

~ What's Wrong With You? ~

RELIGION AS DIAGNOSIS, FEAR, AND THERAPY

FALL 2016 • REL 3938 • University of Florida • Department of Religion



JONATHAN EDELMANN, PH.D.

– Assistant Professor of Religion –

OFFICE	Anderson Hall, Rm.106
OFFICE HOURS	Mon & Wed 10:00-12:00
EMAIL	jonahthanedelmann@ufl.edu
PHONE	(352) 227-2932
TIME	Tues 3:00-4:55 & Thurs 4:05-4:55
LOCATION	Anderson Hall, Rm.134

~ Introduction ~

There are many theories of religion. This course suggests that one way of understanding how people use the term “religion” is that it refers to a system of thought that describes what is wrong with a human being and it provides a solution to the problem. Like other theories of religion, I think it can be applied to an analysis of ideology and politics. Is the problem that we die in sin, or that we are reborn in ignorance? Is that we know too much, or too little? Is it the historical process into which we are thrust by the brute forces of nature, or our inability to control nature? What we call “religion,” as shall see, is often a *diagnosis* of the human condition, and within that is set of remedial or even medical treatments. By looking at the category of “religion” as an answer to the question “what’s wrong with you?,” this course introduces some of the most important texts in global intellectual history. These are the books that shaped and continue to shape civilization. Thus, this is a survey of core texts in intellectual history on a specific theme. The purpose of this course is to better understand how philosophies, sciences, and theologies define the human’s problems, but the content is not limited to the European tradition: it includes Indian and Chinese material as well. Another way of phrasing the goal of this course is to understand how the world’s most enduring texts describe the ultimate goal and purpose of life by a negative description (*via negativa* or *vyatireka*), the central problems we must solve in order to have lived a full, a meaningful, and a complete existence. I have also included material from contemporary media, advertisement in particular, since it too diagnosis the human problem and attempts to solve it.

~ Evaluation ~

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| (1) Class Attendance – 10% | (6) Short Paper 4 – 10% |
| (2) Class Participation – 10% | (7) Midterm Examination – 10% |
| (3) Short Paper 1 – 10% | (8) Final Examination – 10% |
| (4) Short Paper 2 – 10% | (9) Research Paper – 20% |
| (5) Short Paper 3 – 10% | |

CLASS ATTENDANCE is required and more than three unexcused absences result in full grade reduction, but more importantly, class participation is as well. You are encouraged to make regular and relevant contributions to discussions, and this requires having read the material before class. All readings are on Canvas. This is a writing intensive course and that is reflected in the evaluation distribution. You are required to write four **SHORT PAPERS**, approximately 4-6 pages, on each of the section-topics below. Papers should summarize the issues and make evaluative judgments about them. The **MIDTERM** and **FINAL EXAMINATIONS** will consist in short answers and essays based on the readings and lectures. I will help you develop a **RESEARCH PAPER** of approximately 11-14 pages on a topic of your choosing based on the course material. Over the course of the semester you should develop your research and argument, learning and developing your writing skills in the short papers. Topics can be on anything related to the material covered in class. I will provide a summary of how I will evaluate the papers, and I will make suggestions for developing a research paper. The **RESEARCH PAPER** is due in class on **December 6, 2016**.

~ Tentative Class Schedule and Readings ~

(1) JEWISH & CHRISTIAN: THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE FALL (4 WEEKS)

The Hebrew Bible says, "You should be holy" (*Leviticus* 19:2), and Jewish, Christian, and Islamic teachers explain why it is that we aren't holy. A central myth for explaining our un-holiness is in *Genesis* (3:4), or what's wrong with us, is that of Adam and Eve eating the fruit given by the serpent, such that, "the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked." Using this myth, Biblical interpreters have sought to explain how and why we are fallen, often through close textual examination and serious reflection on previous interpreter's interpretations. How have their views shaped Western philosophy, science, politics, and culture? We will start on familiar ground, looking at Augustine's doctrine of original sin, showing how this was appropriated by Francis Bacon in the early modern period to establish the foundations for modern science. Then we shall look at Maimonides' interpretation of *Genesis*, one that echoes the ancient Hebrew dictum of *tikkun olam*, "repair of the world." Finally, we examine John Calvin's interpretation, one that removes all human agency in the matter of salvation, and look at Max Weber's argument that this led to the rise of modern capitalism in the USA.

1. The Myth of the Fall in Early Christianity and Early Modern Science

📖 *Genesis* (2-3). Hebrew Bible.

📖 Augustine. 426 AD. *City of God Against the Pagans*. "Book XIII." Trans. by H. Bettenson. Penguin Books.

📖 Peter Harrison. 2002. "Original Sin and the Problem of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe." *Journal of the History of Ideas*. Vol. 63, No. 2, pp.239-259.

2. Moses Maimonides on the Fall of Adam in Jewish Thought

📖 Moses Maimonides. 1190 AD. "Chapters 1-4" *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Trans. by Shlomo Pines. University of Chicago Press.

📖 Lawrence Berman. 1980. "Maimonides on the Fall of Man." *Association for Jewish Studies Review*. Vol.5, pp.1-15.

📖 Gilbert S. Rosenthal. 2005. "Tikkun ha-Olam: The Metamorphosis of a Concept." *The Journal of Religion*. 85:2, p.214-240.

3. Doctrines of Divine Election in Christianity and the Roots of Modern Capitalism

📖 John Calvin. Latin version 1536 AD. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. "Book II, Chapter I: The Fall of and Defection of Adam, Doctrine of Original Sin; Book III, Chapter XI: Justification by Faith"

📖 Max Weber. 1930. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by T. Parsons. "Chapter IV (The Religious Foundations of Worldly Asceticism) and Chapter V (Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism)."

(2) HINDU & BUDDHIST: THE CONSEQUENCES OF IGNORANCE KNOWN (4 WEEKS)

Indian religions offer us one of the world's most penetrating philosophical examinations of the self that is prompted by various senses of that something is wrong with the self. Is there something fundamental and of the greatest importance that you do not know about yourself? Are you unknown even to yourself? The oldest philosophical texts of India say "yes." What is wrong with you is that you don't know who you are. Hindus and Buddhists agree this far, but reach different conclusions. The questions become: Is there some way that "you" really are, or is the entire notion of a "you" a mistake? While Hindus agree there is a self even though we're mistaken about it, Buddhists do not think there is an everlasting self, but only a false or constructed notion of self. Yet if there is anything that all indigenous Indian religions share in common, it is that the self and/or God must be understood if we are to escape all the problems that befall us: death, rebirth, and the suffering that ensues in between them. Thus, what's wrong with us is "ignorance" (*avidyā*), a deep-rooted lack of awareness of the ultimate truths of self and God. This is not, as you might guess, a question about one's lack of information about body or brain. Udayana, a great Nyāya philosopher, defends the existence of the self against Buddhists who deny it. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas like Rūpa Gosvāmin and Jīva Gosvāmin argue that the self must find its place in eternal heaven, one which hosts a spiritual drama with the supreme God, Kṛṣṇa, and his devotees, whereas Śaṅkara thinks we must free ourselves from the illusions that create a sense of duality.

1. The Nature of the Self: Self and No-Self in Hinduism and Buddhism

- 📖 Jonardon Ganeri. 2007. "Hidden in the Cave: The Upaniṣadic Self." *The Concealed Art of the Soul*. Oxford University Press.
- 📖 Nāgārjuna. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way (Mūla-madhyama-kārikā)*. "Ch XVIII: Examination of Self and Entities." Translation and commentary by Jay Garfield. 1995. Oxford University Press.
- 📖 Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad. 2011. "The Phenomenal Separateness of Self: Udayana on Body and Agency." *Asian Philosophy*. Vol. 21, No. 3, pp.323-340.
- 📖 Udayana. *Discerning the Nature of the Self (Ātma-tattva-viveka)*. Selection from Kisor Kumar Chakrabarti. 1999. *The Nyāya Dualist Tradition*. SUNY.

2. The Nature of God: Qualified and Unqualified in Two Schools of Hinduism

- 📖 Śaṅkara. Śaṅkara's Non-Dualism (Advaita). Introduction to commentary on the Brahma-sūtra. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe34/sbe34007.htm>
- 📖 Jīva Gosvāmin. Paradoxical Same-ness and Difference (*Acintya-bheda-abheda*). Selections from the Bhakti-sandarbha and Bhagavat-sandarbha. Translation by Satyanārāyaṇa Dāsa Bābājī. Jīva Institute of Vaishnava Studies. Vṛndāvana, India.

(3) BIOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY: THE CONSEQUENCES OF NATURAL HISTORY (3 WEEKS)

For well over 400 years human civilization has been hugely influenced by the results of scientific theory and technological output. One can no longer think about philosophical and theological issues in isolation from the sciences. What if we looked at the body, which had evolved through millions of years of competition, "red in tooth and claw," for an understanding of who we really are, as a source of our beliefs about religion and morality, and for a diagnosis of what's wrong with us and how it needs fixing? The 20th century saw a vast array of entirely new ways of framing some of the foundational philosophical problems we examined above. Many were often motivated to find explanations *within* the realm of sense experience and reason, often with naturalistic theories of mind and body. What's wrong with the human being can be examined from a naturalistic point of view, one that doesn't presuppose spiritual or extra-ordinary causes and conditions, but only the physical causes that can be studied and quantified by the natural sciences. Thus evolutionary, psychoanalytic, and more recently, neuroscientific theories came to the forefront of Western intellectual life. Perhaps the key to understanding the central problems what we face reside with the human mind, the guilt or shame we feel because of experiences in this life, or perhaps they reside in the evolutionary history of our species, or perhaps within the brain, which is itself the result of a long, complex but imperfect material process? Or perhaps this is an old way of looking at the world in a new language?

1. Psychology: Problems Underneath

- 📖 Sigmund Freud. 1917. "A Difficulty on the Path of Psycho-Analysis."

📖 Ernst Becker. 1973. "Chapter One: Human Nature and the Heroic, Ch 2: The terror of Death, Ch 11: What is the Heroic Individual." *The Denial of Death*. London: Free Press.

2. Evolutionary Instincts and Ethics

📖 Charles Darwin. 1882. *The Descent of Man*. "Chapter III: Comparison of the Mental Powers of Man and the Lower Animals (esp. Belief in God)." <http://darwin-online.org.uk/contents.html#descent>

📖 Eliot Sober. 2000. Sociobiology and the Extension of Evolutionary Theory. *Philosophy of Biology*.

📖 E.O. Wilson. 1999. Ethics and Religion. *Consilience*.

(4) POPULAR MEDIA & HIGH CULTURE: THE CONSEQUENCES OF CULTURE (3 WEEKS)

We are social creatures, and much of what is good and bad about us is a product of the social world in which we have developed and lived. Perhaps our social body is very much like our physical body. Can we live whole, meaningful, virtuous, and happy lives if we live in a culture that does not help us find enrichment? How do we evaluate a culture without presupposing the values we have assimilated in our own culture? In other words, are there *objective standards* to make sense of a culture's values? If you watch the commercials the subtext is often, "You are fat, ugly, and foolish, and your life is dull, boring, and meaningless because you don't have what we sell." Advertisers attempt to illuminate the emptiness and suffering in your life that you didn't even know was there, and then to provide a product – whether it is deodorant, potato-chips, or a new cell phone – that is certain to save you. Unfortunately, it is all too often that *this* aspect of American culture that is exported abroad and assimilated at home. Part of this section involves a critical evaluation of popular media, especially the notion that the marketing industry recreates what it means to be human to serve the needs of corporations, from high fashion to sports. Does America have a "high culture," one that is based on a refined tradition of aesthetic, moral, and emotional insight? Should it? Roger Scruton is a well-known advocate of that in England, and in his own way so was Henry David Thoreau in America. Has pop-culture, depicted for example in *Mad Men*, undermined authenticity? Yet we might also look to ancient civilizations as well. The Chinese have sustained a body of wisdom and ritual practice, one that they argue you must learn if you are to develop the sensitivity and refinement needed to live a meaningful and virtuous life. Indian thinkers argued we need to cultivate aesthetic and scientific knowledge to fully relish the bliss and anguish of the human emotional experience. The idea of cultivation through art underpins museum culture and we'll visit the Harn Museum in this regard.

📖 Roger Scruton. 2007. "Preface, Chapters 1-2." *Culture Counts: Faith and Feeling in a World Besieged*. Encounter Books.

📖 Henry David Thoreau. 1854. "Reading" and "Sounds." *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*

📖 Ada Jaarsma. "An Existential Look at *Mad Men*: Don Draper, Advertising, and the Promise of Happiness." *Mad Men and Philosophy*. Edited by R Carveth and J South. Wiley and Sons.

📖 Sthaneshwar Timalsinia (San Diego State University), "*Rasāsvāda: A Global Discourse on Emotion and the Self*." Unpublished Manuscript provided by the author.

📖 Hagop Sarkissian. 2010. "Confucius and the Effortless life of Virtue." *History of Philosophy Quarterly*. Vol 27, No 1, pp.1-16.

📖 Pollock, Sheldon. 1985. The Theory of Practice and the Practice of Theory in Indian Intellectual History. *J.AOS*. Vol 105, No 3, pp.499-519.

📖 Donald Preziosi. 1996. Collecting / Museums. *Critical Terms for Art History*. Edited by Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff. University of Chicago Press.