

Modern Analysis of Religion
REL 6013
Thursdays 5-7:40pm, DM 144
Fall 2017¹

“The way we make meaning, then, matters the world around us. In other words, it shapes our own bodies and other earth bodies around us, it co-creates with others the eco-social worlds in which we live. Just as the substance-based metaphysic and meaning-making practice found in Western style metaphysics and its corresponding mechanistic model of science help[ed] to create the nature-cultures of the industrial revolution and all that entails, so now non-substance-based metaphysic and its corresponding interrelated and living models of science found in non-equilibrium thermodynamics, chaos and complexity, and other postmodern sciences are beginning to create new nature-cultures. Thus our meaning-making practices don't so much reflect metaphysics and ontologies as they do serve as regimes of truth in the Foucauldian sense.” (Bauman, *Religion and Ecology: Developing a Planetary Ethic*, 108)

Room: DM 144

Instructor: Whitney Bauman

Office: DM 301A

Office Hours: By appointment

Phone: 305-348-3348

Email: wbauman@fiu.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Religion, if nothing else, is about the critical process of re-reading and re-connecting human beings into some sort of meaningful narrative about reality. In this sense, religion is part of what it means to be human: regardless as to whether one is atheist, agnostic, or a believer that identifies with some sort of faith tradition, we all, as human beings, make meaning out of our daily lives. As such, “religion” is not confined to the narrow definition of “world religions.” Furthermore, religion has historically shaped societal institutions such as economics and politics and therefore, the study of these religious influences is important. Finally, religions matter bodies in the world: they shape what become societal norms for eating, dressing, sexuality, gender, race, and relationships to the rest of the natural world. This course is a **seminar-style (not a lecture-based)** course aimed at introducing MA students to various issues and methods associated with the contemporary study of religion. As you will note, “religious studies” is a “field” and not a “discipline,” which means that it uses a variety of disciplines to study the central subject: in this case, religion. We will explore methods in religious studies from the 19th century (when the academic study of religion began in earnest) to the present and ask questions such as: What is religion and why does it matter? How does religion function in our daily lives to affect institutions, identity, and the rest of the natural

¹ Syllabus is subject to change. Required purchased text, course requirements, and course time will not change, but some of the reading materials may depending on the context of the Fall 2012 semester.

world? How do the contexts of globalization and the plurality of religious expressions change the identity of religious traditions? What new expressions of religion are emerging in the context of what contemporary sciences tell us about the human being and the rest of the natural world around us? And, how does the study of religion rely on interdisciplinary analyses of the phenomena we call “religious”?

Though time does not allow us to take on a full, historical approach of the study of “religion” since the early 19th century, we will question the ways in which “religion” is defined and by whom. Furthermore, we will explore the various differences in how religions are / are not separated off from a “secular” space. Why is religion generally not taught in public schools in the United States? Why is “theology” not a part of the public university in the US as it is in say, Germany or Indonesia (and many other places)? Are there other models of secularism than that which totally separates religion out from politics, economics, and legal institutions? Even in its so-called absence, religion shapes our daily lives in the west, and the aim of this course is to provide you with some tools to think more critically about “how.”

AIM OF THE COURSE

This course will provide students with the theoretical tools and methods for analyzing the function of religion in contemporary societies, and will provide critical thinking skills for dealing with religious plurality in a given context.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

On completing this course, students will know relevant “methods and theories” used in the academic study of religion, and be familiar with some of the major issues in the field. Furthermore, each student will be given the tools to critically analyze the ways in which religions (and meaning-making practices in general) affect institutions, bodies, daily life, and human relationships with the rest of the natural world.

REQUIREMENTS

1. Class Participation—30%

The first step to doing well in this class is to show up! You can’t be a part of the learning community if you are not present. If you have to be absent from the course, please notify me ahead of time. Any more than two absences (unless there are extenuating circumstances) will result in a lowering of your participation grade. One absence is a free-bee. The second you must justify to me. **(Just attending all sessions gets you 10 points.)**

The second step to doing well in this course is to read the materials. I trust that you will read the materials for each week’s class. Further, each of you will submit a leading question for our weekly discussions; these questions will become the basis for our discussion. I will put “reading charts” online, which can be used for you as a guide in developing your weekly questions. **(This will count for 10 points)**

The third step to doing well in the class is to speak up during course discussions. I realize that we all exist on a spectrum between introversion and extroversion, but remember that the classroom is as good as all of the voices therein. We all lose if we don’t hear your voice at some point(s) throughout the semester. **(This will count for 10 points)**

The classroom is a community of learners. That is, we are all in the process of critically engaging the lectures and course materials together. Learning should be a collaborative process and it will take all of us to learn this semester. Having said that, there are some ground rules that should be followed in course discussions and assignments.

1. Confidentiality: Sometimes we are exploring serious issues in the course that may be hard to speak about or give voice too. I expect that students will respect one another's privacy in this course and allow room for this type of exploration.
2. Trust and Respect: The classroom is a learning community and it is only as good as the relationships of the people that make up the classroom. Give your classmates the benefit of the doubt before jumping to conclusions about what is said. Also, be sure to state your opinions, questions, ideas and beliefs in a way that is not intentionally disrespectful to others in the class. While freedom of expression, and challenging assumptions is encouraged in this classroom, hate speech will not be tolerated.
3. Academic Honesty. In all written materials, students will be expected to cite sources. Plagiarizing and "Copying" from other students may result in a failing grade. Grading for written assignments will follow the Rubric that is handed out on the first day.
4. Students should be aware of everyone in the classroom and enable each person to contribute to the conversation. Likewise, each participant should refrain from dominating class discussion.

2. Investigation of an Academic Journal: Research Methods—30%

Each student is expected to research a peer-reviewed, academic journal in the field of Religious Studies. There are plenty in the FIU library. Please ok your journal with me by class on **September 14th**. The point of the project is to look over the publication history of the journal and answer the following three (interrelated) questions in no more than 2500 words (double-spaced, 12pt font, 1-inch margins). 1) Give a history of the journal: where is it published, what academic approaches are represented in the journal, who are the primary (if any) theoretical figures that loom in it, what voices within the study of religion does it "leave out," and what unique questions does it explore. 2) Given the Editorial Mission of the journal, what are two major issues or debates that the journal has focused on in the last 10 years? (pick two and explore the arguments/discussions). 3) How does the journal problematize the issue of "religion": is it theoretical/theological/philosophical, practical/ethical, economic, sociological, historical, anthropological, etc.? You should include here description(s) of the way the journal examines religion: comparative, single tradition, religion in some broader sense, religion and culture, religion and gender, religion and nature, religion and secularism, religion and queer theory, etc. Within this section, note how it fits in with the wider, overall field of religious studies.

Using the Three subheadings, your analysis should be no more than 2500 words, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, 12pt font. **These will be shared with other members of the course and turned in online on September 28th.** We will all read the other papers, and discuss them during class on **October 5th**. As with all of our seminar discussions, each student should pose questions for other class member's journal projects. The point of this project is to analyze various ways of looking at the study of religion from academic perspectives. It should be seen as a way, also, to help you focus in on a method for your final paper (and perhaps even your thesis).

3. Final Paper—40%

Each student is expected to write a final paper for the course of no more than 5000-7000 words, double-spaced, 12pt font, 1-inch margins. This paper will examine a single theorist we have discussed throughout the course, or one of your own choosing with my permission. In examining your figure, please spend equal time on the following three headings. 1) Historical: what is the historical, social, and geographical location of the figure? Who is he/she arguing against? What are his/her primary influences? What events in the life of the theorist are most important in terms of how he/she develops. 2) Theoretical: what are the main contributions of the theorist? What field or

fields has he/she influenced? How have his/her ideas been modified or changed by others? 3) Contemporary Relevance: given the context we find ourselves in today, why does this thinker matter? How would this thinker address issues of pluralism, globalization, and the contemporary global environmental crisis?

An abstract for this paper will be due by class on **October 19th**. We will all discuss these abstracts on **October 26th**, each student must have questions for each of the abstracts.

During our final class period, instead of reading discussions, you will each be expected to have a discussion as if you were the theorist you are researching: I will pose questions about pluralism, globalization, and the contemporary global environmental crisis, and you will play the part of the theorist you have been studying. So don't wait until the last minute to do your paper! This "character" dialogue/discussion will take place on **November 30th**.

The final paper will be due online, during our scheduled finals time.

PLAGIARISM POLICY

This course adheres strictly to FIU's plagiarism policy:

This Policy views plagiarism as one form of academic misconduct, and adopts the definition of the university's Code of Academic Integrity, according to which plagiarism is:

the deliberate use and appropriation of another's works without any indication of the source and the representation of such work as the student's own. Any student who fails to give credit for the ideas, expressions or materials taken from another source, including internet sources, is guilty of plagiarism.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

1. Term papers acquired online or from other sources;
2. Copying of original material without attribution;
3. Use of other students' work;
4. Copying and pasting, verbatim, information from Internet sources, without quotation marks and correct citation.

Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course and a referral to the College of Arts and Sciences Dean of Students for academic misconduct.

GRADING SCALE

A	96-100	C+	76-79
A-	90-95	C	70-75
B+	87-89	D	60-69
B	83-86	F	59 and below
B-	80-82		

REQUIRED TEXTS

Kunin, Seth and Jonathan Miles Watson, *Theories of Religion: A Reader* (Rugers University Press, 2006)
Masuzawa, Tomoko *The Invention of World Religions* (University of Chicago, 2005).
Miller, James, *China's Green Religion: Daoism and the Quest for a Sustainable Future* (Columbia University Press, 2017).

Selected online readings (see syllabus).

IMPORTANT WEB RESOURCES

American Academy of Religion: www.aarweb.org
Religion in the Schools: <https://www.aarweb.org/about/religion-schools>
Philosophy of Religion: <http://www.philosophyofreligion.info/>
Sociology of Religion: <http://www.sociologyofreligion.com/>
Religion and Science: <https://ncse.com/library-resource/science-religion>
Religion and Ecology: <http://fore.yale.edu/>
Religion and Nature: www.religionandnature.com
Religion, Gender and Sexuality: <https://clgs.org/resources/>
Critical Theory of Religion: <http://www.criticaltheoryofreligion.org/>
Religion and Race: <http://dlxs2.library.cornell.edu/r/racerel/>
Comparative Religions: <http://www.interfaith.org/>
Religion and Current Events: <http://religiondispatches.org/>
Religion and Sociological Studies: <http://www.pewforum.org/>
Teaching Religion and Theology: <http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/home/default.aspx>
Religious Studies Project: <http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/>

IMPORTANT DATES

September 14th: Choose academic journal by this date
September 28th: Turn in academic journal research to the whole class
October 5th: Reading discussion of academic journal Projects
October 19th: Abstract for final paper due
October 26th: Reading discussion of abstracts
November 30th: Dialogue from perspective of theorist in final paper
Finals Week: The final paper will be due during the time of the final scheduled for our class. No exceptions!

SCHEDULE

Week 1, August 24: Review Syllabus; Discussion of selection of Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (will be sent to all students registered prior to class).

Reading: Hanna Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 248-293 (sent to you online).

Week 2, August 31: Questioning "Religion"

Reading: Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, Intro through Chapter 3.

Week 3, September 7: Questioning "Religion"

Reading: Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, Chs. 4-7.

Week 4, September 14: Perspectives in the Field: A Guest Lecture:

Readings: Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, Chs. 8-9.

Choose Journal to Research (send to me by email by this date)

Week 5, September 21: Methods in Religious Studies

Reading: Kunin, Seth and Jonathan Miles Watson, *Theories of Religion*, Intro through Ch. 1

Week 6, September 28: Methods in Religious Studies

Reading: Kunin, Seth and Jonathan Miles Watson, *Theories of Religion*, chapter 2.

Turn in Journal Research for all class members to read

Week 7, October 5: Journal Research Discussion

Reading: Read journal projects

Discussion of Journal Research in Class

Week 8, October 12: Perspectives in the Field: A Guest Lecture by Professor Steven Vose

Guest Lecture Readings: Kunin, Seth and Jonathan Miles Watson, *Theories of Religion*, chapter 5-6.

Week 9, October 19: Methods in Religious Studies

Reading: Kunin, Seth and Jonathan Miles Watson, *Theories of Religion*, chapter 3.

Turn in Abstracts for the whole class to read.

Week 10, October 26: Abstract Discussion

Reading: Read Abstracts; Kunin, Seth and Jonathan Miles Watson, *Theories of Religion*, chapter 4.

Week 11, November 2: Critical, Constructive Retrieval

Reading: James Miller, *China's Green Religion*, Intro through Chapter 2.

Week 12, November 9: Critical, Constructive Retrieval

Reading: James Miller, *China's Green Religion*, Chapter 3 through Chapter 5.

Week 13, November 16: Critical, Constructive Retrieval

Reading: James Miller, *China's Green Religion*, Chapter 6 through Chapter 8.

November 23: AAR and Thanksgiving, No class! Hopefully I will see some of you in Boston at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) meeting. It is the largest, scholarly

organization for religious studies in the world. It would be a good time to explore the field a bit more!

Week 14, November 30: Theorists React

Reading Discussion: Taking on the perspective of the subject of your final paper

Final Papers due by the time scheduled for our final! No exceptions.