

RS 200A: Proseminar in the History and Theory of Religion

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Office Hours: Monday 1-3 and by appointment

Fall 2011
W 12:00-2:50
HSSB 3041

Purposes of the 200 Series

1) To orient you to the field of Religious Studies by familiarizing you with the figures, texts, conversations, and controversies which have shaped the field historically and are shaping the field today.

2) To initiate you into the field by through meta-reflection on how it has been, is, and should be understood.

There are two broad types of fields in the humanities and social sciences: those that are defined by their subject matter and those that are defined by their method(s). There are many fields that have a general subject matter and a dominant method, but there are some that epitomize the extremes in this regard.

- Religious Studies falls into the first category along with Political Science, Musicology, and Art History. Methodologically, these fields tend to be 'raider disciplines' when it comes to method. They borrow whatever seems useful relative to their subject matter from wherever they can find it. These disciplines, to maintain their existence, continually return to definitional questions: what is religion? politics? music? art?
- There are other fields that are closely identified with a range of methods that are typically suited to different levels of analysis from the subatomic level (physics) to the level of groups (sociology) and different types of data, e.g., texts, artifacts, real time observation. In these fields, graduate training revolves around learning the method and how to apply it to new questions, e.g. quantitative analysis in mathematics and physics, experimental methods in psychology and the natural sciences, historical methods in history, ethnographic methods in major subfields within anthropology and sociology, textual criticism in literature, logic and conceptual analysis in philosophy.

Although textual criticism is a staple within Religious Studies, there are many scholars of religion who emphasize historical, ethnographic, philosophical and/or theological methods. This creates a methodological overlap between Religious Studies and Philosophy of Religion, History of Religion, Anthropology of Religion, Sociology of Religion, and Theological Studies.

The 200 Series is set up around broad methodological approaches to the study of religion:

1. 200A - sociological and anthropological
2. 200B - philosophical and psychoanalytic
3. 200C - phenomenological and hermeneutic
4. 200D - post-modern literary and historical criticism

Basic Questions: There are three basic questions that you can take with you through the entire 200 Series. We can expand each of these questions into a series of sub-questions upon which there has been much debate (see HANDOUT ON QUESTIONS).

- The Definitional Question: What is the "it" we are studying?
- The Methodological Question: How can or should we study it?
- The Theory Question: What can we say about "it"?

Description of RS 200A

In 200A, we will be reading a series of authors that scholars of religion routinely designate as “classical theorists of religion” (Marx, Tylor, Durkheim, Weber, Geertz) and more contemporary scholars who critique and/or build on the approach of the classics with particularly those who attend to their relevance for understanding local and non-Western traditions. In addition, this year we will devote two weeks to Robert Bellah’s new book, *Religion in Human Evolution*, which explicitly builds on the work of Durkheim, Weber, and Geertz; critiques Tylor; and gives in-depth consideration to both local and non-Western traditions. We will be analyzing the texts in terms of their DEFINITION of [religion], their METHOD, and their THEORY of [religion] recognizing (in light of the HANDOUT ON QUESTIONS) that we also have to attend to their research design, that is, the QUESTION *they* asked, the ANSWER they gave, and the EVIDENCE they provided in support of their answer. In order to cover more figures, we will not consider all these questions with every figure.

Purposes of 200A

Given the nature of Religious Studies as a topical discipline, 200A has two main objectives:

- 1) To develop your ability to analyze different definitions of religion and assess their usefulness for constituting an object of study for the discipline and for your own research.
- 2) To provide an understanding of matters of definition, method, and theory as it relates to research design in the works of selected classical figures, including a sense of the debates that have swirled around these issues within the discipline and the implications of these debates for thinking about the discipline and your own research.

Course Requirements

1) **Weekly expectations:**

- Preparation for and participation in class discussions.
- Leadership of one class session, which includes posting a “definition, theory, method” analysis for a lead figure in the GauchoSpace forum by Sunday evening and then moderating the forum in preparation for leading the class discussion.
- Logging into the weekly forum on Monday and Tuesday and making at least one contribution (e.g., suggestions for improving the moderators’ posted analysis, posting of the definitions of one of the additional figures with comment on their relation to the lead figure, or suggestion of questions or issues for class discussion).

2) **Concise (5-7 page) paper** analyzing either the Durkheim or Weber readings in terms of problem, thesis, argument, noting how they relate to their definition, method, and theory.

3) **Final paper (10-12 page)** on a topic related to the course and, where possible, to your own future research. Possible options would include:

- A paper that analyzes some aspect of one or more of the classical figures in light of subsequent critical assessments and/or use of their work by subsequent thinkers, particularly as their work relates to your area of study and/or theoretical interests.
- Participation in a collaborative project related to Robert Bellah’s new book, e.g., making the core ideas more accessible, assessing the conceptual framework and his use of classical and contemporary thinkers, and evaluating his analysis of particular traditions.

Required Readings available through UCEN Bookstore & Grafikart

Durkheim, Emile. 1912/1995. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Trans. Karen E. Fields. New York: Free Press

Gerth, H. H. and C. Wright Mills, eds. 1958. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bellah, Robert. 2011. *Religion in Human Evolution*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Course Reader. Available at Grafikart, 6550 Pardall Road, Isla Vista (968-3575).

Course Outline and Reading Assignments

Key to analysis of readings

A----- = In-depth analysis of problem, thesis, argument; definition, method, and theory.

B----- = Analysis of definition, method, and theory.

09/28/11: Introduction: General overview of 200 Series and 200A

- Robert A. Segal, "What Makes Religious Studies a Discipline?" In *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert A. Segal (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).
- William E. Arnal, "Definition," in Braun and McCutcheon, *Guide to the Study of Religion* (2000).
- Jan Platvoet, "To define or not to define: The problem of the definition of religion," in Jan Platvoet and Arie Molendijk, eds., *The pragmatics of defining religion* (1999).

10/05/11: **Karl Marx** - ideology

- Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach", "German Ideology", "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy," and "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on Religion* (New York: Schocken, 1964).
- Gary Lease, "Ideology," in W. Braun and R. T. McCutcheon, eds., *Guide to the Study of Religion* (New York: Cassell, 2000), 438-47.
- Harvey W. White, "Deprivation," in W. Braun and R. T. McCutcheon, eds., *Guide to the Study of Religion* (New York: Cassell, 2000), 85-95.

10/12/11: **Edward Tylor** - spiritual beings

- Edward Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 2 vols. (1871), reprinted as *The Origins of Culture* [OC] and *Religion in Primitive Culture* [RPC]; OC: 1, 16-17, 22-25, 141-43; RPC: 1-31, 83-86; 194-97, 209-12, 228-29, 266-69; 448-50, 495-507; 535-39.
- Randall Styers, *Making Magic* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 69-119, focus on pp. 70-97.
- Ann Taves, "2010 Presidential address: 'Religion' in the humanities and the humanities in the university." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 79/2 (2011), 287-314.

10/19/11: No class. We will meet for a double session on 11/02/11 to make up this class.

10/26/11: **Clifford Geertz** – symbol systems

- Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in idem, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1973).
- Talal Asad, "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category," in idem, *Genealogies of Religion* (Johns Hopkins, 1993).
- Martin Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation* (Chicago, 2010), xi-45.
- Peter Beyer, "New religions, non-institutionalized religions, and the control of a contested category," in *Religions in a Global Society* (2006), 254-298.

11/02/11: **Emile Durkheim** – things set apart – 12-5:50 DOUBLE SESSION

We'll begin the Durkheim marathon by focusing on Durkheim's problem, thesis, and argument using Godlove for assistance. Then we'll move to an analysis of his definition, method, and theory and the critical appropriations of Durkheim's conception of the sacred by two Durkheimians (Hertz and Granet).

- Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915), trans. K. Fields, pp. 1-10, 21-44 [45-46, 65-70, 81-83], 84-90, 207-15, 225-41, 313-24, 340-43, 348-54, 418-32.
- Terry Godlove, "Teaching the Critics: One Route through *The Elementary Forms*," in Terry F. Godlove, Jr., ed. *Teaching Durkheim* (Oxford, 2005).
- Robert Hertz, "The pre-eminence of the right hand: a study in religious polarity" (1909) and Marcel Granet, "Right and left in China" (1933).

Half the class posts DURKHEIM draft to forum by midnight on 10/30/11 (Sunday).
Final DURKHEIM PAPER due at 5 pm on 11/04/11 – Please email as attachment.

11/09/11: **Max Weber** - paths-of-salvation

Focus on the problem, method, and thesis for 11/09/11, posting papers on Sunday 11/06 in light of Gerth & Mills introduction, Weber's intro to the PE, first chapter of *Sociology of Religion*, *Religious Rejections*, and *Social Psychology*.

- Gerth and Mills, "Introduction: The man and his work," in *From Max Weber* [FMW], 3-74.
- Weber, introduction to the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, edited by Talcott Parsons and Anthony Giddens, pp. 13-31. READER
- Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, chapter one ("The Rise of Religion"). Skim this and use as needed for positioning Weber relative to others. READER
- Weber, "Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions," FMW, 323-59.
- Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions," FMW, 267-301.

11/16/11: **Weber**, con't -- focus on definition of religions in terms of sacred values and paths of redemption in relation to the social psychology of world religions, charismatic authority, and the vocation of the scientist. Reflect on Weber's understanding in light of Buswell and Gimello, Durkheim, etc.

- Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions," FMW, 267-301.
- Weber, "The Sociology of Charismatic Authority," FMW, 245-52.
- Weber, "The Prophet," *Sociology of Religion*, READER, 46-59.
- Weber, "Science as a vocation," FMW, 129-56 (especially 145-56).
- Robert E. Buswell, Jr. and Robert M. Gimello, "Introduction," in idem, eds, *Paths to liberation: The marga and its transformations in Buddhist thought* (Hawaii, 1992).

Other half the class posts WEBER draft to forum by midnight on 11/06/11 (Sunday).
Final WEBER PAPER due at 5 pm on 11/18/11 – Please email as attachment.

11/20/11 – AAR Session – Sunday, 1-2:30. A Conversation with Robert Bellah on *Religion in Human Evolution* (Harvard University Press, 2011) with Jonathan Z. Smith, Luke Timothy Johnson, and Wendy Doniger

11/23/11: Religion and Evolution Revisited

▪ Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Harvard, 2011), pp. ix-174, 567-608.

11/30/11: Bellah, con't

▪ Divide up the Axial Age chapters with critical reports on each.

FINAL PAPERS due by Friday, December 9, 2011. Send as email attachment.

