REL 601: Theory and Method in Religion I (19th century to early 20th century)

The goal of this class is to introduce you to a selection of classic theories and methods in the study of religion. The Religion faculty agreed collectively to focus on close readings of at least Karl Marx, William James, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, and Sigmund Freud. I have used my discretionary weeks to include Friedrich Nietzsche and Manuel Vásquez’s companion book, More than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion.

In order to head off the sense of dwelling only in the distant past of intellectual endeavor, I have included readings from contemporary religion scholars and also small snippets from novels contemporary with the primary texts. It is my intention that these supplementary readings will call attention to—or provide a forum for focusing attention on—the dynamics of gender, race, class, materiality, thinginess, and affect that are at times referenced slightly, obscurely, or only implicitly in the primary texts.

This course requires quite a bit of reading, writing, reflection, and discussion. The assignment structure is as follows:

1. **An annotated syllabus** to an introductory course close to your subfield, e.g., Introduction to Christianity, Introduction to American Religion, Introduction to Religion and Indigeneity, Introduction to Religion and Ethics, Introduction to Religion and Media, etc. The syllabus needs to cover a 15-week semester, delineate the assigned readings, and assignments. The annotation will take the form of a cover letter explaining the decisions you have made about which of this semester’s theories and methods you have or have not included, and justifying those decisions vis-à-vis the expectations of your subfield. Due December 7th, in class. 20%

2. In consultation with me, choose a recent book in your subfield that you have not yet read, read it, and then compose a publishable **book review** (800-1200 words) that foregrounds the book’s theoretical and methodological claims, presumptions, and deployments. Please use the book review guidelines of JAAR or AJA or AAA. Due October 23rd. 20%

3. **Weekly responses** are due at the beginning of each class. If you are late to class, I count the response as late, too. If you miss class, you may not make up turning in this response, but you may email it to me (mghamner@syr.edu) ahead of class if the missed class is due to illness or family emergency. We may or may not decide to divvy up these three weekly tasks: (a) a **critical summary** of the most salient arguments of the primary text (critical here indicates the need to write with conceptual breadth and explanatory depth while still keeping it a relatively brief summary); (b) a **glossary** of the text’s key terms as you understand them; and (c) a set of **questions** that you have about the reading. Each of these tasks, averaged over 12 weeks of the semester is 15%.

4. **On-time and weekly attendance, preparedness, and consistent intellectual engagement in seminar discussions:** 15%
Schedule of Readings

Week 1  Framing the study of religion: Rationalism and Affect

9/01  Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), selection
Peirce, “A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God” (1908)
Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Chapter 1

Week 2  Marx

9/08  Selections from “On the Jewish Question” (1844); “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*” (1844); *The German Ideology* (written ~1846); “The Communist Manifesto” (1848); and *Capital, volume 1* (1867).
Vásquez, Introduction

Prof. Jay Geller (Vanderbilt) is visiting Friday, September 11.

Week 3  Marx

9/15  Review sub-selection of primary texts (TBA)
Vásquez, Chapter 1
Marcella Althaus-Reid, “Grandes medidas económicas: big economic measures: conceptualizing global erection processes”, from *Indecent Theology*.
Cornel West, “The Indispensability yet Insufficiency of Marxist Theory”, interview from *The Cornel West Reader*
Gogol, *Dead Souls* (1842), chapter 2, or Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I a Woman”(1851), both of which are easily available online.

Week 4  Nietzsche

9/22  Selections from *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887)
Vásquez, Chapter 2.
Cornel West, “Nietzsche’s Prefiguration of America’s postmodern Philosophy,” from *The Cornel West Reader*
Zola, *Ladies Paradise* (1883), Chapter 1, or Maupassant, “The Necklace” (1884), online.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Reading Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Cladis, Introduction to *Protestant Ethic*  
Weber, PESC (1905), chapters 1-2  
Vásquez, Chapter 3 |
| 9/29  |          |                  |
| Week 6 | Max Weber | PESC, chapters 3-5  
Jeff Kosky, “(In place of a) Introduction” from *Arts of Wonder* (2012)  
Vásquez, Chapter 4  
Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899), chapter 1 |
| 10/06 |          |                  |
| Week 7 | William James | *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), Preface and Lectures 1-10  
Vásquez, Chapter 5  
| 10/13 |          |                  |
| Week 8 | William James |                  |
| Prof. Deborah Whitehead (Colorado) is visiting 10/20-10/21 | |
| 10/20 |          | VRE, Lectures 11-20 and Postscript (esp. Lecture 20)  
Vásquez, Chapter 6  
W.E.B. Du Bois, “Of the Faith of our Fathers” from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) |
| 10/27 |          | *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), Books I-II  
Vásquez, Chapter 7 |
Week 10

11/03  
EFRL, Book III and Conclusion  
Vásquez, Chapter 8  
Mary Antin, *The Promised Land* (1912), chapter 1

Week 11  

11/10  
Freud  
*Totem and Taboo* (1913)  
Vásquez, Chapter 9  
James DiCenso, “Displacement, supplementarity and symbolic Meaning”, in *Totem and Taboo*, from *The Other Freud: Religion, Culture and Psychoanalysis*  
Masuzawa, “History on a Mystic Writing Pad: Freud Refounds Time” (selection), from *In Search of Dreamtime*.

Week 12

11/17  
*Future of an Illusion* (1927)  
Vásquez, Chapter 10  
DiCenso, “Freud’s critique of religion and the latent issue of ethical transformation”  
Proust, *Swann’s Way* (1913), selection

Week 13  
Thanksgiving

11/24  
*AAR No class*

Week 14  
Wrap-up

12/01  
Vásquez, chapters 10-end

Week 15  
Presentations

12/08  
Syllabus sharing and review