



# Spring 2014 Courses

## **101: Freshman Seminar – The Seven Deadly Sins / Mira Balberg, TTH 2:00-3:30 PM**

The notion of sin is one of the most central facets of religion in the Western world. Thinking of religion as a system that orients human beings to certain beliefs and actions, we naturally assume that a critical part of these beliefs and actions has to do with questions of right and wrong, and that the “wrong” in religious systems is often classified as “sin.” But what is “sin,” exactly? What constitutes a sinful act and what makes one a sinner? In this seminar, we will approach these questions from a critical point of view and delve into the very rich and complex concept of sin so as to understand how it has evolved through time and how it shaped and continues to shape our world. At the center of the course will stand “the seven deadly sins,” an idea that started to develop around the fourth century C.E., according to which there are seven major sins that essentially generate all possible sins: gluttony, lust, anger, envy, greed, sloth, and pride. We will see how the “seven deadly sins” have emerged against the background of earlier notions of sin (Greek, Jewish, and Christian) and we will look closely into each one of those “deadly sins,” considering why and how it came to be viewed as a sin and how it still resonates in the world in which we live.

Our interest in this class is not in asserting how one should or should not behave, but rather in discovering the history and complexity of the concept of sin. In this respect, this seminar will introduce you to the academic study of religion more broadly: you will have a taste of religion as a fascinating, vibrant, and multifaceted topic of intellectual and analytical engagement from a historical, literary, and social perspective.

## **101: Freshman Seminar – Religion and Philosophy in Film and the Works of Woody Allen / Michelle Molina, M 9:30-11:30 AM & W 9:30-10:50 AM**

In this course, we approach philosophy and religion through the lens of the late-20th century comedic genius, Woody Allen. The human quest for meaning has produced some foundational texts in the western tradition. Allen plays with this tradition in his own films. We will approach his films and his filmmaking practice as essential to understanding philosophy as a “way of life.”

## **210: Introduction to Buddhism / George Bond, MW 12:30-11:50 PM**

This course provides an Introduction to the religion begun by the Buddha in India some 2500 years ago. The Buddhist religion has shaped the thought and culture of Asia and has also influenced Western thought and culture in significant ways. To interpret this diverse religious tradition, this course approaches it from several perspectives, including the historical, the philosophical, the religious and the cultural. The primary emphasis will be on investigating the philosophical and religious teachings of Gautama the Buddha in India as well as the thought and history of later Buddhists in other parts of Asia. The course views Buddhism as a tradition that established a system of values, an interpretation of existence and a pattern of cultural practices and rituals that the Buddhists have interpreted and applied in various ways to find meaning in life.

## **221: Introduction to New Testament/ Richard Kieckhefer, MWF 10:00-10:50 AM**

This course will examine the texts of the New Testament, with attention to themes and interpretations and to historical context. The lectures, the textbook, and the supplementary readings will expose students to a variety of interpretive perspectives-theological and historical, from traditionalists, from revisionists within the Christian tradition, and from outsiders to that tradition-and students will be expected to engage in an intellectually serious way with this diversity of views.



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## **240: Introduction to Christianity/ Christina Traina, MWF 9:00-9:50 PM**

This course explores the basic beliefs and key historical developments of Christianity from a religious studies perspective. We will use both recent and period writings to explore the early history of Christianity and trace its division into three main branches. After a theoretical and hands-on investigation of how these differences manifest in Christian worship and architecture, we will explore some of the points of tension for Christians in recent and contemporary culture. Central themes include Christianity's identity as communal, missional, and theological.

## **RELIGION 272/ GERMAN 272: Luther and the West / Christine Helmer MW 11:00 AM-12:20 AM**

When the 16th-century Catholic friar, Martin Luther, stood up for his convictions before pope and emperor, the history of the West was changed forever. In this course we will study the powerful impact that Luther had on the West, both its history and aspects of its culture. Themes addressed are: the secularization of the modern West, economics, political theology, philosophy of religion (Kant and Hegel), anti-Semitism, reason and the will, modern subjectivity, the arts. The course aims to show how religion and theology are related to broader cultural, political, social, and aesthetic issues. Class evaluation is based on quizzes, study guides, class participation, and a written paper.

## **PHILOSOPHY 312: Studies in Modern Philosophy – Spinoza / Kenneth Seeskin MW 10:00-11:20 AM**

This course will explore Spinoza's metaphysics and epistemology. Among the topics to be covered are: the meaning of substance, the nature of causality, the existence of God, determinism, the relation between mind and body, final causality, the requirements for knowledge, the extent of human knowledge. Parallels will be drawn with Aristotle, Maimonides, and Descartes. Finally we will explore the question of whether Spinoza was the last medieval or the first modern thinker.

## **313: Tibetan Buddhism – Tibetan Religion and Culture / Antonio Terrone TTH 12:30-1:50 PM**

What is Tibet and what are the major features of Tibetan religions? What distinguishes the Tibetan cultural region from its neighbors? How have images of Tibet come to encompass everything from a peaceful Shangri-la on the roof of the world to a superstitious backwater in need of liberation? What does liberation mean in the case of Tibet - both as a religious and a political concept? Who is the Fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet and how has he come to be regarded as a god-king for many Tibetans and a splittist aiming to divide the motherland according to the People's Republic of China? This course will examine the religions of Tibet (primarily Buddhism but also Bön) with a focus on their significance within Tibetan culture, society, and politics in Tibetan history from the time of Tibet's Imperial Dynasty (7-9th centuries) to the present day. Topics the course will explore include Western imaginations of Tibet, Tibetan religious and political history, Sino-Tibetan conflicts, Tibetan religious and philosophical traditions, Tibetan autobiographical literature, Tibetan medical arts, death rituals, the status of women and nuns in Tibet, the Tibetan Diaspora, the post-Cultural Revolution revival of religion in Tibet, and contemporary restrictions imposed on Tibetan religious institutions and practices by the People's Republic of China. Course materials include English translations of major Tibetan historical and religious texts, secondary source analyses of these materials, and Tibet-related films, documentaries, and Websites.



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## **318: Topics in East Asian Religions – Buddhism and Violence in Asia**

**Antonio Terrone, TTH 3:30-4:50**

This course investigates the relationship between Buddhism, politics, nationalism, and violence in a number of Asian states. We will start by examining the categories of nationalism, politics, and violence, with a spotlight on terrorism in south and east Asia. The first part of the course will build students' expertise in the basic concepts, definitions, and general academic consensus about these challenging categories. We will then move into an analysis of Buddhist attitudes toward social engagement, nationalism and ethnicity, and the recourse to violence in modern Asia. Some of the provocative questions that this course will ask include: How is Buddhism involved in politics? How does Buddhism rationalize violence? How can some Buddhist leaders embrace terror as a political tool? Can the practice of self-immolation as it is currently being enacted in Tibet be considered a terrorist act?

By looking at existing academic literature in the field, students will be encouraged to improve their knowledge of these problematic categories and engage critically in the analysis of the specific issues dealt with during the course. Although this course will include some introductory references to the essentials of Buddhism, some knowledge of Buddhism will be an advantage.

## **319: Topics in Buddhism – Buddhist Autobiography / Sarah Jacoby, W 1:00-3:20 PM**

In the middle of the twentieth century, cutting-edge literary theorists concluded that autobiography was exclusively a product of "Western" individualistic culture, thereby ignoring the literary output of large parts of the globe, including the Buddhist religious literature of Tibet and East Asia. The goal of this course is to explore Buddhist biography and autobiography as literary genres and as lenses through which we can examine the various meanings of living an exemplary life, focusing on religious literature from India and Tibet.

Questions the course will probably include: How did a religious doctrine such as Buddhism, which denies the ultimate existence of the self, become a major locus of auto/biographical writing? What is the nature of the self as it is expressed in Buddhist religious auto/biography, and what were the aims of this literature? What can we learn from reading biographies and autobiographies about Buddhist selves, societies, and histories? How do differences of gender, nationality, and religious lineage inform auto/biographical representations of the self?

Course readings will be 1) English translations of Indian and Tibetan biographies and autobiographies and 2) theoretical approaches to the study of biography and autobiography drawn from a diverse array of literary theorists. Through reading primary source literature and theoretical essays hand-in-hand, classroom discussions will explore the relevance of Western literary theory for the study of Buddhist auto/biography while paying close attention to the narrative themes and tropes found in Buddhist auto/biography.

## **332: Modern Jewish Thought / Claire Sufrin, MW 3:30-4:50 PM**

This course examines significant developments in Jewish philosophy and theology from the Enlightenment through the late 20th century. We will consider several thinkers and their understandings of philosophical ideas such as authority, knowledge, and selfhood in relationship to their reinterpretations of Jewish concepts including God, revelation, and the Jewish people. Readings from Spinoza, Mendelssohn, Cohen, Rosenzweig, Buber, Levinas.



# Spring 2014 Courses

## **333: Gender and Existential Aspects in Jewish Mysticism / Yakir Englander** **TTH 12:30-1:50 PM**

What is the role of Jewish mysticism in the general Jewish tradition? Does God have a body and is it a feminine or masculine one? What does it mean when we read sources where God cries and laughs? What are the symbols in Jewish Kabbalah and how are they influenced by our sexual lives?

There are two core goals in the coming course. First, we will explore the role of mysticism in Jewish theology, learn its language and gain the tools necessary to read these secret texts. Second, the course will focus on the existential and gender aspects of Jewish mysticism. My claim is that since mysticism in general is a genre which is hidden from the public, it is a space where theologians can deal with the most intimate elements in their lives. Among other things, the mystics deal in this genre with the tension between public censorship and their sexual wishes, their desire to be totally devoted to the divine by commit suicide, and their feelings of existential suffering. Another aspect of the course will be to read the writings of Jewish mysticism through the lens of gender theory and to see how this can enrich our understanding of the sexual and gender images of God. Among others, we will read Luce Irigaray, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler.

## **339: Topics in Judaism – Judaism and (Non) Violence- Theology and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict / Yakir Englander, TTH 3:30-4:50 PM**

What is the role of the Jewish religion in the Israeli – Palestinian conflict? Is the Occupation a result of Jewish theology? Is nonviolent action also a Jewish value? And - does the Jewish God forbid violence, or encourage it?

This course will delve into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict using the tools of Jewish theology. Each of the course's themes will first be examined from the perspective of Jewish theology. Later, we will investigate if and how Jewish theologies and values influence the actual conflict: do they increase tensions, or can we use them to resolve, transform or end the conflict? A central focus of the course will be on American Jewish theology concerning the conflict, on the image of Israel in the U.S.A., and how these are both relevant to violence and peace-making in Israel/Palestine.

We will examine subjects like: sovereignty and security, rights and obligations, war and peace, nonviolence and occupation. We will learn of different perspectives of Jewish law banning both Jewish sovereignty and Zionist ideology. We will re-examine the term "Judaism" - today "Judaisms" is possibly more correct - and study the implications of this new term for Israel as a "Jewish State." We will focus on the Israeli settlements from a religious political perspective, on the role of religion in the Israeli Defense Force (IDF), and on the role of interfaith dialogue in transforming or ending the conflict.

This course will require that students practice the Greek virtue of epoché – suspending their judgments about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and trying to see it from new angles. The materials of the course will include mostly primary sources like Jewish theological texts, documentaries, memoirs, articles of political criticism and short film clips. No prior knowledge of Israel or Judaism is required, but students will need the courage to devote themselves to learning about the conflict from new perspectives.





# Spring 2014 Courses

## **340-3: Foundations of Christian Thought III / Christina Traina, TTH 9:30-10:50 AM**

This course deals with the particular ways in which historical events and cultural transformations of the 19th and 20th century affected both the content and the method of Christian theology. Among these are the development of historical criticism; democratization; world war; and justice movements organized around race, culture, class, and gender. Views of sin and salvation, incarnation and redemption, and knowledge of God figure very differently in this period than the preceding ones. We will learn how representative modern and contemporary Western theologians have dealt with these issues. We will also discuss how they have responded to the pressures of intellectual, political, and cultural movements on theology.

This is the last in a series of three units. Relg 340-1 (Fall 2011, with Professor Kieckhefer) dealt with Christian theology of the fourth through the fifteenth centuries. Relg 340-2 (Winter 2012, with Professor Helmer) dealt with the Protestant Reformation, Pietism, and the Enlightenment. The first two units are not prerequisites for the third, although they are highly recommended. Students who have taken the other two will find their themes continuing in it. Students will write journal responses to the readings (typically four for each of three units) and papers: either two 5-page papers or one 10-page paper. Class participation and small group discussion are central elements of the course.

## **346: Church Architecture / Richard Kieckhefer, MWF 2:00-2:50 PM**

This class will examine church architecture, its theological significance, and its liturgical uses. We will be looking at representative examples of church architecture from the third century to the twenty-first, and we will be reading commentaries on church design that tell us what churches meant to the people who built them and worshiped in them.

## **349: Topics in Christianity – Love and Evil / Christine Helmer, TTH 11:00AM-12:20 PM**

The problem of evil presents a serious objection to the idea of God as love. How can the prevalence of evil in this world be reconciled with a loving God? In this course we investigate the concepts of love and evil from a Christian theological perspective. We will study different explanations for evil, how evil is related to God, and how different theologians understand love as a solution to the problem of evil. The course is a seminar and readings are selected from the history of modern Christian thought, specifically Søren Kierkegaard, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Marilyn McCord Adams, Friedrich Schleiermacher, John Hick, and Martin Luther King Jr.

## **349: Heresy in Early Christianity / Den Dulk, TTH 2:00-3:20 PM**

Early Christianity was remarkably diverse. Some Christians believed in one God, others in two, still others thought there were 30 or even 365. Some early Christian texts made their way into the New Testament, but many others did not. What happened to all these various other "Christianities"? And why is it that one form of Christianity became "orthodox" while others were rejected as "heretical"? In this course we will study a wide-ranging selection of ancient Christian figures, texts, and ideas that have been categorized under the rubric of "heresy". We will ask when, why and how they were rejected. What led to their demise and why is it that only "orthodox" Christianity ultimately survived?



# Spring 2014 Courses

## **373: Religion and Bioethics – Organ Donation & Transplantation / Alyssa Henning, TTh 2:00-3:20 PM**

Bioethics raises questions about the ethical and social implications of technologically-driven advances in science and medicine. One topic that has riddled bioethics nearly as long as the field has existed is organ transplantation and donation. What steps should the U.S. take to increase the number of transplantable organs available? How should we define death? How should we prioritize patients on organ transplant waiting lists? Should the United States pay organ "donors" to increase the number of organs available for transplantation? Do more recent advances, such as face transplants and limb transplants, raise any unique ethical considerations?

In this course, we will explore Christian, Jewish, and Muslim primary sources and scholarship, as well as philosophical perspectives, as they apply to the bioethical debates over organ donation and transplantation. We will see how scholars use religious sources to think about these issues and compare religious responses to those of secular philosophers.

## **374: Contemporary Religious Thought – Religion and Literature / Claire Sufrin TTh 11:00-12:20 PM**

This course addresses the intersection of religion and literature in Judaism and Christianity from several perspectives. The syllabus begins with biblical stories and then considers ways in which these narratives have been understood as a foundation for theological reflection. The second part of the course considers literature that incorporates themes and images drawn from sacred text. Finally, the third part of the course considers whether works of literature can be read as religious thought.

## **Graduate Courses**

## **462: Religion, Media, and Digital Cultures / Sarah Taylor, Th 2:00-4:30 PM**

In this graduate seminar, we dive into one of today's most exciting and rapidly growing areas of scholarship - the intriguing intersections and complex entanglements of religion and media in contemporary culture. Drawing from a diverse array of interdisciplinary sources, we will explore what media studies and communications theories have to offer the study of religion, and reciprocally how religious studies scholarship might enrich media studies. We will look at such areas as: how religion gets mediated; the religious dimensions of transmedia storytelling and media world-building; religion as communication; online group identity formation and religious identity construction; the blurred boundaries between the so-called "sacred and the secular" in the study of religion and media; controversies in both religious worlds and media worlds over the authorized and unauthorized circulation and distribution of content; and how a better understanding of intermediality in the digital age might inform our theoretical understandings of religion.

Of particular interest in this course will be the impact of digital culture on the media-religion interface. Students will be asked to conduct original research, to present their research in conference-like format, and to produce a shorter version of their final project for submission to one of the course-recommended media/religion/cultural studies online publications. Students will also receive an introduction to key professional organizations, guilds, and research centers that support work on religion, media, and culture.



# Spring 2014 Courses

## Graduate Courses (continue)

### **RELIGION 471/HIST 405/GEND\_STUD 490-21: Body/Embodiment and Materiality** **Michelle Molina, F 11:30 AM – 2:00 PM**

This seminar explores theoretical approaches to the problem of body/embodiment/materiality. One aim of the course is to examine various methodological approaches to embodiment and materiality, making use of sociology and philosophy (Jane Bennett, Pierre Bourdieu, Maurice Merleau-Ponty). The second and closely related aim is to situate bodies in time and place, that is, in history. Here we look to the particular circumstances that shaped the manner in which historical actors experienced their bodies in the Christian west (Peter Brown, Caroline Bynum, Mary Carruthers, Michel Foucault). Ultimately, we will be examining theoretical tools while we put them to work. The goal: how to use these theorists to write more dynamic, creative, interesting scholarship?

### **474: Religion and Narrative / Barry Wimpfheimer, T 1:30-4:00 PM**

Narratives are centrally important to religions. From foundational myths that create the space within which religion happens to discrete episodes that ground specific rituals, narratives are the very stuff of religion. The purpose of this course is to consider narratives as a special site for the production of religious meaning; the course will draw heavily from both religion theory and literary theory. Issues we will cover include: whether textual meaning is located in the author, text or reader; how the religious context of a narrative affects its possible interpretations; how myths and rituals comprise different modes of narrative; the relationship between narrative time and religious time; the challenge to authority inherent to much religious narrative; the variety of ways through which religious figures mobilize narrative to further their authority.

This course will utilize Jewish narratives from the Bible, Rabbinic Literature and the Jewish folk tradition as primary texts. Students will be expected to build on materials covered in the course by applying narrative theory to the study of religious narratives either Jewish or otherwise.

Some of the works to be used are: Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*; Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*; Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality;" Robert Segal, ed., *The Myth and Ritual Theory*; Jerome Bruner, *The Making of Stories*; Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*; Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*