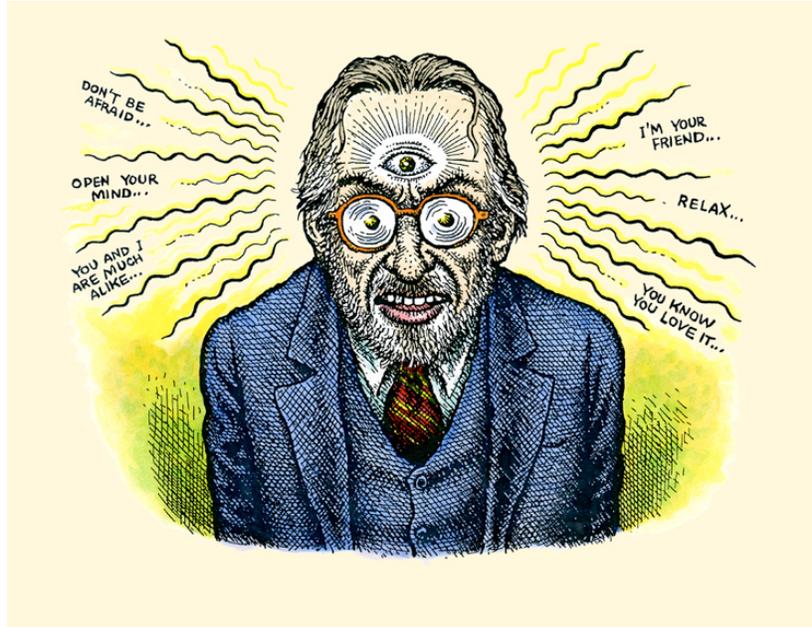


Perspectives in Religious Studies

Where do we stand?



RELG 488

Spring 2020

T 4:25pm-6:55pm

Gambrell 123

Professor Daniel M. Stuart

Office: Rutledge 331

Office hours: Wednesdays 11am–1pm

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This course is an opportunity to explore a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of “religion” while querying that category and questioning what the field of “religious studies” is or might be. During the first part of the course we will read seven recent works—each with its own particular scholarly methodology and key theoretical questions—that attempt to make sense of histories, practices, traditions and worldviews that some might call “religious.” Students are asked to think with, through, and against the perspectives presented in these works, and to use them to broaden their understanding of the interdisciplinary field of Religious Studies. During the second part of the course we will have a series of visits from members of the Religious Studies Department here at USC. We will read their research work, hear about how they approach their research, and see how they fit into the landscape of the field.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to

- Compare and evaluate different approaches to the academic study of religion;
- Identify and discuss current issues and debates in the field of religious studies;
- Analyze a variety of case studies from a range of perspectives.

Course Requirements

1. *Attendance and participation* (30% of the final grade)
You are expected to come to class well-prepared, i.e. having done the reading assignments thoughtfully and being prepared to engage in discussion about them. Participation, including class discussion and other in-class activities, is an essential part of your learning in this class. If you feel shy about speaking up in class, or face any other issues, please come and talk to me.
Note: Class absences will affect your participation grade (see Course Policies).
2. *Class facilitation* (20%)
3. *In-class presentation on final research paper* (20%)
4. *Final research paper* (30%) – Due on Friday, May 1, at 6:00 p.m.

Grading Scale

100-90 A; 89-87 B+; 86-80 B; 79-77 C+; 76-70 C; 69-67 D+; 66-60 D; 59 and below F

Required Readings (All readings will be accessible as e-readings):

Ashforth, Adam. *The Trials of Mrs. K.: Seeking Justice in a World with Witches*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Boylston, Tom. *The Stranger at the Feast: Prohibition and Mediation in an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Community*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018.

de la Cadena, Marisol. *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015.

Chajes, Julia. *Recycled Lives: A History of Reincarnation in Blavatsky's Theosophy*. Oxford University Press, 2019.

- Fabian, Johannes. *Talk about Prayer: An Ethnographic Commentary*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Faure, Bernard. "Can (and Should) Neuroscience Naturalize Buddhism?" *International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture* 27.1 (2017): 115–133.
- Kojève, Alexandre. *Atheism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.
- Lindahl, Jared et al. "The Varieties of Contemplative Experience: A mixed-methods study of meditation-related challenges in Western Buddhists." *PLoS ONE* 12(5) (2017).
- Ogden, Emily. *Credulity: A Cultural History of US Mesmerism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.
- Stuart, Daniel M. "Insight Transformed: Coming to Terms with Mindfulness in South Asian and Global Frames." *Religions of South Asia* 11.2–3 (2017): 158–181.

Course Policies

Academic Integrity

The University of South Carolina has clearly articulated its policies governing academic integrity and students are encouraged to carefully review the policy on the Honor Code in the Carolina Community. Any deviation from these expectations will result in academic penalties as well as disciplinary action. The area of greatest potential risk for inadvertent academic dishonesty is plagiarism. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, paraphrasing or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgement.

Attendance

Prompt and regular attendance is crucial for success in this course. Attendance will be taken at the start of each class. We will follow the university's policy regarding attendance and the effect of unexcused absences on a student's course grade. If you are absent for an excusable reason – such as a medical reason or a family emergency – it is your responsibility to submit the needed documentation (e.g. a doctor's note) to the instructor. The University attendance policy specifies that students may miss up to 3 class meetings (10% of class time) without penalty. The 4th absence will result in a grade penalty of one letter grade for your attendance and participation grade. The 5th absence will result in a deduction of 2 letter grades; and so on.

Classroom Conduct

All cell phones are to be turned off or silenced during class; there is no text messaging, web browsing, etc, during class. Please come to class on time, and be respectful of everyone else in the class. Refrain from personal attacks or demeaning comments of any kind. Disrespectful or disruptive behavior may result in dismissal from class and/or an academic penalty.

Accommodating Disabilities

Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, contact the Office of Student Disability Services: 777-6142, TDD 777-6744, email sasds@mailbox.sc.edu, or stop by LeConte College Room 112A. All accommodations must be approved through the Office of Student Disability Services.

Course Schedule

Week 1:

1/14 (T) What is a perspective? Who is the viewer? What is the spectacle? Where do we stand?

Week 2:

1/21 (T) *Credulity*, by Emily Ogden

Week 3:

1/28 (T) *The Stranger at the Feast*, by Tom Boylston

Week 4:

2/4 (T) *Atheism*, by Alexandre Kojève

Week 5:

2/11 (T) *Earth Beings*, by Marisol de la Cadena

Week 6:

2/18 (T) *The Trials of Mrs. K*, by Adam Ashforth

Week 7:

2/25 (T) *Recycled Lives*, by Julie Chajes

Week 8:

3/3 (T) *Talk about Prayer*, by Johannes Fabian

SPRING BREAK (3/8–3/15)

Week 9:

3/17 (T) Marko Geslani, “Model Minority Religion: Hindu Studies and Multiculturalism in the American University”

Week 10:

3/24 (T) John Mandsagar on *space and practice*

Week 11:

3/31 (T) Daniel Stuart, “Insight Transformed”; Bernard Faure, “Can (and Should) Neuroscience Naturalize Buddhism?”; Lindahl et al., “The Varieties of Contemplative Experience: A mixed-methods study of meditation-related challenges in Western Buddhists”

Week 12:

4/7 (T) Noah Gardiner on *Sufi cosmogony and eschatology*

Week 13:

4/14 (T) FINAL PRESENTATIONS

Week 14:

4/21 (T) FINAL PRESENTATIONS

FINAL PAPERS: Due on Friday, May 1, at 6:00 pm