REL 601: Theories and Methods in the Study of Religion I
(19th century to early 20th century)

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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 added Friedrich Nietzsche and Manuel Vásquez’s companion book, More than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion.

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 Indigenous Religion, 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 16th, in class. 35%

2. Choose a recent book in your subfield that you have not yet read, consult with me about using it, read it, and then compose a publishable book review (800-1200 words) that foregrounds the book’s theoretical and methodological claims, presumptions, and deployments—making use of some of the figures, theories and methods covered in this course. Please use the book review guidelines of JAAR, JSSR, AJS or AA. Due October 19th. 25%

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 (eewallwo@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 25%.

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

**Week 1**  
Marx  
9/01  

**Week 2**  
Marx  
9/08  
Marx, *The German Ideology* (written ~1846); “The Communist Manifesto” (1848).

Vásquez, Introduction and Chapter 1

**Week 3**  
Nietzsche  
9/14  
*On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887)  
Vásquez, Chapter 2.


**Week 4**  
Max Weber  
9/21  
Giddens, Introduction to *The Protestant Ethic*  
Weber, Author’s Introduction  

**Week 5**  
Max Weber  
09/28  
PESC, chapters 3-5  
Vásquez, Chapter 3 & 4

**Week 6**  
William James
10/05  *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), Preface and Lectures 1-10

Vásquez, Chapter 5


Week 7  No Class. Work on the book review due Oct 19.

10/12  Yom Kippur

Week 8  William James

10/19  *VRE*, Lectures 11-20 and Postscript (esp. Lecture 20)

Vásquez, Chapter 6


Week 9  Durkheim


Vásquez, Chapter 7

Week 11  Emile Durkheim

11/2  *EFRL*, Book III and Conclusion


Vásquez, Chapter 8

Week 12  Freud

11/9  *Interpretation of Dreams*, ch 2 & 6, Sections A (pp. 311-319), B (pp. 340-344), E (pp. 385-395) and I (pp. 526-531).
Read the whole of Ch 2---the assigned sections from Ch 6 do not cover the whole of the sections. Section A of Ch 6 includes the Introduction and section A up to ii A Lovely Dream; Read all of B, Read Section E up until “A Hat as a symbol of a Man,” and Read I up until “in selecting examples of dream-interpretation I have so far as possible avoided dreams...


Week 13 Freud
11/16 Future of an Illusion (1927)
Vásquez, Chapter 9-10
DiCenso, “Freud’s critique of religion and the latent issue of ethical transformation”

Week 14 Thanksgiving
Week 15 Freud
11/30 Totem and Taboo (1913)
James DiCenso, “Displacement, supplementarity and symbolic Meaning”, in Totem and Taboo, from The Other Freud: Religion, Culture and Psychoanalysis

Week 16 Presentations and Wrap-up
12/07 Vásquez, chapters 10-end
Student Presentations

Annotated Syllabus Due Date: 12/16