

Theories for the Study of Religion

Graduate Seminar

JSISB 501 | Autumn 2012 | Thursday 11:30am to 2:20pm | SWS 036

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OFFICE HOURS: Wednesdays 10-11am

Course Description

This seminar provides graduate 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, and the creation of this idea of “religion” was a product, in part, of the Academy. As such this course is both about the theories of religious studies and the history of the study of religion. We will argue that 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 historiography, sociology, anthropology, Marxism, psychoanalysis, postmodernism, and feminism. My goal is to provide students with opportunities for future study and ideas for critically thinking about the history and role of religion in public culture today. For students interested in pursuing this thesis outside European and North American societies, I offer a seminar called “Religion and Modernity in the Rest of the World”.

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

- **Participation**—As a graduate seminar, discussion is the core of our meeting. This is not a lecture class! Class participation is measured by active engagement with the readings and with each other's ideas, and generally positive investment in the learning environment of the class. *Actively and verbally engaging in class with the course material is essential for passing this class and counts for a third of your grade.*
- **Weekly Reading Reflection**—On Tuesday night before class you will post online a short reading reflection on the readings for Thursday. In this posting, please critically engage the readings and pose questions for group discussion. Limit your posting to 750 words. I encourage you to read one another's postings before class, and if interested, respond online to posts by Wednesday night. *This will account for a third of your grade.* The board can be found at: <https://catalyst.uw.edu/gopost/board/novetzke/29137/>.
- **A Final Paper**— For your **final paper**, you will be required to write an encyclopedia entry on a topic (partially) of your choice. The entry should involve “religion” and something else. For example, “religion and class” or “religion and history” or “religion and feminism” or “religion and psychoanalysis”. Your entry should be around 5000 words, not including a bibliography of around twenty citations. If you want to submit a complete and polished draft for my review before the final paper is due, I must receive this no later than November 29. *This paper will account for the last third of your grade.*

I will not accept late work or incompletes under any circumstances. Failing to complete the work for this class by December 13, 2012 means failing this class.

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

Syllabus: I reserve the right to change this syllabus at any point, including the readings and assignments, as required.

Etiquette: Please: do not use computers, iphones, mobile phones, ipods, gameboys, PS-whatevers, 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. Please come on time and stay for the entire class.

Academic Conduct: I will strictly enforce the University of Washington Student Conduct code, including the policy on plagiarism. For your reference, the entire code can be found at <http://www.washington.edu/students/handbook/conduct.html>. If you are unsure of what plagiarism is, it is your responsibility to understand plagiarism. Ignorance of the definition of plagiarism will not excuse plagiarism in this class.

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.

Required Texts: I suggest you purchase these texts on your own for class use. I have not order them at the bookstore but leave buying them up to you. I will have copies on reserve, but be aware the check out period is only two hours for reserve books.

- Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*
- Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*
- G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*
- Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*
- Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*
- Rudolph Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*

Please note that all readings not in the required texts are online and are marked on syllabus with a “[o]”; readings from the required texts are not online or in the coursepack. You are responsible for purchasing or borrowing all required readings. Online readings are at: <https://catalyst.uw.edu/sharespaces/space/novetzke/9439>.

Syllabus

- **Religion and Modernity**
 - **Genesis | September 27**
 - Reading in class:
 - Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” (1784) [o]
- **The Social Argument**
 - **“Religion” and Modern Society | October 4**
 - Reading:
 - E. B. Tylor, Selections From *Primitive Culture* on “Animism” (1871) [o]
 - Emile Durkheim, selections from *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), Introduction, Chapter 1, and Conclusion.
 - James Frazer, selections from *The Golden Bough* (1922) [o]
 - **Language, Gender, and Society | October 11**
 - Reading:
 - Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, Chapters 1 and 2.
 - Pierre Bourdieu, selections from *The Field of Cultural Production* [o] and “Genesis” [o]
 - Mary Daly, “The Death of God the Father.”
- **The Cultural Argument**
 - **Cultural Neurosis, Sex, and Psychoanalytical Approaches | October 18**
 - Reading:
 - *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) (entire).
 - Julia Kristeva, “Stabat Mater”
 - Stabat Mater, the poem.
 - **Language, Symbols, and Structures of Belief | October 25**
 - Reading:
 - C. Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” (1966), 87-125. [o]
 - V. Turner, “Liminality and Communitas,” (1969), 94-130. [o]
 - Talal Asad. “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category,” 27–54 [o]

No Class November 1

- **The Historical Argument**
 - **The End(s) of History | November 8**
 - Reading:
 - Hegel, from *The Philosophy of History*, (1837), 1-103.
 - In addition, choose one Part from Parts I-IV to read according to your area of interest (and expect to report to the group).
 - Bultmann, from *History and Eschatology* (1955), pgs 38-138.
 - **Religion and Capitalism | November 15**

- Reading:
 - Marx, “The Communist Manifesto,” entire (44 pages) [o]
 - Marx, “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” Introduction. [o]
 - “The German Ideology—Ideology in General” (1844–46) [o]
 - “Concerning Feuerbach” (1845) [o]
 - Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* 1904, entire.

No Class November 22—Thanksgiving Break

- **The Postmodern argument**
 - **The Death of God and the Birth of the Modern Self | November 29**
 - Reading:
 - F. Nietzsche, *Zarathustra’s Prologue*, entire. [o]
 - F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §§ 108, 125, 335, 343, 345, 350, 373. [o]
 - Nietzsche, “The Religious Nature.” [o]
 - Michel Foucault, “Hermeneutics and the Self” (1980). [o]
 - Pamela Sue Anderson, “Gender and the Infinite” (2001) [o]
- **Political Theology**
 - **History, Nation, and Belief | December 6**
 - Reading:
 - Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?” (1882) [o]
 - Robert Bellah, “Civil Religion in America” (1967) [o]
 - Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History” (1989) [o]
 - Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations” (1993) [o]
 - Slavoj Zizek, “The Clash of Civilizations at the End of History” (2007) [o]

Final Papers Due December 13