

Graduate Division of Religion

Fall 2023 Course Atlas

(Please check back for changes and updates - last update 8.22.2023)

AAS 730/RLR 700.9

Foundations of Black Life and Thought in Africa and the Diaspora

Thursday, 10:00 - 1:00

Dianne Stewart and Emmanuel Lartey

This course invites students to explore foundational principles, concepts, and practices in African and African diaspora religious cultures that have provided orientation for African-descended people's life, thought, and devotion. By exploring epistemological, philosophical, and socio-cultural dimensions of African life and thought we will seek to gain clarity concerning the wellsprings and developments of African knowledge, personhood and religious practices in Africa and its diasporas, including the United States. Our primary investigation will focus upon knowledge, personhood and practice in Africana religious cultures in order to access overlooked orientations, thought systems, and relational poetics that are conversant with critical debates and innovations in African American Studies today. Thus, this course is designed to foster bold, courageous and creative critical thinking that disrupts legacies of colonial intrusion in Africa and its diasporas, with attention to the intellectual colonialism that has characterized much of the framing of and research on African/Black religious-cultures and societies. Expected outcomes for enrolled students include: (1) the ability to critically engage dominant Western discourses that foreclose profound investigations of the multiplicity and plurality of Africana thought within African and African American/diaspora studies, (2) becoming conversant with new theoretical frameworks for conceptualizing African and African diaspora religious cultures, (3) beginning to develop a scholarly perspective that builds on the foundational Africana approaches to thought and practice explored throughout the course.

RLE780 - Moral Agency Under Constraint

Friday, 9:30 -12:30

Ellen Ott Marshall

** This course will satisfy one of the Theories & Methods requirements*

This course takes as its starting point Katie Cannon's observation that the dominant tradition of western philosophical ethics assumes a moral agent with freedom and a wide range of choices. Cannon turned to literature by African American women to study female protagonists who demonstrate moral agency under constraint. This course uses a similar methodology: engaging literature, film, art, and lived experience in order to reconsider assumptions about moral agency. After a few introductory sessions, we move through three units: literature, ethnographic case study, and art. The last part of the seminar focuses on students' research projects and the contexts and models of agency they pursue. To get a sense of the variety of student research from previous semesters and take a sneak peek at our culminating, collaborative project, see: <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/moralagency2019/>

RLHT 712R - Theology of Augustine**Thursday, 1:00 - 4:00****Anthony Briggman**

This seminar will consider the life and thought of Augustine of Hippo. Our aim will be to grasp the fundamentals of Augustine's theology by examining his writings leading up to and following the turn of the fifth century. The working assumption of the seminar is that if you understand the developments that take place in Augustine's thought between 387 and 406, you will be prepared to understand his later thought as well.

We will use Confessions as the spine of the course, thereby enabling us to approach Augustine's thought chronologically for as long as a chronological approach works (that is, through Confessions 8). Using Confessions also permits us to encounter 'organically' many of the key features of his theology. Among the topics we will explore are the following: the importance of Stoic moral psychology to his conception of the will, Manichaeism, the problem of evil, grace and conversion, the freedom of the will, his response to Pelagianism, his Trinitarian theology, and his Christology & response to Arianism.

RLL 701 - Akkadian**Tuesday, 2:30-5:30****Roger Nam**

This course will introduce the fundamentals of Old Babylonian grammar and the most common Neo-Assyrian cuneiform signs. At the conclusion of the semester, students will be able to read literary texts in Old Babylonian (2000-1600) with the help of a dictionary. Students will also be equipped to navigate peripheral dialects of Akkadian and be able to grasp the essential elements of the Akkadian orthographic system. Through the course of the semester, the students will encounter the broader dialect geography of Akkadian.

RLNT 740 - Literature of the Second Temple Period**Wednesday & Friday, 1:00 - 2:20****Walter Wilson**

A review of recent scholarship on ancient Judaism. Possible readings include David Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart* [2005], Erich Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism* [1998], Françoise Mirguet, *An Early History of Compassion* [2017], Tessa Rajak, *Translation and Survival* [2009], Annette Reed, *Demons, Angels, and Writing in Ancient Judaism* [2020], and Lawrence Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* [1995].

RLR 700 - Studying Religious Practices**Wednesday, 9:00 - 12:00****Liz Bounds and Don Seeman**

** This course will satisfy one of the Theories & Methods requirements*

This course explores the recent turn toward practice, toward the body, toward objects, and toward place within the fields of both theological and religious studies. To understand the significance of this development, we will inquire into the assumptions that have traditionally shaped these fields, if not the modern academy at large. These assumptions include the privileging of discursive over practical knowledge, textual over oral media, symbolic over somatic analysis, and elite over popular perspectives. Methodologically the shift to practice has incorporated emphases on embodied forms of knowing, moral virtues and character formation, and community/culture.

During the semester, we will read some theoretical work on the nature of practice, putting these works into conversation with the writings of historians, philosophers, theologians, and ethnographers who have helped advanced the practice turn in religious and theological studies. We will pay particular attention to methodological implications, to the ethics of researching and writing about living and often vulnerable populations, and to the intersections of the study of practice and questions of power (along such axes as race, class, sex, gender, colonial status, and educational attainment). An ongoing question will be tracing the ways the accounts of practice move between empirical descriptions and normative or speculative claims. There will be an opportunity to review and practice some skills in qualitative research.

NOTE: This course is the one common required course for the Concentration in Religious Practices and Practical Theology.

Possible Readings

Essays by Clifford Geertz, Talal Asad, Michael Jackson

Selections from W.E.B. Du Bois and Zora Neale Hurston

Pierre Bourdieu, selections from Outline of a Theory of Practice and the Weight of the World

Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life

Kathryn Tanner, Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology

Robert A. Orsi, History and Presence

Nancy Tatom Ammerman, Studying Lived Religion: Contexts and Practices

Saba Mahmood, The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject

Marla Frederick, Colored Television: American Religion Gone Global

Elizabeth Pérez, Religion in the Kitchen: Cooking, Talking, and the Making of Black Atlantic Traditions

Devaka Premawardhana, Faith in Flux: Pentecostalism and Mobility in Rural Mozambique

Todd Whitmore, selections from Imitating Christ in Magwi: An Anthropological Theology

Essays from The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research

RLR 700 / ICIVS 720 - Islamic Civilizations Studies

Wednesday, 2:30 - 5:15

Vincent J. Cornell

This course is an advanced graduate-level introduction to the field of Islamic Civilizations Studies. The course is divided into two parts. The first part is an introduction to the concept of civilization, using the works of civilization theorists Bruce Mazlish, Norbert Elias, Samuel Huntington, Albert Schweitzer, and Felipe Fernández Arnesto. Students will learn that civilization is not a neutral or innocent concept, but rather was conceived ideologically and has profound political, cultural, and theoretical implications. The second part of the course will consist of a critical examination of major issues in Islamic Civilizations

Studies. Issues to be discussed will include the relation of early Islam to the civilizations of late antiquity, intercultural and interreligious relations in the caliphate period, the concept of the “classical” in Islamic civilization, the problem of sources of knowledge in Islamic thought, minority communities in Islam, women in Islamic society, and cultural patterning in civilizational worldviews.

RLR 700 - Postcolonial Interpretations of the New Testament

Monday, 2:30-5:30

Musa Dube

How is the New Testament read in the postcolonial context and through postcolonial theories? This course will explore postcolonial interpretations of the New Testament. It will first explore selected key postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Elleke Boehmer, Homi Bhabha, Gaytri Spivak, among others. Second, it will explore key exponents postcolonial interpretations of the New Testament and their contributions to biblical studies. These will include R.S. Sugirtharajah, Fernando Segovia, Benny Liew Tat Siong, Musa W. Dube, among others. Third, the course will explore the theme of Bible translation and postcoloniality in New Testament studies. It will also utilize various postcolonial frameworks to read selected passages from the New Testament.

Objectives and Outcomes: By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate competency in broad frameworks of postcolonial theory.
- Discuss the link between postcolonial theory and New Testament interpretations.
- Analyze applications of postcolonial theory to translation of the New Testament
- Apply postcolonial theory to selected passages of the New Testament

RLR 700 - World Christianity Approaches to the Study of Religion: Theories and Methodologies

Tuesday, 1:00 - 4:00

Jehu Hanciles

** This course will satisfy one of the Theories & Methods requirements*

This seminar studies major texts, theories, models, and approaches central to the study of religion from non-Western perspectives with world Christianity as a major focus. The reshaping of global Christianity in the last half century or so has prompted searching questions about the near hegemonic dominance of Western models and perspectives in theological discourse and the study of religion. Western- or Euro-centric paradigms are generally marked by fixed geographical focus, implicit cultural bias (including a tendency to universalize Western views or experiences), and an outlook that privileges the intellectual heritage and initiatives of Western peoples. Renewed focus on non-Western realities or dimensions, and critical appraisal of the wealth of data or sources from contexts around the world, has produced alternative theoretical models and frames of reference—including postcolonial, decolonial and intercultural approaches. The world Christianity discourse provides a useful framework for exploring these concepts and assessing the methodological implications for the study of religion more broadly.

RLR 700 - Asian American Religious History**Wednesday, 1:00 - 4:00****Helen Jin Kim**

What is Asian American religious history? What are its aims, methods, and sources? How does it reshape the fields of Asian American history and US religious history, to name a few? This historiographic debate relies on the pioneering work of historians. Consider Laurie Maffly-Kipp's call for a turn to the Pacific in "Eastward Ho! American Religion from the Perspective of the Pacific Rim" (1997). Note David Yoo's argument for a "reconceptualization of Asian American Studies" so that a "serious and critical treatment of religion becomes an interpretive rule rather than an exception" (1999). Tim Tseng saw in the subfield the potential to overturn reductive characterizations of Asian Americans as either the perpetually foreign religious "other" or the racially assimilated "model minority" (2003). In light of these early conversations, how do historians of religion in America write Asian American religious history? How do they draw upon the history of race and religions, Asian American history, and the "Pacific turn"? In what ways does the subfield intersect with cognate discourses in immigration history, diplomatic history, and transnational history? We will study these questions through historical method and develop historical research skills. We will also discuss how and why, given the resurgence of anti-Asian violence in the age of the COVID-19 pandemic, critical engagement with the subfield of Asian American religious history is all the more urgent and necessary.

RLR 700 - Oneness of Being**Thursday, 2:30 - 5:15****Scott Kugle**

This seminar explores the Islamic mystical tradition known as The Oneness of Being (wahdat al-wujud). Associated with the Sufi theologian Ibn al-'Arabi (died 1240) and his diverse followers, the tradition is informed by Neo-Platonism and shares features with Christian, Jewish and Hindu mysticism. The Oneness of Being was hugely influential in the Islamic world as the ideas of Ibn Arabi permeated theology, poetry and music, especially in Ottoman and Mughal realms. We will read his masterpiece, The Bezels of Wisdom (Fusus al-Hikam) in which Ibn Arabi treats Prophets as facets of divine wisdom revealing how the world and the creator are united in being through humanity's coming to completion in self-awareness. We then explore how Ibn Arabi's ideas spread through Persian poetry, focusing on Fakhr al-Din Iraqi (from Iran, lived in Pakistan and Turkey, buried in Syria), Abd al-Rahman Jami (from Afghanistan, buried in Herat) and Jamali Kambohi (from India, buried in Delhi). The seminar will include an optional component for reading texts in Arabic and Persian, two hours on one day each week (to be determined by students' consultation). The seminar is crosslisted in the GDR, the ICIVS (Islamic Civilization Studies) program and Philosophy.

RLR 700 - Towards Vatican II: New Theology Prior to the Council**Wednesday, 9:00 -12:00****Steffen Lösel**

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) constitutes the watershed event for the Roman Catholic Church in modernity. This course introduces students to several of the theologians who theologically prepared for the monumental changes in Catholic theology and (especially) ecclesiology at the council.

Theologians we will encounter may include Marie-Dominique Chenu OP, Henri de Lubac, SJ, Yves Congar OP, Karl Rahner SJ, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Edward Schillebeeckx OP. We will also look at developments after the council in the global Catholic Church.

RLR 700 - Religion and Ecology

Tuesday, 1:00-4:00

Wei Wu

** This course will satisfy one of the Theories & Methods requirements*

This course explores the intersections and entanglements of religion and ecology and invites students to critically reflect upon the roles of religion in solving environmental challenges and deepening environmental concerns. The course will examine the ecological perspectives of various religious traditions and their implications in the ancient and modern periods. It offers an overview of the history and the latest developments in religious engagement with environmental issues throughout the world. It introduces the developments in moral thought, from the religions of the Greeks, and Hebrews to the environmentalism of today, along the way introducing the implications of the indigenous people in Asia and the United States. The course also investigates the new moral imagination in the rise of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Daoism, and other indigenous traditions that emerged with distinctive worldviews and shared concerns.

The themes include religion and ecological crisis, creation and nature, religion and environmentalism, religion and climate change, eco-justice, etc. We will examine the relationship between religion, human, and nature, as well as the roles played by religious groups in the contemporary environmental movements. Students are invited to investigate the plurality of religious traditions and their implications in addressing the current ecological issues.