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M 3:30-5:30

Office Hours: Tuesday 2-3:30pm, 163 George St., 3<sup>rd</sup> floor

## **Methods in Religious Studies**

## **RELS 1000**

Religion is a phenomenon that defies simple categorization or explanation. Despite the development of an academic field of study, the question persists: what is the basis of the study of religion? Is religion a part of culture? Is it a mode of thought or representation of the world? Is secularism still 'religion'? Does religion concern actions and practices or belief? To answer such questions, we will explore classical and contemporary theorists utilizing anthropological, sociological, hermeneutic, psychological, social theoretical, and philosophical approaches to religion. We will attempt to identify a number of useful theoretical and methodological categories to aid us in our study, such as Text, Ritual, Symbol, Practice, Gender, Body, and Experience. These categories will help us shape our engagement with religion as an interdisciplinary field, acknowledging that the questions asked in the study of Hellenistic Judaism are not usually the questions asked in the study of South Asian pilgrimage practices or a contemporary analysis of Yoga culture in American Christianity. Thus, we will critically examine the differences between methods and the correspondence of these differences to varieties of religions, and evaluate how useful an interdisciplinary approach to the study of religion might be in overcoming this lack of consensus about just what is the object of our study.

### **Method of Evaluation**

Class Participation:	10%
Short Essay:	35%
Essay proposal:	15%
Final Essay:	40%

### **Required Texts**

Daniel Pals, *Introducing Religion: Readings from Classic Theorists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Selected Articles OCRA

### **A Note on Readings**

A complete and critical reading of the assigned texts before class is crucial and required. Reading "critically" will be a theme developed in this course, but at the outset, this means you should ask the following questions as you prepare:

- What is the motivation of the author? I.e.: what is the problem or question of concern to the author?
- What are the stages or moves in the argument? What kinds of support are offered to justify the argument?

All students will be expected to have completed the readings and to have **brought them to class**, prepared to engage in discussion.

### Short Essays (5-7 pages) Due 10/13

The short essay (7 pages max.) will require a deeper examination of a topic we have covered briefly in our course. You will be required to explicate a textual passage and try to summarize the argument and the methodological approach of the author, as an “*explication du texte*.” Such an exercise will help you refine your exegetical skills when dealing with primary texts and so no secondary research is required.

### Final Paper Proposal (2 pages) Due 11/3

The proposal will be due the beginning of November. In the proposal you should include the topic, text, and problem you will discuss in your final paper. You should present the rationale for writing your final paper on this topic and include some preliminary scholarship with which you will engage. This can be presented in the form of an annotated bibliography or a brief written statement followed by a reading list.

### Final Paper (10-12 pages) Due 12/1

The final paper will be due on the last day of class and will consist of your own research into the thinker, text, and/or topic that had been proposed. This paper should consist of both primary source exegesis and any relevant secondary scholarship.

## USEFUL INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

### Policy on Late Assignments and Missed Tests

All assignments are due at the beginning of class, and must be submitted as hard copies (no emailed assignments!). All late assignments will be penalized an additional 2% per calendar day (including weekends). Students are reminded to back up all of their work regularly: computer failure and other technological mishaps do **not** qualify for an extension.

Students are expected to manage their time. A student who has adequately prepared for assignments over the entire tenure of the course will not feel compelled to ask for an extension.

**Punctuality:** Please arrive on time and plan to remain for the entire class. Unless you become ill, do not begin packing up your books before the end of class because this disturbs everyone. If you know in advance that you cannot stay for the entire class, please sit next to the door and exit quietly.

**Courtesy in Class:** other than to respond to or ask a question, please do not converse during lectures. Please turn off or silence all cell phones before class begins. Use of laptop computers and smartphones should be limited to accessing course readings as well as taking notes.

**Email Communication:** Always indicate this course code in the subject line of any email correspondence with the course instructor. All emails will be answered within two days of being received. That means that there is no guarantee that last minute questions about assignments etc. will be answered before due dates. Please organize yourself so that you have ample time to clear up any misunderstandings or questions with the course instructor long before assignments are due.

## ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT (Plagiarism, Cheating, Inappropriate Behavior)

**Plagiarism:** turning in someone else's work as your work; quoting another person's work or statement without acknowledgement. For more information see the Writing Center's website on plagiarism.

**Cheating:** getting answers on exams from someone else or from some help that is not in your own brain (e.g., iPods, cell phones).

**Academic Misconduct:** "Academic misconduct by a student shall include, but not be limited to, disruption of classes; threatening an instructor or fellow student in an academic setting; giving or receiving of unauthorized aid on examinations or in the preparation of notebooks, themes, reports or other assignments [= cheating]; knowingly misrepresenting the source of any academic work; unauthorized changing of grades; unauthorized use of University approvals or forging of signatures; falsification of research results; plagiarizing of another's work; violation of regulations or ethical codes for the treatment of human and animal subjects; or otherwise acting dishonestly in research."

Plagiarism and cheating are very serious offenses and all attempts to take credit for work that is not your own or to assist others in doing so will be dealt with according to the Academic Code. For more information see:  
<http://www.brown.edu/academics/college/degree/policies/academic-code>

## Schedule of Readings

### What is Religion?

- |        |  |
|--------|--|
| 9/8    | Introduction to Course   |
|        | Selections to be read in class from E.B. Tylor "Animism and the Origin of Religion" in Pals, <i>Introducing Religion</i> |
| 9/15 - | Mircea Eliade. "Religion as Response to the Sacred" in Pals  |
|        | James Frazer. "Magic and the Rise of Religion" in Pals   |
|        | Jonathan Z Smith. "Religion, Religions, Religious" (OCRA)  |

### Belief vs. Practice

- 9/22 Clifford Geertz. "Religion as Thick Description" (OCRA) and "Religion as a Cultural System" in Pals
- Rudolf Otto. "Religion and the Sense of the "Numinous" in Pals
- Talal Asad. "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category" (OCRA)
- 9/29 Pierre Bourdieu. "Structures and the Habitus" (OCRA)
- Donald S. Lopez, Jr., "Belief" (OCRA)

### Culture, Identity, Tradition

- 10/6 Sigmund Freud. "Religion as Neurosis" in Pals
- Emile Durkheim. "The Social as Sacred" in Pals
- Max Weber. "Religion and Culture Interwoven" in Pals
- 10/13 **(SHORT ESSAY DUE) Columbus Day - no class**
- 10/20 Benedict Anderson. "Introduction" and Chapter 2 "Cultural Roots" in *Imagined Communities*. (OCRA)
- Jacques Lacan. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the function of the I" in *Ecrits: A Selection*. (OCRA)
- Charles Taylor. "What is a Social Imaginary?" and "Public and Private" in *Modern Social Imaginaries*, (OCRA)

### Ritual, Symbol, and Meaning

- 10/27 Clifford Geertz, "Ethos, Worldview, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols" in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (OCRA)
- Roland Barthes. "The Structure of the Signifier"; "Structure of the Signified"; "Structure of the Sign" in *The Fashion System* (OCRA)
- Talal Asad. "Towards a Genealogy of the Concept of Ritual" in *Genealogies of Religion*, (OCRA)
- 11/3 **(ESSAY PROPOSAL DUE)**
- Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah. "Rationality, Relativism, the Translation and Commensurability of Cultures" in *Magic, Science, Religion and the Scope of Rationality* (OCRA)
- Ann Taves, "Special things as building blocks of religions" (OCRA)
- Sharf, Robert. "Ritual" in (OCRA)

### Text, Genealogy, and Hermeneutics

- 11/10            Michel Foucault. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (OCRA)  
                     Jacques Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (OCRA)
- 11/17            Hans-Georg Gadamer. "Elements of a theory of hermeneutic experience" (OCRA)  
                     Reinhart Koselleck "Social History and Conceptual History" (OCRA)  
                     Paul Ricoeur. "The Historian as Judge" and "Interpretation in History" (OCRA)

### Body, Gender

- 11/24            Judith Butler. "Bodies That Matter" (OCRA)  
                     Thomas J. Csordas "The Body as Representation and being-in-the-world" (OCRA)
- 12/1            **(Final Paper Due)**  
                     Caroline Walker Bynum "The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages" (OCRA)  
                     Saba Mahmood. "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival" (OCRA)

### Experience and Agency

- 12/8            William James. "The Testimony of Religious Experience" in Pals  
                     Immanuel Kant. "What is Enlightenment?" (OCRA)  
                     Robert H. Scharf. "Experience" (OCRA)  
                     Conclusion