

RELI 101: The Examined Life
Blodgett Hall 305, M/W 1:30-2:45
Fall 2016

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Office Hours: Monday 3-4, Tuesday 10:30-12, or by appt

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class will explore a variety of ways that religious thinkers and traditions have responded to ancient, persistent, and troubling questions about the nature of human existence. For example: What is a good life? Does God exist and what does it mean to have faith in God? How do we understand dying, death, and suffering? Is there evil? How do we love? What's the proper way to treat one's neighbor? We will consider these questions historically—how others have answered them—and we will consider how we in modernity might address them. Our focus will be on philosophical texts, however we will also consider filmic and fictional representations of these problems.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

· Participation (15%)

- I ask that you participate because I think that participation is central to learning. The reason that participation is central to learning is that voicing your thoughts, doubts, and difficulties in earshot of others allows everyone—me, your classmates, and even yourself—to begin to ask questions of those thoughts, doubts, and difficulties. Being able to respond to and engage those questions is the crucial step to figuring out what you think.
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- Each of you should bring to every class 1 discussion question from that day's reading. The questions should speak to a larger theme or big issue that the reading raised for you, although it is perfectly fine if you build that question out of a specific detail or line in the text.
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- Here are some tips for participating
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- come to class *with* and *having read* the assigned material. I encourage you to mark up your texts with your own notes.

- come to class with at least one question about the day's reading.
- raise passages that you found intriguing, confusing, objectionable, etc.
- challenge and contest others' views respectfully—no easy task!
- don't fall asleep in class. Expect to be woken up if you do.

WRITING REQUIREMENTS

- You should expect this class to improve your writing. Over the course of the semester, I will spend class time addressing and discussing what my expectations are for your writing in this class. Below is the number and type of assignments due during the semester
 - Two in-class writing assignments (50%--see syllabus for due dates)
 - Final Take Home Exam 5-7 pages of writing (35%--due date TBA)
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- **Late papers without extensions are subject to a penalty at the rate of 1/3 of a letter grade per day**
 - **Failure to complete/receive credit for any of the assignment will result in failure of the class.**
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REQUIRED TEXTS (ALL TEXTS HAVE BEEN ORDERED FROM THE VASSAR COLLEGE BOOKSTORE)

- *The Book of Job* (Norton)
 - Emily Raboteau, *Searching for Zion: The Quest for Home in the African Diaspora* (Grove Press)
 - Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Penguin)
 - Amy Waldman, *The Submission* (Picador)
 - Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Accidental Saints* (Convergent Books)
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TECHNOLOGY POLICY

I'm not a big fan of electronic devices in class. The internet is a very tempting siren and I'm convinced that it distracts us from each other and the matters at hand. However, I realize that we live in a world of screens: that is how we access much of our information. So here's the skinny. You may use devices to refer to course related content. You may not use electronics to email, text, tweet, or, in the immortal words of Bill Belichick, InstantFace. I may ask you at some point if you are playing around on the Wide World Web.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

"Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please schedule an appointment with the instructor early in the semester to discuss any accommodations for this course which have been approved by the Director of Disability and Support Services as indicated in your accommodation letter."

August 29 - September 4

Welcome and Introduction

8/29 M

- Carlos Frankel, "In Praise of the Clash of Culture" <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/02/in-praise-of-the-clash-of-cultures/>
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In Search of a Higher Education

8/31 Weds

Fish, "Aim Low," "[Save the World on Your Own Time](#)"
Berry, "The Loss of the University"

September 5 - September 11

9/5 M: NO CLASS, LABOR DAY

9/7 Weds

Robin Kelly, "[Black Study, Black Struggle](#)"
Mark Oppenheimer, "[Person Up, Yale Students](#)"
Jelani Cobb, "[Race and the Free Speech Diversion](#)"

September 12 - September 18

In Search of the Category of Religion

9/12 M

Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System"
Donald Lopez, "Belief"

9/14 Weds

Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" [M]
Andre Dubus, "On Charon's Wharf" [M]

September 19 - September 25

The Leap of Faith

9/19 M

- Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 41-82
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9/21 Weds

- Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 83-108, 144-47
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September 26 - October 2

The Problem of Evil and Suffering
9/26

- *Job*, 55-157
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9/28

- Voltaire, "The Lisbon Earthquake"
 - Rubenstein, "Making of a Rabbi," Berkovitz, "Faith After the Holocaust," Fackenheim, "Jewish Faith and the Holocaust"
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October 3 - October 9

10/3 M: Rosh Hashanah

- Evening Film Screening: *Breaking the Waves*
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10/5 Weds

- Alyda Faber, "Redeeming Sexual Violence? A Feminist Reading of *Breaking the Waves*," *Literature and Theology*, 2003 17(1): 59-75
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October 10 - October 16

Theodicy in the Black Tradition
10/10 Mon

- Du Bois, "A Litany at Atlanta"
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- Albert Cleage Jr., "Coming in out of the Wilderness"
 - James Cone, "Suffering in the Black Religious Tradition"
 - M. Shawn Copeland, "Wading Through the Sorrows" <http://academic.regis.edu/jbrumbau/Prayer%20Readings/WadingThroughSorrows.pdf>
 - [Michael Eric Dyson, "Gods Gonna Trouble the Waters"](#)
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10/12 Weds: Yom Kippur
- In class Mid-Term Writing Assignment

October 17 - October 23

FALL BREAK

October 24 - October 30

In Search of Home
10/24 M

- Raboteau, *Searching for Zion*
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10/26 Weds

- Raboteau, *Searching for Zion*
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October 31 - November 6

Do Human Rights Need God?
10/31 M

- [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)
 - Abdulaziz Sachedina, "The Clash of Universalisms: Religious and Secular in Human Rights"
 - Nicholas Wolterstorff: "Response: The Irony of It All"
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11/2 Weds

- Vigen Guroian, "Human Rights and Modern Western Faith: An Orthodox Christian Assessment"
 - Louis Henkin, "Religion, Religions, and Human Rights"
 - Charles Villa-Vicencio, "God, the Devil, and Human Rights: A South African Perspective"
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November 7 - November 13

Sex, Sexuality, and the Sacred

11/7 M

- [Song of Songs](#)
 - Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic" <http://www.womenstemple.com/EroticAsPower-article.html>
 - Rowan Williams, *Body's Grace*
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11/9 Weds

- Scott Siraj al-Haq Kugle, [Sexuality, Diversity, and Ethics in the Agenda of Progressive Muslims](#)
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November 14 - November 20

In Search of Radical Christianity

11/14 M

- Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Accidental Saints*, 3-127
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11/16 Weds

- Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Accidental Saints*, finish book
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November 21 - November 27

11/21 – In class-writing assignment

11/23 – No class

November 28 - December 4

9/11 and the Politics of Religion

11/28 M

- Waldman, *The Submission*, chs 1-15
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11/30 Weds

- Waldman, *The Submission*, chs 16-25
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December 5 - December 11

12/5 M

- Excerpt from Paul Woodruff, *Reverence*
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