[C]ritically examining the history, theories and methods of the discipline of religious studies is held to be as crucial an aspect of the discipline as the study of religious phenomena. Just as carpenters must attend to the condition of their tools and not just the wooden objects they fabricate, so too, we must attend to our disciplinary assumptions, orientations, objectives, and productions.


The study of religion is the study of theories and methodologies ... [T]raining in critical thinking about explicit and implicit theories enables students to discover that the comparative study of religion ..., like all human intellectual efforts, is just as much the comparative study of scholarly theories and methodologies.

Russell T. McCutcheon, Manufacturing Religion (1997)

Course Description

This course is an introduction to classic and contemporary approaches to the academic study of religions. This includes perspectives from philosophy, theology, anthropology, sociology, psychology, phenomenology, and feminism. The primary objective is to introduce students to the principal theories and methods that have shaped our understanding of religion, its various meanings as well as its roles and functions in society (3 credits).

Evaluation

1) Two Learning Cells (Feb. 15 and April 12) (65%): Since Learning Cells consist of a written and oral component, students must be present and on time. An attendance sheet is distributed on Learning Cell discussion day (bring ID card). Each Learning Cell is a maximum 6 pages total answering a series of questions provided in advance and to be completed by the student prior to attending class discussion. The student’s paper will be submitted to the TA for grading at the end of the class discussion, which must evidence signs of active engagement. A template is provided on myCourses.
NB: Papers should represent the student’s understanding and/or opinion of questions for group discussion, which is to say that the cell is not a formal research paper. This is also to say that the cell is not a group project. Students are to provide their own responses to questions, even if discussed in advance in study groups. As such, it is imperative that students review University policy on plagiarism (see important note below).

Still, even if the cell is not a formal research paper, good literate style is expected—point form not allowed. Students will be notified of the Learning Cell discussion locale by their TA. Learning Cell #1 (30%) covers readings and lectures from Jan. 9 to Feb. 13, inclusive; Learning Cell #2 (35%) covers readings and lectures from March 22 to April 10, inclusive.

UNAVOIDABLE ABSENCE: In special circumstances, when students are unable to be present at the Learning Cell, students must obtain permission in advance from their TA to submit alternative work. In lieu of the learning cell, the TA will assign a ten-page formal paper (excluding bibliography) to be submitted on a date of the TA’s choosing. Valid reasons for this buffer include, for example, serious illness or death in the family, for which supporting professional and/or medical documentation must be provided.

When students are unable to honor the TA’s due date a penalty of 5% per day is imposed (e.g., a paper submitted two days late, which would normally receive a 70% grade, will receive a 60% grade). Again: Learning Cells are NOT accepted if the student cannot be present at the discussion. Electronic submissions for this alternative assignment are accepted only in special circumstances (e.g., student is out of town or is otherwise indisposed). Please note that responsibility falls on students to ensure their TA possesses a soft copy of their paper. (Only hard copies of Learning Cells are accepted on the day of the discussion.)

2) In-class examination (March 20) (35%): An attendance sheet is distributed at the examination (bring ID card). The exam will consist of multiple choice and identification questions to be written in class. A guide to help students prepare will be provided in advance. The examination will cover readings and lectures from Feb. 18 to March 18, inclusive.

3) Classroom decorum. This is largely a lecture-based course. If you are unable to attend lectures and other class-related events, please reconsider taking this course. If you are more than 10 minutes late for class, please do not enter the classroom. This disturbs the instructors as well as other students in the class.

Other forms of disturbance include the use of social media, photo-editing, news hunting, video streaming, etc. Smartphones are also a “no-no.” Try to imagine how annoying it would be if profs or TAs, in meetings students request, buried themselves in their devices. It’s no different from my point of view. When teaching, I see a collective as one. Students think they’re anonymous, especially in large classes. They’re sadly mistaken, at least in my class, which I will prove by calling them out publically for their indiscretion.
The TAs and I make a concerted effort to ensure that the learning space of the classroom stays as such: a place of learning. Anonymity is nothing!

McGill Grading System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Grade Points</th>
<th>Numeric Scale of Marks</th>
<th>Grade designations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>85-100%</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>80-84%</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>75-79%</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>70-74%</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>65-69%</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>60-64%</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
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<td>2.0</td>
<td>55-59%</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
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<td>D</td>
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<td>50-54%</td>
<td>Conditional Pass</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0-49%</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism, and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (for more, see: http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).

Also, in accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

NB: © Instructor generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions, etc.) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

**Recommended Reading**


**Web Resources**

Course site:

myCourses <mycourses.mcgill.ca/>: an online course management system. It allows instructors to create and manage Web-based or Web-enhanced courses. As a result, students can access important course information, read recent announcements for their course, have real-time discussions with other class participants, keep track of their grades, and so on. All McGill students are entitled to use myCourses and are assigned a Global UserID based on their official McGill records.

Related sites:

See the list of “Select websites” in required textbook by Hillary Rodrigues and John S. Harding, pp. 141-142.

Disclaimer: This should not be seen as unqualified support of the list in question. They are mentioned simply as useful, introductory electronic resources. They are particularly useful for their discussion boards and links to other, sometimes more specialized sites and articles. Needless to say, rules regarding plagiarism apply.

**Tentative Class Schedule and Readings**
Topic: Introduction  
Dates: Jan. 7  

Topic: Orientation  
Dates: Jan. 9, 11, 14  
Readings: Rodrigues and Harding, pp. 1-17 (required textbook)  
Rodrigues, “Premises Concerning Religious Studies” (on MyCourses)

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Topic: Philosophical and Theological Approaches  
Dates: Jan. 16, 18, 21, 23, 25, 28, 30, Feb. 1  
Readings: Rodrigues and Harding, pp. 18-48 (required textbook)  

Classical (on myCourses):  
Plato, “ Allegory of the Cave”  
Aquinas, “Treatise on Sacred Doctrine” (Pt I.1)  
Kukai, “The Difference between Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism”

Contemporary (on myCourses):  
David Ford, “Theology”  
Chad Meister, “Philosophy of religion”

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Topic: Anthropological and Sociological Approaches  
Dates: Feb. 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, 15, 18, 20, 22  

Important dates:  
Feb. 8: Questions announced for Learning Cell #1  
(From Philosophy to Sociology)  
Feb. 15: Learning Cell #1 due  

Readings: Rodrigues and Harding, pp. 49-73 (required textbook)  

Classical I - Philosophical Background (on myCourses):  
Feuerbach, “The Essence of Christianity”  
Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach”; “Toward a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law”

Classical II - Anthropologists and Sociologists (on myCourses):  
E.B. Tylor, “Religion in Primitive Culture”  
Malinowski, “The Art of Magic and the Power of Faith”  
Durkheim, “Definition of Religious Phenomena and of Religion”
Weber, “Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism”
Contemporary (on myCourses)
Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System”
Riesebrodt & Konieczay, “Sociology of religion”
Hackett, “Anthropology of religion”

Topic: Psychological and Phenomenological Approaches
Dates: Feb. 25, 27, March 1, 11, 13, 15, 18, 20, 22, 25

Important dates:
March 4-8: Study Break
March 20: In-class examination (Psychology and Phenomenology)

Readings: Rodrigues and Harding, pp. 74-103 (required textbook)

Classical I - Psychologists (on myCourses)
Freud, “The Future of an Illusion”
Jung, “Psychology and Religion: The Autonomy of the Unconscious Mind”
James, “Mysticism”

Classical II - Phenomenologists of Religion (on myCourses)
Otto, “The Analysis of ‘Mysterium’”
Eliade, “The Sacred and the Profane”
W. Cantwell Smith, “The Meaning and End of Religion”

Topic: Contemporary Critical Perspectives
Dates: March 27, 29, April 1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 12.

Important dates:
April 5: Questions announced for Learning Cell #2 (Contemporary Critical Perspectives)
April 12: Learning Cell #2 due (last day of class)

Readings: Jeremy Carrette, “Post-structuralism and the study of religion” (on myCourses)
Richard King, “Orientalism and the study of religion” (on myCourses)
Rodrigues and Harding, pp. 104-133, 134-140 (required textbook)