

RELS 110: The Nature and Experience of Religion

Spring 2020 • Manhattan College

Section 14: MWR 3:30–4:20pm • De La Salle 312

Section 15: MWR 4:30–5:20pm • De La Salle 312

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Office Hours: MWR 2:30–3:20pm, or by appointment

Course Overview

Any subject as grand as the “Nature and Experience of Religion” will require a careful balancing of breadth and depth. In this course we will explore a wide range of religious theories, practices, and historical periods—from the Hinduism and Buddhism of Ancient India to the Christian Science of twentieth-century America—as well as diverse modes of interpreting and comparing these traditions. In Part One we will begin with conflicts between duty and renunciation in early Hinduism, before turning to Buddhist explanations of karma and suffering in Part Two. In Part Three we focus on religious healing and specific religious communities in the modern United States, including those of Christian Science in Massachusetts and Hmong popular religion in California. By taking this course, students will learn to read and interpret scripture, analyze and narratively explain the difficulties of life from multiple religious perspectives, and finally reconcile these diverse conceptions within the context of a modern pluralistic society.

Course Objectives

1. Applied Knowledge: In this course we will identify, employ, and draw on specific terms related to religious traditions including but not limited to terms regarding symbols, myths, rituals of diverse religious traditions.
2. Encountering Lived Religions: We will seek to identify and describe how religion is contextually situated and therefore dynamic. We will seek to build on concepts that we learn in class in order to illuminate the settings for and expressions of observed religious elements.
3. Defamiliarization: We will seek to see, recognize, and reexamine specific personal presuppositions and explain why the course material does or does not unsettle these assumptions. Once again, we will be challenged to do so by drawing on specific concepts and terminology and by providing at least one concrete example drawn from the course.
4. Communication: We will learn to communicate information and ideas coherently, compellingly, and concisely. In order to achieve this goal, we will learn to present arguments in an organized fashion, such that the different sections of an argument fit together logically and effectively, free of grammatical, spelling, typographical, or other mechanical errors.

Attendance

Students are expected to attend each class session. You are allowed three absences (for any reason) without penalty; absences for athletics are included in these three. Beginning on your fourth absence, your course grade will be reduced by 1/3 of a letter-grade (e.g. B+, B, B-) per absence. On your 9th absence, you will automatically fail the course. If you do not show up for class, my assumption is that you are deliberately making the choice not to attend, and that you understand the attendance policy.

Deadlines

Missing deadlines will affect your grade. Late work will be penalized 5 points per day. If you do not turn in an assignment, I will not chase you around and pester you to turn it in. My assumption is that you are aware of the due dates and are choosing not to turn it in.

Participation

Please complete the assigned readings for each day before you come to class. Bring the readings to class and be prepared to discuss them. Be an active reader! Take notes when you read. Pay attention to the genre and time period of the reading, as well as to the author's argument. Who is the audience for the reading? Is the author persuasive?

Citations and Plagiarism

You will be expected to cite the course readings in your work, but please ask me before you cite outside works (websites and other books). Plagiarism should be understood as taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own, and it will not be tolerated in this course. For more information on plagiarism and its consequences, see [<inside.manhattan.edu/student-life/dean-of-students/code-conduct.php#violationsintegrity>](http://inside.manhattan.edu/student-life/dean-of-students/code-conduct.php#violationsintegrity).

Grades

The grading scale for this class is: A = 100–93, A- = 92–90, B+ = 89–88, B = 87–83, B- = 82–80, C+ = 79–78, C = 77–73, C- = 72–70, D+ = 69–68, D = 67–63, D- = 62–60. In this course, a “B” means: “Good.” Grades above this reflect performance where a student brings a greater degree of creativity, accuracy, insight, energy, and inquiry to the material. Grades below this reflect poorer performance. Note that you must complete all assignments to pass the course (i.e. you cannot decide to skip some of the assignments). Below are the assignments that will make up your final grade:

I. Participation (15% of total grade): The success of this class depends on your active participation. You are expected to be prepared and to participate in discussion. What I am looking for is critical, accurate, creative, and otherwise thoughtful engagement with the course materials. You are not required to be the loudest person in class, but you should have prepared for class so that you are able to discuss the materials and ask questions.

2. Two Reading Responses (20% of final grade; 10% each): In addition to critically discussing the readings in class, you will also be expected to compose two short reading responses (RR) throughout the semester. Each RR will be a 500-word response (two double-spaced pages) to a prompt that can be found on Moodle. These RRs are designed to give you space to read carefully, think critically, and compose a short analysis or argument regarding what you have read.

3. Exams (40% of final grade; 20% each): Two exams will make up half of your grade:

- **Midterm Exam One:** February 13th, covering the material in Part One of the course.
- **Midterm Exam Two:** March 12th, covering the material in Part Two of the course.

4. Final Paper (25% of final grade): Building upon the interpretation and communication skills developed in the Reading Responses, the term paper will be a longer analytical essay. You will be asked to compose a 1250-word essay (five double-spaced pages) about religion in the modern era, and the essay should reflect an understanding of course readings and class discussions that we have throughout the semester. Due May 6th.

Required Books

You are required to buy one copy of each of these books. They are available both at the bookstore and online:

Narayan, R. K. *The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2006 [repr. 1973].

Tenzin Chögyel. *The Life of the Buddha*. Translated by Kurtis R. Schaeffer. New York, NY: Penguin Classics, 2015.

Articles and Book Chapters

The articles and book chapters below will be posted on the course Moodle site:

Berger, Peter L. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1990 [repr. 1967].

Doniger, Wendy. *The Hindus: An Alternative History*. New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2009.

———. *The Rig Veda: An Anthology*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1981.

Eddy, Mary Baker. *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. Boston, MA: The Christian Science Publishing Society, 1917 [repr. 1890].

Fadiman, Anne. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012.

Gottschalk, Stephen. *Rolling away the Stone: Mary Baker Eddy's Challenge to Materialism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011.

Hanna, Septimus J. *Healing Through Christian Science: Discourses and Editorials*. Boston, MA: The Christian Science Publishing Society, 1898.

Articles and Book Chapters (cont.)

- Harrington, Anne. *The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 2008.
- Keown, Damien. *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Larrimore, Mark. *The Book of Job: A Biography*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013.
- Lopez, Donald S., Jr. *Buddhist Scriptures*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2004.
- Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester. *The Upanishads: Breath of the Eternal*. New York, NY: Singlet Classics, 2002.
- Twain, Mark. *Christian Science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996 [repr. 1907].

Part One: Scripture, Hinduism, and Rama

Week 1: Scripture

- Wednesday (1/15): Introductions
- Thursday (1/16): What is Scripture?
Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 1–20.

Week 2: Interpreting Scripture

- Monday (1/20): MLK Day (No Class)
- Tuesday (1/21): An Example (Make-up)
Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 21–44.
- Wednesday (1/22): Double Vision
Doniger, *The Hindus*, 1–16.
- Thursday (1/23): The *Rig Veda*
Doniger, *The Rig Veda* (selections).

Week 3: Hindu Scriptures

- Monday (1/27): The *Upanishads*
Swami, *Upanishads*, 64–78.
- Reading Response #1 Due in Class**
- Wednesday (1/29): Nachiketa and Death
Swami, *Upanishads*, 14–25.
- Thursday (1/30): The Three Aims of Life
Doniger, *The Hindus*, 199–211.

Week 4: The *Ramayana*

- Monday (2/3): *The Ramayana*
Narayan, *The Ramayana*, 3–32.
- Wednesday (2/5): *The Ramayana*
Narayan, *The Ramayana*, 33–73.
- Thursday (2/6): *The Ramayana*
Narayan, *The Ramayana*, 74–105.

Week 5: The *Ramayana*

- Monday (2/10): *The Ramayana*
Narayan, *The Ramayana*, 106–29.
- Wednesday (2/12): *The Ramayana*
Narayan, *The Ramayana*, 130–57.
- Thursday (2/13): Midterm Exam I

Part Two: Theodicy, Buddhism, and Siddhartha

Week 6: Theodicy and Buddhism

Monday (2/17): Giving Meaning to Suffering

Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 53–80.

Wednesday (2/19): *The Book of Job*

Larrimore, *Book of Job*, 1–24.

Thursday (2/20): The Buddhist World

Keown, *Buddhism*, 29–43.

Week 7: The Buddha

Monday (2/24): Birth and Early Life

Chögyel, *The Life of the Buddha*, 1–29.

Wednesday (2/26): Four Sights

Chögyel, *The Life of the Buddha*, 31–51.

Thursday (2/27): Nirvana

Chögyel, *The Life of the Buddha*, 53–77.

Week 8: The Dharma

Monday (3/2): Four Noble Truths

Keown, *Buddhism*, 44–56.

Wednesday (3/4): Mahayana

Keown, *Buddhism*, 57–69.

Thursday (3/5): Meditation

Keown, *Buddhism*, 84–96.

Week 9: The Buddhist Community (COVID-19 in New York)

Monday (3/9): The Sangha

Lopez, ed., *Buddhist Scriptures*, 252–61.

Wednesday (3/11): The Death of the Buddha

Chögyel, *The Life of the Buddha*, 79–105.

[Online class: Prerecorded lecture]

Thursday (3/12): **Midterm Exam 2**

[Online exam]

Week 10: Spring Break (No Class)

Monday (3/16): Spring Break (No Class)

Wednesday (3/18): Spring Break (No Class)

Thursday (3/19): Spring Break (No Class)

Part Three: Christian Science and Ritual Healing

Our course will be online for the rest of the semester. In order to allow for maximum flexibility while also having face-to-face discussions, we will shift to a combination of prerecorded lectures, online activities (TBA), and Zoom discussions. Participation grades will be evaluated using Moodle forums and participation in the Zoom discussions. I will also record the Zoom discussions and post them to Moodle for those who are not able to attend.

Week 11: Scripture and Healing

Monday (3/24): Humans and Scripture

Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 212–42.

[Zoom discussion]

Wednesday (3/26): *Science and Health*

Eddy, *Science and Health*, 465–97.

[Online activity]

Thursday (3/27): An Overview of CS

Gottschalk, *Rolling away the Stone*, 1–8.

[Prerecorded lecture]

Week 12: Christian Science

Monday (3/30): Mind Cure

Harrington, *Cure Within*, 15–30.

[Zoom discussion]

Wednesday (4/1): Mind Cure

Harrington, *Cure Within*, 103–15.

[Online activity]

Thursday (4/2): Twain on CS

Twain, *Christian Science*, xxxi–xxxvii.

[Prerecorded lecture]

Week 13: Christian Science

Monday (4/6): A CS Practitioner

Hanna, *Healing Through CS*, 3–9, 21–32.

[Zoom discussion]

Wednesday (4/8): Twain on CS

Twain, *Christian Science*, 3–38.

[Prerecorded lecture]

Thursday (4/9): Easter (No Class)

Week 14: Religion and Medicine in the USA

Monday (4/13): Easter (No Class)

Wednesday (4/15): Religion and Medicine

Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You*, 1–77.

[Zoom discussion]

Thursday (4/16): Religion and Medicine

Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You*, 78–92.

[Online activity]

Week 15: Religion and Medicine in the USA

Monday (4/20): Religion and Medicine

Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You*, 93–118.

[Zoom discussion]

Wednesday (4/22): Religion and Medicine

Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You*, 119–39.

[Prerecorded lecture]

Thursday (4/23): Religion and Medicine

Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You*, 140–53.

Extra credit due at beginning of class

[Online activity]

Week 16: Religion and Medicine in the USA

Monday (4/27): Religion and Medicine

Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You*, 250–61.

[Zoom discussion]

Wednesday (4/29): Religion and Medicine

Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You*, 262–77.

[Online activity]

Thursday (4/30): Religion and Medicine

Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You*, 278–88.

[Zoom discussion]

Term Paper due on Monday (5/6)