

**Spring 2019
Religion Department Course Offerings**

REL 100 m001 **ST: Introduction to African-American Religion**
TTh 9:30-10:50 **Dr. Biko Gray (bmgray@syr.edu)**

African Americans in the United States have made considerable contributions to the religious and social geography of this country. This class will explore the histories, traditions, and approaches to African American religions that have defined its contexts and contours.

This class focuses specifically on the African American religious experience. We will be focusing on the connection between race and religion in this course, and you will be challenged on how African Americans have contributed to and transformed various forms of religious expression.

REL 100 m200 **ST: Religion & Conflict**
MW 10:35-11:30 **discussion sections on Th, 3:30-4:50; F, 10:35-11:30 & 11:40-12:35**
Dr. Gareth Fisher (gfisher@syr.edu)

What does it mean when someone fights in the name of religion? Does it provide comfort, purpose, or an incitement to violence? Do religions condone conflict or are they only misused to justify conflict for political ends? Do some religions justify conflict while others promote peace? If there were no religions, could we achieve worldwide peace or would we condemn ourselves to endless fighting? Through explorations of religious scriptures and real-life case studies of religious groups mired in conflict both historically and in the world today, this course will explore these questions.

REL 101 m001 **Religions of the World**
TTh 5:00-6:20 **Mr. Abel Gomez (abgomez@syr.edu)**

Religion is fundamental to the ways many people understand and interact with the world around them. Because of this, an awareness of what religion is, how it operates, and the various forms it takes is central to understanding and appreciating cultural diversity. In this course, we explore this diversity by examining central features of six major religious traditions: Indigenous religions (in North America and Africa), Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. While it is impossible to truly understand the complex nature of these traditions in an introductory course, each religious tradition is paired with a case study to analyze one way that religious tradition is lived. This course challenges the widespread notion that religion is fundamentally about belief, and instead invites us to consider how issues of place, ritual, body, gender, image, and dress, are just as important, if not more so, to what religion is all about. Examining case studies

also invites us to rethink the boundaries of what counts as “Buddhism” or “Christianity,” for example, and consider variations within each tradition. By the end of this course, students will develop a critical understanding of religion in various contexts that can be applied to further study in the academy or to various professional settings.

REL 103 **Religion & Sports**
TTh 8:00-9:20 **Dr. Philip Arnold (pparnold@syr.edu)**

Nearly all sports have the origins in religious ceremonies. Olympic Games, Hockey, Sumo wrestling, and the Martial Arts are obvious examples, but also more popular games like Football, Basketball, Soccer, and Golf connect directly with ancient ceremonial practices. The most important local example of this is with the Haudenosaunee (i.e., Iroquois) game of Lacrosse. Even more important than its ceremonial history, however, sports are currently understood by enthusiasts and critics alike as a “religious activity.” The course will take the perspective that it is clearer to understand the current popularity and appeal of sports (including games of all types) as ceremonial activities rather than as business or entertainment activities.

REL/JSP 114 **The Bible in History, Culture and Religion**
TTh 3:30-4:50 **Dr. James Watts (jwwatts@syr.edu)**

The Bible has been the most widely read literature in Western culture. It has influenced literature, law and politics as well as religious traditions. This survey of Jewish and Christian scriptures in English translation pays particular attention to the literary form of biblical books, their origins and original ancient Near Eastern and Hellenistic contexts, and their role in the development of Western religions and cultures.

REL 120 **Introduction to the Study of Religion**
MW 5:15-6:35 **Dr. William Robert (wrobert@syr.edu)**

This course is an engaged, dynamic exploration of what we talk about when we talk about religion. It is not a distanced consideration of how others have studied religion. Instead, we will learn how to study religion by studying religion. So our class becomes a learning laboratory, exploring extended case studies from different times and traditions. We will use these case studies to consider how religion works, what religion does, and why religion matters.

REL 156 **Christianity**
TTh 5:00-6:20 **Dr. Marcia Robinson (mrobin03@syr.edu)**

This course covers Christianity’s institutional forms, sacred writings, ideas and beliefs, worship practices, cultural and creative expressions, and ethical and political roles in society, from antiquity to the present. In covering these things, this course basically asks what Christianity has to do with being human. That is, how does Christianity

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address human needs, concerns, and desires? What are some of the problems that Christianity has caused believers and non-believers? And, why, in spite of its problems, does it remain appealing and viable to a broad array of people over centuries and across cultures?

REL//MES/SAS 165 Discovering Islam
On-line Dr. Tazim Kassam (tkassam@sy.edu)

Islam is the world's fastest growing religion. One of the three Abrahamic traditions, it shares the monotheistic and ethical worldview of Judaism and Christianity. Yet, there is a dangerous vacuum of ignorance about Islam that is filled with misinformation about its history, beliefs and followers. The public relies on a constant diet of sensationalist media portrayals of Islam that focus exclusively on post-colonial zones of war and conflict. Discovering Islam's historical roots, core teachings, and cultural diversity will enable you to assess critically its representations in multiple contexts, to interact meaningfully with Muslims in daily life, and to make informed decisions in any profession. You will learn about its founder, Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an, differences between Sunni and Shi'a, the spiritual search of Sufis, the position of Women and the role of faith in Islamic art and music.

REL/SAS 186 Buddhism
MW 2:15-3:35 Ms. Mallory Hennigar (mahennig@sy.edu)

This course will provide a general introduction to the Buddhist religion from its origins in India to its practice today throughout the world. We will explore both the historical development of Buddhist teachings and the diversity of its lived practices across cultures.

REL 200 m001 ST: blacklivesmatter and Religion
TTh 3:30-4:50 Dr. Biko Gray (bmgray@sy.edu)

The rise of the #Blacklivesmatter movement in the United States has resulted in both the resurgence and shift in national conversations about race and justice in this country. Started by three queer women, the movement started shortly after George Zimmerman was acquitted for killing Trayvon Martin, and gained prominence and power through the continued spate of high-profile killings of black people by the state, most notably, by police officers. Carrying with it both a digital and physical imprint, Blacklivesmatter has become a political tour de force, operating as a banner under which protests, speak outs, books, and policy platforms have emerged.

Some might think this has little to do with religion however, as this class will seek to show, blacklivesmatter and religion are deeply intertwined, largely through what philosophers have called "the problem of evil." Starting with the question, "If God is so

good, why does suffering happen?” this course will explore how the BLM movement is a response to this question, albeit in unconventional and untraditional ways.

REL 200 U800 **Gender in Islam**
Online **Dr. Tazim Kassam (tkassam@syr.edu)**

Is Islam anti-woman? Muslim women are typically identified with the veil. Their religion is seen as the cause of their oppression. What is the basis of this stereotype? How do Muslim women themselves view the veil? Is it a tool of Oppression or a symbol of defiance? Having abandoned it, why have many reclaimed it and reverted to reveiling? How is dress implicated in the politics of identity, gender and space? In what forms does patriarchy exert control over fe/male bodies? How do cultural practices and socio-political contexts shape the experience of Muslim women in different parts of the world?

Students will pursue some of these questions by examining multiple ways that women’s status, nature, and roles have been inscribed in religious, legal, and theological works including the Qur’an and Hadith. In addition to reading critical works by Muslim activist and feminist scholars who have challenged patriarchal structures while also criticizing Western feminist stereotypes of Muslim women, students will also hear directly the voices of Muslim women.

REL 206 **Greco-Roman Religion**
MW 12:45-2:05 **Dr. Virginia Burrus (mvburrus@syr.edu)**

This course explores the variety of religious practices and traditions that flourished in the richly pluralistic context of the Roman Mediterranean, from roughly the first through the fifth centuries of the Common Era—the period in which Christianity emerged on the scene. We will consider a range of religious expressions, including myths and stories, philosophy, ritual practice, and art, encountering a world that is truly different from our own and yet strangely familiar as well. The goal of the course is to learn to think critically about religion, religious pluralism, and the encounter between polytheistic and monotheistic traditions, while also developing skills in historical analysis, textual interpretation, and writing.

REL/JSP/LIT 239 **Jewish Humor & Satire**
TTh 2:00-3:20 **Dr. Ken Frieden (kfrieden@syr.edu)**

Introduction to Jewish humor and satire, focusing on American and Yiddish fiction and film. Informed by Freudian theories, analysis of literary works, stand-up comedy, early Yiddish movies, and American films.

REL 295 **Religion & Art**

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TTh 12:30-1:50 **Dr. Zachary Braiterman (zbraiter@syr.edu)**

Relationship between art, religion, and religious thought. May draw on classical religious sources, art history, literature, theology, or philosophy. Emphasis placed on Western religious/artistic traditions (Judaism, Christianity)

REL 300 m001 **ST: Islamic Philosophy of Science (meets with PHI 300)**
TTh 2:00-3:20 **Dr. Ahmed Abdel-Meguid (aelsayed@syr.edu)**

Is religion always in conflict with science and scientific reason? Does religion always have to be based on an irrational/affective leap of faith? What if religion is rational? Can such a rational religion inspire paradigmatic shifts in our conception of science or does religion, even if it is rational, have to be confined to morality as most modern Western thinkers like Spinoza, Leibniz and Kant argued? In this course we will explore the Islamic responses to these critical questions. We will examine how Islam advanced radically different positions on the relationship between religion and scientific inquiry from Christianity, whether in its classical Catholic/Scholastic formulation or in its modern Protestant/Enlightenment formulation? Our approach will be mainly thematic rather than historical. We will focus on four main problems that are central to any system of scientific thinking: 1) scientific methodology and problems of induction; 2) key scientific concepts: substances, particles and principles of individuation, properties and powers; 3) problems concerning laws of nature (nomological claims) and the foundation of their claims; 4) Problems concerning scientific justification and explanation. We will start tackling each theme by initially considering general introductions from classical Greek and contemporary analytical philosophy of science alike. We will then turn to the leading Muslim philosophers who tackled these themes considering figures from the classical period (from 9th through the early 13th century) and post-classical period (from the 13th through the late 18th century) alike. This approach will enable us to appreciate the uniqueness and innovativeness of the Muslim philosophers' positions and how certain rational religious commitments led them to maintain these perspectives.

REL 300 m002 **ST: Religion & Politics in Modern Judaism**
TTh 2:00-3:20 **Dr. Zachary Braiterman (zbraiter@syr.edu)**

REL 320 **Magic, Witchcraft & the Occult**
TTh 9:30-10:50 **Ms. Diana Brown (dlbro100@syr.edu)**

This course provides an overview of British and American individuals, groups, and movements categorized by scholars as "esoteric" or "metaphysical," from the 19th century to the present. Authors of the writings we will examine often refer to themselves as magicians, witches, and occultists. What do such terms mean, for

practitioners and for scholars? We will start close to home, with Spiritualism's mediums, seances, and other phenomena of spirit contact--which arose in the mid-19th century in central and western New York State-- and follow a trail through Theosophy, Christian Science, ceremonial magic, Witchcraft, Paganism, Satanism, Chaos Magick, and more. Along our journey, we will also ask: how are these movements "religious"? What is their appeal? Are they fringe, or mainstream?

REL 327 **Yoga: Ancient Religion to Modern Practice**
MW 12:45-2:05 **Dr. Joanne Waghorne (jpwaghor@syr.edu)**

What is yoga? Often those in yogic practices declare that yoga is not associated with "religion" but rather either "spiritual" or totally "secular." This course will consider contemporary yoga in the context of its origins in India paying close attention to the ways the human body and the larger cosmos are intertwined within the Hindu tradition and then tracing the changes in the modern period when yoga developed anew in India and in Europe and then America. The practice of yoga always concerned the re-formation of both mind and body—and included a broad understanding of health-- but in what sense? Here the newer work in cognitive studies, contemplative studies (sometimes called Mindfulness or Wisdom research) will be important to understand.

REL/JSP/LIT 335 **Israeli Literature and Culture**
TTh 11:00-12:20 **Professor Erella Brown-Sofer (ebrownso@syr.edu)**

Literary and cultural approach to the modern history of Israel, with special attention to conflicts that have arisen during the Zionist project.

REL 342/PSC/JSP **Religion and Politics in the Israeli Palestinian Conflict**
TTh 2:00-3:20 **Dr. Miriam Elman**

Considers the extent to which religion matters in an enduring ethno-nationalist conflict. Approaches the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from an interdisciplinary perspective that explores the intersection of religion and politics.

REL 359 **Stem Cells and Society (cross-listed with BIO/PHI 396)**
MWF 10:35-11:30 **Prof. Gustav Niebuhr, Dr. Hille Paakkunainen, Dr. Scott Erdman**

The science of stem cells and the philosophical, religious and legal complexities surrounding the research and use of stem cell technologies.

REL 362 **Islamism & Islamist Movements (cross-listed with MES/PSC 392)**
MW 12:45-2:05 **Dr. Hossein Bashiriyeh**

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A study of the historical, religious, social and political origins of Islamism and Islamist movements around the world today.

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T 3:30-6:15

Jewish Studies Seminar: Religion, Politics and Israel

Dr. Zachary Braiterman (zbraiter@syr.edu)

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TTh 2:00-3:20

Enlightenment: Between European West and Islam (cross-listed with PHI 427) Dr. Ahmed Abdel-Meguid (aelsayed@syr.edu)

From its advent in the 18th century, Enlightenment has arguably been considered the most important intellectual movement in modern history by both its advocates and its critics. It is deemed the consummation of the efforts of European thinkers to break away from the fetters of what they considered the dogmatic and superstitious heritage of Scholastic Christianity that remained imprisoned in its theological reception of Greek philosophy. Most philosophical movements in the 19th and 20th centuries shaped their projects either by way of furthering or critiquing the themes and claims of the Enlightenment. But were the Enlightenment contributions really originally posed by Western European and mainly Protestant thinkers? This course is going to challenge this classical bias. Islam was the key civilization that radically and formatively influenced the development of Western modernity and Enlightenment; it ruled over and shaped the intellectual trajectory of the Mediterranean and Europe for centuries from the 8th through the late 17th centuries. We will thoroughly examine the stances of key Muslim thinkers at the height of Islamic civilization exploring the following themes: 1) epistemology focusing on Muslim critiques of classical Aristotelian naturalism laying special emphasis on question of causality and modality, 2) political philosophy focusing on Muslim philosophers' conceptions of sovereignty and the relation between the private and public spheres, 3) ethics and philosophy of human nature focusing on Muslim philosophers' conception of human freedom and rational agency. We will respectively consider the corresponding positions of key Enlightenment thinkers on these questions. The aim of our investigation is not merely comparative though; rather, the exploration of the stance of both traditions on these three fundamental themes is primarily intended to acquire a more profound perspective on their convergences and divergences. Secondly, and more importantly, this investigation aims to show how both perspectives could possibly be combined to respond to key challenges posed by both the advocates and the critics of Enlightenment in contemporary philosophy.