

RETH 43302 The Ethics of Belief
Winter 2017
T: 2:00-4:50
Swift 200

Professor Richard B. Miller
Office: Swift 202
Hours: Thursday 1:30-4:00
email: rbm1@uchicago.edu
N.B.: Sign up for office hrs. with
Julia Woods in MMC and indicate
windows of time when you're
available.

Description

This seminar will examine authors who ask, Is religious belief and practice good for its adherents and for society more generally? We will examine critics who pose normative questions about religious belief and practice, focusing on authors ranging from early modern European thought to the early twentieth century.

The seminar will have a double focus. We will explore how theologians, philosophers, and social theorists have seen religion as an object of critique, focusing their ethical, political, psychological, or economic claims and criteria. We will also examine how, and on what terms, European and American thinkers have seen religion as good for its adherents as well as for others. Throughout the course, we will explore how religion is theorized in the critical discourses surrounding it.

Format

Class meets once a week in a seminar format. Starting on week 2, one or more student(s) will help to lead each session by providing a ~15 minute presentation. The presentation is to engage the assigned material and pose questions for discussion. Depending on the number of seminar enrollees, some seminars may have more than one presentation – one at the outset, one midway through the seminar meeting. Each presentation is to take its cues from the focus questions that I list below. Students assigned to a presentation are to send two questions to me via email by 5pm the day before class. Note that questions are to conclude a seminar presentation and are not to constitute the whole of it. I'll elaborate on the format during the first seminar; guidelines and a presentation assessment form are posted on Chalk\Course Material.

Assignments

1. Regular attendance and participation: 20%
2. Seminar presentation: 20%. Guidelines and a Presentation Assessment form (which I will complete) are on Chalk\Course Material.
3. Concept Analysis. 20% Each student is to write a 2 page, single-spaced, 12 font paper that takes up one concept from the readings and puts it to critical scrutiny. The paper should examine how one or two authors understand the concept, e.g., toleration, religious

experience, or nature, and analyze how that idea is understood. The Concept Paper is due on February 3 at 5pm.

4. Final Paper on topic approved by the instructor. 40%. Each student is to write a 12-15 page double-spaced, 12pt font paper on one or more of the texts read in the course on a topic approved by me. *Note: The paper title, 1-2 paragraph thesis, and initial bibliography are due on February 17.* The Final Paper is due on March 15. Please include your name in the subject heading, e.g., J Jones Final Paper.

P/F and Auditing Policy

Students may enroll P/F or as Auditors with my approval. All students, regardless of enrollment status, are expected to keep up with the readings, attend all sessions, and provide a seminar presentation with discussion questions. P/F Students must write two Book Reviews, due Feb. 1 and March 15. Auditors must write one critical Book Review, due March 15.

Readings

Bartolomé de Las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians*
John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*
David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*
Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*
Richard C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*
William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*
Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion and Civilization and Its Discontents*
John Dewey, *A Common Faith*
W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

These books have been ordered for purchase at the Seminary Co-op Bookstore. In the calendar below, I have listed recommended secondary source readings for each of our primary sources. Many of these secondary sources are articles in e-journals or are PDF files posted on Chalk\Course Material.

Focus questions

1. What core claims about religion and its merits does each author make? How would you describe the author's project in broad, comprehensive terms?
2. How is religion conceived? What concepts organize each author's depiction of religion? Is religion largely a matter of, e.g., virtue, belief, epistemic assent, piety, ritual, feeling, order, discipline, or power, for example?
3. What values are invoked in each author's assessment of religion? By what criteria is religion assessed?
4. What features of experience are included in the author's assessment of religion? Is the author concentrating on psychological aspects, sociological aspects, political aspects, economic aspects, or scientific aspects (or some combination thereof), of religion?
5. What describes the author's method of analysis?
6. Against what foil(s) is the author arguing?

7. Is the author focusing on *religion*, *religions*, or “*the religious*”? What differences, if any, do these terms suggest?
8. Are some religions, or modes of being religious, better than others according to the author in question?
9. What picture(s) of religion do we acquire over the course of this seminar?

Calendar

Wk 1 Introduction

- 1.3 W. K. Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief,” available on Chalk\Course Material.
 Van Harvey, “The Ethics of Belief Revisited,” available on Chalk\Course Material.

William James, “The Will to Believe,” available at
<http://educ.jmu.edu/~omearawm/ph101willtobelieve.html>

Recommended: Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed., Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), available via electronic text at U of C Libraries.

Wk 2

- 1.10 Bartolomé de Las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians*, Contents, chaps. 1-8, 28-38; skim chaps. 15-25

See: Anthony Padgen, “The ‘School of Salamanca’ and the ‘Affair of the Indies,’” *History of Universities of England* 1 (1981): 71-112; Brian Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law, and Church Law, 1150-1625* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2001): chap. 11: “Aristotle and the American Indians.”

Wk 3

- 1.17 John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*

See: James H. Tully, “Introduction,” to *A Letter Concerning Toleration*; Jeremy Waldron, *Liberal Rights: Collected Papers 1981-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): chap 7: “Locke, Toleration, and the Rationality of Persecution”; Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations in Locke’s Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 208-226.

Wk 4

- 1.24 David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*

See: J. Samuel Preus, *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), chap. 5: “Religion within the Limits of ‘The Science of Man’: David Hume”; Jennifer Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume’s Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), chap. 5: “Religion and Irrationality in History.”

Wk 5

- 1.31 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, chaps. 1-3 (minimum)

See: Richard Crouter, "Introduction" to *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 39-55; Julia A. Lamm, *The Living God: Schleiermacher's Theological Appropriation of Spinoza* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996): chap. 2, "Berlin and the *Speeches on Religion, 1799-1801*"; Andrew C. Dole, *Schleiermacher on Religion and the Natural Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), chap. 2: "Religion in Outline;" Wayne Proudfoot, "Immediacy and Intentionality in the Feeling of Absolute Dependence," and Theodore Vail, "Anschauung and Intuition, Again," in *Schleiermacher, the Study of Religion, and the Future of Theology*, ed. Brent W. Sockness and Wilhelm Gräb (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010); Frederick C. Beiser, "Schleiermacher's Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacqueline Mariña (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

February 3: Concept Analysis due at 5pm via email as Word attachment with your name in the subject heading.

Wk 6

- 2.7 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and *The German Ideology*, Pt. 1 from Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*

See: Allen W. Wood, "The Marxian Critique of Justice," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1.3 (Spring 1972): 244-82; Denys Turner, "Religion: Illusion and Liberation," and Jeffrey Reiman, "Moral Philosophy: The Critique of Capitalism and the Problem of Ideology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, ed. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Wk 7

- 2.14 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lectures 1-10, 16-postscript.

See: David C. Lamberth, *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chap. 3: "*Varieties of Religious Experience: Indications of a Philosophy Adapted to Normal Religious Needs*"; Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); G. William Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism*, chap. 4: "Beyond Words, Beyond Morals: The Metaphysical and Ethical Implications of Mysticism" (on Chalk\Course Material).

February 17: Final Paper title, 1-2 paragraph thesis, and initial bibliography are due via email as a Word attachment with your name in the subject heading.

Wk 8

- 2.21 Sigmund Freud, *The Future of An Illusion and Civilization and Its Discontents* (chaps. 2, 3, 5, 7)

See: Ernest Wallwork, *Psychoanalysis and Ethics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Wallwork, "Ethics after Freud," *Criterion* (Winter 1993): 24-32; Arnold I. Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formulation of Concepts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), chap. 3: "How to Do the History of Psychoanalysis: A Reading of Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*."

Wk 9

- 2.28 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

See: Barbara Diane Savage, "W. E. B. Du Bois and "The Negro Church," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 568 (March 2000): 235-249; Edward J. Blum, *W. E. B. Du Bois: American Prophet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), chap. 2: "Race as Cosmic Sight in *The Souls of Black Folk*"; Edward J. Blum and Jason R. Young, eds., *The Souls of W. E. B. Du Bois: New Essays and Reflections* (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 2009); Jonathon S. Kahn, *Divine Discontent: The Religious Imagination of W. E. B. Du Bois* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Terrence L. Johnson, *Tragic Soul-Life: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Moral Crisis Facing American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Gary Dorrien, *The New Abolition: W.E. B. Du Bois and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

Wk 10

- 3.7 John Dewey, *A Common Faith*

See: Steven C. Rockefeller, *John Dewey: Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), chap. 11: "Nature, God, and Religious Feeling"; Melvin R. Rogers, *The Undiscovered Dewey: Religion, Morality, and the Ethos of Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), chap. 3: "Faith and Democratic Piety."

March 15: Final paper due via email as Word attachment with your name in the subject heading.