

Religions of the World

Fall 2023, RLST 1020-01, 3 Credit Hours
11:00am – 12:15pm, Tues. & Thurs., NH 17

Instructor: Jeffrey Colgan
Office location: 107 Newcomb Hall
Office hours: After class or by appointment
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Course Description:

When we speak of particular religions, we might be referring to a specific group of people, a collection of practices or rituals, certain beliefs held by that specific group of people, or even celebrated physical structures. However, we also refer to certain foundational texts that (among other things) unite adherents under a set of shared beliefs and practices, provide grounds for justifying or condemning certain practices, and serve as a site of interpretive engagement. But how do these texts come about? How are we (as religious adherents or students) supposed to engage with them? How do they differ from other sorts of texts? And as forms of life change, how does the role that these texts play evolve?

In this course, we will closely study some of the primary religious texts (understood in the broadest sense) from Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Our study will be guided by the question: What is the role of the text in the study, practice, and evolution of world religions? Our exploration will be conducted at two levels. First, we will approach the texts themselves as rich and sophisticated works. Second, we will step back and engage with authors that (like we will attempt to do) have closely studied and critically engaged with these foundational religious texts. Through conducting our own interpretations of these texts as well as studying the interpretations of others, we will move beyond getting a basic grasp on these different traditions and be confronted with several more general yet very difficult questions concerning (a) the functions and methods of interpretation, (b) the limits of language, (c) the connection between religion and political founding, and (d) the often difficult distinction between criticism and heresy.

Course Goals/Objectives:

By the end of the course, successful students will have:

- Developed strategies for engaging with challenging religious and philosophical texts.
- Been exposed to certain key concepts and themes of certain world religions, as conveyed in primary foundation texts.
- Expressed their own ideas clearly to both fellow students and the instructor.
- Articulated and defended interpretations and evaluations of assigned texts in both writing and speech.
- Explored the contemporary relevance of certain major religious and philosophical themes and questions.

Program-Level Outcomes

- To introduce selections from the earliest written record of five major world religions.
- To acquire a grasp of what is distinctive about each religion as a complex of questions.
- To approach the study of religion from a philosophical perspective.

Core Curriculum Outcomes

- To improve cultural knowledge through a variety of textual and historical perspectives.
- To encourage a global perspective regarding religious matters.

Grade Components

Attendance/participation (20%)

Reading responses (25%)

Presentations (25%)

Final exam (30%)

Attendance/Participation (20%)

Attendance is mandatory. Two unexcused absences are permitted, but each subsequent absence will be penalized with a reduction in the attendance/participation component of the course grade. Greater than 5 unexcused absences (i.e., 3 more than the 2 permitted) may result in failing the course. Arriving more than 10 minutes late to class will result in an unexcused absence.

Students are responsible for notifying instructors about absences that result from serious illnesses, injuries, or critical personal problems. Medical excuses are issued by the Student Health Center in the following instances: illnesses or injuries that involve hospitalization, a partial or complete withdrawal due to medical reasons, or a missed examination for a medical condition being treated by the Student Health Center. In all of these instances, medical information will be released only with the student's written permission. Instructors are authorized to lower the grades of students who are absent excessively without a satisfactory excuse. With the approval of the Newcomb-Tulane College dean, an instructor may have a student who has excessive absences involuntarily withdrawn from a course with a WF grade after written warning at any time during the semester.

Each student is expected to arrive to class on time, prepared to discuss the assigned reading, meaning that they have the reading materials with them and have carefully read the assigned texts in advance of the class meeting. Full participation points will require evidence of having thought through the material by being able to discuss the readings in class and to ask engaged questions relevant to the reading(s).

Reading Responses (25%)

Students will submit a short reading response before each class. The responses will have two components: (1) a three sentence summary of the reading that succinctly explains the author's position and (2) a short (~150 words) reflection on the reading. This short reflection should be original work done by the student that engages with the content of that class's reading. This can be a detailed question that you have about the reading, a connection between the reading and some issue outside of class, or your evaluation of some aspect of the reading.

Reading responses must be submitted on Canvas by **11:59pm CT** the night before each class (i.e. Monday night before Tuesday classes and Wednesday night before Thursday classes). No late assignments will be accepted. Reading responses will be graded pass/fail.

Presentations (25%)

Each student will give a 15-20 minute presentation on a specific reading(s) for that week. Presentations should give and explain your extended reading summary, answer any

clarification questions that come up along the way, and pose a couple of discussion questions to help guide our class discussion. Further information about this will be provided in class as well as example presentations.

Final Exam (30%)

A comprehensive exam covering the material from the entire semester will be administered at the end of the semester. Further information about this will be provided in class.

Grading Scale

A = 100 – 93		A- = 92.99 – 90
B+ = 89.99–87	B = 86.99–83	B- = 82.99–80
C+ = 79.99–77	C = 76.99–73	C- = 72.99–70
D+ = 69.99 – 67	D = 66.99 – 63	D- = 62.99– 60
	F = 59.99 - 0	

Use of Electronic Devices

The use of electronic devices (e.g. phones, tablets, computers, etc.) is strictly prohibited. You may not use electronic devices unless you receive written permission from the instructor. The use of any electronic device in class without permission will result in a substantial penalty to your attendance/participation grade. Students with permission to use electronic devices must sit at the front of the class.

Students are required to have physical copies of the readings in class. Students should purchase physical copies of the required texts. All other readings will be posted on Canvas, so please print out the readings before class.

Required Texts:

Indian Buddhist Philosophy, Amber Carpenter (Routledge, 2014)

Tao Te Ching: the Classic Book of Integrity and the Way, Lao Tsu translated by V.H. Mair (Bantam Books, 1990)

Genesis, Robert Alter (W.W. Norton and Company, 1997)

Course Schedule:

Week 1: Introduction: What is Religion? What is a Text?

8.22: Syllabus review & course introduction

8.24: Kevin Schilbrack, “The Concept of Religion” (On Canvas); Damien Keown “Buddhism and Elephants” (On Canvas)

Week 2: Buddhism: The Four Noble Truths

8.29: “The Sutta on Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion” (On Canvas.); Amber Carpenter, Chapter 1 “The Buddha’s Suffering”

8.31: “Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta, Mahā-nidāna Sutta, and Milindapañha” (On Canvas—Edelglass pp. 265–274)

Week 3: Buddhism: No-Self & the Nietzschean Objection
9.5: Carpenter, Chapter 2 “Practice and Theory of No-Self”
9.7: Carpenter, Chapter 3 “Klāsas and Compassion”

Week 4: Buddhism: The Mahāyāna
9.12: Nāgārjuna, *Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way* (On Canvas—Edelglass, pp. 26-35);
Carpenter, Chapter 4 “The Second Buddha’s Greater Vehicle”
9.14: NO CLASS

Week 5: Buddhism: Ethics and Reception
9.19: Carpenter, Chapter 5 “Karmic Questions”
9.21: Selections from Hanshan (*Cold Mountain Poems*), Bashō, and Gary Snyder (On Canvas)

Week 6: Taoism: Integrity
9.26: Victor H. Mair, Afterword to the *Tao Te Ching* pp. 119–140
9.28: *Tao Te Ching* pp. 3–35

Week 7: Taoism: The Way
10.3: *Tao Te Ching* pp. 36–69
10.5: NO CLASS (Fall Break)

Week 8: Taoism: The Way (Cont’d) and Reception
10.10: *Tao Te Ching* pp. 70–105
10.12: NO CLASS

Week 9: Taoist Poetry and Judaism
10.17: Selections from the poetry of Li Po (On Canvas)
10.19: *Genesis* 1–4

Week 10: Judaism
10.24: *Genesis* 5–11
10.26: *Genesis* 12–23

Week 11: Judaism
10.31: *Genesis* 24–36
11.2: *Genesis* 37–50

Week 12: Jewish Folktales and The Qur’an on the Genesis Stories
11.7: Selections from Martin Buber’s *Tales of the Hasidim* (On Canvas)
11.9: Malise Ruthven, “The Quran and the Prophet” (On Canvas); Qur’an Sura 2:29–39; Sura 5:27–34; Sura 71 (On Canvas)

Week 13: Qur’an Continued and Christianity: The Gospel of John
11.14: Qur’an Sura 6:74–83; Sura 11:71–83; Sura 15: 51–77; Sura 19: 41–50; Sura 26:69–89; Sura 12
11.16: Gospel of John 1–12 (On Canvas)

Thanksgiving Break
11.21: NO CLASS
11.23: NO CLASS

Week 14: Christianity and The Canterbury Tales
11.28: Gospel of John 13–21 (On Canvas)
11.30: *Canterbury Tales*, the General Prologue (On Canvas)

Week 15: Canterbury Tales and Philosophical Themes
12.5: *Canterbury Tales*, The Pardoner's Tale (On Canvas)
12.7: Plato's *Apology*

Finals Week
12.11–12.15

ADA/Accessibility Statement

Tulane University is committed to offering classes that are accessible. If you anticipate or encounter disability-related barriers in a course, please contact the Goldman Center for Student Accessibility to establish reasonable accommodations. If approved by Goldman, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. I will never ask for medical documentation from you to support potential accommodation needs. **Goldman Center contact information:** Email: goldman@tulane.edu; Phone (504) 862-8433; Website: accessibility.tulane.edu

Code of Academic Conduct

The Code of Academic Conduct applies to all undergraduate students, full-time and part-time, in Tulane University. Tulane University expects and requires behavior compatible with its high standards of scholarship. By accepting admission to the university, a student accepts its regulations (i.e., [Code of Academic Conduct](#) and [Code of Student Conduct](#)) and acknowledges the right of the university to take disciplinary action, including suspension or expulsion, for conduct judged unsatisfactory or disruptive.

Unless I indicate differently on instructions, all assignments and exams are to be completed individually and without any study aid, including textbooks, class notes, or online sites. If you have any question about whether a resource is acceptable, you must ask the instructor rather than assume.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Statement (EDI).

"Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are important [Tulane values](#) that are key drivers of academic excellence in our learning environments. In our drive for academic excellence, we seek to ensure that students, faculty, and staff across diverse social identities, cultural backgrounds, and lived experiences can thrive - especially those from underrepresented and underserved communities (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, social class, international, veterans, religious minorities, age, and any other classification protected by applicable law - see [Tulane's Nondiscrimination Policy](#)). In order to build a supportive culture and climate for every member of our community, we recognize that we each of have unique EDI strengths to share with others and that we also have areas for EDI growth, learning, and change. This EDI commitment and cultural humility helps us collectively build a university community and culture where everyone experiences belonging."

Religious accommodation policy

Per Tulane's religious accommodation policy as stated at the bottom [Tulane's academic calendar](#), I will make every reasonable effort to ensure that students are able to observe religious holidays without jeopardizing their ability to fulfill their academic obligations. Excused absences do not relieve the student from the responsibility for any course work required during the period of absence. Students should notify me within the first two weeks of the semester about their intent to observe any holidays that fall on a class day or on the day of the final exam.

Title IX:

Tulane University recognizes the inherent dignity of all individuals and promotes respect for all people. As such, Tulane is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination including sexual and gender-based discrimination, harassment, and violence like sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or is experiencing these types of behaviors, know that you are not alone. Resources and support are available: you can learn more at allin.tulane.edu. Any and all of your communications on these matters will be treated as either "Confidential" or "Private" as explained in the chart below. Please know that if you choose to confide in me I am required by the university to share your disclosure in a Care Connection to the Office of Case Management and Victim Support Services to be sure you are connected with all the support the university can offer. The Office of University Sexual Misconduct Response and Title IX Administration is also notified

of these disclosures. You choose whether or not you want to meet with these offices. You can also make a disclosure yourself, including an anonymous report, through the form at tulane.edu/concerns.

Confidential	Private
<p><i>Except in extreme circumstances, involving imminent danger to one's self or others, nothing will be shared without your explicit permission.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) (504) 314-2277 The Line (24/7) (504) 264-6074 Student Health Center (504) 865-5255 Sexual Aggression Peer Hotline and Education (SAPHE) (504) 654-9543 	<p><i>Conversations are kept as confidential as possible, but information is shared with key staff members so the University can offer resources and accommodations and take action if necessary for safety reasons.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case Management & Victim Support Services (504) 314-2160 or srss@tulane.edu Tulane University Police (TUPD) Uptown - (504) 865-5911 Downtown – (504) 988-5531 Office of University Sexual Misconduct Response and Title IX Administration (504) 865-5611 or titleix@tulane.edu Student Affairs Professional On-Call (24/7) (504) 920-9900

Emergency Preparedness & Response:

<p>In the event of a campus emergency, Tulane University will notify students, faculty, and staff by email, text, and/or phone call. You were automatically enrolled in this system when you enrolled at the university.</p> <p>Check your contact information annually in Gibson Online to confirm its accuracy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow all TU Alerts and outdoor warning sirens Seek shelter indoors until the severe weather threat has passed and an all-clear message is given Do not use elevators Do not attempt to travel outside if weather is severe <p>Monitor the Tulane Emergency website (tulane.edu/emergency/) for university-wide closures during a severe weather event</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RUN – run away from or avoid the affected area, if possible HIDE – go into the nearest room that can be locked, turn out the lights, and remain hidden until all-clear message is given through TU ALERT FIGHT – do not attempt this option, except as a last resort For more information or to schedule a training, visit emergencyprep.tulane.edu 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Download the Everbridge app from the App Store or Google Play store The Report feature allows you to silently and discreetly communicate with TUPD dispatchers The SOS button allows you to notify TUPD if you need help The Safe Corridor button serves as a virtual escort and allows you to send check-in notifications to TUPD

From: Tulane Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response