

Winter 2014 Courses

UNDERGRADUATE COURSES

173 Religion, Medicine, and Suffering / Robert Orsi, MWF 12:00-12:50 p.m.

Physical suffering--pain in the body--is an unavoidable fact of life. All humans must encounter the dreadful reality of pain in their own bodies and in the bodies of people they love. And whatever else religions are and do, all religions offer humans ways of understanding and coping with--and sometimes even healing-- the body in pain. Religions are also responsible for causing pain in bodies. This course examines religion and pain in modern Western culture. In sequence we take up the questions: What is culture? What is pain? What is religion? Then we will turn to the question of how humans have used religious idioms to heal themselves as well as what it means to "heal." Readings include early Christian martyr accounts, autobiographies of people in pain, and stories of religious healing.

210 Introduction to Buddhism / Antonio Terrone, MW 11:00-12:20 p.m.

This course provides an introduction to key aspects of the Buddhist religious traditions of multiple South and East Asian countries. Through careful examination of a variety of literature produced by these traditions, we will consider the many ways in which Buddhists have understood human suffering, life after death, karma, the nature of the world and human's place within it, and the path to enlightenment. Our emphasis will be on attempting to understand the moral values, philosophical insights, ritual practices, and social concerns that have shaped Buddhism over centuries of dynamic change in diverse cultural contexts. We will examine not only the history of Buddhism and its three-fold division into Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana/Tantrayana, but also facets of the contemporary practice of Buddhism in the United States and the role of socially engaged Buddhism. In addition to some textbook readings, reading assignments will privilege primary source readings in order to introduce students directly to the narrative, doctrinal, liturgical, and biographical texts that inform our knowledge of what it has meant to live a Buddhist life over time and across cultures. As an academic course in the Department of Religious Studies, this course draws on scholarly approaches to the study of religion to examine the history of Buddhist thought and practice. In doing so, the course neither presumes nor prescribes any religious commitment on the part of students, but rather encourages students to cultivate an eagerness to learn about a cultural and religious tradition that may be very different from their own.

220-20: Introduction to Hebrew Bible / Mira Balberg, TTH 12:30-1:15 p.m.

It is difficult to think of a book that has been as prominent in the history and culture of the Western world as the Hebrew Bible. For over two thousand years people have considered the Hebrew Bible – a rich assortment of stories, laws, hymns, prophecies, prayers, and more – to be a source of religious, artistic, and psychological inspiration. The Bible has profoundly shaped, and still does shape the ways in which we think about the world, about ourselves, about the relations between humans and God, about literature, about history, and of course, about religion. We all live in a world in which this book and the history of its interpretation are still one of the most formative powers.

The purpose of this course is to introduce the students to the richness and diversity of the Hebrew Bible, with special emphasis on the many different voices, genres, positions, opinions, and mindsets that we find in the various biblical texts. We will learn that the Bible consists of many different works, composed at different times and in different historical circumstances, and which voice different ideas and concerns.

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220-20 Introduction to Hebrew Bible (Continued)

While the course is structured more or less according to the order of the books in the Bible, which itself more or less corresponds to the biblical history of the world, this course is not a simple survey of biblical books or biblical history, which can be found on multiple other sources. Rather, this course suggests different ways and strategies for reading and interpreting the Bible. Our focus will be on discovering the many angles and perspectives from which the Bible can be approached.

319/ASIAN_LC 290-21 East Asian Religious Classics / Antonio Terrone, MW 2:00-3:20

This course will examine a number of texts that represent some of the most important and influential philosophical traditions and religious systems in East Asia. Ranging from abridged and unabridged readings of the Analects by Confucius, the Mencius, the Chuang Tzu, and the Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu, to the Lotus Sutra, The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi, and the Life of Milarepa, students will be introduced to many facets of Asian religious and philosophical thought. With an eye to the socio-cultural and historical context in which these texts were composed, this course will be structured as a lecture and a discussion in order to encourage students to participate actively in analyzing the religious culture of East Asia through these great texts.

320: The Art of Biblical Narrative / Mira Balberg, TTH 3:30-4:50 p.m.

Can the Hebrew Bible be read as a literary creation? In what sense are biblical stories, which are usually extremely short and spurious in details, analyzable in terms of plot, characters, narration, style, and other critical terms that pertain to modern prose? How can stories which are ostensibly geared to teach uncontested truths about God and about history be read as works of fiction? Are there literary connections between different parts of the Hebrew Bible, so that we may think about the Bible as a whole as one elaborate work of art? And how can literary sensibility make us better readers of the Bible as a theological, philosophical, poetical, legal, and historical text? These questions will stand at the center of this course, which will be dedicated to the artistic and literary design of biblical narrative – both of individual biblical narratives as unique and disparate units, and to the interrelations between different narratives and between narratives and other biblical materials. This course is, first and foremost, an opportunity to become closely familiar with the rich and dramatic world of biblical protagonists such as Jacob, Joseph, Samson, Saul, David, Elijah, and many more, and to unravel the means through which they are made into lively and powerful figures. It is also an opportunity to cultivate literary sensitivity and to explore fundamental issues pertaining to literature, and to reading in general, through what is probably the most influential and widely-read text in the history of Western culture.

333: American Judaism / Claire Sufrin, MW 12:30-1:50 a.m.

As a nation of immigrants committed by the Bill of Rights to freedom of religion, the United States of America has offered Jews both a unique setting in which to live and work and a unique setting in which to worship and understand their God and observe the customs of their religion. In this course, we will examine the evolution of American Judaism from the colonial period through to the present day. Using a variety of perspectives, we will trace shifts in the situation of Jews in America and corresponding changes in the way(s) Jews have practiced and understood their religious traditions. Emphasis will be placed on critical understanding of theology and cultural materials such as short stories, films and music as well as other primary documents.

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339 God After the Holocaust / Claire Sufrin, MW 9:30-10:50 a.m.

Throughout the history of the Jewish religion, times of crisis and collective suffering have given rise to theological innovation and creative shifts in religious expression as Jews sought to understand their tradition in light of their experiences. In the wake of the Holocaust, Jews and others faced a similar need for religious rethinking. In theological terms, they asked: where was God and should we expect God to act in human history? What does this event indicate about God's existence? In human terms, they asked: how do we live as Jews today? How do we live as human beings? Given that the Holocaust occurred in modern Europe and within the context of the Second World War, not only Jews but Christians and others asked many of these same questions and also struggled to articulate answers. Focusing on theological and literary texts, in this course we will explore how Jews and others have reshaped their thinking about God and religion in response to the Holocaust and the experience of suffering in the modern world.

339 Topics in Judaism: Reading the Talmud /B. Wimpfheimer, TTh 11:00-12:20

In this seminar, we will study a tractate of Talmud in its original form (not in English translation). Our class discussion will be conducted in English, but we will spend considerable time discussing texts written in Hebrew. The seminar is limited to students who either are enrolled in second year Hebrew or have background Hebrew reading and comprehension skills that have been certified by the instructor. This course will introduce students to Talmud Criticism by reading the Talmudic discussion of the laws of false testimony in light of prior and contemporaneous Jewish literature on this topic, the historical realities of Rabbinic Culture and questions raised within the lengthy history of Talmudic commentary. Students need not have a background in Talmud to take this class, though students with such background are also encouraged to attend.

340-2 Topics In Christian Thought II / Christine Helmer, TTh 9:30- 10:50 a.m.

This course considers the new ways of thinking and the new things that were being thought about in European Christianity from the beginning of the sixteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century. This was an especially exciting period in the history of Christianity. Turbulent reformations in sixteenth-century Christendom precipitated the birth of three churches in the West: Lutheran, Reformed, Roman Catholic. These new births were followed by a political reconfiguring of the European map, the expansion of economic capitalism, religious wars, and the development of modern ways of being. Mixed into this political, cultural, economic, and historical brew is religion, in the case considered by this course, the Christian religion. We will explore how Christianity contributed new ways of thinking, acting, and being in the world to Europe's (and the world's) historical development.

Although this course is officially the second part of the sequence "Foundations of Christian Thought," you are welcome to participate without having taken the first part in the fall quarter 2013. The perspective I bring to this course in the sequence is theological, which means I look at the ways in which people have thought about religion in distinct times and places, and how they organize the ideas about religion in relation to other ideas, whether cultural, philosophical, and historical. The texts we will read represent some of the most famous texts in Western theology, religion, and philosophy.

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350 The Qu'ran / Brannon Ingram, TTh 2:00-3:20 p.m.

One of the most influential books in world history, the Qur'an is believed by Muslims to be the literal speech of God in Arabic. It is recited daily by Muslims throughout the world, transformed into beautiful calligraphy, and venerated as a sacred object. The course explores the text's historical milieu and the life of the Prophet Muhammad, its form and structure, its ethical worldview, its role in the ritual lives of Muslims, how it has been variously interpreted in multiple contexts, as well as critical issues pertaining to the Qur'an in the contemporary world. The course proceeds under the premise that understanding the Qur'an is an essential aspect of a broad liberal education in the humanities.

354 Sufism / Brandon Ingram, TTh 11:00-12:20 p.m.

This course introduces Sufism, the 'mystical' tradition of Islam. After critically examining the concept of 'mysticism' within Religious Studies, we will examine the historical origins of Sufism, its emergence from and relationship to foundational discourses within Islam, its engagement with the Qur'an, and the figure of the Prophet Muhammad in Sufi piety. We will then investigate notions of 'sainthood' in Islam, the roles of Sufism in popular Muslim piety, the centrality of the body and bodily disciplines in Sufi practice, conceptions of gender in Sufism, as well as the critique and defense of Sufism in modern reformist thought. We will conclude with critical reflections on how 'Sufism' is conceptualized and deployed in American political discourse.

371 Religion and Film / Sara Vaux, Th 6:00-9:15 p.m.

The seminar seeks to expand the view of "Religion & Film" through a close study of individual films across cultures. Each week we will discuss a particular lens through which current studies in Religion (or Theology) & Film attempt to analyze movies: theological themes; media attention to manifestations of "religion" in culture; presence of religious figures or symbolism; audience reception; the visualization of biblical narratives; and the like. Expect heavy viewing; short weekly papers; and focused class discussions. Expect to acquire knowledge of film language—the ways movies "work." All disciplines welcome.

374 Religion and Economics / Beverly Mortenson, MW 3:30-4:50 p.m.

This course examines the two perspectives on modern systems and people's role in them. It embraces the gap between what Religion teaches is right and what Economics teaches is actually going on. It asks how we can hold both wisdoms in our minds and hearts at the same time. It explores the giant thinkers of moral philosophy, and the gritty analysis of the individual's role in today's tech-savvy world. It examines the long tradition of moral thinking from pre-history, through the axial age of classical religion formation, through modern questions until today. It probes caring economists who struggle with all the topics of modern concern and how religion demands new views. And it concludes with a secular look at how the individual can begin to grapple with these challenging contrasts.

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396-2 Senior Seminar / Sarah Taylor, Mo 2:00-4:00 p.m.

This seminar is for advanced senior majors only who meet our stated department requirements for honors consideration. In this seminar, students are guided through the honors thesis writing process while engaging with seminar mates in a workshop environment. We explore pieces of exemplary expository writing, discuss approaches to working with primary sources, learn advanced research strategies, and become skilled at editing and revising. More broadly, this seminar teaches project management skills applicable to most any career path (applying to graduate school, searching for a job, writing a grant, completing a project assigned by one's employer, starting a business, etc.). We will learn how to schedule a large project, how to break it down into smaller steps, and then how to make steady progress toward completion. Life/work balance skills will also be discussed, and students will learn strategies for prioritizing. Students will be encouraged to think about their life goals as they head toward graduation and what sorts of steps they can take toward achieving those goals. Attendance and active workshop participation is required. Instructor approval code is needed to register. Pre-req : Rel 396-1

GRADUATE COURSES

460 Late Medieval Religion Culture / Kieckhefer TBA

This is an advanced course in medieval Latin, meant for students who have already taken beginning and intermediate Latin. It will focus on challenging texts such as twelfth-century correspondence and verse. It may be taken either for credit or on a non-credit basis.

470 Theology and the Study of Religion / Christine Helmer, Th 2:00-4:00 p.m.

The development of the modern study of religion is, at least on the surface, articulated in polemical relation to theology. Yet when one probes deeper into the historical and conceptual issues at stake, one finds that theological parameters, concerns, and questions are fundamentally embedded in the enterprise. We will look closely at specific texts that are considered formative for the modern study of religion, but will consider them in relation to theology. Texts are selected from the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Schleiermacher, Feuerbach, Otto, Troeltsch).

481-2 Theory and Method of Religion / Robert Orsi, T 3:00-5:00 p.m.

A review of important current issues and questions in the contemporary study of religion and of recent, innovative theoretical approaches to the subject. Topics to include religious research on the Internet; everyday religion; the notion of transcendence as an analytical category; Islam in Europe; and the revival of religion in post-Mao China.