals, “Society as Sacred: Émile Durkheim,” (pgs. 81-102)

Monday 10/2 – Religion and Society cont.

- Pals, “Society as Sacred: Émile Durkheim,” (pgs. 102-109)

Thursday 10/5 – Discuss Final Paper

- Kim Knott, “Insider/Outsider Perspective”

Monday 10/9 – Religion, Economics, and the Commodification of religion

- Pals, “Religion as Alienation: Karl Marx”, (pgs. 113-131)

Thursday 10/12 - Religion, Economics, and the Commodification of religion cont.

- Pals, “Religion as Alienation: Karl Marx”, (pgs. 131-138)
- Laurence A. Iannaccone & William Sims Bainbridge, “Economics of Religion”

Monday 10/16 – Religion and Social Theory

- Pals, “A Source of Social Action: Max Weber,” (pgs. 143-152; 177-180)

Thursday 10/19 – Phenomenology and Religious Experience

- Pals, “The Verdict of Religion Experience: William James,” (pgs. 185-204)
- Dan Merkur, “Psychology of Religion”

Monday 10/23 – “The Sacred and Profane”

- Pals, “The Reality of the Sacred: Mircea Eliade,” (pgs. 227-237; 246-259)

Thursday 10/26 – Sacred and Profane? The Challenges of marking space

- Geography, Space, and the Sacred (476-492)
- at-home film: *In Light of Reverence* (with guided viewing questions)

Monday 10/30 – Social Anthropology and Religion

- Pals, “Society’s ‘Construct of the Heart’: E.E. Evans-Pritchard,” (pgs. 263-283)

Thursday 11/2 – Social Anthropology and Religion

- Pals, “Society’s ‘Construct of the Heart’: E.E. Evans-Pritchard,” (pgs. 283-290)

Monday 11/6 – Religion and Culture

- Pals, “Religion as a Cultural System: Clifford Geertz,” (pgs. 293-304)

Thursday 11/9 – Religion and Culture cont.

- Pals, “Religion as a Cultural System: Clifford Geertz,” (pgs. 304-321)
- “Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight,” by Clifford Geertz

Monday 11/13 – Gender and Religion

- Gender and Religion (pgs. 245-259)
- Genesis 1 & 2
- video: Women of Islam: Veiling and Seclusion (at home) with guided reading questions
- video: *Miriam’s Daughter’s Celebrate* (in-class)

Thursday 11/16 – Gender and Religion cont.

- readings TBA

Monday 11/20 - Orientalism

- Richard King, “Orientalism and the Study of Religions”
- Images TBA

Tuesday 11/21 – Religion and Nature

- Roger S. Gottlieb, “Religion and the Environment”
- Bron Taylor, “Introduction,” Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature (ERN).
- Bron Taylor, Exploring Religion, Nature and Culture: Introducing the Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture, JSRNC 1.1 (2007): 5-14.

Thursday 11/23 – NO CLASS – New Religious Movements

- Judith Fox, “New Religions Movements” (guided reading activity)
- documentary film links TBA

Monday 11/27 – New Religious Movements Cont.

- no new reading

Thursday 11/30 – Religion and Media

- Gordon Lynch, “Religion, Media and the Cultures of everyday life”

Monday 12/4 –Diaspora: Religion in Motion

- Sean McLoughlin, “Religion and Diaspora “

Thursday 12/7 – Diaspora: Religion in Motion cont.

- Religion and Diaspora (cont.)

Monday 12/11 – Final Essay Due at the Beginning of class

- no new reading
- Concluding Thoughts