

RLG 6035: Method and Theory I
Sect. 07EG
Fall 2013
T 7-9 MAT51

Instructor: Robin M. Wright
Office: Anderson 107C Tel. 392-1625
Office Hours: TWR 11-1 and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course offers an overview of the main sociological, anthropological, historical, psychological, philosophical, and textual approaches that have defined the academic study of religion. Focusing on the writings of foundational figures such as Durkheim, Marx, Freud, Weber, and Eliade, as well as their detractors and those who have been influenced by them, the course will trace the origins and evolution of the discipline of religion, highlighting continuities and discontinuities in the process of theory-building. In order to make sense of this evolution, we will borrow the concepts of paradigm and research programme from the philosophy of science. To ground theoretical approaches, students will also be introduced to various methods to research religious symbols, beliefs, practices, and institutions.

OBJECTIVES

1. To map out the main theoretical lineages in the genealogy of the academic study of religion
2. To sharpen the students' capacity to identify and critically evaluate the epistemological and ontological assumptions behind various theoretical approaches, with the aim of developing a reflexive stand when studying religion.
3. To offer students some hands-on experience with methodological design and theory building as they prepare to undertake their own research projects.

REQUIREMENTS

1. **A Class Presentation.** Each student will be responsible for presenting in class one of the Required Readings for the date scheduled. Presentations must cover (1) the key ideas and presuppositions of the theories and methods under discussion; (2) an historical contextualization of the theories, and/or an evaluation of the utility of the methods. Presentations should be accompanied by an outline of the main points (with printed copies to be distributed on the day of presentation). The assignment is worth 15.0% of the final grade.
2. **Two Annotated Outlines of Additional Theoretical Works :** At the beginning of the semester, the instructor will distribute a bibliography containing significant works in the various research programmes in the study of religion. Students will select one work and will produce an annotated outline that will be circulated among the class. The objective here is to build a data base of outlines of classic works that can be useful later in your career, when you have to take your qualifying exams or teach a course on related topics. The two outlines are due at the last

day of classes and will be 25.0% of your grade.

3. **A Field Research Practicum:** In consultation with the instructor, students will select a religious group and conduct participant observation with the aim of producing a detailed ethnographic account of a key event in the group's life. In addition, students will be required to use another research method (i.e., in-depth interviewing, oral histories, focus groups, textual analysis, or analysis of space and material culture) to explore how religion is experienced by leaders or particular members of the group. We will discuss various field and textual methods throughout the course. Students are encouraged to select groups and individuals related to their research interests and dissertation topics. The end product of this assignment will be a report integrating the ethnographic account and the information collected through the other research method. The length of the report will vary according to the additional research method used. However, aim for between 15 to 20 pages. NOTE: Part of the goal of this assignment is to familiarize students with IRB protocols, which must be completed before any research involving human subject can begin. IRB's procedures will be discussed at the beginning of the class but please refer to: <http://irb.ufl.edu/> for an advance preview. The assignment is due during exam week and is worth 35% of the final grade.

4. **Attendance and Active Participation.** Since this course is a small advanced seminar, attendance is **mandatory**. Absences will be allowed only under very special circumstances, such as a medical emergency, which will need to be properly documented. Students are expected to **read all** the assigned material carefully **before** coming to class and to participate actively in group discussions. As part of the participation grade, students are to e-mail the instructor and peers one or two short queries connected with the readings assigned for Tuesday by the preceding Saturday night. These queries will count as participation, since they will inform our conversations. The instructor reserve the right to give quizzes at any time (in case students are not doing the readings). Attendance and participation represent 15.0% of your final grade.

RULES

1. **Plagiarism or cheating:** Students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. On the issue of plagiarism and cheating, I operate under a zero tolerance policy. Students caught plagiarizing or cheating will automatically receive a grade of zero on the assignment in question and will fail the course. In addition, they will be reported to the appropriate university authorities. Please keep in mind that plagiarism does not consist only in copying verbatim someone else's material and presenting it as if it were yours. It also includes taking ideas (even paraphrased!) from an author without according him/her proper recognition (through a footnote, for instance). Other forms of cheating (particularly downloading material from the Internet and presenting as if it were yours) will also be subject to the same action. See <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honestybrochure.htm><http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/academic.htm> for more information on UF policies.

2. **Incompletes are strongly discouraged** and will be given only when students who have finished most of the assignments satisfactorily cannot complete the final requirements due to unforeseen events. If this is the case, students must arrange for the incomplete **before** the end of the semester.

3. Students engaging in disruptive behavior will be asked to leave the classroom. Please turn phones and pagers off during class.

4. **Students with Disabilities.** Students requesting classroom accommodation or special consideration must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation or special consideration.

READINGS

Required Books:

Kuhn, Thomas. 1996. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago University of Chicago Press.

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

Weber, Max. 2001. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Routledge. (The Parsons Translation).

Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt, ed. 1988. *The Hermeneutics Reader*. Continuum.

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

_____. 1996. *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press.

Freud, Sigmund. 1962. *Totem and Taboo*. New York: W.W. Norton

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

Recommended Books:

Bernard, Russell. 2001. *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

Morgan, David. 1997. *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

All required books will be on reserve at Smathers Library 2 hr. /overnite loan. It is recommended that students make their own copies before the first class on 08/28. Used copies of most of the readings may easily be found through online used bookstores.

Required Articles and Book Chapters:

One or two copies of the additional articles and book chapters will be available in the Religion Department's main office.

SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

I. Introduction

[Prior to the first class, students should become familiar with the syllabus and bibliography; books and articles on course reserves at Smathers; and begin the readings for 08/27]

08/27: Of Paradigms and Research Programmes

Readings: Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, read all,
Recommended: Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes." In *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, edited by Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 91-138, 173-180.

09/03: The Pioneers

Readings: Chapters 3, 6, 9, 13 of *The Essential Max Muller*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002; Chapter XI of Edward B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1883; and part I, # 1-40, 189-207 of James Frazer's *The New Golden Bough*. New York: Criterion Books, 1959.

II. The Structural-Functionalist Research Programme

09/10: Durkheim I: General Theory of Society.

Readings: Chapters 2, 5, 6, and 8 from *Durkheim: Selected Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972.
Methodological Interlude I: IRB's and Participant Observation
Recommended Readings: Bernard, Chapter 7

09/17: Durkheim II: What Religion Does.

Readings: *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pp. 13-149, 194-262, 462-496.

09/24: The Successors

Readings: Bronislaw Malinowski, from *Magic, Science and Religion* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1948, pp. 66-92); Claude Levi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth" in *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963, pp. 206-231); Mary Douglas from *Implicit Meanings* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975, pp. 27-59; and Victor Turner, "Liminality and Communitas," Chapter 3 from *The Ritual Process* (Cornell, 1969, pp. 94-130).

III. The Historical Materialist Research Programme

10/01: Feuerbach & Early Marx:

Readings: Lectures 3-5, 20-21, and 29-30 from Feuerbach, *Lectures on the Essence of Christianity*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.
The Marx-Engels Reader, 53-65, 143-200
Methodological Interlude II: Survey Instruments
Recommended Readings: Bernard, Chapter 12
(Guest Lecturer: Dr. Manuel Vazquez)

IV. The Psychoanalytical Research Programme

10/22: Freud

Readings: *Totem and Taboo*.
Methodological Interlude III: In-depth Interviewing and Oral Histories

Recommended Readings: Bernard, Chapter 10

10/29: Successors and Counter-Currents:

Readings: "Approaching the Unconscious," in Carl Jung's *Man and His Symbols*, New York: Laurel, 1968.

Chapters 1, 7-8 of Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1977.

V. The Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Research Programme

11/05: The Philosophical Foundations

Readings: *The Hermeneutic Reader*, Introduction and Chapters 2, 5, 7-9.

Invited Speaker: Prof. Kawashima (on Textual Interpretation)

11/12: *Verstehende* Sociology

Readings: *The Protestant Ethic*

Methodological Interlude IV: Focus Groups

Recommended Readings: Morgan's *Focus Groups*

11/19: Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion. Class Cancelled

11/26: History of Religions

Readings: *The Sacred and the Profane*, Introduction, Chapters I, II & III

Patterns in Comparative Religion, Chapters III, V, VII-XI

12/03: History of Religions vs. Thick Description

Readings: *The Sacred and the Profane*, Chapter IV

Clifford Geertz's "Religion as a Cultural System" and "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cock Fight" in *Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973, pp. 87-125 and 412-454.