

**REL 480 • FALL 2003**  
**HISTORY OF THE STUDY OF RELIGION**  
**"RELIGION" AND THE PROBLEM OF THE AUTHENTIC SELF**

Dr. Russell McCutcheon  
russell.mccutcheon@ua.edu  
Manly 211 Ph: 348-8512

Wednesday 2:00-4:40  
Student Services 101F  
www.as.ua.edu/rel/

Office Hours: Tuesday 2:00-3:00 or by appointment

### **Description**

This senior-level seminar examines the role played by the categories of experience and authenticity in the history of the study of religion. Beginning with the influential work of the eighteenth-century German Romantic, Friedrich Schleiermacher, the course charts, in broad outline and in roughly chronological order, the development of a humanistic discourse on religion that presumes the object of study to be personalistic, interior and subjective, yet universally present. This study of religion is therefore premised on three key assumptions: 1. the object of study is intersubjectively unavailable for empirical analysis; 2. The object of study is a fundamental feature of universal Human Nature; and 3. Scholarship on this transhuman experience has a therapeutic value for the scholar and society at large. After surveying some notable members of the humanistic tradition up to the present, the course changes focus and offers several examples of scholarship that contextualizes and historicizes the claims to experiential authenticity and socio-political autonomy characteristic of the humanistic tradition. Those examples are: Marxist, postmodern, feminist, and cognitivist.

### **Goals**

1. To familiarize students with some of the writers and themes that have significantly shaped the modern study of religion.
2. To introduce upper-level students to some provocative, modern scholarship from other disciplines that has had an impact on how it is that we approach the study of religion.
3. To ensure that all students are capable of leading and participating in in-depth class discussions.

### **Books**

Most of the readings listed below are available on reserve, either as books in Gorgas Library (2<sup>nd</sup> floor), or on the web (see "Course Reserves" for "REL 480" at <http://www.lib.ua.edu/>). You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader to open and print these electronic reserve files (it is installed on all campus computers). Or, you can go to [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com) to obtain a free copy of the software to read and print these PDF files on your home computer.

Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*. London: Verso, 2002.

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London and NY: Routledge Press, 1999 [1990].

Anthony Elliott, *Concepts of the Self*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2001.

Michel Foucault, *A History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Vol. 1. NY: Vintage, 1990 [1978]. (FYI: Volumes 2 and 3 are on reserve.)

Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*. London: Verso, 2002.

These books should all be available at such sites as amazon.com as well as the UA Supply Store.

## Requirements

This is a seminar/discussion class. As such, there is no final exam or research paper.

The course grade is comprised of two components: presentation and participation. Each student will take turns being responsible for acting as the authority on each day's readings and all other students will show evidence of their preparation by means of their active participation in the discussion. Regular attendance is therefore necessary.

Students leading the seminar will be responsible for: providing sufficient historical background on the work and its author so as to understand the work in its historical context; summarizing the key features of that day's reading(s), applying the work to data with which they are familiar, integrating the readings with material already covered in the course, and offering an analysis or critique of the material. Each class presentation therefore must have at least three components: background, description, and analysis, followed by open discussion. Presentations must also include a handout prepared by the presenter (a minimum of one page, double-sided). Handouts must summarize the seminar and must contain original material (**not** simply be material copied from the web or a book). Ideally, presenters will be able to consult these handouts in the future.

Periodically, I will provide students with a written assessment of their performance in the class (as presenter and as discussion participant), so that you have some feedback throughout the course.

## Films

Although we will not be viewing these films during class time, I would like to ensure that everyone in the class has seen several recent films, so that we can collectively draw on these as examples throughout the course. The movies I would like to ensure that you have seen are:

*eXistenZ* (1999)  
*Groundhog Day* (1993)  
*The Matrix* (1999)  
*The Matrix Reloaded* (2003)  
*Memento* (2000)

## Tentative Schedule

### Aug 20

Introduction: Authenticity, Experience, and the Uniform Self in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blowup* (1966).

### Aug 27 Human Nature: Public and Private, Us and Them

Edward Rothstein, "Attacks on the U.S. Challenge the Perspective of Postmodern True Believers," New York Times Sept. 22, 2001: A17.

Roger Rosenblatt, "The Age of Irony Comes to an End," Time Sept. 24, 2001: 79.

Stanley Fish, "Postmodern Warfare: The Ignorance of our Warrior Intellectuals," Harpers July 2002: 33-40.

Karen Armstrong, "The True, Peaceful Face of Islam," Time Oct. 1, 2001: 48.

Edward Said, "Impossible Histories: Why the Many Islams cannot be Simplified," Harpers July 2002: 69-74.

### Sept 3 The Rhetoric and Evidence of Experience

Antony Elliott, Concepts of the Self, 1-45.

Raymond Williams, "Experience," in Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983 [1976].

Robert Desjarlais, Shelter Blues: Sanity and Selfhood Among the Homeless. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, pp. 1-24.

Robert Sharf, "Experience," in Mark C. Taylor (ed.), Critical Terms in Religious Studies, 94-115. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Joan Wallach Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," Critical Inquiry 17 (1991): 773-797.

### **Sept 10 Religious Experience in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

Friedrich Schleiermacher, On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers, Speech 2, "The Nature of Religion."

William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature, Lectures 1, "Religion and Neurology," 2, "Circumscription of the Topic," and 20, "Conclusions."

### **Sept 17 Religious Experience and Devout Humanism**

Charles Taylor, Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.

### **Sept 24 The Numinous and How to Study "It"**

Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy. Translated by J. W. Harvey. London: Oxford University Press, 1917, Chapters 1-3.

Gerardus van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986 [1938], Chapter 107, "Phenomenon and Phenomenology," and Chapter 108, "Religion."

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The Comparative Study of Religion: Whither--and Why?" in The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology, 31-58. Mircea Eliade and Joseph Kitagawa, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959.

Mircea Eliade, "A New Humanism," in The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.

### **Oct 1 Self-Reflexivity and Mutual Understanding**

Wendy Doniger, "The Uses and Misuses of Other People's Myths," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 54 (1986): 219-239.

James Martin, "Religious Experience," in M. Eliade (ed.), Encyclopedia of Religion, vol 12, 323-330. New York: Macmillan Press.

Eck, Diana (2001). Encountering God: A Spiritual Journal from Bozeman to Banaras. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993, chapters 1 and 8.

Carol Zaleski, "A Letter to William James," The Christian Century 119/2 (January 16-23, 2002): 32.

### **Oct 8 Experience as a Protective Strategy**

Wayne Proudfoot, Religious Experience. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

### **Oct 15 Religious Experience and Psychic Masterbation**

E. P. Thompson, "The Transforming Power of the Cross," Chpt 11 in The Making of the English Working Class. London: Penguin Books, 1991 [1963]

Anthony Elliott, Concepts of the Self, chapter 2

### **Oct 22 The Manufacture of Subjectivity**

Michel Foucault, A History of Sexuality: An Introduction. Vol. 1. NY: Vintage, 1990 [1978].

Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault, 113-138. Donald F. Bouchard (ed.). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977.

Anthony Elliott, Concepts of the Self, chapter 3

### **Oct 29 Gender and Identity**

Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. London and NY: Routledge Press, 1990.

Anthony Elliott, Concepts of the Self, chapter 4

**Nov 5 Cognitive Sciences and Belief in the Gods**

Benson Saler, "On What we May Believe about Beliefs," in Jensine Andresen (ed.), Religion in Mind: Cognitive Perspectives on Religious Belief, Ritual, and Experience. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Ilkka Pyysiäinen, "Cognition, Emotion, and Religious Experience," in Jensine Andresen (ed.), Religion in Mind: Cognitive Perspectives on Religious Belief, Ritual, and Experience. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Stewart Guthrie, "Why Gods? A Cognitive Theory," in Jensine Andresen (ed.), Religion in Mind: Cognitive Perspectives on Religious Belief, Ritual, and Experience. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

**Nov 12 Liberal Humanism and the Politics of Subjectivity**

Tim Murphy, "Eliade, Subjectivity, and Hermeneutics," in B. Rennie (ed.), Changing Religious Worlds: The Meaning and End of Mircea Eliade, 35-47. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.

**Nov 19 Modern Geo-Politics, Postmodernism, and the Rhetoric of the Real**

Jean Baudrillard, The Spirit of Terrorism. London: Verso, 2002.

Slavoj Žižek, Welcome to the Desert of the Real. London: Verso, 2002.

Anthony Elliott, Concepts of the Self, chapter 5

**Nov 26 The Semiotics of Religion**

Guest Lecturer: Professor Jeppe Sinding Jensen, Aarhus University, Denmark (other REL faculty and majors will be invited to join our class on this day)

**Dec 3 The Category 'Religion' and the Governable Self**

Russell McCutcheon, "'Religion' and the Governable Self," in The Discipline of Religion: Structure, Meaning, and Rhetoric. London and NY: Routledge, 2003.



**All items  
carbon-dated for  
authenticity.**