

Religious Studies 600  
Fall, 2006  
Tu 8:45-10:45  
Office hours: Tu 11-1 and by appointment  
2611 Humanities  
Class email: religst600-1-f06

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## RELIGION IN CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Thinkers have sought to understand religion as a human phenomenon in many ways. Whatever their perspective—debunkers or apologists, atheists or *dévots*, “westerners” or “easterners,” advocates or critics of religious studies as a discipline—they have tried to comprehend what role systems of ideas and behaviors issuing from the existence of divine beings have played and should play in human affairs. This course will introduce you to some of the major participants in an ongoing debate.

The following books are required reading and are available at the University Book Store:

Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*  
Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed*  
Hans Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age*  
Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors*  
Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*  
Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*  
Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*  
Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*

A packet of required materials entitled:

*The Words: A Reader for Religious Studies 600*

is available at the Humanities Copy Center, 1650 Humanities Building. All additional assignments come from this packet. The College Library in H. C. White Hall has placed all of the readings on three-hour reserve. Readings for week 1 have been placed on electronic reserve at the College Library, and can be accessed through your MyUW account at <http://my.wisc.edu/portal/>.

### Written Assignments

You will write one 5-page paper, one 10-page paper, and six brief minor assignments. There is no final exam. Page 5 below lists the paper topics, minor assignments, and due dates. The minor assignments are due in class on the **Tuesday** indicated, the 5-page paper is due in my mailbox at **5:00 P.M.** on the **Friday** indicated, and the final paper is due in my mailbox on **Monday, December 18** at **noon**. Please note that you need write only **one** of the four 5-page paper options. All assignments, including the minor ones, must be typed and double-spaced. I have placed examples of “A” papers on my webpage. You are responsible for knowing the material in the “style sheet” for written assignments, also located on my webpage.

### Rewrite Policy

You may rewrite the 5-page paper; the research paper comes due too close to the end of the semester to permit second versions. To begin the rewrite process, you must first talk with me about such details as the

new due date and the kinds of changes to be made. You must inform me of your decision to rewrite by the end of the next class session after I return the original version. You will ordinarily receive one week to rewrite, but I am flexible about negotiating extensions for good cause. The old draft (plus any separate sheet of comments) *must* accompany the new version. Rewriting cannot lower your grade (nor can changing your mind about handing in a revised paper), but it does not by itself guarantee a higher one; you must *substantially rework the essay*, following my comments and initiating your own improvements too. I have placed an example of an original paper and its rewritten version on my webpage.

## Grading

The 5-page paper counts for 30% of the final grade, class participation 30%, and the final paper 40%. Class participation will be evaluated on a combination of attendance and quality of discussion (which is not identical to quantity). The minor assignments will be ungraded, but failure to turn them in will lower your class participation grade.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Assignment for Class Discussion</b>
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### I. INTRODUCTION: THE STUDY OF RELIGION

#### 1. What is Religious Studies?

Sept. 5	<b>Reading:</b> Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious"; Russell McCutcheon, "More Than a Shapeless Beast"; D. G. Hart, <i>The University Gets Religion</i> , 235-51; Timothy Fitzgerald, <i>The Ideology of Religious Studies</i> , 3-32; Gavin Flood, "Reflections on Tradition and Inquiry in the Study of Religions"; Nancy Levene, "Response to Gavin Flood; Flood, "Reply." <b>Minor Assignment:</b> #1
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#### 2. Historical Background

12	<b>Reading:</b> Daniel Pals, <i>Eight Theories of Religion</i> , 3-52; Hans Kippenberg, <i>Rediscovering Religious History in the Modern Age</i> <b>Minor Assignment:</b> #2
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### II. CLASSICAL THEORIES OF RELIGION

#### 1. Psychology I: William James

19	<b>Reading:</b> Ann Taves, <i>Fits, Trances, &amp; Visions</i> , 261-91; Wayne Proudfoot, "Pragmatism and an 'Unseen Order' in <i>Varieties</i> "; William James, <i>The Varieties of Religious Experience</i> , 30-138, 382-408
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#### 2. Psychology II: Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung

26	<b>Reading:</b> Pals, <i>Eight Theories of Religion</i> , 53-84; Sigmund Freud, <i>The Future of an Illusion</i> ; Carl Jung, <i>Psychology and Religion</i> , 5-63
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29	<b>5-Page Paper Option 1 due</b>
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#### 3. Sociology I: Émile Durkheim

Oct. 3 **Reading:** Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 85-117; Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 37-63, 121-49, 216-72

4. Sociology II: Max Weber

10 **Reading:** Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 149-92; Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 155-83; Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, 2.399-451

13 **5-Page Paper Option 2 due**

5. Religion I: Rudolf Otto

17 **Reading:** Philip C. Almond, *Rudolf Otto: An Introduction*, 55-87; Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 1-178

6. Religion II: Mircea Eliade

24 **Reading:** Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 193-228; Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*

27 **5-Page Paper Option 3 due**

7. Anthropology I: E. E. Evans-Pritchard

31 **Reading:** Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 229-59; E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion*, 106-43; E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, 100-22

8. Anthropology II: Clifford Geertz

Nov. 7 **Reading:** Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 260-91; Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in idem, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 87-125; Geertz, *Islam Observed*

10 **5-Page Paper Option 4 due**

III. CONTEMPORARY THEORIES OF RELIGION

1. Post-Colonialism

14 **Reading:** Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 27-54; David Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 1-29; Charles Hallisey, "Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravāda Buddhism"; Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 143-60; R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 127-54; John P. Burris, *Exhibiting Religion*, 167-78

**Minor Assignment: #3**

2. Feminism

Nov. 21 **Reading:** Victoria Lee Erickson, *Where Silence Speaks*, 3-66; Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 1-22; Grace M. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, 100-

**Date**                      **Assignment for Class Discussion**

27; Fatmagül Berktaş, *Women and Religion*, 35-57; Jone Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism*, 67-96

**Minor Assignment: #4**

3. Non-Western Philosophy

28                      **Reading:** Keiki Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 1-118  
**Minor Assignment: #5**

4. Western Philosophy

Dec. 5                      **Reading:** Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 1-118, 155-236; G. William Bernard, "Explaining the Unexplainable"

5. Religious Studies

12                      **Reading:** Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Warriors*  
**Minor Assignment: #6**

18                      **Final Paper Due**

**Paper Topics**

In writing this essay, you should draw on any and all material from the readings and class discussions, making specific statements firmly rooted in the evidence, using quotations whenever applicable, and evaluating the arguments of all “authorities” (including me!). You may choose another topic if the suggested ones bore, fatigue or disorient you, but you must consult with me **before** so proceeding.

## 5-PAGE PAPER

**Option 1 - due September 29:** Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the classical psychological theories of religion.

**Option 2 - due October 13:** Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the classical sociological theories of religion.

**Option 3 - due October 27:** Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the classical “religionist” theories of religion.

**Option 4 - due November 10:** Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the classical anthropological theories of religion.

## 10-PAGE PAPER

**Due December 18:** Does the field of Religious Studies have a subject matter? If so, what is it? If not, why not?

**Minor Assignments**

**#1 *Defining a term* - due September 5.** In one sentence NOT EXCEEDING 50 words (the 51<sup>st</sup> word and its successors face a terrible fate), define the term “religion.” Keep this sentence; you will need it for the final minor assignment.

**#2 *Summarizing an argument* - due September 12.** In one sentence NOT EXCEEDING 50 words (see above for implied threat), summarize Kippenberg’s argument about the history of religious studies.

**#3 *Evaluating opposing arguments* - due November 14:** In one sentence NOT EXCEEDING 50 words (or else), evaluate Asad’s critique of Geertz.

**#4 *Determining a basic assumption* - due November 21.** In one sentence NOT EXCEEDING 50 words (you should know how to be brief by now), state the basic assumption(s) that inform feminist critiques of religion.

**#5 *Explaining a term* - due November 28.** In one sentence NOT EXCEEDING 50 words (yadda, yadda, yadda), explain what Nishitani means by *śūnyātā*.

**#6 *Rethinking a previous conclusion* - due December 12.** In one sentence NOT EXCEEDING 50 words (yadda, yadda, yadda), assess the definition of “religion” you wrote for the first minor assignment.

# A PROCLAMATION

## *Regarding Late Papers*

Whereas it may come to pass that one or more individuals, whether through dilatoriness, dereliction, irresponsibility, or chutzpah, may seek respite and surcease from escritorial demands through procrastination, delay, and downright evasion;

And whereas this unhappy happenstance contributes mightily to malfeasance on the part of parties of the second part (i.e., students, the instructed, you) and irascibility on the part of us (i.e., the professor, the instructor, me);

Be it therefore known, understood, apprehended, and comprehended:

That all assignments must reach us on or by the exact hour announced in class, and that failure to comply with this wholesome and most generous regulation shall result in the assignment forfeiting one half of a letter grade each day for which it is tardy (i.e., an “A” shall become an “AB”), “one day” being defined as a 24-hour period commencing at the announced hour on which the assignment is due; and that the aforementioned reduction in grade shall continue for each succeeding day of delay until either the assignment shall be remitted or its value shrunk unto nothingness. And let all acknowledge that the responsibility for our receiving papers deposited *surreptitio* (i.e., in my mailbox or under my door), whether timely or belated, resides with the aforementioned second-part parties (i.e., you again), hence onus for the miscarriage of such items falls upon the writer's head (i.e., until I clutch your scribbles to my breast, I assume you have not turned them in, all protestations to the contrary notwithstanding).

Be it nevertheless affirmed:

That the greater part of justice residing in mercy, it may behoove us, acting entirely through our gracious prerogative, to award an extension in meritorious cases, such sufferances being granted only upon consultation with us, in which case a negotiated due date shall be proclaimed; it being perfectly well understood that failure to observe this new deadline shall result in the immediate and irreversible failure of the assignment (i.e., an “F”), its value being accounted as a null set and less than that of a vile mote. And be it further noted that routine disruptions to routine (i.e., lack of sleep occasioned by pink badgers dancing on the ceiling) do not conduce to mercy, but that severe dislocations brought on by Acts of God (exceedingly traumatic events to the body and/or soul, such as having the earth swallow one up on the way to delivering the assignment) perpetrated either on oneself or on one’s loving kindred, do.

And we wish to trumpet forth:

That our purpose in declaiming said proclamation, is not essentially to terminate the wanton flouting of our didactic intentions, but to encourage our beloved students to consult with us, and apprehend us of their difficulties aforehand (i.e., talk to me, baby), so that the cruel axe of the executioner fall not upon their Grade Point Average and smite it with a vengeance.

To which proclamation, we do affix our seal:

