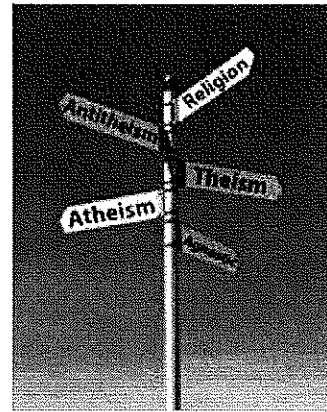


**SCTR 011**  
**CONTROVERSIES IN RELIGION:**  
**ANCIENT AND MODERN**

**SPRING 2015**  
**CORE: Religion, Theology, and Culture 1**

**Instructor: Dr. J. David Pleins**  
**Office: Kenna 300J, extension 4763**  
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**Office Hours: MW 2:30-3:30, or by appointment**



**CLASS MEETING TIMES:**  
 Section 19723, MWF 10:30-11:35, Kenna 212

**FOCUS OF THE COURSE:**

This RTC introductory course is built around central religious questions asked at different times and in diverse places.

**Dimensions:** Through film and by reading myths, philosophic texts, and other writings, this course critically explores ancient and modern debates about Western religion, especially questions of war, violence, suffering, human purpose, and the relation of science to religion.

**Diversity:** In terms of geographic diversity, we will consider these questions in relation to the ancient Mediterranean, the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. We will also blend ancient and modern time periods.

**Debate:** To ensure students actively enter the debate, the course readings emphasize a direct encounter with the literature produced by the writers of the time, not the digested views of secondary authors.

**REQUIRED TEXTS FOR DEBATE AND ANALYSIS:**

Flood and Martin, *The Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation*, Norton, 978-0-393-34513-1  
 Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Random House, 9780807014271.  
 Homer, *The Essential Iliad*, trans. S. Lombardo, Hackett, 0872205428.  
 Huxley, *Ape and Essence*, Ivan R. Dee Publisher, 0929587782.  
 Mitchell, *Gilgamesh: A New English Version*, Simon and Schuster, 074326164X.  
 Mitchell, *The Book of Job*, Harper, 0060969598  
 Pleins, *The Evolving God*, Bloomsbury, 9781623562472.

## CORE LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

As an RTC level 1 course for the Core, this course has two major learning objectives:

- A. *Students will be able to describe and compare the central religious ideas and practices from several traditions or within one, and from at least two globally distinct regions.*
- B. *Students will be able to use critical approaches to reflect on their own beliefs and the religious dimensions of human experience.*

In terms of central religious practices and traditions as well as diverse regional focus, the course considers the relation between the modern United States, early modern and modern Europe, the Middle East, and the ancient Mediterranean.

In terms of critical dimensions, the course raises the following major reflective questions concerning the religious dimensions of human experience:

TOPIC #1: Why are science and religion always at war?

TOPIC #2: Is religion to blame for the world's violence?

TOPIC #3: Why is there so much suffering in the world?

TOPIC #4: Is there an ultimate wisdom by which we should live?

Each session also has its own specific question related to these topic areas.

## ADDITIONAL LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- (1) analyze religion's rise and development in myth and epic form, examining this process over time and in diverse global contexts,
- (2) debate foundational Greek, Roman, and biblical ideas about desire, reason, and skepticism,
- (3) define the political contributions of Christianity in its earliest and most recent periods,
- (4) assess the enduring impact of ancient beliefs in terms of modern and postmodern debates about religion, science, and culture, and
- (5) craft good critical questions about the religious dimensions of human experience.

## ATTENDANCE POLICY:

\*All students are expected to attend class *regularly* and *arrive promptly*.

\*Chronic lateness or failure to attend class not only is an annoyance but may result in immediate dismissal and/or failure of the course, *regardless* of completion of assigned work. Exceptions require written proof of illness from the health service or from the student's personal physician. If you are unable to attend, leave word at 554-4763.

\*The basic rule of thumb is: 3 unexcused absences and the highest grade you may receive in the course is a C (you have missed 10% of the quarter at this point); 5 unexcused absences and you must withdraw from the class because if you do not, you will fail the course (you will have missed 15% of the course by that point).

\*Students are expected to be actively involved in all Learning Community or Honors Program

events and attend lectures, films, or plays related to the course.

\*No cell phone use or internet surfing in class.

\*Note that the outside films are *mandatory*.

\*Note, also, that your presence in class is *mandatory* for the discussion of assigned papers and that your papers may not be handed in by another student. Failure to appear for a paper discussion will result in an automatic reduction of two letter grade levels for the paper.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:** "I am committed to being a person of integrity. I pledge, as a member of the Santa Clara University community, to abide by and uphold the standards of academic integrity contained in the Student Conduct Code." All written work must be uniquely and individually one's own work. Failure to abide by the spirit and the letter of this policy may result in dismissal from the course and a failing grade, and will lead to *procedural action* under the student conduct and honor codes. This instructor adheres to the rigorous *standards* we expect at SCU, thus while in-class discussion and outside of class discussion is certainly desirable and encouraged, the material that a student hands in must reflect the student's own labor and ought to be clearly and decisively distinguishable from the work of all other students in the class. At no time are students to represent as their own the work of others. Be sure that you indicate the sources of all quotes and paraphrases. The procedure is simple: If it is not your own material, you should not take credit for it. Indicate the source.

#### **DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION POLICY:**

To receive academic accommodations for a disability, students must contact Disability Resources located in Benson 216. The phone number is 408-554-4109 or inquiries can be emailed to Robin Cole, Administrative Associate, [rcole@scu.edu](mailto:rcole@scu.edu). Students must register with Disabilities Resources and provide documentation of a disability to Disabilities Resources prior to receiving academic accommodations. (Other advising matters can be directed to The Drahmman Center in Kenna 101, (408) 554-4318.)

#### **RELIGION MAJORS, RELIGION MINORS, OR HONORS STUDENTS:**

If you are a religious studies major, religion minor, or honors student, please identify yourself at the start of the quarter and make an appointment to discuss the construction of your assignments for the quarter.

**CRITICAL ESSAYS AND GRADING** (Note that you must complete all assignments to receive a grade for the course; note attendance and plagiarism policies below)

***I. Daily Written Assigned Questions and Class participation:***

1. *Daily Written Assigned Questions:* For most class sessions, you will be assigned a brief question to answer based on the day's reading. Type your answer single-space and roughly half a page.

Grading of the daily written assignments is as follows (0-3 points):

- 0 is for failure to submit an assignment (late papers not accepted).
- 1 is for a "personal opinion" response to the question.
- 2 reflects some attention to the reading including brief quotation.
- 3 indicates serious engagement of the reading, complete with a range of abbreviated quotations.

2. *Class Discussions:* During class discussions and debates, remain on task and seek to bring the discussion to a deeper level.

3. *Notes:* Remember to *take good notes on the group discussions* and during the course videos since these will be useful in building your essays.

4. *Make Yourself Heard Outside of Class:* E-mail the professor your reactions to the readings and discuss class topics with the professor during office hours.

5. *Films:* Attend outside of class films. Be sure to sign in.

6. *Technology Use:* Since our emphasis is on the discussion of texts, please do not bring laptops to class. Turn off cell phones when entering class. E-book readers are permitted for class texts only. No internet surfing, e-mailing, or social networking while in class.

Daily Written Assignments and Class Participation factors as 25% of grade.

***II. Thematic Essays Based On Course Readings: Three Critical Research Papers***

Students will have the opportunity to write a series of 3 critical essays (5-6 pages in length) based on the sequence of topics covered in the course. Observe these Format guidelines carefully: All essays are to be typed double space. Attach bibliography on a separate page at the end. Paper "introductions" should *only* state the question and thesis (2 sentences!). Divide the paper into *four* equal sections. Number and label the sections. Quote course readings liberally, cite the videos, and use at least four outside sources. Use a *one* sentence "conclusion" to sum up.

\*These essays total 75% of the total course grade.

### ***III. Thematic Essay Grading Policies***

Research Paper grades run from A to F. But what are the qualities that distinguish high grades from low? In addition to the Grading Rubric for Critical Research Papers, there are three dimensions that are considered as assignments are evaluated for *quality*.

1. **Comprehension:** Excellent papers will show a high degree of comprehending the course content, avoiding superficial comparisons. Such papers will offer strong critical reflections on the readings.
2. **Critical Reasoning:** Excellent papers will ask thought-provoking questions that can be debated. Such papers will quote (and evaluate and analyze) relevant readings and offer rigorous use of evidence to make the case. These papers will tap different analytic approaches to examine the data. These papers will unfold in a logical fashion a tightly considered argument. They will also show a healthy ability to spar with opponents' views.
3. **Synthesis:** Excellent papers will make strong comparisons between different readings, time periods, and analytic methods. Such papers will "make connections" between thinkers, sources, time periods and regions.

Accordingly, Good papers (B) are less strong, usually in at least one area. Fair papers (C) show some command of these three categories but are more superficial in character. Deficient papers (D) make a weak effort at these categories. Failing papers (F) have not made any solid headway in most if not all aspects.

**COURSE OUTLINE AND READING SCHEDULE:****(Note: The syllabus date gives the work to be read or completed *before* that specific date.)**

March 30

Course Introduction: What side am I on in the religion debates?

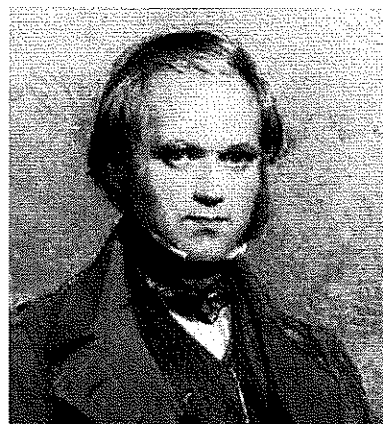
**TOPIC #1: Why are science and religion always at war?**

April 1

*The Evolution of a Seeker*

Q: How did Darwin's voyage change his view of religion?

Reading: Pleins, Ch. 1, Unsettling Encounters



April 3 (holiday)

April 6

*Scientific Debates about God*

Q: Is doubt the same as unbelief?

Reading: Pleins, Ch. 2, Disposition to Doubt

Emma Darwin letters (online)

**\*Afternoon/Evening Film (2:30 pm, 4:30 pm,  
and 7:00 pm in Media Services): Creation: The Movie**

April 8

*Search for a Material Theory of Religion*

Q: Is religion natural?

Video Segment: What About God? (PBS Evolution Series)

Reading: Pleins, Ch. 3, Did Religion Evolve?



April 10

*Religion: Dangerous Delusion or Source of Moral Truth?*

Q: Did religion and morality evolve?

Reading: Pleins, Ch. 4, The Golden Rule

April 13

*Can a Darwinian be Religious?*

Q: Was Charles Darwin an Atheist?

Reading: Darwin, Autobiography (handout)

April 15

*Religion and Modern Science: Dangerous Delusion or Source of Truth?*Paper #1 Due: Model your paper topic along the following lines (*develop your own question*):

1. Was Darwin an atheist?
2. Is religion a dangerous delusion or a source of moral truth?
3. Do we need religion in an age of science?

(Your presence in class is MANDATORY for the presentation of papers.)

## TOPIC #2: Is religion to blame for the world's violence?

April 17

*Heroes on the Road of Adventure*

Q: Why are we so addicted to the hero journey myth and is this a healthy addiction?

Reading: Mitchell, Gilgamesh, pp. 69-117

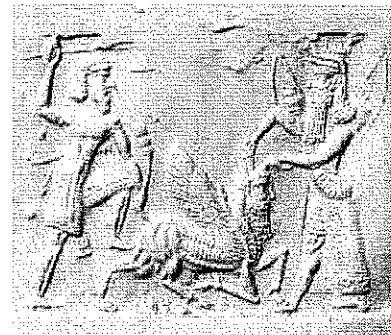
April 20

*Monsters, Seduction, and Death*

Q: What is the "wisdom" of the Gilgamesh epic? Consider whether Gilgamesh actually achieves this wisdom.

Reading: Mitchell, Gilgamesh, pp. 118-158

**\*Afternoon/Evening Film (2:30 p.m., 4:30 p.m.,  
and 7 p.m. in Media Services): Paradise Now**



April 22

*Ultimate Questions and Ultimate Realities*

Q: Does life have no meaning until we accept the reality of death?

Reading: Mitchell, Gilgamesh, pp. 159-199

April 24

*The Iliad: Conflict and Honor*

Q: What is the relation between honor, duty, and heroism in Homeric thinking? Evaluate this idea.

Reading: Homer, Iliad, pp. 1-42

April 27

*The Iliad: Duty and Choices*

Q: What is the relation between freedom and destiny in Homeric thought? Evaluate this idea.

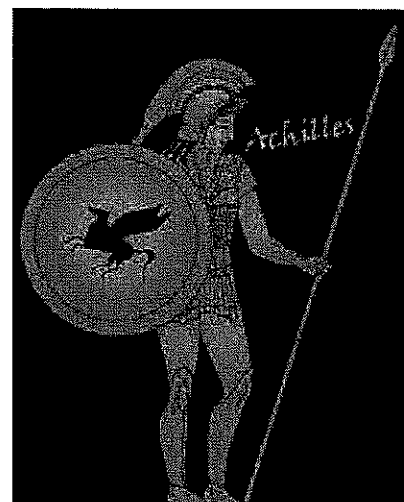
Reading: Homer, Iliad, pp. 43-79

April 29

*The Iliad: Death and Destiny*

Q: Is suffering necessary and is there a purpose to our suffering?

Reading: Homer, Iliad, pp. 79-101



May 1

*The Iliad: Resolve and Compassion*

Q: Is aggression or altruism the ultimate human trait? (What does Achilles learn in the end?)

Reading: Homer, Iliad, pp. 101-157

May 4

*Terrorists vs. Heroes*

Q: Why are most terrorists male?

Reading: Morgan, *The Deadly Hero* (handout)



May 6

*Analyzing our Addiction to the Hero Myth*

Paper #2 Due: Model your paper topic along the following lines (*develop your own question*):

1. Mythic Heroes: Cultural asset or misguided delusion?
2. Religious Violence: Can we break the addiction?

(Note that your presence in class is MANDATORY for the discussion of papers.)

### TOPIC #3: Why is there so much suffering in the world?

May 8

*The Suffering of the Innocent: Natural Evil vs. Moral Evil*

Q: Why do the innocent suffer?

Reading: Mitchell, *Job*, pp. 5-49



May 11

*Poverty, Oppression, and Social Injustice*

Q: Is solidarity the only real answer to the question of suffering?

Reading: Mitchell, *Job*, pp. 50-91

May 13

*Suffering and the Holocaust*

Q: What does suffering look like from the "inside"?

Reading: Frankl, pp. 3-48

Video: *Night and Fog* (\*this film contains potentially disturbing images)

**\*Afternoon/Evening Film (2:30 p.m., 4:30 p.m.,  
and 7 p.m. in Media Services): God on Trial**

May 15

*Seeking Meaning in the Midst of Suffering*

Q: Does suffering have a "meaning"?

Reading: Frankl, 48-93



May 18

*A Tragic Optimism?*

Q: What is life asking of me?

Reading: Frankl, 97-134



#### TOPIC #4: Is there an ultimate wisdom by which we should live?

May 20

*Loss of the Human: Technology and Dehumanization*

Q: Shall we live by “medicine and machines” or “Shakespeare and spirituality”?

Reading: Huxley, *Ape and Essence*, pp. 33-74 (bottom of page).

May 22

*Nuclear Madness and Higher Purposes*

Q: Can religion help us overcome our nuclear madness?

Reading: Huxley, *Ape and Essence*, pp. 75-116 (bottom of page)

May 25 (holiday)

May 27

*Religion, Technology, and Inhumanity*

Q: Is technological “progress” or religion the real source of social evil?

Reading: Huxley, *Ape and Essence*, pp. 117-162 (bottom of page).



May 29

*Poetry and the Search for Human Purpose*

Q: Is "love" the ultimate truth of the universe?

Reading: Huxley, *Ape and Essence*, pp. 163-205.

June 1

*Transcendent Wisdom or Anti-Colonial Revolution?: Gita and Politics*

Q: Does religion have a role to play in sparking social change?

Reading: *Bhagavad Gita*, chapters 1-3

“Sri Aurobindo and the Gita” (article handout)



June 3

*Transcendental Vision and Practicing Austerity: Americans and the Gita*

Q: Is there a wisdom from the East for American consumers?

Reading: *Bhagavad Gita*, chapters 4-5

Thoreau, “Brahma” (handout)

Emerson’s meditation on the Gita (handout)

**\*Afternoon/Evening Film (3:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. in Media Services): Gandhi**



June 5

*Gita, Mysticism, and Gandhi’s Non-Violence*

Q: Is non-violence the higher wisdom?

Reading: *Bhagavad Gita*, chapters 6-11

“Gandhi, Nonviolence, and the Bhagavad-Gita” (handout)



**FINAL PAPER MEETING TIMES:**

Monday, June 8 at 9:10 a.m.

(Arrive promptly at the time scheduled for presentations and discussions. Make your travel plans in light of this information.)

*Religious Truth East and West*

Paper #3 Due: Model your paper topic along the following lines (*develop your own question*):

1. Religion: the answer to our suffering?
2. Religion: source of transcendent truth or a delusion?
3. Human Purpose: Is there more to life than mere breath?
4. Wisdom: Is there an ultimate wisdom by which we should live?

(Note that your presence in class is MANDATORY for the discussion of final papers.) NOTE THAT EXAM TIMES ARE *FIXED* AND THAT EXCEPTIONS CANNOT BE MADE TO ALLOW STUDENTS TO GO HOME EARLIER. Be careful of airline ticketing!