RELIGION 101: Freshman Seminar: The Seven Deadly Sins
Mira Balberg
T 9:30-10:50am, Th 9:30-11:30am
University Hall 112

The notion of sin is one of the most central facets of religion in the Western world. Thinking of religion as a system that orients human beings to certain beliefs and actions, we naturally assume that a critical part of these beliefs and actions has to do with questions of right and wrong, and that the “wrong” in religious systems is often classified as “sin.” But what is “sin,” exactly? What constitutes a sinful act and what makes one a sinner? In this seminar, we will approach these questions from a critical point of view and delve into the very rich and complex concept of sin so as to understand how it has evolved through time and how it shaped and continues to shape our own world.

At the center of the course will stand “the seven deadly sins,” an idea that started to develop around the fourth century C.E., according to which there are seven major sins that essentially generate all possible sins: gluttony, lust, anger, envy, greed, sloth, and pride. We will see how the “seven deadly sins” have emerged against the background of earlier notions of sin (Greek, Jewish, and Christian) and we will look closely into each one of those “deadly sins,” considering why and how it came to be viewed as a sin and how it resonates in the world in which we live.

Be aware that our engagement with the topic of sin will be academic and not normative. That is to say, our interest in this class is not in asserting how one should or should not behave, but rather in discovering the history and complexity of the concept of sin. In this respect, this seminar will introduce you to the academic study of religion more broadly: you will have a taste of religion as a fascinating, vibrant, and multifaceted topic of intellectual and analytical engagement from a historical, literary, and social perspective, which is very different from the perspective on religion introduced in devotional settings such as church, synagogue, Sunday school, etc.

RELIGION 210: Introduction to Buddhism
Antonio Terrone
MW 9:30-10:50am
Swift Hall 107

This course provides an introduction to key aspects of the Buddhist religious traditions of multiple South and East Asian countries. Through careful examination of a variety of literature produced by these traditions, we will consider the many ways in which Buddhists have understood human suffering, life after death, karma, the nature of the world and human's place within it, and the path to enlightenment. Our emphasis will be on attempting to understand the moral values, philosophical insights, ritual practices, and social concerns that have shaped Buddhism over centuries of dynamic change in diverse cultural contexts. We will examine not only the history of Buddhism and its three-fold division into Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana/Tantrayana, but also facets of the contemporary practice of Buddhism in the United States and the role of socially engaged Buddhism. In addition to some textbook readings, reading assignments will privilege primary source readings in order to introduce students directly to the narrative, doctrinal, liturgical, and biographical texts that inform our knowledge of what it has meant to live a Buddhist life over time and across cultures. As an academic course in the
Department of Religious Studies, this course draws on scholarly approaches to the study of religion to examine the history of Buddhist thought and practice. In doing so, the course neither presumes nor prescribes any religious commitment on the part of students, but rather encourages students to cultivate an eagerness to learn about a cultural and religious tradition that may be very different from their own.

**RELIGION 221: Introduction to New Testament**
Richard Kieckhefer  
MWF 9:00-9:50am  
*University Hall 121*

This course will examine the texts of the New Testament, with attention to themes and interpretations and to historical context. The lectures, the textbook, and the supplementary readings will expose students to a variety of interpretive perspectives, and students will be expected to engage in an intellectually serious way with this diversity of views.

**RELIGION 265: Contemporary American Religious History**
Brian Clites  
TTH 11:00-12:20am  
*Crowe Hall 4-138*

This class is not merely an overview of contemporary American religious history; it also challenges the way that history is normally narrated. We will cover three units: (i) The Atomic Age (WWII to the 1950s); (ii) Seekers and Spiritual Experimentation (the ’60s and ’70s); and (iii) The New Religious Right (1980s - 2008). Your readings will supplement this history by including marginalized and understudied religious groups, including Native Americans, Mormons, and African American Pentecostals. Throughout the course, we will draw on contemporary events in order to understand the tension inherent in the central themes of this period: American pluralism (conflict), free-market spirituality (secularism), Protestant hegemony (anti-immigration), religious liberty (reactions to 9/11). I hope we will have a diverse classroom environment. I encourage students to reflect critically on both our discussions and the course readings. At the end of each unit, students will write one paper that reframes these tensions in light of a case study from our assigned readings. In turn, I will provide each of you with substantive feedback to help improve your critical thinking and further enhance your excellent communication skills.
PHILOSOPHY 266: Philosophy of Religion
Kenneth Seeskin
MWF 11:00-11:50am

This course will investigate fundamental problems raised by the theory and practice of monotheistic religions. Among the issues to be considered are: the conflict between faith and reason, the source of evil, the interpretation of sacred texts, proofs for the existence of God, the relation between religion and morality, and the nature of religious love.

RELIGION 309: Hinduism: Sources and Contexts
Wendy Doniger
M 11:00-2:00pm
Crowe Hall 4-138

A survey of the texts of Hinduism, setting texts in historical contexts. The course is designed around the forthcoming Norton Anthology of Hinduism, supplemented by a history of the Hindus. The readings will focus closely on texts in Sanskrit and vernacular literatures, from different historical periods. It will situate each major idea in the context of the historical events to which it responded: the Rig Veda in the Indo-European migrations, the Upanishads in the social crisis of the first great cities on the Ganges, and so forth, up to the present day BJP revisionist tactics. And it will emphasize the alternative traditions of women and the lower classes. A 15 page paper will be due at the end of the course.

RELIGION 318: Religion and Politics in the People’s Republic of China
Antonio Terrone
MW 3:30-4:50pm
Annenberg Hall 101

This course will examine the role, current revival, and the socio-political implications of the practice of religion in the People's Republic of China (PRC) both from a legal and socio-historical perspective. Students will read about and discuss not only the five religions officially recognized in China (Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Daoism, and Islam) but will also explore the controversy around popular religions and illegal congregations. Furthermore, this course will look at the relationship between religion and politics in China through an analysis of the case the Muslim Uyghurs of Xinjiang and Tibetan Buddhists of Western China, and so-called "evil cults" including underground Churches and Falungong movements. Through analysis and critical evaluations, students will be encouraged to discuss not only what role religion, faith, and spirituality have among contemporary people in China, but also the Chinese government's reaction to a growing interest and influence of religious beliefs in civil society.
RELIGION 330: Varieties of Ancient Judaism: Rewriting the Bible
Mira Balberg
TTH 2:00-3:20pm
Fisk Hall 114

Oftentimes when we think of Scripture or Sacred Literature we think of writings that resist any sort of change or intervention, writings that are fixed not only in their wording but also in their meaning. However, when we examine the literature composed by Jews in antiquity, we see that nothing could be further from this description. Throughout antiquity, the Hebrew Bible, because it was seen as a sacred and authoritative text, was constantly being rewritten. Various authors, each with their own agenda, ideology, convictions, and creative inclinations, have ventured to retell the biblical stories, to reconstruct the biblical laws, and to present the biblical texts anew – not with the purpose of replacing Scripture but with the purpose of making Scripture resonate with their own world and come to life as a powerful source of meaning. This phenomenon of rewriting the Bible so as to approach it through changing lenses and concerns continues to this day, as we can see through contemporary literature and film.

In this class, we will familiarize ourselves with the vast array of works of rewritten Bible of Jewish antiquity, ranging from the 6th century BCE to the 6th century CE. We will get to know genres such as translation, pseudo-epigrapha, allegory, pesher, and Midrash, and examine texts that range from the Bible itself to Hellenistic philosophy, from the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Talmud, and from the New Testament to modern film.

Learning Objectives
Beyond acquisition of familiarity with these texts and the world in which they were composed, the main goal of the class is to understand the process of interpretation of scripture and to acquire tools to examine interpretation in a critical way. The message that will be emphasized over and over again in the class is that interpretation of a text tells us mainly about the interpreter, not about the text that is being interpreted, and that the drama of the text takes place not within it, but within the encounter between text and reader. In essence, then, this is a class about reading, and about writing as a way of reading.

RELIGION 332: Jews and Sports in the Modern World
Rachel Gordan
MW 2:00-3:20pm
University Hall 121

This course uses sports as a lens through which the larger dimensions of Jewish life can be explored. We will seek to understand the relationship between Jews and sports, primarily in the United States. Overarching themes and questions running through this course include: 1) Jews and sports and social class 2) Jews and sports and gender 3) anti-Semitism and Jews and sports 4) Is "sports" a Jewish category?
RELIGION 333: Religion and Literature
Claire Sufrin
TTH 9:30-10:50am
Parkes Hall 222

This course addresses the intersection of religion and literature in Judaism and Christianity from several perspectives. The syllabus begins with biblical stories and then considers ways in which these narratives have been understood as a foundation for theological reflection. The second part of the course considers literature that incorporates themes and images drawn from sacred text. Finally, the third part of the course considers whether works of literature can be read as religious thought.

RELIGION 339 / GENDER ST 390-0-21: Gender Theory and Jewish Life
Yakir Englander
TTH 3:30-4:50pm
University Hall 121

One of the questions facing Gender Studies is the issue of interfacing gender theory with research in other disciplines. The proposed course is designed to respond to one aspect of this issue, by demonstrating methods of using gender theory to shed light on religious texts. The theory will be applied to point out choices made by religious leaders, by different readings of religion in varying historical contexts, and by power structures and alternative interpretations, some of which found expression and others of which were suppressed. The course has a double purpose: first, to expose students to gender theory and its relevant discourses, and second, to demonstrate the application of theory to the actual reading of religious texts, with the focus this year being on Judaism.

The course opens with a close reading of Catharine MacKinnon, and we will then examine the state of the meeting between her thinking and Jewish law concerning the status of women in marriage and divorce. We will follow changes in the status of women in Judaism, comparing Jewish law to laws promulgated in Christian and Muslim milieus in which Jews have historically lived. Among other issues, we will uncover conscious and unconscious assumptions behind the literature of halacha (Jewish Law), the concept of a “reasonable wife,” the link between religion and morals, and the connection between violence and sexuality.

In the second part of the course, we will proceed to a study of the body, sexuality and gender in the writings of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. Once we have established a familiarity with the theories, we will bring them to bear on Judaism’s attitudes, over the generations, toward homosexuality and lesbianism. We will especially examine the definitions of what is sexually forbidden, the relationship between sexuality and gender, and the construction of the body as “concealed/revealed.” Discussion will include reference to texts from the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, followed by texts from the Talmud and Halachic literature.

In the last part of the course will consider the status of the body in Traditional Judaism as contrasted with the Enlightenment and Zionism. Readings will be accompanied by theoretical questions designed to shed light on the texts themselves. For example, we will probe attitudes toward the body in Honor/Shame and Guilt Societies.
RELIGION 350: The Qur’an Text and Context
Brannon Ingram
TTH 12:30-1:50pm
Annenberg Hall G30

One of the most influential books in world history, the Qur’an is believed by Muslims to be the literal speech of God in Arabic. It is recited daily by Muslims throughout the world, transformed into beautiful calligraphy, and venerated as a sacred object. The course explores the text’s historical milieu and the life of the Prophet Muhammad, its form and structure, its ethical worldview, its role in the ritual lives of Muslims, how it has been interpreted in multiple contexts, as well as critical issues pertaining to the Qur’an in the contemporary world. The course proceeds under the premise that understanding the Qur’an is an essential aspect of a broad liberal education in the humanities.

RELIGION 369 / AMES 310-0-20: Topics in American Religion: American Teenage Rites of Passage
Sarah McFarland Taylor
TH 2:00-4:30pm
Parkes Hall 215

This seminar is specially geared to American Studies and Religious Studies majors. Drawing from anthropological and sociological case studies, we will examine various rites of passage experienced by teens in the U.S. In analyzing these rites, students will become conversant with theories of ritual, contemporary surveys of teen demographics and cultural trends, gender studies and cultural studies literature dealing with teen popular media and consumption. Students will also be asked to generate original research for their seminar final project, applying the tools of the course to a case study of their own choosing. This seminar will make rigorous use of multimedia materials and will require multi-source digitized media viewing and analysis as integral to course assignments. Attendance is required at the first meeting of seminar in order to be admitted to the course and is required subsequently each week thereafter.
Laurie Zoloth & Cristina Traina
MW 11:00-12:20pm
Swift Hall 107

This is a lecture class that will explore the topic of how a variety of religions approach the issues and problems of bioethics. We will examine the issue of epistemic stance, of truth claims, and of how normative policies are created amidst serious controversy. We will explore the nature of the relationship between religion and public policy study how religious traditions and moral philosophy shape our view of issues as “bioethics controversies” in the first place. This seminar will look at both classic dilemmas in modern medicine and how the discipline of bioethics has emerged to reflect upon such dilemmas with particular attention to the role that theology and religious studies has played in such reflection. We will look at both how the practice of theologians historically has shaped the field of bioethics and at how religion's claims, methodology, and praxis have continued to shape and inflect bioethics. We will use a case based method to study how different faith traditions describe and defend differences in moral choices in contemporary bioethics and how such different traditions both collide and cohere over such topics as embryo research, health care reform, how to treat the terminally ill, and issues in genomic research. This class is based on the understanding that case narratives serve as the motivation for the discipline of Bioethics and that complex ethical issues are best considered in discourse with one another. We will examine both classic cases that have shaped our understanding of the field of Bioethics and cases that are newly emerging. I will present a general argument for your consideration: that the arguments and the practices from faith traditions offer significant contributions that underlie our arguments in bioethics.

RELIGION 395: Theory and Method of Religion
Sarah McFarland Taylor
T 2:00-4:30pm
Parkes Hall 215

What is "theory"? What does it mean to have a theory about something? How are theories helpful? What do theories do? What is "religion"? How do things get excluded or included in this category? What counts as "religious" and why? Who gets to decide? This course is an introduction to foundational theories of religion and to the history of the construction of the category of "religion" over time. Throughout the term, you will be working on formulating your own theory of religion, which you will articulate and defend in your final seminar paper. In this course, you will gain (as ritual theorist Catherine Bell says) "the skills and tools to make sure that very complicated situations and ideas can be put into words, thereby making it possible to have discussions about issues that can only be discussed if there is language for reflexivity, nuance, counter-evidence, and doubt." In the process, you will be asked to make theory translatable to your peers by actively engaging theoretical concept in creative ways.

Class Materials (Required) Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion
This course focuses on the relationship between empire and American religions in order to constitute a study of modernity. Studies of modernity are generally more strictly concerned with natural rights, consumer capitalism, religious pluralism, and the emergence of revolutionary technologies like publishing and scientific innovation. This course, however, reckons with the linkage between the more benign aspects of modernity (e.g., religious toleration, popular sovereignty, and the democratization of spiritual power) and modernity's "underside" - racialization, ethnic cleansing, and religious hatred. We will devote central attention to questions like the following:

- How did religious toleration function in the Americas to amplify the architecture of Christian supremacism?
- Why did racialization coincide with the birth of political orders based on popular sovereignty and freedom?
- What is the effect of democracies (like US America) on the experience of religious otherness?
- How have American religions participated in and resisted empire in the early and recent history of the Americas? How have histories of slavery, race, and settler colonialism shaped religion and modernity in the Americas?

In this way, the course aims to make sense of the organicity that binds the triumph of reason and universalizing discourses to what the historian of religion Mircea Eliade described as the "terror of history" - viz., the violent strategies of power that proceed unrestrained in the modern era. The first half of the course begins with a study of Atlantic empires - the Aztecs, New Spain, and the British colonies - paying attention to both the architecture of European and Native American colonialisms in order to assess the relationship between violence and civilization. The problem of temporality (ideas about time and the challenging of rooting identity in ideologies of time - viz., moderns and primitives) is next taken up by considering Kathleen Biddick’s assessment of modernity and anti-Semitism. We then examine the role of religion and racialization in establishing settler societies (including settler democracies) in the Americas. In the second half of the course, we examine the problem of modernity within the context of US American engagement with the "Islamic world." Central here is Samuel Huntington's thesis that Western civilization is clashing with a non-modern, Islamic one. How has this shaped US religion, particularly the public meaning Islamic vis-à-vis American modernity? And what happens when we "anthropologize" the rhetoric of modernity by attending to the meanings of its secularity? Is this a non-religious secularity? We also examine the role of US-sponsored evangelical Christianity in creating a modern Latin American state (Guatemala) in order to elucidate the role of the US as a religiously inflected empire. Among the final considerations of this course is the emergence of a public form of American religion since the Cold War that has deeply invested in the strategies of empire and the grammars of modernity.
This seminar will examine recent theoretical literature on mysticism, will apply that literature to the writings of Meister Eckhart and The Cloud of Unknowing. Then we will turn to discussion of materials relevant to students' interests, which ideally will take us into comparative investigation of mysticism in various religious traditions, and to the application of theories to those various traditions.

Class Materials (Required)