

Religion 200, Spring 2005

“Cases and Genealogies in the Study of Religion”

Tyson & Saunders

Session 1, January 18

Weber “Science as a Vocation”
Writing assigned: scholarly kinship network
Keyword research for 1/25 (Working Parties): classic, canon

Session 2, January 25

Nietzsche “On the Use and Abuse of History for Life”
LaCapra “Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language”
Weber, “Science as a Vocation” (still)
Discuss scholarly kinship networks

Session 3, February 1

Hume *Natural History of Religion*
Hume “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm”
Hume “Of Miracles”
Writing assigned for 2/7: objectivity

Session 4, February 8

Weber *Ancient Judaism* excerpts on charisma, prophet as ideal-type
Weber selections from “The Social Psychology of the World Religions” and
“Religious Rejections of the World,” *From Max Weber*
Weber *Theory of Social & Economic Organization* selection
Weber “Science as a Vocation (reread)

Session 5, February 15

Kant “What Is Enlightenment?”
Kant “Conjectural Beginnings of Human History”
Kant “What Is Orientation in Thinking?”
Kant “Preface” to 1st Edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*
Frazer *The Golden Bough* selections
Wittgenstein *Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough*
Hume *A Treatise of Human Nature* selections on principles of association
Writing assigned for 2/21: genealogy & teleology (+/- reflections on LaCapra’s
contexts as applicable)

Session 6, February 22

Nietzsche *Genealogy of Morals* 3rd Essay, “What Is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?”

Foucault “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”

Foucault “What Is Enlightenment?”

Foucault “Kant on Enlightenment and Revolution”

Writing assigned for 3/1: on one of Marx’s figurations of religion (other than opium)

Begin longterm assignment (for 4/19): research contributions of one key scholar in the study of religion (other than those we are reading this term) for distillation to handout and oral presentation

Session 7, March 1

Guest scholar: Chris Roberts

Marx “The Jewish Question”

Marx “Theses on Feuerbach”

Feuerbach selections from *The Essence of Religion*

Marx “Introduction” to *Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*

Marx *1844 Economic and Philosophical MS*—selections:

Preface

on Alienated Labor

on Money

Marx *Capital* Vol 1 Chapt 1

Session 8, March 8

Weber *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

Giddens *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* selections on Marx/Weber

Smith *Wealth of Nations* selections on division of labor

Shils “Charisma”

Writing assigned for 3/22: on “origins” in study of religion

Session 9, March 22

Durkheim *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* selections:

Introduction, Book 2 Chapter 7, Book 3 Chapters 1-5 & Conclusion

Durkheim review of Guyau

Masuzawa “Society versus Difference”

LaCapra “Durkheim’s Milieu”

Choose: Van Gennep review of Durkheim; Durkheim & Mauss review of Frazer

Session 10, March 29

Guest scholar: Chris Roberts

Tylor "Sacrifice" selections (from *Religion in Primitive Culture*)

Hubert & Mauss *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*: Introduction and Chapter 1

Evans-Pritchard "Meaning of Sacrifice among the Nuer"

Firth "Offering and Sacrifice"

Guest scholar: Randall Styers

Tylor "Animism" selections (from *Religion in Primitive Culture* Chapter XI)

Marett "Pre-Animistic Religion" from *The Threshold of Religion*

Freud "Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thoughts" from *Totem and Taboo*

Evans-Pritchard "Psychological Theories" from *Theories of Primitive Religion*

Session 11, April 5

De Man "The Rhetoric of Temporality"

Todorov *Theories of the Symbol* selections

Szondi "Hope in the Past: On Walter Benjamin"

Session 12, April 12

Bataille *Theory of Religion*

Session 13, April 19

Reports on key figures: Freud; Marx; Geertz; Hume; James

Session 14, April 26

Smith *Imagining Religion* selections: "Introduction"; "In Comparison a Magic Dwells"; "Sacred Persistence" (on canon); "The Bare Facts of Ritual"; "The Devil in Mr. Jones"

Heller "Enlightenment against Fundamentalism"

Wills "The Day the Enlightenment Went Out"

Submit 3 questions for consideration of instructors toward development of general exam

Notes:

Students taking the UNC Religious Studies General Exam are not required to write a major final paper.

ExtraDepartmental students will write a final seminar paper on a topic to be arranged with instructors.

Most weeks students should expect to turn in brief informal writings on a topic TBA— and/or to do focused researches on key terms or additional readings of interest to seminar. These may be undertaken individually or in “Working Parties.”

Appendix:
Religious Studies General Exam 2005

Write essays on 2 of the 7 questions provided below. You will have 4 hours total (commencing 9:00 AM Thursday May 5th). You may consult your annotated primary texts in composing your essays during the examination.

Deliver your word-processed essays—doubled spaced—digitally or on paper to Myra Quick by 1:15pm. Please put your name *only* on a cover page. This page should be printed and signed by you, as pledge of honor. Ms. Quick will remove that page so that your response is judged anonymously by both instructors—independently of each other, then in consultation. Responses judged not passing by either reader will be submitted to a third reader for final judgment.

Your exam essays will be judged as exhibitions of:

- 1) close reading and critical appropriation of assigned texts from Religion 200;
- 2) effective use of critical scholarly tools of reading and writing, synopsis and redescription, comparison, exegetical acuity and ingenuity
- 3) recognitions of genre, figures of speech (tropes) and other rhetorical aspects of prose writing
- 4) clarity and organization of your essay responses
- 5) coherence and persuasiveness of each essay

You are not expected to quote the texts you reference verbatim—but your citations and appropriations of texts or arguments should be specific enough to convince your readers of your command and understanding. “Marx is unhistorical” is unsatisfactory because it is untethered and, so far as it goes, erroneous. “Marx is unhistorical when he talks about religion” is more specific but still a gross over-simplification. “Marx’s indictments of religion as illusion are not always rendered with the historical specificity of his commentary “On the Jewish Question” or the elaborateness of his account of commodity fetishism” suggests at least some sense of differential weightings among his texts.

The Examination Questions

- 1) J. Z. Smith said, with emphasis: “*the academic study of religion is a child of the Enlightenment.*” (“The Devil in Mr. Jones,” 104) He cited the Enlightenment’s mood, its “exemplary attitude toward religion”—and elaborated: “religion was domesticated; it was transformed from *pathos* to *ethos*.”
 - A) Offer your exegesis and interpretation/s of these figures of speech. What does *pathos-to-ethos* mean, and how is it a form of domestication? How can a discipline be a child of a cultural movement? In the process,
 - B) Re-present Smith’s claims here (what aspects of which Enlightenment did he cite?) And
 - C) Extend or complicate Smith’s case by referencing texts from this year’s 200 seminar, including:
 - i) Scottish and German Enlightenment writers (Hume, Kant), and
 - ii) writers who could be said to bear a filial relation to the Enlightenment (Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Frazer...—all with qualifications!)—perhaps including commentators on Enlightenment texts (Foucault on Kant; Weber on Franklin; Heller on Lessing), and
 - iii) particular critical or technical terms we have considered that may help characterize shifts from *pathos* to *ethos* (rite, charisma, rationalization, commodification, bureaucratization...) or the reverse (fundamentalism...)
- 2) J. Z. Smith suggested, in reflecting on canon, that historians of religion should overcome Romantic preoccupations with primitivity (uninterpreted primordia) and symbolic plenitude (“Sacred Persistence,” 43). There is a normative judgment here, that primitive and symbol are fraught, perhaps troublesome, notions. Why is this a concern for history of religions? Take the theme of “Persistence” in Smith’s title as a clue: how do Romantic notions of symbol and primitive figure temporality, and history? In your response, you should adduce:
 - A) Romantic or crypto-Romantic dimensions of any 19th- or 20th-century approaches to the study of religion that we have consulted—or critiques of same (e.g., Nietzsche on history; Durkheim on collective effervescence; Weber on charisma, Bataille on immanence, Smith on morphology *à la* Goethe, Spengler, Eliade, Goodenough...)
 - B) philosophies of time discussed by De Man (re Proust) and Szondi (re Benjamin)
 - C) critique/s of and equivocations about origin, *à la* Masuzawa/Durkheim, or Nietzsche/Foucault.
- 3) Using J. Z. Smith’s idea of the “building blocks of the history of religion” (57)—echoes Bataille—, write an essay arguing for a minimum of 4 essential terms/concepts that constitute building blocks of the study of religion as you have gleaned them from readings on the syllabus. For example: canon, ritual, sacrifice, gift, exegesis, comparison, charisma, rationalization. Which readings have you found to offer the best exemplification of these terms/concepts; and, a key criterion, how do these building blocks you have selected and critically appropriated fit together, in a coherent approach, to the scholarly study of religion in the contemporary academy?

Once you have selected the building blocks (or key terms/concepts), cite the texts from the syllabus (or elsewhere) where you found them most helpfully elaborated; say why you have selected each; and clarify: how do they fit together as an approach you have formulated were you to teach a 200-type course? How would you present these terms, as parts of an approach to the study of religion, to an imagined first meeting of the seminar?

- 4) We have read several authors who comment on asceticism (Nietzsche, Weber) or sacrifice (Tylor, Durkheim, Hubert and Mauss, Evans-Pritchard, Bataille, Firth). How might an interest in abnegation, as paradigmatic religious expression, intersect with anxieties about capitalism or cultural impoverishment? Comparing several such figures—perhaps alongside with Marx, a key provocateur—, can you make any broad observations about how they have understood religion’s role in promoting or resisting utility, bourgeois values, etc.?
- 5) This semester we have read several accounts of origins of religion. We have also read critiques of specific origin accounts, as well as of the search for origins in general—ranging from Evans-Pritchard on “If I were a horse” kinds of hypotheses to Masuzawa on Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms* to Foucault on Nietzsche’s genealogics. Elaborate on these accounts and critiques in discussing some pitfalls of searches for origins of religion. Is there value in such a search, and if so, how might pitfalls be avoided? Note that in some accounts of origins, sometimes an explicit, sometimes an implicit view of social/cultural evolution is assumed.
- 6) J. Z. Smith, in reflecting on the closure and systematicity of a canon, incorporates a notion of “freedom” by emphasizing the ingenuity of the hermeneute (“Sacred Persistence,” 44). Consider at least two other seminar readings in which we have encountered notions of freedom. Then, in a comparative mode, write about how these notions of freedom (presumably in tension with associated notions of fixity or limit) offer theoretical resources to religious studies. Examples may include Kant on release from tutelage, Marx on political versus human emancipation (“The Jewish Question”), Nietzsche on priestly power and its heroic overcoming, Bataille on gratuitous violence.
- 7) Reflect on the functions of similarity and contiguity, as “principles of association,” for at least three of the writers whose works we have read this term. (Prime candidates: Hume, Frazer, Durkheim, Evans-Pritchard, Freud, J. Z. Smith...) Construct genealogical connections among these writers; discuss other possible reasons for these principles’ recurrence as theoretical resources. What relevance does this nexus hold for you as a scholar?