

REL 211 Western Religions 10J
Fall 2008
TTh 2:30-3:45

Florian Pohl
Email: fpohl@emory.edu
Humanities Hall

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 gain factual knowledge of the historical forces and cultural traditions that have shaped and in turn have been shaped by the western religions,
- to gain a broader understanding and appreciation of human religious activity and to think both empathetically and critically about the western traditions,
- to develop the ability to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view that have religious presuppositions or implications, and, of course,
- to further develop skills in expressing yourself orally and in writing 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:

(1) Preparation and Participation (including student minutes with presentation)	10%
(2) Lecture Presentation	10%
(3) Three Short Analysis Papers	20%
(4) Midterm Exam	20%
(5) Final Exam	20%
(6) Academic Research Paper	20%

Course Requirements

1. Preparation and Participation (10%)

Attendance: 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. Make sure you arrive for class on time. Latecomers will be counted absent at the very beginning of class. Should you be late, you are permitted to enter the classroom only if you do so silently and without disturbing class proceedings. 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.

Participation: 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. Additional activities and assignments including peer assessments on written and oral work will also count toward your participation grade. I strongly encourage you to ask questions and suggest topics for discussion. For this purpose, I will make available index cards on which you can jot down any questions and suggestions at the beginning of each class session.

Student Minutes and Presentation: Taking notes on lectures and class discussion is a critical part of your learning experience. You are all expected to take notes during class as you will have to draw on them for your own work as well as when preparing for the tests. Your notes will also be the basis for a brief 3-5 minute presentation that each of you is to give in class as part of your participation grade. Every day our meetings will start with one of you presenting on the previous class session. Be concise as you only have three to five minutes of talking time. Highlight the main points and provide details only when relevant. Your peers will provide you with feedback on your presentation's content, structure, and delivery. Additional tips and guidelines for presentations and public speaking can be found on our Blackboard site.

2. Lecture Presentation (10%)

During the course of the semester we will be discussing a wide range of concepts, events, or people in the history and contemporary reality of the western religious traditions. Frequently we will benefit from additional information and analysis that goes beyond what our textbook and the supplemental readings offer. Therefore, you will be assigned a particular topic for which to develop expertise through additional out-of-class research. You will be responsible for an eight-to-ten-minute lecture presentation based on your topic in order to deepen the class' understanding of the subject (see additional guidelines on Blackboard). Your lecture will be graded based on content, organization, and delivery. As you will be covering important course content, your audience's responsibility is to listen actively and attentively, take notes, keep track of main ideas, and think critically in order to evaluate and pose questions after the lecture. Furthermore, everybody will write one peer assessment for another class member's lecture presentation over the course of the semester (guidelines available on Blackboard).

3. Three Short Analysis Papers (20%)

You will write three short essays of three to four pages (12 pt TNR, double-spaced, one-inch margins) over the course of the semester. These are meant as opportunities for analysis and critical reflection. Therefore it is essential that you not merely summarize the position maintained by another, but present your own argument, scholarly analyses and reflections. 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. Your assignments will be graded based upon quality of thesis, argument, and writing style as well as evidence of understanding and sensitive, informed level of engagement with the topic. More concrete guidelines for each assignment can be found on BB and will be discussed in class.

- a. *First Analysis Paper* (topic instructor-assigned): The topic for the first essay is assigned (see Blackboard for details). Please submit your completed essay through Blackboard no later than **Sunday, September 21 (6PM)**. You can hand it in early, but you cannot be late.
- b. *Second Analysis Paper* (topic self-selected): This assignment follows the same format as the first. The one exception is that you are responsible for choosing the topic of your analysis. Any topic that relates to our course content and can be treated successfully within the parameters of the assignment is permissible. Please turn in your completed analysis paper through Blackboard. The deadline for this assignment is **Sunday, November 2 (6PM)**.
- c. *Third Analysis Paper* (site visit analysis): For your final essay you are required to attend a public worship service or a particular religious ceremony in a religious tradition covered this semester. You may choose any temple, synagogue, church, mosque, etc. that you wish, with *the rule that it must be of a faith you have never practiced*. Part of the visit will be to interview a member of the group about what you observed. After your visit you are to write an analytical essay about your observations as well as the interview. The due date for your Site Visit Analysis is **Sunday, November 23 (6PM)**. Late papers will NOT be accepted.

4. Midterm Exam (20%)

A mid-term exam will be given on **Tuesday, October 7** covering both the reading assignments and in-class material up to this point in the semester. The mid-term exam will consist of two parts: The first will include multiple choice, true/false, pattern match, or short identification questions. This will be followed by an essay section. The time of the mid-term exam may not be changed.

5. Final Exam (20%)

The final exam for our class will be given on **Friday, December 12 (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. The first part of the final will address the material covered since the mid-term exam until the end of the semester and will include both multiple choice and essay questions. The final's second part will be cumulative and treat the semester's material in a synthetic and comparative manner. This second part will consist of essay questions only. 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.

6. Academic Research Paper (20%)

The research paper is an opportunity to engage more deeply with a particular topic of your choice related to this course. It is of greatest importance that you choose a topic of interest to you. The research paper should ideally use both primary source material and appropriate secondary and theoretical studies to focus more closely on a particular subject. You can find a list of recommended resources on the [research guide](#) available on the library webpage. Your 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.

Format, Length, Deadline: Your research paper should be 8-10 pages. Use 12 point font (TNR), 1" margins, and double-spacing throughout (except for block quotations). Consistently follow one method for citing sources. Any established method is acceptable. That might mean, for instance, the methods outlined in the [MLA, APA, or Chicago Manual of Style](#). The paper must include a bibliography that list all the works cited in your paper. Number your pages. Include a separate title page listing your name, the title of your paper, "Religion 211 Western Religions," and the date. The due date for the final draft of your research paper is the last day of class. Late papers will not be accepted.

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 course schedule at which I expect you to discuss your results to date with me and/or your peers.

- **Week 6 (9/29-10/3):** Determine research paper topic and clear it with me
- **Thursday 10/9:** Library Research Workshop
- **Thursday 10/16:** Three annotations
- **Tuesday 10/28:** Annotated bibliography (minimum of six sources)
- **Friday 11/7:** Thesis statement and outline
- **Tuesday 12/2:** Draft for peer review (minimum of 8 pages, completed bibliography)
- **Thursday 12/4:** In-class peer reviews (refer to peer review handout for guidelines)
- **Tuesday 12/9** (last day of class): Turn in final draft with copy of initial draft and peer reviews attached

Facilitating a Stronger Learning Experience

Those students needing help with writing, English, or research, please also note the support provided by the Writing Center run by Dr. Adriane 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 contact [Jessalyn P. Smiley](#), the Coordinator for Disability Services for Students at Emory.

Academic Honesty

Finally, all students deserve an atmosphere of fairness, honesty and maturity. All of us at Emory University live by the standards set forth in the Honor Code which indicates that we cannot tolerate actions in others that violate this code, so I (and you) am obligated to report violations. Emory University takes this honor code very seriously, as do I, and penalties for violations are severe. Please read the Honor Code carefully; I trust you to conduct yourselves accordingly.

Class Schedule

Week 1 (8/28)	Introductions to each other and the class: What are your expectations from this course? What is Religion? What are Western Religions? Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Introduction Overview)
Week 2 (9/2, 9/4)	The Academic Study of Religion; Characteristics of Basic Religions: What is Animism? Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.1) and selections from Tylor's <i>Primitive Culture</i> (BB).

Week 3 (9/9, 9/11)	Ancient Mesopotamia: Gilgamesh, Myth, and the Hero's Journey Reading: <i>The Epic of Gilgamesh</i> (62-119)
Week 4 (9/16, 9/18)	Ancient Persia: Zoroastrianism's Conflict Dualism Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.10) Sunday (9/21): Turn in first analysis paper (6 PM)
Week 5 (9/23, 9/25)	Biblical Judaism: Monotheism, Covenant, Written and Oral Torah, Sacred Rites Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.11)
Week 6 (9/30, 10/2)	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> Media: <i>Survivors of the Holocaust</i> Research Paper: last week to clear topic with me
Week 7 (10/7, 10/9)	Midterm and Library Workshop Tuesday: Midterm Exam Thursday: Library Research Workshop
Fall Break (10/13-10/14)	
Week 8 (10/16)	Christianity: Life of Jesus and Sources about Him, Doctrine of the Trinity Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.12: 270-293) Thursday: Turn in three annotations
<i>Wednesday, October 15: Midterm deficiencies due</i> <i>Friday, October 17: Last day for dropping course without academic penalty</i>	
Week 9 (10/21, 10/23)	Christianity: Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Protestant Reformation, Christianity Today: Fundamentalism Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.12: 293-308)
Week 10 (10/28, 10/30)	Islam as a Monotheistic Creed: Muhammad and the Qur'an, Sacred Rites Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.13) Tuesday: Turn in annotated bibliography (minimum of six sources) Sunday (11/2): Turn in second analysis paper (6 PM)
Week 11 (11/4, 11/6)	Variations within Islam: Sunni, Shi'i, Sufi Muslims Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.13 cont.) Friday (11/7): Turn in your thesis statement and outline
Week 12 (11/11, 11/13)	Clash of Civilizations? Reading: Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations" <i>Foreign Affairs</i> 72:3 (Summer 1993): 22-49 (BB). Essays by Amartya Sen and Marc Erikson on Huntington's thesis (BB).

Week 13 (11/18, 11/20)	Baha'i Required Reading: Hopfe/Woodward (Ch.14) Sunday (11/23): Last chance to turn in third analysis paper/site visit analysis (6PM)
Week 14 (11/25)	Open Class
11/26-11/30	Thanksgiving Recess
Week 15 (12/2, 12/4)	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 (12/9)	Evaluations and Review Turn in the final draft of your research paper.

Final Exam: Friday, December 12 (2:00 – 5:00 PM)