

Comparative Study (Senior Seminar)

REL 4933.0008, Fall 2020

MWF 8 (3:00-3:50)

Professor: Dr. Robert Kawashima

office hours: M 1:00-2:00; T 10:00-11:00; or by appointment

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Course Description:

The comparative method, practiced in varying forms in a number of disciplines (biology, linguistics, literature, etc.) compares, say, species, languages, and texts, in an attempt to account for both what unites as well as differentiates these objects of study. Generally speaking, they either arise from an historical relation. According to comparative grammar, for example, the Romance languages all descend historically from Latin. Or they arise from certain universal properties intrinsic to the objects under consideration. According to Chomsky, for example, all natural human languages derive formally (not historically) from an innate mental faculty he calls “universal grammar,” so that even wholly unrelated languages still share a core of crucial grammatical features. Comparative religion, in the same way, might be said to identify and account for the similarities and differences that exist between religions. What is religion? And what similarities, both historical and formal in origin, exist between religions?

In this seminar, we will approach these problems through the lens of Foucault’s project, “the archaeology of knowledge.” We will conceptualize and analyze religions as discourses, realized in various beliefs, rituals, institutions, and so forth. We will specifically compare the religious traditions of what might be thought of, broadly speaking, as the ancient Mediterranean world: Mesopotamia, Canaan (including Israel), and Greece. Given the nature of our primary evidence, we will need to confront certain theoretical issues involved in the critical analysis and interpretation of ancient literature. (Thus, we will also read a selection of secondary texts addressing these problems of method.) Our comparative analyses will not only trace religious evolution through history, but chart religious variation across geography as well. In particular, we will uncover two “epistemic breaks” or “ruptures.” The first underlies what is generally (and unsatisfactorily) known as the “monotheistic revolution” of ancient Israel — which led, as we will see, to homologous developments in other religious traditions as well. The second underlies the appearance of Jewish apocalypticism, out of which Christianity itself would eventually emerge. By thus using the comparative method, in conjunction with critical analytical and interpretive tools, we will seek to gain some sense of historical and theoretical perspective within the diversity of ancient religious traditions.

Required Texts:

HarperCollins Study Bible — or other approved translation

Michael David Coogan, *Stories from Ancient Canaan*

Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*

Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days*, trans. M. L. West

Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Richmond Lattimore

additional secondary readings, course materials, and information will be made available through **Canvas** at e-Learning

Accommodations for students with disabilities: students requesting classroom accommodation 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.

Course Requirements:

Attendance is mandatory

Participation — 10%

2 Exams — 45%

2 Essays (6 pages) — 45%

Make-up exams and late papers must be approved by instructor beforehand, or justified afterward by providing appropriate documentation (medical, etc.).

Grade scale:

	87–89 = B+	77–79 = C+	67–69 = D+	below 60 = E
93–100 = A	83–86 = B	73–76 = C	63–66 = D	
90–92 = A-	80–82 = B-	70–72 = C-	60–62 = D-	

Schedule:

Week 1

8/31 **Introduction:** syllabus; general background

9/2 **Creation Myth:** Dalley, “Epic of Creation”

9/4 **Creation “History”:** Genesis 1-3

Week 2

9/7 **Labor Day (no class)**

9/9 **Creation “History”:** Genesis 1-3

9/11 **Myth versus History:** Eliade, “Sacred Time and Myths”

Week 3

9/14 **The Enchanted Cosmos:** Hesiod, *Theogony*; Dalley, “Epic of Creation”; Dalley, “Epic of Creation”; Frymer-Kensky, “The Pantheon”

9/16 **The Disenchanted World:** Genesis 1-11; Psalms 19 and 29; Frymer-Kensky, “Israel and the Master of the Universe”

9/18 **Divinity:** Coogan, “Epic of Baal”; Genesis 1; 1 Kings 19; Vernant, “Mortals and Immortals: The Body of the Divine”; Bottéro, “Religious Representations,” 44-58

Week 4

9/21 **Nature:** “Homeric Hymn to Demeter”; Dalley, “Descent of Ishtar”; Coogan, “Baal”; Genesis 1-3, 6-9; Bottéro, “Religious Representations,” 77-95

9/23 **Culture and Cosmic Balance:** Hesiod *Theogony*, 19-21; *Works and Days*, 38-40; Genesis 2-11; Vernant “The Myth of Prometheus in Hesiod”

9/25 **Discussion:** TBA

Week 5

9/28 **Flood Myth:** Dalley, “Atrahasis”

9/30 **Flood “History”:** Genesis 6-9

10/2 **Sons of Adam versus Sons of God:** Genesis 6:1-4, 11:1-9

Week 6

10/5 **The Human Condition:** Dalley, “Gilgamesh”; “Atrahasis”

10/7 **The Human Condition:** Exodus 19-24; Deuteronomy 5-11, 27-34; Kawashima, “Covenant and Contingence”

10/9 **Discussion:** TBA; **PAPER 1 due in class**

Week 7

10/12 **The Hero:** *Iliad* 1, 9; Coogan, “Aqhat” and “Kirta”; Detienne, “The Memory of the Poet”

10/14 **The Patriarch:** Genesis 12-50; Auerbach, “Odysseus’ Scar”

10/16 **Discussion:** TBA

Week 8

10/19 **EXAM 1** (8/31 to 10/16)

10/21 **Genealogy of the Self:** *Odyssey* 19-20; Genesis 22; 1 Samuel 24; 2 Samuel 11-12; Aeneid 2; Vernant, “Some Aspects of Personal Identity in Greek Religion”

10/23 **Discussion:** TBA

Week 9

10/26 **Death:** *Odyssey* 11; *Aeneid* 6; 1 Samuel 28; Dalley, “Nergal and Ereshkigal”; Vernant, “Three Ideologies of Death”

10/28 **Divine Abode:** Deuteronomy 33; Judges 5; Habakkuk 3; Psalm 68; Exodus 19; Deuteronomy 4; 1 Kings 8, 19

10/30 **Discussion:** TBA

Week 10

11/2 **Sacred Space:** Kawashima, “Priestly Tent of Meeting”
Exodus 35-40; Leviticus 10; Numbers 1-3, 9:15-23;
Exodus 33:6-11; Numbers 11:16-17, 12:4-10; Deuteronomy 31:14-15;
Genesis 28, 35; 2 Samuel 24

11/4 **Temple:** Exodus 35-40; 1 Kings 6-8

11/6 **Divine Presence:** Exodus 3, 24-25, 32-33; 1 Samuel 4:1-7:2; Eilberg-Schwartz, “The Averted Gaze”

Week 11

11/9 **Sacred Time:** Genesis 1; Exodus 12, 23:10-17, 31:12-17, 34:18-24; Leviticus 23; Numbers 28-29; Deuteronomy 16

11/11 **Veteran’s Day (no class)**

11/13 **Sacrifice:** review Hesiod and “Atrahasis”; Detienne, “Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice”

Week 12

- 11/16 **Sacrifice:** Genesis 4, 6-9, 22; Exodus 12-13; Leviticus 1-10, 16; Deuteronomy 12, 16, 21
11/18 **Oracles and Prophecy:** Exodus 19-20, 24; 1 Kings 18; Amos 4-5
Exodus 28:15-30; Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; 1 Samuel 14:36-42, 28:3-20;
11/20 **From Autochthon to Alien:** Genesis 11-23, 31-35, 50; Exodus 1-12; Deuteronomy 12,
26; Joshua 12-21; Aeneid 12

Week 13

- 11/23 **Discussion:** TBA; **PAPER 2 due in class**
11/25 **Thanksgiving (no class)**
11/27 **Thanksgiving (no class)**

Week 14

- 11/30 **History:** Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 40-42; “KingList” and “Hammurabi Law Code”;
Deuteronomy 17:14-20; 1 Samuel 1-10; 2 Samuel 5, 7; Psalm 2
12/2 **Apocalypticism (Space):** “The Astronomical Book” (1 Enoch 72-82); Auerbach,
“Figura”
12/4 **Apocalypticism (Time):** “Jubilees,” excerpts; Mark 13-14; Auerbach, “Figura”

Week 15

- 12/7 **EXAM 2** (10/21 to 12/4)
12/9 **Conclusion**