

Theories of Religion

PHIL 3205, Fall 2017



Contact info and meeting times

Instructor Dr. Rosemary Kellison

Office TLC 2245

Office hours M 10–12 & 1–4, T 3:20–4,
R 1–1:45 & 3:20–4, and by appt.

*Note: During the weeks of 9/11 and 10/9,
office hours will be on W instead of M*

Email rkelliso@westga.edu

Phone 678.839.5514

Classroom Humanities 205

Meeting time T/R 2–3:15 pm

Course website

<https://westga.view.usg.edu>

What this course is about

What is religion? How is it practiced and why? To address these questions, we examine some of the most important developments in the Western academic study of religion from the nineteenth century to the present.

Among the topics we will study are: how religion should be defined and whether it is “special” compared to other aspects of human social life; the question of whether and how religion scholars can study people’s beliefs and experiences; how religion is used to create community identities—and draw boundaries around those communities; the relationship between religion and violence; and how our concept of religion relates to our concept of secular democracy.

What you will learn in this course

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

define and use basic vocabulary of the academic study of religion,
describe and critically analyze the arguments of several significant theorists of religion,
identify and critically analyze some of the most significant debates within the academic study of religion,
describe and critically analyze the role religion plays in the development and enforcement of social norms, and
describe ways in which differing concepts of religion both reflect and shape historical, social, and political developments.

These course-specific learning outcomes contribute to the learning outcomes of the Philosophy Program by enabling you to:
discuss the general historical development of the discipline of philosophy, including the views of at least three major historical figures of philosophy,
incorporate a philosophical position in oral and written communications,
critically outline and analyze philosophical issues, and
exhibit critical thinking skills.

COURSE MATERIALS

The following **books** are required. You can purchase them at the UWG Bookstore or from Amazon or other online sellers:

Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford, 2008, 978-0199540129)

Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (W. W. Norton, 1989, 978-0393008319)

William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Penguin, 1982, 978-0140390346)

Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago, 2006, 978-0226482033)

Other required readings, marked (CD) below, will be posted as **PDFs on CourseDen**.

ASSESSMENT

Participation (18%) To earn an excellent participation grade, you must:

- come to class on time each day.
- be attentive during class, which requires putting away your phones, tablets, and laptops (except to reference assigned readings), staying awake and engaged, and not speaking while others are.
- bring the assigned reading to class and be prepared to reference it.
- participate in class discussions in a way that demonstrates familiarity with and critical thinking about the assigned readings and shows respect for fellow classmates.

When you are not in class, you cannot participate, nor can you engage in the very important parts of learning that take place only in the classroom. Therefore, you are expected to attend class every day. Documentation of an illness, emergency, or other approved university-approved reason for absence must be provided in order for an absence to be excused. After two unexcused absences, a 1-point deduction will be taken from your final course grade for each additional unexcused absence. Additionally, because late arrivals and early departures also inhibit your ability to participate, along with disrupting other students' learning, late arrivals and early departures will also lead to deductions from your final course grade.

Your participation will be assessed according to a rubric (available on CourseDen) that measures your conduct and respect for others, use of the readings, quality of reasoning, and frequency of contributions. Participation will be graded three times throughout the semester (once every five weeks); each participation grade is worth 6% of your final course grade.

Essays (34%) Over the course of the semester, you will write four essays in which you construct your own argument in response to the course readings. Success on these essays will require familiarity with and critical reflection on the course readings and our class discussions. The first three essays are each worth 8% of your final course grade; the slightly longer final essay is worth 10% of your final course grade. A 25% deduction will be assessed immediately when an essay becomes late. An additional 25% deduction will be assessed for each consecutive day that the essay is late.

Daily Reading Journal (48%) While completing the assigned reading for each class day, you will complete a short journal entry. This journal is intended to help you become a more critical reader, to prepare you for informed participation in class discussion, and to help you develop ideas and notes for your essays. To earn full credit, each journal entry should be several sentences long and include two components: a description of one of the reading's significant arguments or contributions (with specific references to the reading) and a critical observation or question. Further details can be found on CourseDen.

Your highest 24 (out of 28 total) journal grades will count toward your final grade; each is worth 2% of your final grade. Journal entries are due every class day (beginning on Aug. 17) at 2 pm and will be submitted online through CourseDen. No late entries will be accepted.

Grading Scale: A: 90–100; B: 80–89; C: 70–79; D: 60–69; F: 0–59

COURSE POLICIES

UNIVERSITY POLICY ON ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Violation of the honor code will incur serious consequences. Ignorance is not an excuse for plagiarism. Thus, please review the academic honor policy at <http://www.westga.edu/undergrad/1762.htm> and consult with Dr. Kellison if you have any questions. If you commit a violation of the honor code, you will receive a minimum penalty of a 0 for the assignment and the offense will be reported to the Student Conduct Specialist in the Division of Student Affairs.

UNIVERSITY EMAIL POLICY

You are expected to check your MyUWG email account regularly, and must email professors only from that account.

UNIVERSITY CLOSURE POLICY

Should UWG cancel classes for any reason, our course will continue. You are responsible for checking CourseDen and your UWG email for information on how our course will proceed.

FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

If you have a documented disability, you are entitled to accommodations if you email Dr. Kellison your SAR immediately. Contact UWG Disability Services for more information.

FOR HONORS STUDENTS

If you wish to receive honors credit for this course, you must bring the appropriate paperwork to Dr. Kellison for approval immediately; Honors Contracts are due by the end of the second week of classes.

For more details on these and other UWG policies, visit
https://www.westga.edu/administration/vpaa/assets/docs/faculty-resources/common_language_for_course_syllabi_v2.pdf.

Course Schedule

INTRODUCTION

Th 8/10 Introduction to course and syllabus

Tu 8/15 Catherine Bell, "Paradigms Behind (and Before) the Modern Concept of Religion" (CD)

PSYCHOLOGY, EXPERIENCE, AND RELIGION AS SUI GENERIS

Th 8/17 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, II

Tu 8/22 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, IV & V

Th 8/24 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, VI, VII, & VIII (see CD notes for what to focus on)

Tu 8/29 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, XVIII & XX

Th 8/31 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pgs. 1–40 (CD)

Tu 9/5 Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, chapters I–V

Th 9/7 Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, chapters VI–X

Tu 9/12 Mircea Eliade, Introduction & chapter 1 from *The Sacred and the Profane* (read pgs. 8–13 & 20–47) (CD)

Th 9/14 Mircea Eliade, chapter 1 from *The Sacred and the Profane*, (read pgs. 62–65), and "A New Humanism" from *The Quest* (CD)

Tu 9/19 Diana Eck, "Prospects for Pluralism: Voice and Vision in the Study of Religion" (CD)

SOCIETY, BOUNDARIES, AND VIOLENCE

Th 9/21 Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (CD)

M 9/25 *Essay #1 due by 2 pm*

Tu 9/26 Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pgs. 3–24

Th 9/28 Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pgs. 25–46

Tu 10/3 Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pgs. 153–82

Th 10/5 *No class—Enjoy Fall Break!*

Tu 10/10 Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pgs. 310–44

- Th 10/12 Mary Douglas, "Secular Defilement" from *Purity and Danger* (CD)
- Tu 10/17 Mary Douglas, "The Abominations of Leviticus" from *Purity and Danger* (CD)
- Th 10/19 Mark Juergensmeyer, "Cosmic War" from *Terror in the Mind of God* (CD)
- M 10/23 *Essay #2 due by 2 pm*
- Tu 10/24 Mark Juergensmeyer, "Martyrs and Demons" from *Terror in the Mind of God* (CD)
- Th 10/26 Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Devil in Mr. Jones" (CD)
- Tu 10/31 Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11*, pgs. 1–18 & 97–102
- Th 11/2 Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11*, pgs. 19–50 & 103–11
- Tu 11/7 Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11*, pgs. 51–96

**DEFINING RELIGION
IN SECULAR
DEMOCRACY**

- Th 11/9 Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious" (CD)
- M 11/13 *Essay #3 due by 2 pm*
- Tu 11/14 Russell McCutcheon, "'Religion' and the Governable Self" (CD)
- Th 11/16 Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, "Free Religion" (CD)
- Tu 11/28 Saba Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?," pgs. 64–78
- Th 11/30 Saba Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?," pgs. 79–92
- M 12/4 *Final Essay due by 2 pm*