

GODS, MYTHS, RELIGIONS IN A SECULAR AGE
Fall 2020
Rel 840:101 sections 90, 91, & 92

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Office Hours: TBA

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:

Our Common Future (CCO), Philosophical and Theoretical Issues (AHo)

The **Required Texts** for the course:

Textbooks are available at the Rutgers Bookstore, a Barnes & Noble College Bookstore.

- ❖ Daniel Pals, *Nine Theories of Religion* 3rd ed. (Oxford, 2014) ISBN-10: 0199859094
- ❖ ALL other articles and primary sources will be available on Canvas.
- ❖ Other readings or media may be assigned during the course of the semester.

Learning Methods and Resources: This class is designed as an online course. All of the work, including reading, discussions, and assessments will be completed online. The course material and work will operate through the use of Canvas. The course requires internet access, a Rutgers ID, and access to the course Canvas site. All students are required to familiarize themselves with Canvas. The site will contain announcements, assignments, tests and quizzes, recommended resources, discussion forums, and grades, among other things. Student self-discipline and motivation to participate in the course, and engage the online material cannot be over emphasized. You must truly be an active learner to benefit from (and pass) the course.

Course Requirements:

1) Discussion Forums (20% of final grade): Course discussion forums will utilize the Canvas forum tools. The discussion forums are one the most important aspects of the online course in the sense of comprehending and engaging with the subject matter. **There are eight graded forums for this course.** Most of the content discussion will take place in these forums. Students are therefore required to contribute to the Discussion Board on Canvas. These are meant to be open, threaded conversations about various topics related to the course. Students' posts will be graded based on your understanding of the reading assignments and the development of ideas through interaction in the forums with the professor and other students. Forum discussions are spaces for asking questions and critically engaging with the course material. You will receive up to 10 points for each forum.

In addition to course reading, there are a number of documentaries and other visual sources that you will be expected to watch. The textual and visual material should be put into dialogue with one another in our forum discussions.

Prior to our first forum, I will provide samples of successful and academically meaningful posts and threads. Coupled with the course resource *Writing for Religious Studies* (see below), you should have all of the tools necessary to help us have a lively and engaging discussion.

Forum post guidelines: Forum posts but be thoughtful and analytical. They must meaningfully engage the material and demonstrate that you have completed the work in the relevant folder.

Forum posts must be respectful in their engagement with other course members. Everyone has a difference of a opinion, and that can be celebrated as a space for intellectual discussion. However, forum posts must be respectful in tone, must use respectful and appropriate language, and must not violate any of the university's code of ethics or conduct.

Forum posts require posting a thoughtful, engaged, and analytical response of at least 200 words to an initial prompt by 10pm (EST) on the Wednesday of the week that the post is assigned. *Then, course participants must post a response of at least 100 words to TWO of the initial posts of other course members by 10pm (EST) on the Friday following the post.**

The rubric for discussion forums is as follows:

9-10 Points:

The student is able to appropriately employ the core concepts relevant to the discussion; can effectively respond to other students in a way that promotes further analysis and reflection; offers justification for the arguments she puts forward; arguments are presented in clear and accessible language, with consideration for opposing interpretations; cites relevant course material.

7-8 Points:

The student is able to appropriately employ some of the core concepts, but may be on less sure footing with others; demonstrates independent thinking but does not always offer support for their argument; engages other views, but may not always be able to frame disagreements in terms of the material covered in class; presentation is generally clear, but not always concise and effective.

5-6 Points:

Posts evidence a perfunctory engagement of the material, with poor grasp of the course material; student tends to respond to other posts in ways that express approval or disapproval, rather than substantive engagement; arguments, when put forward, are often stated without support and difficult to parse. Student may respond when prompted, but lacks initiative.

1-4 Points:

Student hardly engages, even when prompted. Posts fail to demonstrate a proper grasp of the course material, do not meaningfully engage the views of other students, and are often poorly written.

2) Quizzes (25% of final grade): Each week's folder will include an approximately 10 questions quiz. Quizzes will comprise of multiple choice, true-false, or short answer questions, which will test the students' grasp of ideas and concepts under discussion. The quizzes will be made available on Canvas. Quizzes will be made available according to the schedule below. Once you begin the quiz, you will have a set time limit to complete it.

4) Two response papers (each assessment is 15% of your final grade): You will submit two one-page (app. 500 word) response papers during the course. These require NO outside research and are based on the assigned course material. Further guidelines and instruction will be provided. The first is due October 11th by 10pm EST (eastern standard time). The second, is due November 22nd by 10pm EST.

5) Final Exam (25% of final grade): The final exam will cover all course material and will be similar to the quizzes given throughout the course.

Grading Policy: All final grades will be calculated according to the Rutgers' grading system. Grades will appear in the online Gradebook as we move through course material.

Office of Disability Services:

Any student requiring special accommodations to participate in and successfully complete this course must contact the Office of Disability Services and ask to speak with a Coordinator (848-445-6800 or <http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu>) to discuss accommodations.

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 Services. Full policies and procedures are at <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>

Evaluations will cover all course material, even if it is not specifically covered in class.

Syllabus is subject to change.

*******Each week's reading and viewing assignments will be in a folder. That folder will also include my lecture, where I present the material. Please make sure that you listen to the lecture as well as complete all of the assignments for the assigned week. ***Listening to the lecture and completing the all assigned reading and viewing assignments, should be completed prior to posting on the class discussion board (deadline: Wednesdays 10pm EST).**

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.

***** Please note that there are no make-ups for assessments unless there is a documented emergency or documented illness that would prevent you from engaging in online learning. If this occurs please communicate with me promptly, and we will figure out how best to proceed. You have the syllabus and *all* assessment dates in advance, please make proper arrangements to complete course material (posts, assessments, etc.) during the designated time. Again, 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/>
- ❖ Evaluations will cover all course material, even if it is not specifically covered in class.
- ❖ Course deadlines, office hours, and meetings are based on Eastern Standard Time. Please be sure to note that as you make your plans to submit work or respond to forum posts.
- ❖ Syllabus is subject to change.

■ Schedule ■

Folder 1 (Sept. 1-Sept. 4th)

Introduction

- view: Introductory video to course (includes review of the syllabus)
- view: excerpts of *Flight from Death* in class with discussion questions
- view short clip: What is Religion (app. 5 minutes)
- read: John R. Hinnels, “Why Study Religions?” (pgs. 5-20)
- read:

Folder 2 (Sept. 8th-Sept. 11th)

Overview of Theories of Religion

- view: lecture video
- read: “Introduction” in Pals (pgs. 1-14)
- view short clip: Has Religion Surged During the Covid-19 Pandemic (app. 7 minutes)
- view short clip: Does Religion Affect Public Health (app. 5 minutes)
- Questions for consideration: Religious Responses to Covid-19
- Religious responses to Covid-19 TBA

Folder 3 (Sept. 14th-18th)

Animism and Magic

- view: lecture video
- read: Pals, “Animism and Magic: E.B. Tylor and J.G. Frazer” (pgs. 15-44)
- view: assigned images & how to closely read various sources
- view short clip: Animism: The First Religion (app. 9 minutes)
- view short clip: Does Humanity Still Believe in Magic (app. 8 minutes)
- take: Quiz

Folder 4 (Sept. 21st-25th)

Freud, Personality, and the Psychology of Religion

- view: lecture video
- view: satirical cartoons (analysis)
- Pals, “Religion and Personality: Sigmund Freud” (pgs. 49-76)
- view short clip: What did Freud Think About Religion? (approximately 5 minutes)
- take: Quiz

Folder 5 (Sept. 28th-Oct. 2nd)

Religion and Society

- view: lecture video
- read: Pals, “Society as Sacred: Émile Durkheim,” (pgs. 81-109)
- read: Kim Knott, “Insider/Outsider Perspective”
- view short clip: Émile Durkheim (app. 7 minutes)
- view short clip: Social Construction of Mormonism (app. 4 minutes)
- view: *Devil's Playground* with discussion questions
- take: Quiz

Folder 6 (Oct. 5th-Oct. 9th)

Religion Ritual and Community

- view: lecture video
- read: Grimes “Ritual”
- read: Roger Sansi. “The Everyday Lives of Shrines in Brazil.” 13(2):231-249; University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018.
- view short clip: What is Ritual? (app. 6 minutes)
- view: “Ritual: Circle of Life” & “Ritual: Great Gatherings” with guided viewing questions
- take: Quiz

Folder 7 (Oct. 12th-Oct. 16th)

Religion, Economics, and the Commodification of religion

- view: lecture video
- read: Pals, “Religion as Alienation: Karl Marx”, (pgs. 113-141)
- read: Capitalism and American Evangelical Christianity (TBA)
- view short clip: Super Mario Brothers and Marxism (app. 3 minutes)
- view short clip: Marxist Theory Explains Why These Cocoa Farmers Have Never Tasted Chocolate (app. 6 minutes)
- take: Quiz

Folder 8 (Oct. 19th-Oct. 23rd)

Religion and Social Theory

- view: lecture video
- read: Pals, “A Source of Social Action: Max Weber,” (pgs. 143-180)
- view short clip: Max Weber (app. 7 minutes)
- view short clip: Classic Theories of Religion (app. 4 minutes)
- view short clip: I Love Lucy Meets the Iron Cage (app. 2 minutes)
- take: Quiz

Folder 9 (Oct. 26th-Oct. 30th)

“The Sacred and Profane”

- view: lecture video
- read: Pals, “The Reality of the Sacred: Mircea Eliade,” (pgs. 227-259)
- read: Geography, Space, and the Sacred (476-492)
- film (view): *In Light of Reverence* (with guided viewing questions)
- take: Quiz

Folder 10 (Nov. 2nd-Nov. 6th)

- view: lecture video
- read: Pals, “Religion as a Cultural System: Clifford Geertz,” (pgs. 293-321)
- read: TBA
- view short clip: Is Coca-Cola a Religion (app. 5 minutes)
- view: New Muslim Cool on Tubi
- take: Quiz

Folder 11 (Nov. 9th-Nov. 13th)

- view: lecture video
- Gender and Religion PowerPoint available on Canvas (for use with lecture)
- read: Gender and Religion (pgs. 245-259)
- read: Genesis 1 & 2
- read: Knauss, Stefanie & Pezzoli-Olgiati, Daria. (2015). The Normative Power of Images: Religion, Gender, Visuality. *Religion and Gender*. 5. 10.18352/rg.10079.
- read: LGBTQI+ primary source TBA
- view: Women of Islam: Veiling and Seclusion with guided questions
- view: *Miriam's Daughter's Celebrate* with guided questions
- take: Quiz

Folder 12 (Nov. 16th-Nov. 20th)

- view: lecture video
- read: Judith Fox, “New Religions Movements”
- read: *New Religious Movements* from The Encyclopedia of Religion in America
- read: *New Religious Movements: Twentieth Century* from The Encyclopedia of Religion in America
- read: selections from Jonestown website: Archival Sources: <https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/>
--spend about twenty minutes on this site.
- take: Quiz
- view: Jonestown: The Life and Death of a Peoples Temple
- view: Waco: Rules of Engagement

*** Please note: Both documentaries can be considered very disturbing. They contain newsreel and other documentary footage, which contains graphic scenes, death, and violence. Though many popular movies contain much more violence and gore, this is *real* violence, and may be difficult for some with particular circumstances. If this poses a specific issue for you, please be in touch with me.

Folder 13 (Nov. 23rd-Nov. 27th)

- view: lecture video
- read: Roger S. Gottlieb, "Religion and the Environment"
- read: Taylor, Bron. (2007). *Surfing into Spirituality and a New, Aquatic Nature Religion*. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. American Academy of Religion. 75. 923-51.
- read: "The Earthquake" from *Our National Parks* by John Muir (1-page)
- view short clip: Surfing as Spirituality (app. 3 minutes)
- take: Quiz

Folder 14 (Nov. 30th-Dec. 4th)

- view: lecture video
- read: Van Horn, Gavin; Lucas Johnston (2007). "Evolutionary Controversy and a Side of Pasta: The Flying Spaghetti Monster and the Subversive Function of Religious Parody". *GOLEM: Journal of Religion and Monsters*. 2 (1).
- view: Judgment Day: Intelligent Design on Trial with guided viewing questions
- take: Quiz

Folder 15 (Dec.7th-Dec. 10th)**Pluralism and its Limits: The Supreme Court**

- Supreme Court Cases