

REL 440 THEORIES OF RELIGION

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Dept. webpage: <http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/>
Course webpage under "Courses" on this page
See also eLearning page for this course

Description: How does religion "construct" identity, both collective and individual? This course will look at the ways in which Religious symbols and practices tie individuals into larger systems of power by creating "subject positions," i.e., pre-established sets of identities through which individuals become disciplined, self-regulating members, i.e., a being with a conscience filled with guilt and an overwhelming sense of duty. We will trace this process from the Puritans who made the modern world a remarkably disciplined society, as some scholars will argue, and *not* the "land of the free" it claims to be. We will examine such theoretical topics as the relation between religion, language, and consciousness, as well as the relation between the subject, the individual and trans-personal systems of power such as, science, the state, and religion.

Format: Lecture, discussion, and eLearning postings.

Studying religion in the University: The study of religion in the university is conducted along the same lines and for the same purposes as are all other forms of disciplined, methodical inquiry. The core premise of the academic study of religion is that religion, whatever else it may be, is a human activity, and is one element of the larger cultural creations of human beings. Within the context of the university, scholars of religion hold themselves to the same principles of reasoned argument from evidence as do all other scholars. We do not seek to teach people how to be religious, but to study religion as a human phenomenon which is commensurate with all other human phenomena. Our task is descriptive and analytical, not normative. We seek to explicate and understand a religious position, not interpret one religious position in terms of another. For more on the academic study of religion, see Religious Studies' webpage, listed above.

Course objectives: this course seeks:

- 1) to show students the link between 16th Century Puritans and contemporary religious America;
- 2) to tie together braids of theoretical discourse such as "genealogy," "subject positions," "identity," and related concepts into a meaningful, if provisional, unity;
- 3) to develop their ability to understand, formulate and critique written and verbal arguments;
- 4) to examine the relationship between religion, language, power, discipline and subjectivity from contemporary theoretical perspectives;
- 5) to introduce students to the perspective that modern society is a highly regulated, disciplined set of structures and identities, founded on "work," not "creativity" (Camus), of which these formal objectifications of the subjective act of "learning" are an example;

6) to equip students with the tools, concepts, and with strategies that will empower them to become proactive, constructive *shapers* of their world, including new forms of intellectual/discursive resistance to those structures encountered in this course.

Required Texts: In the Schedule of Lectures and Assignments below, readings are referred to by the author's last name as are PDF's (unless an author has more than one, then it goes by title listed in Schedule). One assignment will be an html document. Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*; Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics*; Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*; Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*; Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*; Murphy, *Representing Religion Essays in History, Theory and Crisis*.

Description of Assignments:

Midterm and Final Essays: For each half of the course students will write a 10-12 page essay around a theme of their own design. See "Dr. Tim's Guide to Expository Writing" PDF. More in class.

Attendance & Participation: you are expected to be in class every week, to be here on time, to have done the reading, and actively participate in class activities, discussion, etc. As part of your participation grade, you will be required to make at least one posting on our eLearning board per week. Postings must address issues in the course, and should be connected to other postings. My hope is that you all will develop an ongoing conversation that will carry over into class. You should also read each week's posting before class. Finally, as a weekly assignments students will be required to make up 3 questions connected in some important way to the material at hand which will facilitate class discussion. These can be handwritten and turned in during class each week. They can only count for credit if handed in the day of that reading. No exceptions.

Assignments and Grading: The point values of the assignments are as follows:

Essays	200 points
<u>Attendance & Participation</u>	<u>200 points</u>
Total	400 points

Final grade: Your final grade will be based on a straight percentage of the point total of 600 points. 90%+ = A; 80%+ = B; 70%+ = C; 60%+ = D; 59%- = F. I do give +/- grades. Also, the instructor reserves the right to use discretion, factoring in things such as attendance, class conduct, tardiness, effort, participation in discussion, etc., in calculating each student's final grade.

Late assignments: late assignments will be penalized one letter grade for each class they are late. Exceptions will be allowed only for *documentable* emergencies or illnesses. No exceptions.

Attendance Policy: You are expected to attend class; failure to do so *will* affect your grade as well being chronically late. In-class assignments cannot be made up. If you get sick or there is some kind of emergency, notify me and/or the appropriate University office—this is *your* responsibility. This does not mean you can never miss class. However, if you miss up to three *weeks* worth of class (i.e., 6 classes) for any reason whatsoever you must drop the course, otherwise it will result in automatic failure.

Disabilities: Students with documented physical, learning or other disabilities should contact Disability Services and notify the professor as soon as possible to provide copies of their documentation and to discuss the reasonable accommodations that can be made to meet their needs. Contact Disability Services as soon as possible. Office of Disability Services, 133B Martha Parham East, Box 870185, Phone: (205)348-4285, TTY: (205)348-3081, Fax: (205)348-0804.

Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct: Academic misconduct includes all forms of misrepresentation, such as copying of other's work, signing attendance sheets or quizzes for other students, copying work off the internet without attribution, etc. If a student is caught committing plagiarism, whether from the work of a classmate, published author, or internet site, they will receive a grade of zero for that assignment and may be subject to punishment from the Dean's Office, including failing the course and even expulsion from the university.

Norms of class conduct: It is important to maintain the integrity (*not to be confused with stuffiness*) of the learning environment. To maintain that integrity, we all must learn to subordinate individual impulse to collective endeavor. In that spirit, and, as it is generally better to say something that does not need to be said than not to say something that needs to be said:

- >Do not have running conversations during class.
- >Be on time (I will if you will!).
- >If you need to read the newspaper or do your homework, do so elsewhere.
- >~~Do not eat or drink beverages in class.~~
- >Disagree in a civil and respectful manner with your fellow students and the professor.
- >No "dogmatizing" or "witnessing," i.e., trying to persuade others that your perspective is *the* only right one is not the same thing as discussing the material at hand. Criticizing the material is fine, but you must first show that you understand it!
- >No chewing tobacco in class.
- >Turn off all cell phones, pagers, and/or beepers.

Serious and/or continued infractions of these norms *will* affect one's grade negatively and possibly result in disciplinary actions. If everyone is "good" about these regulations and attendance, I will lighten the work load (some!)—and the reverse.

Schedule of Lectures, Readings, and Assignments

8/20 First Day. Syllabus, overview, background lecture. Read Walzer chapter 1.
Recommended Murphy, chapter 1.

Part I The End of the Middle Ages and the Emergence of the Modern Social Order

8/29 The Puritan's destruction of the "old order." Read Walzer chapters 2 & 5.

9/3 The Puritan's creation of a new order of discipline. Read Walzer chapters 6, 8 (skim) & Conclusion.

Part II Theorizing Religion: Language, and the Creation of the Self by Cosmic Powers

9/10 Creating the “sacred *nomos*” out of ‘man.’”Read Berger, chapters 1 & 2. Recommended: Barry, chapters 2 & 3.

9/17 World Maintenance. Read Berger, chapters 3 & 4.

9/24 Religious legitimation and suffering. Read Berger, chapters, 5, 6 &7.

10/1 Power, Language, and Pain: Nietzsche’s genealogies of the modern, religious self. Read Nietzsche, 1st Essay

10/8 Breeding an animal that can make promises. Read Nietzsche, 2nd Essay

10/15 The meaning of the Ascetic Ideal. Read Nietzsche, 3rd Essay

Part III: The (Post)Structural (Dis)Placements: Refiguring the Premises of the Study of Religion

10/22 Read Murphy chapter 6 and Barry, 3 & 4.

10/29 Read Foucault chapters 1 & 2.

11/5 Read Foucault, pp.77-102.

11/12 Read Foucault, pp.77-102. Skim rest of the book.

11/19 Read Murphy chapter 8 and “What is a Semiotic Theory of Religion?” PDF.

11/26 Read Thanksgiving Break no class

12/3 Last day. Read Murphy, chapter 7.

Deadline: papers due via email only: 12/8, by 5:00pm CST. This is a hard deadline. Late papers will not be accepted—no exceptions (see policy above).

Finals week: 12/8-12 (M-F)

Grades due to Registrar: Tuesday, 12/16.