

REL 100.001 Introduction to the Study of Religion
T/Th 9:30-10:45 • Fall 2021
Prof. Chelsea Ebin
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Course Description

This seminar-style course introduces students to the study of religion through an investigation of the concepts of sacrifice and salvation. Students read a range of inter-disciplinary theoretical texts that are later applied to the examination of historically-grounded, empirically-driven representations of religious practice. In order to broaden how we think about religion, faith, and ritual, students investigate the twinned concepts of sacrifice and salvation by critically engaging with secular, religious, and liberation discourses. Course readings focus on the following themes: martyrdom, state violence, liberation, and political and civil rights. The intent of this course is neither to exhaust the conceptual history of sacrifice and salvation in Western thought nor to create a singular narrative out of their conjoined usage. Rather, it is to utilize these concepts as a lens through which students can begin to closely engage with the critical study of religion.



Goals/Outcomes

Students will:

- Develop an understanding of key philosophical texts that inform our understanding of religion;
- Hone their analytical thinking through the application of a philosophical framework to a case study;
- Cultivate research skills.

Course Texts

All readings will be available as PDFs. *If a link or PDF is broken/missing, email me ASAP. I do my best to have everything posted in good working order, but sometimes a link goes down or a PDF goes missing.

A note on assigned texts: All readings should be completed before the class day for which they are assigned.

Attendance and Participation Policy

Regular attendance and critical engagement with course material are expected. Participation can take many forms, ranging from asking questions to proffering relevant observations in class, from attending office hours to emailing a question or comment about the reading to the professor *before* it is discussed in class.

Course Requirements

- Midterm Exam** [In-class on Oct. 7] 30%
- Short essay in-class exam.
- Final Paper and Recorded Presentation** [Paper due Dec. 9] 40%
- For this assignment, you have the opportunity to delve deeper into the examination of a particular religious faith, ritual, or practice. You are asked to choose a case study topic you will research independently. Your paper should present the reader with its history and development and analyze the case by applying at least one of the philosophical frameworks you have read.
 - **Essay assignment details:**
The style basics:
 - 2000-2500 word essay examining your assigned movement
 - Should incorporate outside research, in-text citations, and a complete bibliography.
 - Please use MLA or Chicago-style citations.
 - Double-spaced, 12 point font, one inch margins.
 - This is a scaffolded assignment, meaning you must submit: a proposal, an annotated bibliography, an outline, final paper, prerecorded five-minute presentation. Due dates TBD.
- Weekly Discussion Posts** 20%
- Each week, you'll write a 400-500 word reflection in the form of a Padlet discussion post. While your reflection should directly relate to one reading/set of readings (i.e. you should cite a course reading), you are free to engage, reflect, discuss, critique, relate to any/all of the course topics raised that week in whatever manner you wish. I will read your posts throughout the block and comment occasionally, however, you will grade yourself on how well you met the requirements for weekly posts at the end of the semester in a one-page reflection paper you submit to me.
- Participation** 10%
- *see rubric below

<p>10 pts Stellar attendance and <i>daily</i> participation that reflected engagement with assigned readings and course topics. (0-1 absences)</p>	<p>8 pts Strong attendance and consistent participation in course discussions that reflected engagement with assigned readings and course topics. (0-2 absences)</p>	<p>7 pts Strong attendance and some participation; OR average attendance and very strong participation in course discussions that reflected engagement with assigned readings and course topics (0-2 absences)</p>	<p>5 pts Strong attendance and little participation; OR average attendance and some participation in course discussions that reflected engagement with assigned readings and course topics. (0-3 absences)</p>	<p>4-0 pts Average attendance with no participation; OR poor attendance with some participation; OR participation in course discussions does NOT reflect engagement with assigned readings and course topics. (2-3 absences)</p>
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Course Schedule


Week One: Practice, Belief, Religion

8/19 – Syllabus; In-class reading of “The Lottery,” Shirley Jackson.

8/26 – Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?* Chapters 3 and 7. 

Week Two: On Religion

9/2 – Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Chapter 1 (p. 25-46).

9/4 - Richard Madsen. “The Archipelago of Faith: Religious Individualism and Faith Community in America Today.” 

Week 3: Sacrifice

9/9 – Soren Kierkegaard, “Tuning Up” and “A Tribute to Abraham,” *Fear and Trembling*.

9/16 – Sophocles, *Antigone*.

Week 4: Martyrdom


9/23 – Brent D. Shaw, “The Passion of St. Perpetua,” *Past & Present*.

9/30 – Excerpt from Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*, (p. 39-64).

Week 5: The State, Sacrifice, and Salvation

10/5 – Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*


10/7 – Excerpt from Kelly Denton-Borhaug, *U.S. War Culture, Sacrifice, and Salvation* (p. 14-55).

Week 6: Sacrifice and salvation in and out of time 

10/12 –Karl Lowith, “The Biblical View of History,” *Meaning in History*, (p.182-207).

10/14 – Friedrich Nietzsche, [“On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,”](#) *Untimely Meditations*, (p. 29-49).


Week 7: Midterm

10/19 - Midterm wrap up discussion and review 

10/21 – **Midterm**

Week 8: Paths to Salvation

10/26 – Max Weber, Ch. 1, Ch. 3, and 10, *The Sociology of Religion*

10/28 – Watch in class: *Trembling Before G-d* 

Week 9: Submission 


11/2- [Southern Baptists on Wifely Submission \(1998\)](#); John P. Bartkowski, "Debating Patriarchy: Discursive Disputes over Spousal Authority among Evangelical Family Commentators."

11/4 – Lila Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?”

Week 10: Resistance


11/9 – Robin D. G. Kelley, “Keepin’ It (Sur)real: Dreams of the Marvelous,” *Freedom Dreams*

11/11 – Poems of Protest: [“Revolution Dwells in the Heart: Myanmar’s poets cut down by the military,”](#) *The Guardian* (5/21/2021); choose a resistance poem to read and be prepared to discuss it in class.

Recommended resource: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/101581/poems-of-protest-resistance-and-empowerment> 

Week 11: Liberation

11/16 – James Cone, “The Sources and Norm of Black Theology” and “A Revolution Unfulfilled” from *A Black Theology of Liberation*.

11/18 – Keeanga Yamahtta Taylor, Ch. 7, *From Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation* 

Week 12: Giving thanks for revolution

11/23 – Watch in-class: *The Battle of Algiers*


11/25 – NO CLASS

Week 13: The ambivalent in-between

11/20 – Edmund Burke, Part 1, “A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful.”

12/2 – Kristen Roupenian, “Cat Person,” *The New Yorker*.

Week 14: Final thoughts

12/7 – Final paper workshop 

12/9 – Final paper presentations

Final Paper Due