

# Theories for the Study of Religion

Relig 501 | Spring 2012 | Thursday 11:30am to 2:20pm | Thomson Hall 215

**Professor Christian Lee Novetzke**

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**OFFICE HOURS: Thursdays 3-4:30**

## 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! If you are not prepared to speak in class and express your ideas, and think about the material, this is not the right class for you. 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. In addition, I'll ask each student to choose at least one week to share with me the responsibility of introducing a topic and leading discussion. Participation will account 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. I encourage you to read one another's postings before class on Monday morning, and if interested, respond online to posts. This will account for a third of your grade. The board can be found at: <https://catalyst.uw.edu/gopost/board/novetzke/18528/>
- **A Final Critical Review Essay**—You will complete a final review essay in which you choose two to four books to critically review. Only one of these books may be published before 2010. Rather than a book review, a review essay aims to evaluate two or more books of significance in a field and use the content of those books to discuss the field as a whole. In the process, you will review and assess the content of the books, but the goal is a statement about the field, not a review of the books. This is due one week after the end of class. On the day the paper is due,

you should email an electronic copy in Word (PC) format to me and put a hard copy in my mailbox on campus. These two copies must be identical, and I cannot accept one without the other. Both must be delivered on time. I strongly suggest you choose your books by the seventh week of class. This project will account for the last third of your grade.

**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:**

- 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*
- Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*

**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**
    - Reading in class:
      - Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” (1784) [o]
      - J. Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious” [o]
- **The Social Argument**
  - **“Religion” and Modern Society**
    - 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]
  - **The Creation and Maintenance of Society**
    - Reading:
      - Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, Chapters 1 and 2.
      - Pierre Bourdieu, selections from *The Field of Cultural Production*
- **The Cultural Argument**
  - **Cultural Neurosis, Sex, and Psychoanalytical Approaches**
    - Reading:
      - *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) (entire).
  - **Language, Symbols, and Structures of Belief**
    - Reading:
      - C. Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” (1966), 87-125. [o]
      - V. Turner, “Liminality and Communitas,” (1969), 94-130. [o]
- **The Historical Argument**
  - **The End(s) of History**
    - Reading
      - Hegel, from *The Philosophy of History*, (1837), 1-103.
        - In addition, choose one Part from Parts I-IV to read according to your interest (and expect to report to the group).
      - Feuerbach, “The Essence of Religion in General,” from *The Essence of Christianity*, 1855. [o]
      - 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]
  - **Religion in History—the Spirit and the Terror**
    - Reading:
      - Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* 1904, entire.
      - Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Chapters 1 and 3.

- **The Postmodern argument**
  - **The Death of God and the Birth of the Modern Self**
    - Reading:
      - F. Nietzsche, *Zarathustra's Prologue*, entire. [o]
      - Friedrich 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**
    - Reading:
      - Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" (1882)
      - Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America" (1967)
      - Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History" (1989)
      - Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations" (1993)
      - Slavoj Žižek, "The Clash of Civilizations at the End of History" (2007)

*Final Papers Due*