

### **Course Description**

This course will provide an introduction to the history, practice, and core of doctrines of the so-called western monotheisms. The concept of a single deity is often considered the centrally defining and uniting element of these traditions. We will begin the semester with a reflection on the question of the origins of religion and monotheism by critically evaluating the theories of early anthropologists of religion such as Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) and George Frazer (1854-1941). This will be followed by our study of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* from ancient Mesopotamia, and a discussion of Zoroastrianism, the still-existing tradition of ancient Persia. Both traditions have exerted remarkable influences on the development of the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic monotheistic religions. These three traditions will concern us in more detail in the subsequent section of the course. Here you will familiarize yourself with the major religious and philosophical traditions of these three faiths by focusing upon their key historical developments and contemporary forms. Of particular interest to us will be the interaction and interconnectedness of these traditions, past and present. During the concluding weeks of the semester we will deal with the question of whether it is justified to speak of an inevitable conflict between different religions, cultures, or civilizations in the light of the semester's findings. We will familiarize ourselves with new religions such as Baha'i and discuss desirable and viable ways to accommodate the world's growing religious diversity from a perspective of simultaneous commitment to one's own worldview and respect toward beliefs and ways of life other than one's own.

### **Course Objectives**

From the foregoing you can see that the ultimate aim of the course is to neither glorify nor critique any one tradition but rather to allow you to understand how people within these traditions view themselves and how these traditions in their interactions with each other have shaped human values and cultural traditions in and beyond the western world. In short, the goals and objectives for you as a student enrolled in this course are:

- to think both empathetically and critically about the western traditions,
- to gain knowledge of the historical forces and cultural traditions that have shaped and in turn have been shaped by the western religions,
- to develop the ability to interpret texts and other cultural phenomena (such as rituals, myths, architecture) that have religious presuppositions or implications, and, of course,
- to further develop your critical skills as a thinker, reader, writer, and speaker within and beyond the academic study of religion.

### **Readings**

- (1) Required Course Textbook: Lewis M. Hopfe and Mark R. Woodward, *Religions of the World*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006 (available at the book store).
- (2) Required Supplemental Text: The *Epic of Gilgamesh: An English Version with an Introduction* (Penguin Classics), transl. N. K. Sanders, revised edition, 1960 (available at the book store).
- (3) Additional Readings: Primary and other secondary readings will be photocopied and provided in class or will be made available through Blackboard

### **Blackboard**

This course will involve using the online communication tools on Blackboard as well as readings and documents located there. You would do well to acquaint yourself with Blackboard's features and different usages and use them as frequent points of entry and exploration around many of the issues we will be discussing as well as in preparation for the assignments.

## Grading

The Final Grade will be calculated as follows:

(0) Attendance	prerequisite
(1) Quizzes	20%
(2) Two Analysis Papers	20% (10% each)
(3) Mid-term Exam	20%
(4) Academic Research Paper	20%
(5) Final Exam	20%

## Course Requirements

### 0. Attendance (prerequisite)

You must be present for class meetings in order to do well in the course. The assigned readings will be supplemented by in-class lectures, discussions, exercises, and more. You are allowed to be absent from a total of three (3) class sessions. With every additional absence your final grade for this class will go down 5%. This means you will have to plan ahead with your allowance of three absences. Talk to me ahead of time if you foresee any difficulties for yourself with this policy.

There will be ample opportunity for you to participate in our class. Apart from my lectures you will be involved in activities such as class discussion, group work with subsequent presentations, and in-class writing assignments. I encourage you to ask questions and suggest topics for discussion. You will also be required to give a **brief oral presentation**. Most of our meetings will start with one of you presenting on the preceding class session. You will need to be concise as you only have five minutes of talking time. Your presentation should include a brief summary of the main points previously discussed as well as an outlook on unresolved issues and open questions which need further address.

### 1. Pop Quizzes (20%)

Quizzes will be given frequently to encourage diligence in reading. The quizzes will cover the material in the reading assignments. They will primarily consist of multiple-choice, matching, and short answer questions but may also include short essay questions. In preparation you may find it helpful to make use of our textbook's study questions at the end of each chapter. There will be NO make-up quizzes if you missed class. I will drop your two tests with the lowest scores and only count the remaining tests toward your grade in this section.

### 2. Two Analysis Papers (20%; 10% each)

These short papers (1,000 words, 12 pt TNR, double-spaced, one-inch margins) are meant as an opportunity for analysis and critical reflection. You will write in a thoughtful, mature, informed, and scholarly manner on a topic of your choice relating to our course. Any topic or text relating to our course is permissible. In your writing I will look for increasing use of terminology relevant to the academic study of religion, exploration of religious concepts, questioning that extends beyond class discussion, and courageous attempts on your part to answer questions that arise from your interaction with the material. The criteria for grading the assignments are: a) level of effort (appropriate length and degree you interact with the material), b) appropriate and relevant use of terms, concepts, examples, and scholarly sources c) coherent argument and clear presentation of points. In short, the assignment will be graded based upon evidence of understanding and sensitive, informed level of engagement with the topic of your choosing. The first reflective analysis must be turned in, at the latest, by Thursday, September 27. The second reflective analysis may be turned in on or before Thursday, November 29.

### 3. Mid-term Exam (20%)

A mid-term exam will be given on Thursday, October 18. It will consist of essay questions that cover both the reading assignments and in-class material discussed up to this point in the semester.

### 4. Academic Research Paper (20%)

For this class you are required to write one research paper on a topic of your choice. Of greatest importance is that you choose a topic that interests you. You are permitted and encouraged to write on the same topic as in one of your analysis papers, provided the research paper builds and reflects upon the material already presented there.

**Length:** Your research paper should be 2,500-3,000 words. This approximately corresponds to 8-10 pages (12 pt TNR, double-spaced, one-inch margins).

**Deadline:** The due date for the final draft of your research paper is the last day of class. Late papers will be penalized.

A research paper is a focused analysis of material obtained from any of a number of different sources. Note that Internet research is problematic, often unscholarly, and strongly discouraged. Use of “wiki” encyclopedias online is not allowed. A list of recommended resources is available on the online research guide for our course (<http://www.emory.edu/OXFORD/Library/Guide/rel211.html>).

The paper must not merely summarize the position maintained by another, but present your own argument, scholarly analyses and reflections. Your argument must be amply supported by the data reviewed. This paper should be carefully structured and presented. The paper must include a title page, appropriate documentation, and a bibliography. Please note that plagiarism is easy to spot, and harshly penalized by the University. Don’t be afraid to trust your own words and opinions.

The research and writing process consists of different stages and includes a wide variety of activities such as making a decision about your research topic, locating the appropriate references and texts, devising an outline and initial bibliography for your paper, presenting your initial findings to a group of peers and eliciting feedback from them, writing a preliminary draft, and usually ends in editing and revising your paper before you turn in your final draft. You will find that I indicated different dates and deadlines for these activities on the syllabus at which I expect you to discuss your results to date with me and/or your peers.

- Tuesday 9/18: Determine research paper topic and clear it with me
- Tuesday 10/2: Two annotations
- Thursday 10/11: Two annotations
- Tuesday 10/16: Annotated bibliography (minimum of six sources)
- Thursday 10/25: Thesis statement and outline
- Tuesday 12/4: Draft for peer review (minimum of 8 pages, completed bibliography)
- Thursday 12/6: In-class peer reviews (refer to peer review handout for guidelines)
- Last day of class: Turn in final draft with peer reviews attached

### 5. Final Exam (20%)

The final exam for our class will be given on Thursday, December 13 (2:00-5:00 PM). It is a formal test of what you have learned during the class lectures and discussions, seminars, guest lectures, your research, films and assigned readings. In preparation for it you will have to look back at the entire semester and reflect on the material in a synthetic and comparative manner. The questions on the exam will be taken from discussions generated during class. I will indicate the types of questions that may be asked on the final exam during the last class. Textbooks and notebooks will not be allowed in the exam room. The time of the final may not be changed.

### A Note on Facilitating a Stronger Learning Experience

Those students needing help with writing, English, or research, please go to the Writing Center run by Dr. Adrian Ivey or the ESL program headed by Dr. Stacy Bell. If a disability requires special circumstances for you in the classroom, taking notes, or taking tests or exams, please see Disability Services on campus for proper aid.

### A Final Note on Academic Fairness

All students deserve an atmosphere of fairness, honesty and maturity. All of us at Oxford College live by the standards set forth in the Honor Code, which includes the “responsibility for maintaining standards of unimpeachable honesty in all academic work.” The Honor Code also indicates that we cannot tolerate actions in others that violate this code, so we (and you) are obligated to report violations. Oxford College takes this honor code very seriously, as do I, and penalties for violations are severe. Please read the Honor Code carefully; I will trust you to conduct yourselves accordingly.

### **Class Schedule**

Week 1 (8/30)	Introductions to each other and the class: What is Religion? What are Western Religions? What is the academic study of religion? Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Introduction Overview)
Week 2 (9/4, 9/6)	Characteristics of Basic Religions: What is Animism? Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.1) and selections from Tylor’s <i>Primitive Culture</i> (1871).
Week 3 (9/11, 9/13)	Ancient Mesopotamia: Gilgamesh and the Hero’s Journey Reading: <i>The Epic of Gilgamesh</i> (62-119)
Week 4 (9/18, 9/20)	Ancient Persia: Zoroastrianism’s Conflict Dualism Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.10) Tuesday: Clear research paper topic with me
Week 5 (9/25, 9/27)	Zoroastrianism (cont.) Thursday: Library workshop!!! Thursday: Turn in first analysis paper
Week 6 (10/2, 10/4)	Biblical Judaism: Monotheism, Covenant, Written and Oral Torah, Sacred Rites Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.11) Tuesday: Turn in first two annotations

*Wednesday, October 3: Last day for dropping course without academic penalty.*

### **Fall Break (10/8-10/9)**

Week 7 (10/11)	Judaism: Holocaust, Theodicy, and Modern Jewish Thought Reading: Selections from Elie Wiesel’s <i>Night</i> and from the biblical book of <i>Job</i> Thursday: Turn in second set of annotations
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Week 8 (10/16, 10/18)	Tuesday: Judaism (cont.) Tuesday: Turn in annotated bibliography (minimum of 6 sources) Thursday: Mid-term Exam
Week 9 (10/23, 10/25)	Christianity: Life of Jesus and Sources about Him, Doctrine of the Trinity, Schism of Eastern and Western Church Required Readings: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.12: 270-293) Thursday: Turn in your thesis and outline
Week 10 (10/30, 11/1)	Christianity: Protestant Reformation, Monasticism, Christianity Today Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.12: 293-308), selections from the works of St. Antony, Thomas Merton, and Fr. McNamee
Week 11 (11/6, 11/8)	Islam as a Monotheistic Creed: Muhammad and the Qur'an, Sacred Rites Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.13)
Week 12 (11/13, 11/15)	Variations within Islam, Islam Today Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.13 cont.)
Week 13 (11/19)	No class. Professor at annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR)
<b>11/21-11/23</b>	<b>Thanksgiving Recess</b>
Week 14 (11/27, 11/29)	Clash of Civilizations? Reading: Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations" <i>Foreign Affairs</i> 72:3 (Summer 1993): 22-49. Baha'i and New Religious Movements in the West Required Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.14) Thursday: Last opportunity to turn in second analysis paper
Week 15 (12/4, 12/6)	The Future of Western Religions, Peer Reviews Tuesday: Turn in draft of research paper to peer group. Thursday: In-class peer review discussion
Last Day of Class (12/11)	Evaluations and Review Turn in the final draft of your research paper.

**Final Exam: Thursday, December 13 (2:00 – 5:00 PM)**