REL 115 - Introduction to the Study of Religion
Gen Ed. MOI: Analyzing Arguments, Reasons, and Values (AR)
Fall 2003
MWF 1:50 - 2:50
Eaton 110

Professor: Douglas R. McGaughey
Office: Eaton 116

Teaching Schedule:
MWF 1:50 - 2:50 Intro. to the Study of Religion
MW 3:00 - 4:30 History of Christianity I: 100-700 CE
TTh 1:50 - 3:20 Contemporary American Theology

Office Hours: W, Th 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.
OTHER TIMES BY APPOINTMENT

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REQUIRED TEXTS
(listed alphabetically)

Allen, Paula Gunn, “Kochinnenako in Academe: Three Approaches to Interpreting a Keres Indian Tale” in The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986): 222-244 (to be distributed)


COURSE DESCRIPTION

REL 115 - Introduction to the Study of Religion introduces the student to the academic study of religions in general. It is not an investigation or defense of any particular religious tradition. REL 115 seeks to open up the horizon of religious phenomena to encourage the student to include the investigation of the religious richness and depths of humanity as a life-long project in a world that has come to define religion ideologically.

The course illuminates three central components shaping the human condition:

1. The necessary dependence of human understanding and knowledge upon paradigms (models) of reality that are incapable of empirical proof. Hence, one may appropriately speak of the “mythic” nature of reality.

2. The paradox that our experience is composed of the perceptible (sense data) and the imperceptible (mind/consciousness) that enables a distinction between (but not necessarily a separation of) matter
and spirit. This paradox results in two entirely different kinds of rationality that is helpful for appreciating and critiquing the rational nature of reality (religious) systems.

3. Our necessary dependence upon tradition as a depository of communal wisdom, as providing a language for making sense of our every new experience, and as a source of communal expression of order through the repetition of ritual and the source of ethical rules, which govern our behavior.

These three central components of the human condition (paradigms, paradox, and tradition) both enable us to make sense of our experience and represent profound limits for us that can help us understand the nature and appeal of religious convictions. Examination of them helps us to perceive the necessity of our commitment to reality as we understand it, but their examination will also help us to make sense of the source of much of the conflict between and among individuals, groups, religious communities, and nations.

**Gen Ed. MOI: Analyzing Arguments, Reasons, and Values (AR)**

Courses satisfying this requirement focus on the critical analysis and evaluation of the principles of reasoned normative discourse. Students in these courses should:

- Understand the nature and structure of arguments;
- Know how to apply various criteria of evaluation to arguments;
- Recognize that it is possible to reason and draw meaningful conclusions about matters of ethical or aesthetic value.

REL 115 addresses these issues through an investigation of alternative models of reality, of the role of presuppositions in all analysis and argument, and of the determination of the role of principles accompanying any and all action.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. Attendance at all class sessions - students are responsible for all information given at all class sessions
2. Reading assignments according to the assignment schedule (or as modified by the professor)
3. Participation in a discussion group (all six sessions) and the writing of one “protocol” of a discussion (10%).
4. 2 tests (each at 27.5%)
5. Final comprehensive exam (35%)

**DISCUSSION GROUPS**

Each student will be assigned to a discussion group. These groups will meet during class to address review themes distributed in advance. In addition, you are strongly encouraged to form a discussion group to meet outside of class to review at least weekly.

**Discussion Protocols**

A discussion protocol that includes the names of those present is to be written for each discussion group session. It is to be a summary of the group’s conversation. The task of writing the transcript of the discussion will circulate through the group. Each student is to write one protocol.

It is not the task of the author of the transcript to provide the “correct” answers to the questions and themes under discussion. S/he is only responsible for writing up a summary of what was said.
Protocols are due according to the schedule in the Course Outline below.

ASSIGNMENT DEADLINES

Should a student fail to meet an assignment deadline for any reason other than serious illness, there will be a penalty on the grade each late day of a portion of a letter grade (e.g., the day after the due date of the assignment results in the highest possible grade of an “A-,” the second late day results in a “B+,” etc., down to a “C”). This policy only applies to discussion protocols for this course. Although discussion protocols are Pass/No Pass, the penalty will be applied down to the “C.” Below a “C” grade is a No Pass for the discussion protocol. This is to ensure that the playing field is even for all. Since these protocols are important review records for you and your peers, it is important for you to submit them on time.

Incompletes: An incomplete is possible in the course only in the case of serious illness documented by a physician. In any event, arrangements must be made for an incomplete no later than the date of the final exam (Monday, December 19th at 2:00 p.m.).

STUDENT DISABILITIES

Any student eligible for and desiring academic accommodation due to a disability should provide documentation to Disability Services located in the Bishop Wellness Center within the first two weeks of the semester.

COURSE OUTLINE

Paradigms

Week 1
September 3, 5:

Introduction
“Religion” and “religions”: The history of a social concept

Reading Assignment:
“Postscript” of Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*
Issue: What does Kuhn mean by “paradigm”? What is the difference between an “exemplary past achievement” and a “sociological” paradigm?

Read all of the “Postscript,” however, because we will return to key themes (e.g., the difference between “stimuli and sensation” and “solipsism”)

Week 2
September 8, 10, 12

September 5 and 7:

Reading Assignment completed by Wednesday:

Kuhn, Chapters III - IV
Issues: Relationship of rules to paradigms; definition of “normal” science; necessity of paradigms
Week 3
September 15,17,19

Reading Assignment completed by Monday:

Kuhn, Chapters VI - IX
Issues: How do paradigms change? What are the steps that initiate change and can result in a paradigm “revolution”? Are paradigm shifts and/or revolutions inevitable?

Friday, September 19: Discussion Session 1 (Protocols due Monday, Sept. 22)

Week 4
September 22,24,26

Reading Assignment completed by Monday:

Kuhn, Chapters X, XII, XIII
Issues: When a paradigm revolution does happen, has the world changed or only our interpretation of the world? Why is the answer to this question not simply a “yes” or a “no”? What is the problem that we cannot resolve?


Week 5
September 29, October 1,3

Review Assignment:
1. What does Kuhn mean by “paradigm”? What are the two meanings of the term according to him? How are paradigms cognitive, coherent, communal, and how do they determine causal explanation, insist on commitment, and require conformity?

2. Why are paradigms necessary? What role do they play in permitting us to perceive anomaly? What are the steps usually followed in dealing with a “crisis” in a paradigm? What does Kuhn mean by a paradigm shift, by a paradigm revolution? Does a crisis always lead to a paradigm revolution?

3. Does “reality” change when there is a paradigm revolution? What does Kuhn mean when he suggests that a scientist is in a “different world” following a paradigm revolution? What are the difficulties in talking about “stable data” and about the world as something permanently the same for all which is then simply interpreted in different ways?

Monday, September 29: Discussion Session 2 (Protocols due Wednesday, October 1)

TEST 1: Friday, October 3

Paradox

Week 6
October 6,8,10

Reading Assignment completed by Monday:

Plato’s “Republic”: 174 - top of 202
Issues: Why does Plato propose that “philosophers” should be the rulers of society? Why are “philosophers” susceptible to corruption? What is the connection between “being” and “knowledge?” What role does “imitation” play for “philosophers?” What is meant by: “there is a many beautiful and a many good ... [a]nd there is an absolute beauty and an absolute good?” What is meant by: “[t]he many ... are seen but not known, and the ideas are known but not seen?” What three “things” are needed for us to physically see? In what way is the “sun” both the author of sight and the source of all nourishment and growth?

Week 7
October 13, 15, 17

Reading Assignment completed by Monday:

Plato’s “Republic”: 202-204

Issues: By the end of our discussion, be able to draw, label, and describe the segments of the line. What do the two larger segments of the line represent? Why does the realm of sense perception stand for opinion? What is dialectic? How might we use the notion of “being” to think about a dialectic for understanding the Good? How is the Good like the sun?

Week 8
October 20, 22 [October 24 is Mid-Semester Day - No Class]

Wednesday, October 22: Discussion Session 3 (Protocols due on Monday, Oct. 27)

Review Assignment:

1. What does the “sun” represent for Plato? In what way is it a “third thing” that makes sight possible? What two functions does the sun perform?

2. Be able to draw, label, and describe Plato’s simile of the line - beginning at the bottom with your description! Using this diagram, answer the following questions:
   a. How does Plato distinguish between “opinion” and “reality?”
   b. How does Plato distinguish between “understanding” and “reason?” What are “hypotheses” according to Plato? Are Plato’s hypotheses the same as is meant by a hypothesis in the “scientific method?” How do understanding and reason use “hypotheses” differently according to Plato?
   c. What does dialectic mean according to Plato? How is the structure of dialectic present throughout the discussions of the sun simile and the line simile?
   d. How is the First Principle of the Whole (or the Good) analogous to the sun? Is Plato using “Good” here as that which is the opposite to “Evil?”

4. How do Plato’s sun and line similes allow us to talk about “reality” and “rationality” that is different from the way our society speaks about “reality” and “rationality?” Be able to compare and contrast the “scientific paradigm” and the “Platonic paradigm.” How might these two paradigms help us to understand religions in our world?
Week 9
October 27,29,31

TEST 2: Monday, October 27

Traditions

Reading Assignment completed by Wednesday:

Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, Introduction and chapters 1 and 2

Issues: What is “homogeneous space”? What is an “hierophany” or a “theophany”? What is the relationship between “chaos” and “cosmos”? What is an “axis mundi”? How does Eliade distinguish between “profane” and “sacred”? What role does “repetition” play for “religious humanity” according to Eliade? What is the relationship between “myth” and “paradigms”?

Week 10
November 3,5,7

Reading Assignment completed by Monday:

Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, chapter 4

Issues: What does Eliade mean by “microcosm” and “macrocosm”? What “sanctifies life” for “religious humanity”? In what way is the human body representative of “axis mundi”? What role do “passages” and “rites of passage” play for “religious humanity”? How are passages similar to paradigm revolutions? How does Eliade connect these revolutions to the notion of “spiritual generation” and “second birth”? What role do symbols play for “religious humanity”?

Week 11
November 10,12,14

Reading Assignment completed by Monday:

Allen, “Kochinnenako in Academe: Three Approaches to Interpreting a Keres Indian Tale”

Issues: What are the three approaches? What do they illustrate about the role of “assumptions”/“paradigms” in perception?

Week 12
November 17,19,21

Monday, November 17: Discussion Session 4 (Protocols due Wednesday, Nov. 19)

Reading Assignment completed by Wednesday:


Issues: How do the Mandaeans illustrate the role of paradigms in a religious community? What is “Gnosticism”? How are the Mandaeans “gnostic”? How do the Mandaeans illustrate an “alternative rationality” to that of “traditional” Western culture?
Week 13
November 24, 26 [November 28 is Thanksgiving break - No Class]

Reading Assignment completed by Monday:


Week 14
December 1, 3, 5

Reading Assignment completed by Monday:


Week 15
December 8, 10, 12

Reading Assignment completed by Monday:


Issues: How do these teachings of Mandaean “theology” illustrate “gnostic” thought?

Wednesday, December 10: Discussion Session 5 (Protocols due Friday, December 12)

Review:

1. What do chaos, cosmos, hierophany/theophany, and axis mundi mean according to Eliade? Be able to give examples for at least two religious traditions of the applicability of these concepts for understanding religious phenomena. How might the human body serve as an analogy for the concept of axis mundi? How are these notions related to Kuhn’s “sociological paradigms?”

2. How does Eliade distinguish between “sacred” and “profane?”

3. According to Eliade (p. 181): “When brought to birth, man is not yet complete; he (sic) must be born a second time, spiritually; he (sic) becomes a complete man by passing from an imperfect, embryonic state to a perfect, adult state. In a word, it may be said that human existence attains completion through a serious of ‘passage rites,’ in short, by successive initiations.” What does Eliade mean by “spiritual rebirth?” What are rites of passage? Be able to provide an example of a rite of passage from his text.

4. What are the similarities and/or differences between Eliade’s notion of myth and Kuhn’s notion of paradigm; between Eliade’s notion of spirituality and Plato’s similes of the sun and line? Be able to explain and defend your answer.

5. How does the discussion of religion enabled by the perspective we’ve developed from Plato, Kuhn, and Eliade help to understand the human condition and religion? Use Allen to illustrate the influence of “tradition” on perception and understanding.

6. How does the discussion of religion enabled by the perspective we’ve developed from Plato, Kuhn, and Eliade help us to understand a tradition whose notion of “reality” is 180° opposite to the physical empiricism of our own culture? Use Lupieri’s discussion of Mandaean gnosticism to illustrate!

Final Exam: Monday, December 19, 2:00 - 5:00 p.m. (Eaton 110)