

# Theories and Methods in the Study of Religion Seminar

THEO 6000

Spring 2021: Tuesdays 9-11:45am

Dr. Lindsey

## Course Description

This course is designed for graduate students in the Department of Theological Studies. The primary objectives of this course are to cultivate a deep understanding of the long conversations animating the academic study of religion, the relationship between the study of religion and academic theology, and their critical contribution to a fuller understanding of human experience.

The seminar is designed to enrich future study by provoking deeper scrutiny of primary categories of analysis—religion, human, and place, among others—as well as deeper introspection of the scholar’s positionality in relation to our object(s) of study. Questions of evidence, classification, and interpretation are pressed to the front of our inquiries. Among the questions we ask are: what definitions of religion prevail in our studies? where do we look for religion and theology? why do we look there? what do we do with that evidence? what do our interpretations do?

As “interdisciplines,” religion and theology draw from many disciplines and traverse many theoretical and methodological terrains, from literary studies to history to sociology to anthropology to political science and more. While there are undoubtedly schools of thought that can be traced back through generations, this seminar is organized thematically rather than genealogically to allow ideas to crisscross, fade, and resurface throughout the semester. Nevertheless, students will be introduced to major thinkers and major texts that have shaped the academic study of religion in the past and into the present.

## Course Objectives

- **Introduce** key conversations and debates in the academic study of religion;
- **Sharpen** abilities to think, read, speak, and write critically about theology and the study of religion;
- **Prepare** for the Theories and Methods comprehensive examination and for dissertation research

## Course Requirements

### 1. Attendance, preparation, and active engagement in class (20%)

Arrive to class promptly, whether in person or remotely, having actively read and reflected on the week's materials. Prepare constructive questions to discuss and be prepared to converse at length on the materials and the questions they raise. Active engagement also includes timely submissions of weekly response papers and other assignments.

Ideally everyone will read all assigned materials for each class discussion. However, I understand that things can come up from week to week. All students, under usual circumstances, should \*at minimum\* read the starred material. Presenters should strive to read all required materials and familiarize yourself with the recommended material to enrich discussion.

### 2. Weekly responses (10%)

Response papers should be ~500 words and substantively engage the week's assigned materials. These are process papers and do not have to be polished writing but must present original thought and engagement with weekly material. Response papers will be due by 3pm on Mondays before our Tuesday morning classes periods. May be submitted as an attachment on Slack or emailed to Prof. Lindsey. Discussion leaders will turn in a copy of discussion questions in lieu of the response paper.

### 3. Discussion leader (20%)

In addition to weekly attendance and preparation, each student will lead discussion **three times** throughout the semester. Discussion leaders have two responsibilities. They are to introduce the principal theorist(s) at length and structure a robust conversation around the week's materials. Presenters should strive to fit the two responsibilities seamlessly together in the course of the discussion. Discussion leaders should prepare at least 5 substantive questions and submit a copy to Prof. Lindsey at the start of class.

### 4. Unit essays (30%) 10 pages/each.

Unit essays are opportunities to process and substantively engage with ideas, thinkers, and topics raised in each unit while, ideally, applying them to your own specialized field of study. They will move beyond summary of texts to critical evaluation.

Essays must engage at least three assigned texts from the unit and two additional secondary sources of your own choosing. It is strongly recommended that students use this opportunity to identify the "additional" texts for the T&M exam (comp 2). High standards of academic writing and citation are expected.

Unit 1 Essay: Due Friday, March 5

Unit 2 Essay: Due Friday, April 2

Unit 3 Essay: Due Friday, May 7

## 5. Pedagogical Artifact (20%)

Choose ONE of two options:

- Write a teaching guide for one of the books assigned this semester; or
- Design an undergraduate syllabus in your area of expertise that integrates a strong T&M component

Drafts due in class Tuesday, May 4. Revised artifacts due no later than Wednesday, May 12. We will discuss these in class on Tuesday, May 4.

**Required Books** (All other readings on the syllabus will be provided as PDFs or links on syllabus/Slack)

Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992)

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1990)

David Chidester, *Empire of Religion, 2d edition* (2014)

M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom* (2010)

Ashon Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath* (2017)

Mary Douglass, *Purity and Danger* (1966)

Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (2015)

Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory* (1981)

Maia Kotrosits, *The Lives of Objects* (2020)

Kathryn Lofton, *Consuming Religion* (2017)

Charles Long, *Significations* (1966)

Justin McDaniel, *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk* (2014)

Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (2005)

Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth* (2004)

Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling* (2008)

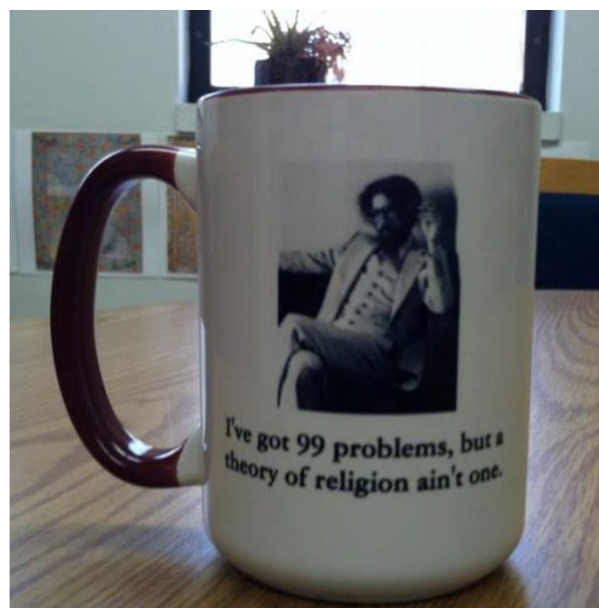
### Required Links

ZOOM: Weekly seminars until further notice.

Slack: Communication hub for semester.

### Other stuff

Course policies and additional resources are posted to course Slack channels. Invitation link has been sent to all enrolled students (and is also [↑](#) )



Whodis?

# Schedule of Classes

## Unit 1: Selves and Others

Feb. 2 **Object(s) of Study**



J.Z. Smith, "A Twice-Told Tale: The History of the History of Religions' History," *Numen* 2 (2001), 131-146.

Craig Martin, "Religion and the Problem of Definition," in *Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion* (2012)

Kathryn Lofton, *Consuming Religion* (2017)

**Recommended:** JZ Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious"

Feb. 9 **Positionalities**



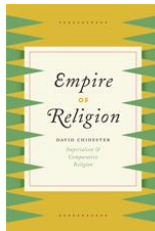
Michel Foucault, "What is an Author" (1969)

Cornel West, "A Genealogy of Modern Racism," in *Prophecy Deliverance* (1982)

Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth* (2004)

**Recommended:** Newton, "Racial Profiling?: Theorizing Essentialism, whiteness, and scripture in the study of religion," *Religion Compass* (July 2020)

Feb. 16 **Colonialism, Empire, and Comparative Religion**



Daniel Pals, "Animism and Magic, E.B Tylor and J.G. Frazier" *Nine Theories*

David Chidester, "Frontiers of Comparison," in *Savage Systems* (1996)

Chidester, *Empire of Religion* (2014)

Karen McCarthy Brown, "Writing About 'the Other,'" *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (1992)

**Recommended:** Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in New York* (1991); Patton and Ray, eds., *A Magic Still Dwells* (2000)

Feb. 23 **Inventing World Religion**



Edward Said, "Orientalism (1978)," in *The Edward Said Reader* (2000)

Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (2005)

**Recommended:** Said, *Orientalism* (Eng. trans., 1978)

## Unit 2: Towards Critical Theory

### March 2 Phenomenology



Yao Xiao, Wall Street Journal

Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Simone de Beauvoir in *The Continental Philosophy Reader* (1996)

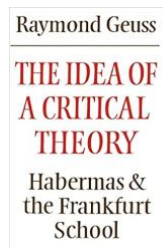
Raymond Williams, “Experience,” from *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976)

Joan Wallach Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” from *Critical Inquiry* (1991)

Robert Sharf, “Experience” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (1998)

**Recommended:** Jason N. Blum, “Retrieving Phenomenology of Religion as a Method for Religious Studies,” *JAR* 2012

### March 9 Ideology



“Horkheimer and Adorno,” in *The Continental Philosophy Reader* (1996)

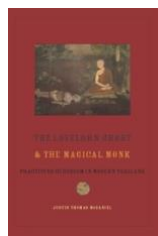
Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory* (1981)

Barbara J. Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History,” in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J.

Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (1982)

James Scott, “Hegemony and Consciousness: Everyday Forms of Ideological Struggle,” in *Weapons of the Weak* (1985)

### March 16 Interpretation



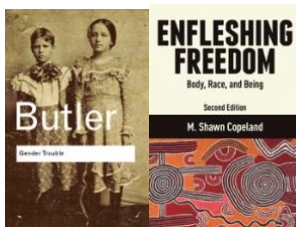
“Hans-Georg Gadamer” and “Paul Ricoeur” in *The Continental Philosophy Reader* (1996)

John R. Bowlin, “Representation and Reality in the Study of Culture,” *American Anthropologist* (1997)

Justin McDaniel, *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk* (2014)

**Recommended:** Stout, “The Relativity of Interpretation”

### March 23 Subjectivity



Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1990)

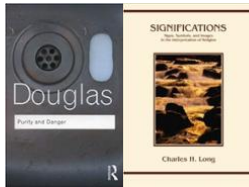
Saba Mahmood, “The Subject of Freedom” in *Politics of Piety* (2004)

M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (2010)

**Recommended:** Shaw, “Feminist Anthropology and the Gendering of Religious Studies”

## Unit 3: Social and Cultural Theory

March 30 Sign + Symbol



Daniel Pals, “Society as Sacred: Durkheim”

Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (1966)

Charles Long, *Significations* (1986)

**Recommended:** Émile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912)

April 6 Culture

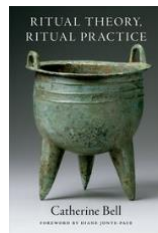


Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description” and “Religion as a Cultural System,” from *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973)

Talal Asad, “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category,” from *Genealogies of Religion* (1993)

Ashon Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath* (2017)

April 13 Practice



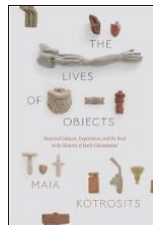
Michel DeCerteau, “Theories of the Art of Practice,” *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984)

Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992)

Craig Martin, “How Society Works: Habitus,” from *Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion* (2012)

**Recommended:** Bourdieu, from *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (trans., 1977)

April 20 Objects



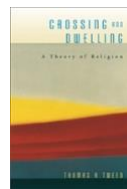
“Editorial Statement,” *Material Religion* (2005)

Sonia Hazard, “Thing,” *Journal of Early American History* (2018)

Maia Kotrosits, *The Lives of Objects* (2020)

**Recommended:** Laura Levitt, *Objects that Remain* (2020); Kevin Schillbrack, “The Material Turn in the Academic Study of Religion,” *Journal of Religion* (2019); Jennifer Schepper Hughes, *Biography of a Mexican Crucifix* (2010)

April 27 Space + Place



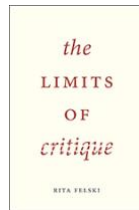
Yi-Fu Tuan, “Introduction,” “Time and Place,” and Epilogue,” *Space and Place* (1977)

Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling* (2008)

## Wrapping things up: What comes next?

May 4

Critique



Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (2015)

Saba Mahmood, "[Is Critique Secular?](#)" *The Immanent Frame*, 2008

Pedagogical Artifacts