

THEORY AND METHOD SEMINAR

Professor Johannes C. Wolfart

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COURSE OBJECTIVES

The seminar has as its mandate “examination of selected theoretical and methodological models used in the interpretation of religious data” (Carleton Undergraduate Calendar). The seminar is, with the exception of RELI 1730 “Interpretations of Religion,” the only such course offered undergraduates at Carleton. By faculty consensus it must survey a very broad selection of such models, both “classical” and “contemporary.” In keeping with developments in the academic study of religion in the last two decades (roughly), emphasis will be on theoretical questions, though these are frequently entwined with methodological issues. This is NOT, however, a “methods” course in the technical sense. In keeping with the rich traditions of the academic seminar, the presentation of material by the instructor of record/seminar leader will be limited in favour of participation of all members of the seminar (on which, more below). Finally, wherever possible, the seminar will explore the contrasting positions and debates that are inevitably associated with any theory or methodology in the world of scholarship.

This course presupposes your acceptance of the principles of the modern research university, in particular: **1) that a seminar differs fundamentally from a lecture course; 2) that the academic study of religion is not the same thing as confessional theology.** Your understanding of these will undoubtedly develop further during this course.

EVALUATION

- 1) Seminar participation: 20%. To receive credit for the course members of the seminar must attend at least 9 of the 12 substantive meetings of the seminar (i.e., if you miss too many meetings, you cannot receive credit for the course!). Just being there isn’t enough, however. To receive full participation marks you must make a contribution to the discussion on a regular basis.
- 2) Reading responses: 30%. During the term each member of the seminar must submit a written response of no more than 500 words on any six of the assigned readings (you may contrast two readings in a single response, but that only counts as one response). These responses are due at the beginning of class on the day that a particular reading is scheduled for consideration by the seminar (i.e. I will not accept after-the-fact response pieces; if you are contrasting two readings, one may have already come up for discussion). Response pieces may be either type-written or hand-written, but they must be double-spaced and single-sided. They must be composed in a suitable prose style. Please do not include a cover sheet. Please do include your full name at the top of the first page, along with a suitable title and the date of submission. Please also include a word count at the end of your response. Please keep a copy of your submissions, just in case...
- 3) Final essay: 50%. This essay of no more than 5000 words will be due on 7 December. A detailed brief will be distributed separately and in due course. Deadline extensions will be granted no later than one week in advance of the deadline, and only for very good reason. Exceptions to this rule will be made only in emergencies. **Late work will be assessed a penalty of 2 marks per day or partial day, without exception.**

Certainly, it is my aim as a teacher to get to know you as individuals, to recognize your individual strengths and weaknesses, and to foster individual intellectual development. At the same time, however, I am obliged to treat individuals equally in certain key respects. Therefore, as a marker I cannot take into consideration anything other than your actual performance on the items above.

POLICY ON ATTENDANCE

Not only is it common practice to evaluate participation in discussion and contribution to a seminar, it is also customary that habitual non-attendance be considered unacceptable performance. Such non-attendance entails a failure to contribute that is simply un-collegial. Moreover, since it is impossible to make up a missed seminar, a member who does not attend regularly cannot really be said to have taken the course. **Therefore, any member who is absent from more than 3 substantive meetings of the seminar will not receive course credit.** In other words, all members of the seminar must be present for three quarters of all meetings of the seminar.

READINGS

All readings are available to seminar members through MacOdrum Library, either electronically or via the reserve system. Please note that readings are a prerequisite for seminar participation. Your ability to contribute effectively will depend on you keeping up with the reading. Furthermore, all members of the seminar are encouraged to “read around” the seminar topics as much as possible, and to share their scholarship with the seminar. The preparation of an essay proposal and term essay will also undoubtedly involve such further reading.

OFFICE HOURS

Office hours will be held Tuesdays from 10:00-12:00.

E-MAIL COMMUNICATION

Carleton communications policy states that faculty must conduct email communications with students only through their Carleton accounts. Please be advised, further, that students can normally expect up to a 24hour turn-around time on e-mail communication, especially during high volume times (i.e. before examinations, at essay time, etc.).

SEMINAR MEETING SCHEDULE AND TOPICS

Week I (7 Sept) **Introduction to the course...and what is a seminar anyway?**

Readings: none.

Optional: Donald Wiebe, “The Failure of Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 13 (1984), 401-22.D.G. Hart, “Religious Studies, the Would-be Discipline” in: idem, *The University Gets Religion: Religious Studies in American Higher Education* (Baltimore, 1999), 223-233; 292-296.

Week II (14 Sept) **Method or methodology? Is there data for religion? Are we post-theoretical?**

Readings: Bruce Lincoln, “Theses on Method” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8 (1996), 225-227; Jonathan Z. Smith, “Introduction” in: *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Russell T. McCutcheon, “Beyond Cynicism: A Sampling of Current Work in the Swiss Study of Religion” *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 46/1 (2017), 3-6; Anja Kirsch, “Failed Theory, Cynicism and the Study of Religion” *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 46/1 (2017), 19-22.

Some Conventional Disciplinary Approaches to the Study of Religion

Week III (21 Sept) **What is (or was) anthropology of religion?**

Readings: E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* [excerpt] in: M. Lambek, ed., *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Oxford, 2002), 23-33; 99-113; Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious” in: Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago, 1998), 269-284.

Optional: Malcolm Ruel, “Christians as Believers” [excerpt] in: Michael Lambek, ed. *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Oxford, 2002).

Week IV (28 Sept) **What is (or was) history of religion(s)?**

Readings: Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction" <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>

[*Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher* 7 and 10 (Paris, 1844)]; Brian Morris, "Historical Materialism" in: idem, *Anthropological Studies of Religion: An Introductory Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 35-50; Mircea Eliade, "Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism" in: M. Eliade and J. Kitagawa, eds, *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), 86-107; Carl Olson, "Eliade, the Comparative Method, Historical Context, and Difference" in: Bryan Rennie, ed., *Changing Religious Worlds: The Meaning and End of Eliade* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 59-76.

Optional: Mircea Eliade, "The Terror of History" [excerpt] in: D. Carrasco and J.M. Swanberg, eds., *Waiting for the Dawn: Mircea Eliade in Perspective* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1985), 70-86; Peter Thompson, "Karl Marx, part 1 [of 8]: Religion, the wrong answer to the right question" *The Guardian* 4 April 2011

(<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2011/apr/04/karl-marx-religion>)

Week V (5 Oct) **What is (or was) psychology of religion?**

Readings: James H. Leuba, "The Emotions in Religious Life" in: idem, *A Psychological Study of Religion: Its origin, function and future* (New York, 1969 [1912]), 126-150; Roderick Main, "Psychology of Religion: An Overview of its History and Current Status" *Religion Compass* 2 (2008), 708-733.

Optional: <https://www.freud.org.uk/education/topic/10573/freud-and-religion/>

Week VI (12 Oct) **What is (or was) sociology of religion?**

Readings: Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* [excerpt] in: M. Lambek, ed., *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Oxford, 2002), 34-49. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*. Transl. Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963 [1922]), 246-274 (= chapters XV and XVI).

Optional: Ann Taves, "Special things as building blocks of religions" in: Robert A. Orsi, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 58-83.

Week VII (19 Oct) **Taking stock: is Religious Studies a discipline? What about theology?**

Reading: Rodney Stark, "SSSR Presidential Address, 2004: Putting an End to Ancestor Worship" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43/4 (2004), 465-475; Nancy Levene, "Courses and Canons in the Study of Religion (With Continual Reference to Jonathan Z. Smith)" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80 (2012), 998-1024; Donald Wiebe, "An Eternal Return All Over Again" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74/3 (2006), 674-96; Ann Taves, "A Response to Martin and Wiebe" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80 (2012), 601-604.

Optional: Leigh E. Schmidt, "On sympathy, suspicion, and studying religion: historical reflections on a doubled inheritance" in: Robert A. Orsi, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 17-35.

BREAK

Some Recent Cross-disciplinary Approaches to the Study of Religion

Week VIII (2 Nov) **Colonialism, post-colonialism and the study of religion**

Reading: John and Jean Comaroff, "The Colonization of Consciousness" in: M. Lambek, ed., *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Oxford, 2002), 493-510; Talal Asad, "The Construction

of Religion as an Anthropological Category” [excerpt] in: M. Lambek, ed., *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Oxford, 2002), 114-131; David Chidester, “Real and Imagined: Imperial inventions of religion in colonial southern Africa” in: Tim Fitzgerald, ed., *Religion and the Secular: Historical and Colonial Formations* (London, 2007), 153-175.

Week IX (9 Nov) Ritual studies and the study of religion

Reading: Ron Grimes, “Ritual” in: W. Braun and R.T. McCutcheon, eds., *Guide to the Study of Religion* (Cassell: London and New York, 2000), 259-269; Ed Muir, “Introduction” in: idem, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997), 1-11. Frits Staal, “Interpretations of Ritual” in: idem, *Rules Without Meaning: Rituals, Mantras and the Human Sciences* (New York, 1989), 115-140.

Week X (16 Nov) Cognitive science and the study of religion

Reading: E. Thomas Lawson, “Cognition” in: W. Braun and R.T. McCutcheon, eds., *Guide to the Study of Religion* (Cassell: London and New York, 2000), 75-84. Harvey Whitehouse, “Modes of Religiosity: Towards a Cognitive Explanation of the Sociopolitical Dynamics of Religion” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 14 (2002), 293-315; Justin L. Barrett, “Cognitive Science of Religion: What is it and Why is it?” *Religion Compass* 1 (2007), 768-786.

Week XI (23 Nov) Visual and material cultures and the study of religion

Readings: TBA

Week XII (30 Nov) New and emerging religions studies

Readings: J. Gordon Melton, “Toward a Definition of “New Religion” *Nova Religio* 8/1 (2004), 73-87; Eileen Barker, “What Are We Studying? A Sociological Case for Keeping the “Nova” *Nova Religio* 8/1 (2004), 88-102; Eugene V. Gallagher, “Compared to What? “Cults” and “New Religious Movements” *History of Religion* 47/2-3 (2007/08), 205-220; David Feltmate, “Rethinking New Religious Movements beyond a Social Problems Paradigm” *Nova Religio* 20/2 (2016), 82-96.

Optional: David G. Bromley, “Whither New Religions Studies? Defining and Shaping a New Area of Study” *Nova Religio* 8/2 (2004), 83-97.

Week XIII (7 Dec) FINAL ESSAYS DUE!



University Regulations for All Humanities Courses

Copies of Written Work Submitted

Always retain for yourself a copy of all essays, term papers, written assignments or take-home tests submitted in your courses.

Academic Integrity at Carleton

Plagiarism is presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas, or work of others as one's own. Plagiarism includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to: books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, art works, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, and material on the internet. More information can be found on <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/#AIatCU>.

Academic Accommodation Policy

Academic Accommodation

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: write to the instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details see the [Student Guide](#)

Religious obligation: write to the instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details see the [Student Guide](#)

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at

613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the [PMC website](#) for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

Grading System at Carleton University

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor, subject to the approval of the faculty Dean. Standing in courses will be shown by alphabetical grades. The system of grades used, with corresponding grade points and the percentage conversion is below. Grade points indicated are for courses with 1.0 credit value. Where the course credit is greater or less than one credit, the grade points are adjusted proportionately.

[Grading System Chart](#)

Course Sharing Websites and Copyright

Classroom teaching and learning activities, including lectures, discussions, presentations, etc., by both instructors and students, are copy protected and remain the intellectual property of their respective author(s). All course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, outlines, and other materials, are also protected by copyright and remain the intellectual property of their respective author(s).

Students registered in the course may take notes and make copies of course materials for their own educational use only. Students are not permitted to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly for commercial or non-commercial purposes without express written consent from the copyright holder(s).

Statement on Class Conduct

The Carleton University Human Rights Policies and Procedures affirm that all members of the University community share a responsibility to:

- promote equity and fairness,
- respect and value diversity,
- prevent discrimination and harassment, and

preserve the freedom of its members to carry out responsibly their scholarly work without threat of interference.

Deferred Term Work

In some situations, students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, which forces them to delay submission of the work.

Students who claim illness, injury or other extraordinary circumstances beyond their control as a reason for missed term work are held responsible for immediately informing the instructor concerned and for making alternate arrangements with the instructor and **in all cases this must occur no later than three (3.0) working days after the term work was due.**

The alternate arrangement must be made before the last day of classes in the term as published in the academic schedule. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of term. More information is available [in the calendar](#).

Deferred Exams

Students who do not write/attend a final examination because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control may apply to write a deferred examination.

1. be made in writing to the Registrar's Office **no later than three working days after the original final examination or the due date of the take-home examination;** and
2. be fully supported by appropriate documentation and in cases of illness by a medical certificate dated no later than one working day after the examination or by appropriate documents in other cases. Medical documents must specify the date of the onset of the illness, the (expected) date of recovery, and the extent to which the student was/is incapacitated during the time of the examination. The University's preferred medical form can be found at the Registrar's Office [forms and fees page](#).

The granting of a deferral also requires that the student has performed satisfactorily in the course according to the evaluation scheme established in the Course Outline, excluding the final examination for which deferral privileges are requested. Reasons for denial of a deferral may include, among other conditions, a failure to (i) achieve a minimum score in the course before the final examination; (ii) attend a minimum number of classes; (iii) successfully complete a specific task (e.g. term paper, critical report, group project, computer or other assignment); (iv) complete laboratory work; (v) successfully complete one or more midterms; or (vi) meet other reasonable conditions of successful performance.

More information can be found [in the calendar](#).

Any questions related to deferring a Final Exam or Final Assignment/Take Home Examination should be directed to: [Registrar's Office](#)

Withdrawal From Courses

Withdrawn. No academic credit, no impact on the CGPA.

NEW FALL 2017: WDN is a permanent notation that appears on the official transcript for students who withdraw after the full fee adjustment date in each term. Students may withdraw on or before the last day of classes.

Dates can be found here: <http://calendar.carleton.ca/academicyear/>

Department Contact Information

College of the Humanities 300 Paterson Hall (613)520-2809

CollegeOfHumanities@cunet.carleton.ca

Drop box for CLCV, HUMS LATN GREK Term Papers and assignments is outside 300 P.A.

Greek and Roman Studies 300 Paterson Hall (613)520-2809

GreekAndRomanStudies@cunet.carleton.ca

Drop Box is outside of 300 P.A.

Religion 2A39 Paterson Hall (613)520-2100

Religion@cunet.carleton.ca

Drop box for RELI Term Papers and assignments is outside of 2A39 P.A.

Registrar's Office 300 Tory (613)520-3500

<https://carleton.ca/registrar/>

Student Resources on Campus

[CUKnowHow Website](#)