

RELIGION 300: Grappling with Existence

Professor Ernest Wallwork
 506 Hall of Languages
ewallwo@syr.edu 315-443-5720

Fall, 2016
 Tues/Thurs. 2:00-3:20
 Office hours by appointment

“Grappling with Existence” seeks to provoke critical reflection on the meaning or value of human life, by providing a forum for discussing beliefs, values and practices that make life worth living. It pursues this ambitious goal by exploring the existential significance of some of the most trenchant critiques of religious and spiritual ways of grappling as well as influential responses to these critique that reconfigure our religious heritages in novel ways. We will ponder rival religious, spiritual and moral subjectivities, as we seek to locate our own lives and ways of living among a rich range of possibilities. Your teacher hopes the seminar will provide resources for thinking about yourself in depth, while introducing you to one another in the context of fostering a sense of community among us.

Course Requirements: Attendance/Participation. Critical discussion is essential to this seminar. I expect attendance at every class meeting. More than one absence will be excused only with advanced notice and written, official documentation of illness or emergency. Unexcused absences will lower your final grade. Students are expected to contribute to all seminar discussions. It is important that you read the assignments carefully before class and that you come prepared to discuss the readings.

Weekly Reflection Papers/Participation Grade (25%). Students are expected to bring weekly reflection papers to class to aid the discussion. These responses will constitute a significant portion of your participation grade since you will be expected to share them with the class or working group. Your response papers should state in a couple of sentences or a short paragraph one of the primary issues/arguments in the reading. The body of the paper should discuss critically the treatment of the issue/argument and your agreement/disagreement with how the author handles it. At the end of your discussion, formulate at least 2 questions you would like the class to discuss. You may want to think about the meaning of key terms. The response papers should be 1-2 pages long, double-spaced, with regular margins and font. It is your responsibility to give a hard copy of your response papers to the instructor before you leave the classroom. Late papers will not be accepted.

Mid-term Exam (25%). There will be mid-term exam on **Thursday, Oct 13** on the readings through October 6.

Group Projects (25%). You will be divided into groups to work together on understanding 2 topics: 1) how baseball, football, basketball or some other sport functions religiously, (2) the relationship between religion, violence/terrorism and reconciliation. Groups will present on the first topic on **Thursday October 20** and the second topic on **Thursday, December 1**.

Final Exam (25%).

Texts. St Augustine's Confessions, Johnson and Wallwork, Critical Issues in Modern Religion, William James's Varieties of Religious Experience, Thrower, Religion: The Classical Theories and Wuthnow, America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity are all available at the SU bookstore.

Class Schedule and Reading Assignments

8/30 Syllabus Distribution & Introduction

PART I: TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

REVELATION

9/01 Thrower, Religion: The Classical Theories, chs 1 and 2 (1-44)

9/06 St. Augustine, Confessions, trans. Henry Chadwick, Books 1-4, 8.14-9 (1-71, 142-178).

RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

9/08 Thrower, Religion: The classical Theories, ch. 3 (pp. 49-72)

9/13 William James, Varieties of Religious Experience, Lectures 1-8

9/15 William James, Varieties of Religious Experience, Conclusion

PART II: NATURALISTIC THEORIES OF AND RELIGIOUS RESPONSES

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY AS HUMAN CONSTRUCTS

9/20 Thrower, Religion: The Classical Theories, ch. 5 (93-97);

Johnson and Wallwork, Critical Issues in Modern Religion, chs 1.

9/22 Johnson and Wallwork, Critical Issues in Modern Religion, ch. 2

THE CHALLENGES OF VIEWING RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCTS

9/27-9/29 Johnson and Wallwork, Critical Issues in Modern Religion, chs 8, 9 (pp. 213-265).

Additional Reading for extra credit: Johnson and Wallwork, Critical Issues in Modern Religion, either Chapter 10 (pp.271-302) or Chapter 11 (pp.309-341). Those who opt for Chapter 10 will present that chapter to the rest of the class. Those who opt for Chapter 11 will present that chapter to the class.

- 10/04-10/06 Thrower, Religion: The Classical Theories, Ch. 8, sections on “Emile Durkheim” and Max Weber (pp.183-198)
- Durkheim, Emile. The Elementary Forms, Book 1, Introduction, Ch.1, Ch. 7.
- 10/11 No class. Work on your group project on baseball, football, basketball or some other sport as a religion.
- 10/13 **MIDTERM EXAM**
- 10/18 Bellah, Robert. “Civil Religion in America,” in Russell E. Richey and Donald G.Jones, American Civil Religion, ch. 2.
- 10/20 Group presentations on sport as religion

THE CHALLENGES OF VIEWING RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY AS PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTS

- 10/25 Thrower, Religion: The Classical Theories, ch. 7 (pp. 126-157)
- 10/27 Johnson and Wallwork, Critical Issues in Modern Religion, ch.5, Sigmund Freud, pp.118-145.

POST-FREUDIAN RECONSTRUCTIONS

- 11/01 Johnson and Wallwork, Critical Issues in Modern Religion, ch. 6, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Religionless Christianity: Maturity, Transcendence, and Freedom” (146-175).
- 11/03 Johnson and Wallwork, Critical Issues in Modern Religion, ch. 7, “Erik H. Erikson: Psychosocial Resources for Faith” (pp. 178-207).
- 11/8 Viktor Frankl, Man’s Search for Meaning.

PART III RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

RELIGION IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

11/10 Johnson and Wallwork, Critical Issues in Modern Religion, ch 12

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND PLURALISM

11/15 Johnson and Wallwork, Critical Issues in Modern Religion, ch 13 (362-87)

11/17 Johnson and Wallwork, Critical Issues in Modern Religion, ch14.

11/29 Wuthnow, America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity, ch.3 (pp. 75-78), 4,5, 6, and 10.

Part IV RELIGION, VIOLENCE, TERRORISM, RECONCILIATION

12/01 Groups meet to prepare presentations on religion and violence

12/06 **Group presentations** on religion and violence

12/08 Wrap-up

Official Policies

Academic Integrity: The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The Policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/> .

Religious Observances: This is a reminder that students must notify instructors by the end of the second week of classes when they will be observing their religious holiday(s). In fall and spring semesters, students fill out their notification forms online.

Disability Statement: Students who may need academic accommodations due to a disability are encouraged to discuss their needs with the instructor at the beginning of the semester. In order to obtain authorized accommodations, students should be registered with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309 (315) 443-4498 and have an updated accommodation letter for the instructor. Accommodation and related support services such as exam administration are not provided retroactively and must be requested in advance. For more information about services and policy, visit the Office of Disability Services website at <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/> or contact the office at the addresses below:

Syracuse University, Office of Disability Services
804 University Avenue Room 309
Syracuse, NY 13244-2330
Phone: (315) 443-4498 TDD: (315) 443-1371