*Matthew H. Brittingham*

[*m.h.brittingham@emory.edu*](mailto:m.h.brittingham@emory.edu)

**REL 270:**

**Introduction to Theories and Methods in Religious Studies:**



**Course Description:**

“Religion” is everywhere, songs, memes, television, billboards. But, what is it: An experience? A social phenomenon? A byproduct of human brain development?

How has “religion” been defined, and by whom? How has use of “religion” changed over time? We will explore these questions in this course, a course that introduces students to the classic theorists of religion (Otto, Freud, Durkheim, Eliade, etc.) and the various methods they used to address religion: psychological, sociological, anthropological, phenomenological, etc.

We will also consider the implications of various definitions of “religion” as they have been applied to subfields or subthemes within the study of religious, such as gender, civil religion, popular culture, embodiment, etc.

In this course, we will read the classical theorists and how they have been critiqued. Through this combination of the new and old, we will struggle with “religion” and its genealogy, just as other scholars have. We will take it slow while working on other issues related to the profession of religious studies. Trust me, we will have fun!

**Some Course Objectives:**

* + Be able to summarize and critique “classical” approaches to the study of religion and “classical” definitions of religion.
  + Be able to discuss and workshop with peers, noting the difficulties facing subfields, methods, and theories.
  + Be able to analyze complicated arguments and summarize their components.
  + Be able to understand the academic process of theorizing, research, writing, editing, presenting, critiquing, etc.

**Course Requirements:**

**Attendance and Participation: 15%**

Students are required to attend class regularly and participate in class discussion. Students are allowed one undocumented absence before absences start counting against attendance and participation grade. Participation includes being prepared each day for class by having read the material for that day. Documented absences, approved by the university, are always accepted.

**Argument Analysis Assignments: 25%**

Students will be required to write argument summaries of the “classical” primary sources we will be reading. The papers must be 1.5 pages double-spaced and you need only select one text from the week’s readings. Each argument analysis must analyze the author’s definition of religion and how that theorist argues for the particular definition or approach. I will circulate an example paper after the first week of the course.

**Two Papers: 60%**

Midterm paper (3 pgs): 15%

Argument analysis: This paper is designed to introduce students to writing longer book reviews. Student is required to review a book outside our course list. Texts must be selected in consultation with the professor by the 5th week of class. Professor can also be consulted to aid analysis.

Final paper (8 pgs): 45%—This grade includes drafts and paper presentations (to be discussed later)

By week 8 students should be developing a topic for the final paper. The professor must confirm the topic in question by week 11. Final paper topic is up to the student’s discretion but should come out of class literature or discussions. Professor is open to helping students develop ideas for the final paper. As you read, consider topics or arguments you are interested in pursuing further.

**Required Books:**

* Daniel Pals, *Nine Theories of Religion*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
* Daniel Pals, *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
* *Critical Terms for Religious Studies,* Mark C. Taylor, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998)
* Scott Brown, *A Guide to Writing Academic Essays in Religious Studies* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008)*.*

***Any articles or books other than these will be posted on e-reserve or available online.***

**General Policies:**

***Students with disabilities*:** If you have any disability and need my help in making this course fully accessible to you, please feel free to contact me, either in person or through the Academic Resources Center (555-5555). I’ll be happy to help in whatever way I can. If you recognize that you are having trouble with your writing, talk to me or contact the Emory Writing Center at [writingcenter@emory.edu](mailto:writingcenter@emory.edu) or call (555-5555).

***Academic dishonesty*:** Any form of cheating, including copying others’ assignments and plagiarism, will not be tolerated and any academic dishonesty will be reported to the university’s student affairs office. If you have questions regarding how to properly cite, talk to me and I can direct you to some resources.

**Class Conduct:** This class is an educational safe zone. It welcomes and respects the viewpoints of students of all sexual orientations, genders, races, ethnicities, religions, and abilities. All members of this learning community are expected to treat each other with respect and dignity, and to listen especially carefully to the voices of culturally and socially disempowered groups.

**Course Schedule:**

*Week 1: Introduction and Magic/Supernatural Beings:*

January 13—Introduction, Thinking about “Religion.” Before Class: JZ Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies,* 269-284.

January 15—E.B. Tylor, “Animism and the Origin of Religion,” & James Frazer, “Magic and the Rise of Religion,” in Pals *Introducing Religion*. & Pals, “Animism and Magic,” in *Nine Theories*.

*Week 2: Religion and Psychology:*

January 20—SigmundFreud, “Religion as Neurosis,” in Pals, *Introducing Religion*. & Pals, “Religion and Personality,” *Nine Theories.*

January 22—William James, “The Testimony of Religious Experience,” in Pals, *Introducing Religion*. Pals, “The Verdict of Religious Experience,” *Nine Theories.*

**Argument Analysis Assignments #1 due**

Recommended: Robert Sharf, “Experience,” in *Critical Terms*, 94-116.

*Week 3: Religion and Society:*

January 27—Émile Durkheim, “The Social as Sacred,” in Pals, *Introducing Religion*.

& Pals, “Society as Sacred,” *Nine Theories*.

January 29—Continue Durkheim.

**Argument Analysis Assignments #2 due**

*Week 4: More on Society and Religion:*

February 3—Max Weber, “A Source of Social Action,” in Pals, *Introducing Religion*. Weber in *Nine Theories*.

February 5—Continue Weber.

**Argument Analysis Assignments #3 due**

*Week 5: Society, Religion, and Opium?:*

February 10—“Religion as Alienation,” *Karl Marx*, Marx in Pals, *Introducing Religion*.

February 12—Continue Marx.

**Argument Analysis Assignments #4 due**

Suggested: Karl Marx, “Introduction,” *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (1844), a versionfound here: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>

*Week 6: The Numinous and The Sacred:*

February 17—Rudolf Otto, “Religion and the Sense of the ‘Numinous’,” in Pals, *Introducing Religion*.

February 19—Pals, “The Reality of the Sacred,” *Nine Theories*. & Mircea Eliade, “Religion as Response to the Sacred,” in Pals, *Introducing Religion*.

**Argument Analysis Assignments #5 due**

**Midterm paper decided, plus 250-500 words abstract of midterm paper.**

*Week 7: Religion and Culture:*

February 24—Pals, “Religion as Cultural System,” *Nine Theories*. & Clifford Geertz, “Religion as World-view and Ethic,” in Pals, *Introducing Religion*.

February 26— Tomoko Masuzawa, “Culture” (70-93) in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*.

**Argument Analysis Assignments #6 due**

*Week 8: Review the Nine Theories:*

March 3—Class questions and responses

March 5—Class discussion and debate

**Spring Break:**

***Monday of Spring Break, midterm paper emailed to me.***

**Final paper decided, plus 500-word abstract. EMAILED TO ME FRIDAY OF SPRING BREAK.**

*Week 9: Religion and Orientalism:*

March 17—Edward Said, “Introduction” (1-30); “Chapter 1” (31-92), *Orientalism* (Vintage Books Edition, 1979). Other reading TBD.

March 19—Continue *Orientalism* selections.

**Work on final paper.**

*Week 10: More on Orientalism:*

March 24—**Blackboard: Richard King, “Orientalism and the Study of Religion,” (275-290) in *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*. & David N. Lorenzen, “Who Invented Hinduism?,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 41, Issue 4 (Oct., 1999): 630-659.**

March 26—**Blackboard: Richard King, “Orientalism and the Modern Myth of ‘Hinduism’,” *Numen*, Vol. 49 (1999): 146-185. & Continue Lorenzen.**

**Work on final paper. Briefly discuss topics and approaches.**

*Week 11: Taking Culture and Encounter Further:*

March 31—**Blackboard: David L. McMahan, “Introduction,” (3-26) and “The Spectrum of Tradition and Modernism” (27-60) in *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).**

April 2—**Blackboard: McMahan, “The Spectrum of Tradition and Modernism” (27-60).**

**Work on final paper.**

*Week 12: What’s Religion and What’s Not?: On Popular Culture as Religion:*

April 7—**Blackboard: Robert Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus*, Vol.96, No.1 (Winter, 1967): 1-21.**

April 9—**Blackboard: Michael Jindra, “Star Trek Fandom as a Religious Phenomenon,” *Sociology of Religion*, Vol.55, No.1 (1994): 27-51.**

**Draft 1 of final paper due. Will be returned with comments and edits shortly.**

*Weeks 13: What’s Religion and What’s Not?: Popular Culture, Part #2*

April 14—**Blackboard: Gary Laderman, selections from *Sacred* *Matters.***

April 16—**10-15 minute paper presentations on paper topics.**

*Week 14: Odds and Ends:*

April 21—**15-20 minute presentations continued.**

April 23**—Final papers: Draft #2.**

*Week 15: Exam week:*

April 28—final paper workshop

**Final draft of final paper: DUE BY EMAIL MAY 3RD**