

RSOC 9
Ways of Understanding Religion
Winter 2009
Section 45369 (8:00-9:45, Kenna 310)
Section 45371 (1:45-3:30, Kenna 109)

Instructor: Philip Boo Riley

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 10:00-11:00 a.m., Wednesday, 2:00-3:20 p.m., and by appointment

Texts

Three texts were ordered through the SCU bookstore:

- Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (WW Norton & Co., 1989)
- Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Begins Here: Palestinians and Israelis Listening to Each Other* (Parallax Press, 2004)
- Elie Wiesel, *Night* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006)

Additional materials will be posted on Angel and/or accessed through websites.

Objective, Starting Point and Prerequisites

The primary objective of this course is to engage students in thinking about religion within the discipline of religious studies. The Religious Studies Department some time ago explained thinking along these lines as follows:

"[t]he first course in religious studies is supposed to focus not on 'believing' (or not) in a religion, but on providing a set of categories...for probing what religion reveals about human beings - their societies, traditions, convictions and aspirations."

Categories developed in religious studies function as heuristics to direct our approaches to religious phenomena along specific lines of inquiry, and, to the extent they are made explicit, categories provide a common language by which students of religion can converse across their differences.

This quarter we will take our starting point from a question that emerged in the recent United States presidential race and election (and what by some reckonings will be at the center of our new president's leadership): what is/should be the proper role of religion in civic or public life? After a brief introduction to the discipline of religious studies, we explore that question in four very different contexts, each of which is a section for our course:

- Religion—believed, practiced, civil and other--in United States public squares
- Criticisms of Religion's Public Role from the perspective of Enlightenment Rationality
- Religions' Emerging Forms and Roles in the emerging Global Public Square
- Religion's Role in Representing and Memorializing Evil

As indicated on the course schedule, each context will have a main reading to orient our discussions and introduce categories with which to think about religion.

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Angel Course (Learning) Management System

This course utilizes the University's course (learning) management system, *Angel*. Each section of the course has a folder on that site, to which will be posted preparation notes (initial drafts and revisions), readings, discussion forums, etc. In addition, there is a folder called *Course Syllabus and Related Stuff*, which at this point that folder contains this syllabus, "Thinking and Writing"

(suggestions for writing and reading in this course), and information about the Monday, January 19, 2009 interfaith event on the SCU campus students are required to attend. As the quarter progresses we will add to that folder.

Students should register on our Angel course site before our second class, and access the site regularly throughout the quarter. Students are expected to resolve technical problems they encounter with Angel on their own by consulting the instructions and suggestions posted on the Angel site (<http://angel.scu.edu/default.asp>) and as necessary contacting the learning resources specialists who support Angel (<http://www.scu.edu/mediaservices/resources/itrs/angel.cfm>)

Academic Integrity Expectations

We should conduct ourselves in accordance with the University's academic integrity standards and policies that are presented at length on the website for the Office of Student Life (www.scu.edu/studentlife/resources/integrity.cfm) and in an abbreviated fashion in the *Undergraduate Bulletin* (2008-2009), pp. 353-355.

Disability Accommodations

To request accommodations for a disability, or to obtain information about this process at SCU, students should contact Disability Resources, located in the Benson Center, 2nd floor: (408) 554-4111 (TTY (408) 554-5445), www.scu.edu/advising/learning/disabilities/index.cfm.

Office Hours and E-mails

Individually or in groups, students are encouraged to visit me to discuss ideas, questions, assignments, etc. The hours specified above are regular "drop-in" hours. Students who have a conflict with those hours should contact me to schedule an appointment. Regarding e-mail, we should be judicious in our use of it—e-mail is an aid to communication and conversation, not a substitute.

Class and Course Expectations and Engagement ...and laptops

Each class session will be devoted to student and instructor engagement with the assigned readings and topics. To make this work, the instructor and students should attend each class session, complete the assigned readings (with the aid of the preparation notes) and exercises ahead of time, and be prepared to draw on their own experiences and perspectives to pose questions, try out insights and arguments, and contribute to the overall class effort to progress as students of religion. We should take away from each class session 1) a clear understanding of the categories that were introduced as our common language and a heuristic guiding our inquiry, and 2) a richer sense of the topic(s) we discussed and the nuances of different approaches to it than we had before class began.

Students should complete and submit tests, projects, exams, and preparation reflections on the due dates indicated on the schedule; extensions beyond those dates can be made in response to reasonable and timely requests, but the work must be completed within one week of the original due date.

Experience to date suggests that student use of laptops impedes class discussions; students who wish to use laptops during class should discuss their interest with the instructor.

Requirements and Grade Weighting

Student completion of required work will be evaluated as follows:

- Course Engagement (attendance, participation, religion in the media portfolio, two co-curricular activities) (10%)
- Four Reflection Essays (2 pages, based on class readings, throughout the quarter) (15%)
- Two Midterm Exams (identification of terms, multiple choice/t-f, essay) (40%)
- Final Exam (comprehensive identification of terms, essays) (20%)

- o Representing Religion in Public Media Course Project (electronic submission modeled on Speaking of Faith <http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org>, comprised of a statement, op ed, and resources for further inquiry related to a topic of the student's choosing) (20%)

Documents with details regarding these requirements (e.g. study sheets for exams, rubrics for reflection essays, details for course project) will be posted on Angel in the as the quarter progresses in the *Course Syllabus and Related Stuff* folder.

Instructor's Grading Strategy

Throughout the quarter students receive a score on each piece of work they complete, along with the median and range of scores for the class. Students who wish to do so during the quarter can use this **rough guide** to transpose percentages to a letter grade (and descriptors, from the *University Bulletin*, p. 345): A grades=90-100 (excellent); B grades=80-89 (good); C grades=70-79 (adequate), D grades=60-69 (barely passing). (Earning a grade of F, typically scoring below 60, is difficult but not impossible.) **However**, the letter grade for the course will not be assigned until the end of the quarter, at which point these ranges may be adjusted by a curve that takes into account the distribution of scores across the entire class (To date, adjusting the grading scale has resulted only in lowering the percentages for each grade.).

Schedule

Students should use this schedule along the following lines: 1) read it in conjunction with the corresponding preparation notes, which provide background, questions, and in some instances specific reading selections; 2) prepare the assigned readings and related assignments for class on the day they are listed; 3) bring the text we are reading (and related materials, including reflection essays as applicable) to that class; and 4) check Angel ahead of time for announcements and adjustments. The schedule is subject to change by the instructor. Should that happen, students will be notified via Angel and/or in class, and a revised schedule will be posted on Angel in the *Course Syllabus and Related Stuff* folder.

ONE 1/6-8	Introductions
T	Course Overview ❖ Ellacuria, SCU Commencement Address at http://www.scu.edu/Jesuits/ellacuria.html
TR	❖ Reflection Essay ❖ American Academy of Religion <i>Why Study Religion?</i> (1 st 3 sections, Why Study..., What is, and Misconceptions...) from http://www.studyreligion.org/why/index.html ❖ Russell T. McCutcheon, " Case Study: 'Religion' and the Politics of Classification " (on the Thich Quang Duc's self immolation), excerpt from <i>Manufacturing Religion</i> , available at www.as.ua.edu/rel/studyingreligion.html) ❖ Two "founding" texts (US Declaration of Independence 1776 and French Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen 1789 (Angel) ❖ Religion in the Media: "Library plans to collect sermons for inauguration," <i>S.J. Mercury News</i> , 01/02/2009 (angel)

TWO 1/13-15	Religion—believed, practiced, civil and other--in the United States public squares
T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ "Summary of Key Findings," Report Two of PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life, <i>US Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Beliefs and Practices: Diverse and Politically Relevant</i> (18 pages; download from http://religions.pewforum.org/reports#; see preparation notes for specific selections from the main report) ❖ Brian Grimm and David Masci, "The Demographics of Faith," in <i>Freedom of Faith: Religious Minorities in the United States</i> (e-journal usa, vol. 13, n. 8 [August 2008]) (www.america.gov/publications/ejournalusa/0808.html)
TR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" (Angel) ❖ Thomas Jefferson, excerpts by Beliefnet.com from his Bible and letters regarding the "wall of separation between religion and state" (Angel) ❖ Religion in the Media: Students

THREE 1/20-22	
M 19	❖ "New Beginnings: Building a Community of Hope," Interfaith Citizen's Celebration, Mission Room, Benson Center 7:00-8:30 p.m.
T	❖ Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," <i>Daedalus</i> , vol. 96, no. 1 (1967), pp. 1-9 (Angel)
TR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Reflection Essay ❖ Martin Luther King, "I Have a Dream" Speech (text w/ video link available on Angel) ❖ Obama, 'Call to Renewal' Keynote Address (Angel) ❖ Religion in the Media: Students

FOUR 1/27-29	Criticisms of Religion's Role in the Public Square from the perspective of Enlightenment Rationality
T	❖ Freud, <i>Future of an Illusion</i> , chs 1-2
TR	Midterm exam

FIVE 2/3-5	
T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Freud, chs 3-5 Co-curricular Activity: Freud Discussions
TR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Freud, chs. 6-8 ❖ Religion in the Media: Students

SIX 2/10-12	
T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Freud, chs. 9-10 ❖ Illustrative Examples of "New Atheists" (Angel)
	Religions' Emerging Forms and Roles in the emerging Global Public Square
TR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Reflection Essay ❖ Parliament of World's Religions 1993: "Declaration Toward a Global Ethic" (Angel) ❖ Parliament of World's Religions 2009, selections ❖ United Nations Declaration: Human Rights (1948) (Angel) ❖ Religion in the Media: *"Palestine and Israel: Current Events and Representations in Local

	Media" (Angel)
SEVEN 2/17-19	
M	HOLIDAY—PRESIDENT'S DAY
T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>Speaking of Faith: Two Narratives</i>, 3/9 (part one) or 16 (part two), 2006 radio podcast ❖ Thich Nhat Hanh, excerpts from <i>Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire</i> (on the Thich Quang Duc's self immolation) ❖ Thich Nhat Hanh, <i>Peace Begins Here</i>, ch. 1
TR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Thich Nhat Hanh, chs 2-3 ❖ Religion in the Media: Students ❖ Co-curricular activity: interfaith activism
EIGHT 2/24-26	
T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Thich Nhat Hanh, chs 4-5
TR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Reflection Essay ❖ Thich Nhat Hanh, ch. 6 ❖ Religion in the Media: Students
NINE 3/3-3/5	
T	Midterm exam
	Religion's Role in Representing and Memorializing Evil
TR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Elie Wiesel, <i>Night</i> (text only) ❖ Religion in the Media: Students
TEN 3/10-12	Representation of Evil through (and beyond?) religions
T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Elie Wiesel, <i>Night</i>, Foreword and Preface ❖ Elie Wiesel, Noble Prize Acceptance Speech, included in <i>Night</i>, pp. 117-120 ❖ Elie Wiesel "Learning and Respect" (Commencement speech at DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, June 15, 1997) www.humanity.org/voices/commencements/speeches/index.php?page=wiesel_at_depaul ❖ Congressional Gold Medal Awarded to Elie Wiesel Acceptance Speech(April 19, 1985) http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/RR4_19_85.html
TR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Albert Camus, Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1957/camus-speech.html (also on Angel) (highlighted version on Angel) ❖ Martin Luther King, "Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech" (excerpts) (Angel) ❖ Religion in the Media: Students
ELEVEN 3/16-20	Final Exam Week
M, 3-16	Course Project due
T, 3-17	Final Exam (selection of terms and essays—comprehensive—in class)