

**THE NATURE OF THE STUDY OF RELIGION:
RELIGION AND MODERNITY IN WESTERN
THOUGHT
RELIG/CHID 380
SPRING 2012 | T, TH 11:30-1:20
BAGLEY HALL 154**

CHID Gateways Course | I&S | Comparative Religion Majors Required Course

"Modernity is the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art of which the other half is the eternal and the immutable."

Charles Baudelaire, French poet (1821-1867)

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Course Description

This course provides students with a variety of approaches to the study of religion centered on examining the relationship between religion and modernity in the tradition of post-enlightenment, Euro-American scholarship. The central thesis of this course is that what we understand to be "religion" today was fashioned out of Western modernity, similar to other "modern" ideas such as science, democracy, the modern state, humanism, and capitalism. Religion is not a relic from a pre-modern period or the purview of non-modern, non-Westernized, "irrational" societies, but rather is the creation of the modern world itself. We will examine this thesis in relation to several disciplines: history, anthropology, sociology, Marxism, feminism, postmodernism, political theology, and Freudian psycho-analytical theory. As a survey course, we will tread lightly through these areas with the goal to provide opportunities for future study and ideas for critically thinking about the history and role of religion in modern public and political culture. For students interested in pursuing this thesis in the rest of the world outside European and North American societies, I offer a seminar called "Religion and Modernity in the Rest of the World".

Format: This is a lecture course in which I strongly encourage discussion, interaction, and conversation. Occasionally the class may divide into smaller groups for various projects, but in general class will consist of interactive lecture. We will watch three films and a few short videos in the course. The use of this media is meant to get us to engage with the themes of the course, and return those themes and theories to creative interpretations of the media. **Please note that my lectures do not summarize the readings but contextualize them. If you do not do the readings you will have a hard time following the lectures.**

Assignments:

Your grade for this course will be distributed evenly among three components:

- **Participation**—Class participation is measured by active participation in the form of questions and comments during lecture; demonstration that you have done the readings and thought about the material; and attentive participation in all assignments and components of the course. **In-class Reading Reflections** will be part of this grade. We'll begin each class with a 5 minute hand-written reflection on some aspect of the reading. The reflections will be on the reading *for that day* so be sure to do the reading before class. I assess these based on the way in which you engage the materials, even if you are still in the process of understanding the materials. I don't expect you to have mastered the reading but rather thought critically and carefully about them. Participation and in-class writing will constitute 1/3 of your grade.
- **Two In-Class Essay Exams**—You will complete two in-class essay exams, a mid-term essay exam and a final essay exam on the last day of class. The final essay exam will be cumulative, and we will devote one class to preparation for that exam and for a review of the course. These essay exams are to be (legibly) hand-written. You may use the readings, your notes on the readings, and your class lecture notes. **Lecture notes in particular will be vital.** The nature of the questions will allow many possible answers but will rely on materials in lecture and readings. A high grade will be determined by the quality of your thought in the essay, the organization of your response, and your ability to reference the ideas and materials of the course. Each exam will account for 1/3 of your grade—that is, both exams combined will be equivalent to 2/3 of your grade.

Grading: I use the standard 4.0 grading system in use at the University of Washington.

Readings: All readings for this course are online or in a coursepack. You can access these readings online at the course's sharespace, which is <https://catalysttools.washington.edu/sharespaces/space/novetzke/10424>. In addition, a course pack is available for purchase at Ave Copy Center with all readings. Whether you buy the coursepack or download the readings and print them, you are responsible for bringing them to class. If you are interested in buying the books from which these readings are drawn, please talk to me and I'll give you advice on what to purchase.

Class Etiquette: Please do not use computers in class. If you must use a computer in class as a way to accommodate a disability, please talk to me before class begins and/or visit Disabled Student Services (see below). **Please do not use iphones, mobile phones, ipods, gameboys, gadgets, doohickeys, thingamabobs or other devices in class.** Use pen/pencil and paper to take notes and exams; do not read other materials, like books, newspapers, magazines, letters, etc., in class; **do not eat in class**, though caffeinated beverages are encouraged. Please come on time and stay for the entire class.

Syllabus: I reserve the right to change this syllabus at any point, including the readings and assignments, as required in order to adapt to the needs of the class or other factors.

Lecture Materials: I do not give students copies of my lecture notes or powerpoint slides. They are cues to help me lecture and are not intended to be stand-alone documents.

Absences: Please try to let me know if you'll be absent from class. Also keep in mind that I do not give my lecture notes or powerpoint slides to students (as noted above), so you will need to get lecture notes from colleagues in the class.

How to Get an A: You can get an A by participating in class conversation in an informed way, and by completing all the work conscientiously and on time.

How to Get an F: I will strictly enforce the University's rules on Student Academic Responsibility (<http://depts.washington.edu/grading/pdf/AcademicResponsibility.pdf>) and the Student Conduct Code (<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=478-120>). **It is your responsibility to understand what your responsibilities are as a student and the consequences involved in transgressing your responsibilities.** Also, generally checking out or disappearing, especially throughout the middle of the quarter, is a bad idea.

Disabled Students: If you would like to request accommodations due to a disability, please contact Disabled Student Services, 448 Schmitz Hall, 543-8924 (V/TDD). If you have a letter from Disabled Student Services indicating you require accommodations, please present the letter to me as soon as possible so that I can make necessary arrangements.

Syllabus

✚ Religion and Modernity

- **Tuesday: Introduction, review syllabus |**
 - No Reading
- **Thursday: What is modernity? |**
 - Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” (1784)
 - J. Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious” (1998)

✚ The social argument

- **Tuesday: “Religion” and Modern Society |**
 - Emile Durkheim, selections from *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), Introduction, Chapter 1, and Conclusion.
 - James Frazer, selections from *The Golden Bough* (1922)
- **Thursday: The Creation and Maintenance of Society |**
 - Screen the *The Matrix* (1999; 136 minutes)
 - Peter Berger, “Religion and World-Construction” from *The Sacred Canopy*, 1967, 1-52.
- **Tuesday: Belief and the Idea of the Cultural Field |**
 - Pierre Bourdieu, selections from *The Field of Cultural Production*, pp. 29-40, 74-81, 95-97, 101-103, 106-111.

✚ The cultural argument

- **Thursday: Illusion and Neurosis |**
 - Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), entire.
- **Tuesday: Language, Symbols, and Structures of Belief |**
 - Screen in class: The Inauguration of 44th President of the United States (January 20, 2009; 22 minutes)
 - C. Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” (1966), 87-125.
 - V. Turner, “Liminality and Communitas,” (1969), 94-130.

✚ The historical argument

- **Thursday: Spirit and the End of History |**
 - Hegel, from *The Philosophy of History*, (1837) 1-54.
- **Tuesday: Marx and the Beginning of History |**
 - Karl Marx
 - Skim: “The Communist Manifesto,” entire (44 pages)
 - “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” Introduction.
 - “The German Ideology—Ideology in General” (1844–46)
 - “Concerning Feuerbach” (1845)

- Mircea Eliade, “The Terror of History,” (1954): 139-167.

✚ **The Midterm Exam**

- **Thursday: *Midterm Exam* |**
 - **Come to class with sharpened pencils and eraser!**
- **Tuesday: NO CLASS |**

✚ **The historical argument continued**

- **Thursday: Religion Makes History |**
 - Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* 1904 chapters 1, 2, and 3 (pgs 1-23 plus notes).

✚ **The postmodern argument**

- **Tuesday: How Did God Die? |**
 - Screen *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989, 104 minutes)
 - F. Nietzsche, *Zarathustra’s Prologue*, entire.
 - Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §§ 108, 125, 335, 343, 345, 350, 373.
 - Nietzsche, “The Religious Nature.”
- **Thursday: Religion and the Modern Self |**
 - Michel Foucault, “Hermeneutics and the Self” (1980).

✚ **The feminist/gender argument**

- **Tuesday: The Body and God |**
 - Screen in class *Babette’s Feast* (1987 103 mins).
 - Mary Daly, “After the Death of God the Father” (1971)
- **Thursday: Motherhood, Womanhood, and Religion |**
 - “Stabat Mater Dolorosa [13th Century]”
 - Julia Kristeva, (1987) “Stabat Mater.”

✚ **The political argument**

- **Tuesday: The Nation and Religion |**
 - Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?” (1882)
 - Robert Bellah, “Civil Religion in America” (1967)
- **Thursday: Religion and the Clash of Civilizations |**
 - Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History” (1989)
 - Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations” (1993)

✚ **The Final Exam**

- **Tuesday: Final Exam Preparation and Course Review |**
- **Thursday: In Class Exam | June 2**