

HH 262
History of Religions

Spring 2008



This course is designed as an introduction to the modern, academic, secular study of religion through the examination and comparison of concepts and themes central to human cultures. Students will focus primarily on examples from the biblical book of Leviticus in the context of the ancient Near East (including ancient Israel and Iran), but will include comparisons with examples from contemporary non-literate cultures, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, China and Japan, Southeast Asia, the Americas, Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. Students are challenged to think in broad comparative terms, bringing together both details and generic categories.

This is an introductory course, and students are not expected to have prior knowledge or experience with the academic study of religion. Students are encouraged to approach the materials in this course with an open but critical academic perspective. The history of religions, within the context of the Humanities and Social Sciences, puts particular emphasis on an analytical understanding of culture as a human and particularly social construct. In its attempts to compare diverse cultural products and generalize about the human condition, the history of religions is more appropriately described in relation to anthropology rather than theology.

Books

Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Oxford World's Classics, 0192832559).

Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Taylor, Routledge Classics, 0415289955).

Max Weber, *Sociology of Religion* (Beacon Press, 0807042052).

Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (W.W. Norton, 0393001431).

Assignments and Grades

Grades do not represent simply the total points received on assignments during the course of the semester. The instructor reserves discretion in exercising his professional evaluation concerning how well a student performed, how much a student learned in the course, and other factors. These other factors include the instructor taking into account trends in student learning, assessment of student effort, and an overall judgment regarding how well a student has mastered the course materials and objectives.

All assignments must be completed, turned in, and judged to be of at least adequate quality for a student to pass this course, regardless of the total number of points earned by that student with other assignments. No late assignments or make-up tests are accepted without prior approval of instructor. All outside of class assignments are to be typed (laser-printed), double-spaced, stapled (when appropriate), and are to include the full name on each page of the assignment. Assignments are to be completed and ready to turn in at the beginning of class on the date they are due.

Expectations and Objectives

Students are expected to approach this course with intellectual curiosity, mental discipline, and a mind open to exploring creative possibilities across a wide spectrum of beliefs, practices, and philosophical and ethical principles. Essential to this expectation is students' responsibility to exercise careful attention to discrete details and the thoughtful combination of these details into synthetic concepts with generic significance.

The primary goal of this course is to equip students with certain attitudes and skills integral to a liberal arts curriculum, and to provide opportunities for students to enhance and implement these attitudes and skills. These skills include the ability to read effectively, think comparatively, and construct a reasoned argument. The course also imparts to students basic information about how the modern academic study of religion defines beliefs and practices from influential texts, artifacts, and ethnographic observation within the larger global framework of human society and culture.

This course is designed to compliment other courses in the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Leadership, Ethics, and Law division, including Political Science, Leadership and Ethics, English, Language and Culture, and Economics. Students are expected to be cognizant of connections among these courses, and to work through the implications of such connections as they apply to the overall curriculum of their four-year course of study.

Grades

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| Participation | 30% |
| Assignments (4) | 40% |
| Paper | 30% |

Class Participation: Students are expected to attend all class sessions having prepared carefully, in advance, all reading and other work assigned to date. Effective participation is informed, active, and respects the overarching goals of the course and the standards of the institution. Evaluation of class participation may also include quizzes, extra-credit assignments, and other short assignments.

Response Papers: Students are required to complete a limited number of short papers assigned over the course of the semester. These short papers are designed to help students stimulate, organize and express their analysis of the main secondary sources that are to be discussed in designated class sessions. Papers are to be concise, well-organized, and written in a clear, analytical style. Papers are not to exceed 1000 words (use computer program to count words). Further specific instructions may be made available in class by the instructor.

Paper and Presentation. Each student is to research and write a paper on a limited set of verses or issue from the primary reading (Leviticus) as assigned by the instructor. Students are to make in-class presentations of their papers, and may do so in groups as approved by instructor, on assigned dates. Presentations will be graded primarily on creativity and effort. Papers are to (a) interpret a selected portion of Leviticus in the historical context of the ancient and late antique world, and (b) use this text to explain the generic significance of Leviticus to the history of religions. In-class presentations are to provide a concise and theoretically provocative synopsis of the written paper. All students should consult with the instructor regarding the paper and presentation early in the course.



Notes

Portions of this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. Students are responsible for the contents of this syllabus, and enrollment in this course constitutes acceptance of the conditions of this syllabus. Each student must submit his or her own work for evaluation, and all students are accountable for knowing and abiding by the statement regarding plagiarism in this syllabus and the Naval Academy's statement on plagiarism (<http://intranet.usna.edu/Senate/plagiarism2004v2.doc>).



Introduction

Tuesday 8 January: General Introduction.

Thursday 10 January

Reading: J.Z. Smith, "Fences and Neighbors: Some Contours of Early Judaism," in his *Imagining Religion* (Chicago, 1982), 1-18.

KJH Memorial Lecture: Eboo Patel

Tuesday 15 January. No Class.

Assignment 1: Emile Durkheim, "Preliminary Questions," in his *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 25-86.

Thursday 17 January. No Class.

Reading: Leviticus.

Tuesday 22 January

Reading: Numbers 5:11-31, Deuteronomy 21.

Secondary: Mary Douglas, "Magic and Miracle," in her *Purity and Danger*, 59-73.

Due: Topic for paper.

Exegesis and History

Thursday 24 January

Reading: Leviticus 19, Deuteronomy 20.

Exegesis: Tertullian; Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer; Leviticus Rabbah 24, 27; Q on Moses and Israelites.

Tuesday 29 January

Reading: Judges 17-18, 1 Samuel 1-3, Genesis 13-22

Thursday 31 January

Reading: Reports on Beersheba, Shechem, Arad, Lachish, Gilgal.

Pure and Impure

Tuesday 5 February

Reading: Leviticus 11

Secondary: Deuteronomy 14, Leviticus Rabbah 13; Mishnah, Tohorot 1:1-1:3; Kelim 1:1-1:9.

Thursday 7 February

Reading: Mary Douglas, "The Abominations of Leviticus," in her *Purity and Danger*, 42-58.

Tuesday 12 February

Reading: Sefer ha-Zohar (Noah 29); Babylonian Talmud 56a-56b; Q on Moses and Israelites; Acts 11:1-10.

Thursday 14 February

Reading: Leviticus 12-15

Secondary: *Mukhtasar* of Quduri on Taharah.

Due: Assignment 2

Tuesday 19 February: No class. Monday class schedule.

Grades due Wednesday 20 February.

Sacred and Profane

Thursday 21 February

Reading: Durkheim, "The Negative Cult and its Function," in his *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 221-243.

Secondary: Spencer and Gillen, "The Churinga or Bull Roarers of the Arunta and Other Tribes," 128-166.

Tuesday 26 February

Reading: Leviticus 1-7

Thursday 28 February

Reading: Durkheim, "The Positive Cult: The Elements of Sacrifice," 248-260.

Tuesday 4 March

Reading: J.Z. Smith, "The Domestication of Sacrifice," in *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, Rene Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, ed. G. Hamerton-Kelly (Stanford, 1987) 191-205, Discussion, 206-235.

Thursday 6 March

Reading: Leviticus 16

Due: Assignment 3

8-15 March: Spring Break.

Totem and Taboo

Tuesday 18 March

Reading: Leviticus 17

Secondary: Deuteronomy 12; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*; Elephantine documents.

Thursday 20 March

Reading: Leviticus 18

Secondary: Exodus 22, Ezekiel 20:18-26.

Tuesday 25 March

Reading: Freud, "The Horror of Incest" and "Taboo and Emotional Ambivalence," in his *Totem and Taboo*, 1-74.

Thursday 27 March

Reading: Leviticus 20

Tuesday 1 April

Reading: Freud, "Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thoughts," 75-99.

Thursday 3 April

Reading: Freud, "The Return of Totemism in Childhood," 100-161.

Due: Assignment 4.

Hierarchy

Tuesday 8 April. Grades due.

Reading: Leviticus 21-22

Thursday 10 April

Reading: Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, 32-117.

Tuesday 15 April

Reading: Leviticus 8-10

Secondary: Exodus 28; Clement of Alexandria.

Thursday 17 April

Reading: Weber, 138-222.

Secondary: Laws of Manu

Tuesday 22 April

Reading: Leviticus 23-25

Secondary: Babylonian New Year's Festival.

Thursday 24 April: General Conclusions.

Due: Final Paper

Friday 9 May. Grades due.

Friday 23 May. Graduation.