

RLG 6035: Method and Theory I
Fall 2019
Wed. 4th-6th periods, CBD 234

Instructor: Anna Peterson
Office: 105 Anderson (Mailbox in 107 Anderson)
Tel. 392-1625, fax 392-7395
E-mail: annap@ufl.edu
Office Hours: Monday and Friday, 12:30-1:30 and by appointment.

Course Description

In this seminar, we will reflect upon the modern study of religion, namely, its “method” and “theory.” The bulk of this course will be devoted to the careful reading of several major theories of religion, including sociological, anthropological, psychoanalytical approaches. We will therefore begin the semester by discussing, first, the purpose of theory in religious studies, with a focus on the way theory helps us see patterns and connections within and across traditions, identify and analyze important themes, and understand the way religions operate in the real world. Second, we will establish what it means to construct and evaluate a well-formed theory, including defining a clear and distinct object of study, building arguments based upon empirical evidence, building consistent arguments, and achieving clarity in language. Third, we will consider a variety of different methods used to examine religions and religious phenomena, including textual, archival, ethnographic, and quantitative studies, and the relations between methods and theories.

Format

The seminar is organized around class discussions based on the weekly assigned readings. We will usually read a monograph or several articles per week. Since this is a small advanced seminar, active and engaged participation is required. Students will make presentations and help to lead discussions.

Required Books

Bayne, Tim. *Philosophy of Religion: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, 2018.

Comaroff, Jean. *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance*. Chicago, 1985.

Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. New York: Free Press, 1965.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane*. New York: Harvest/HBJ Book, 1968.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Future of an Illusion*. New York: Norton, 1989.

Marx, Karl and F. Engels. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert Tucker. New York: W.W. Norton, 1978.

Weber, Max. *The Sociology of Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.

Additional required readings will be posted on Canvas. See separate document with list of required and recommended readings.

Assignments

1. Participation. This grade will be based primarily on unannounced reading quizzes. 10% of grade.
2. IRB approval. 5% of final grade. You must complete the training to be approved for IRB2 (human subjects) by 9/4. If you have already completed this, submit your informed consent, interview or survey questions, and other documentation. More information is at <https://my.irb.ufl.edu/> and information on required training is at: <http://irb.ufl.edu/index/requiredtraining.html>.
3. Three short critical commentary papers (about 3 pages each) – 10% each, for a total of 30% of final grade. Due 9/25, 10/23, and 11/20.
4. For weeks 3-15, students will sign up to do short presentations on the day's readings. The purpose is not summarize the reading but to identify major questions, issues, and themes for discussion. The presentations will count for a total of 15% of your grade.
5. Review essay or other final paper (10-15 pp.), to be decided in consultation with instructor. 30% of final grade. Due Dec. 9.

Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic and Assignments</u>	<u>Readings</u>
8/21	What is theory? What is it good for? Exercise: “applying” theory	Syllabus
8/28	Theories and methods	Cadge et al; Omer; Vernon Optional: Kupari, Ploch
Complete IRB approval by 9/4		
9/4	Early theorists	Müller, Tylor, Frazer, Evans-Pritchard, Douglas
9/11	Anthropological approaches	Levi-Strauss, Turner articles
9/18	Emile Durkheim	Durkheim, <i>Elementary Forms</i>
9/25	Max Weber	Weber, <i>Sociology of Religion</i>

First short paper due in class 9/25

10/2	Karl Marx	Marx, selections from <i>The Marx-Engels Reader</i>
10/9	Pragmatism	James, selections from <i>Varieties of Religious Experience</i> ; Dewey, <i>A Common Faith</i>
10/16	Freud	Freud, <i>Future of an Illusion</i>
10/23	Biblical Interpretation	Alter, Ogden, Schussler-Fiorenza, Tribble

Second short paper due in class 10/23

10/30	History of religions	Otto and Eliade
11/6	Modern classics	Geertz, Berger, and Bellah
11/13	Theology and religious studies	Niebuhr and Tillich
11/20	Philosophy of religion	Bayne, <i>Philosophy of Religion</i>

Third short paper due in class 11/20

11/27	No class – Thanksgiving	
12/4	Historical ethnography	Comaroff, <i>Body of Power</i> Recommended: Orsi

Final paper due Monday, December 9