

ANT 363: THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF RELIGION

Fall, 2009

Class meets: M, W, F, 9:30 – 10:30 AM
Location: Edwards Hall, Room 101

Professor: Neal Keating
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Office Hours on M & W: 1:30-2:30
& T: 4:00-5:00
- and other times by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course introduces the study of religion from an anthropological perspective, and suggests the human capacity for religion is a generally adaptive trait that has profoundly shaped the evolution of the human species. Religious ideas may be perennial philosophical questions, but religious behaviors are real enough. One of religion's evolutionary features is its capacity to unite and organize individuals into coherent groups that help each other to survive. The flip side of religion is its capacity to incite groups to kill and destroy other groups with whom they disagree. Within anthropology there are diverse approaches to the study of religion. This course will engage with the new biocultural synthesis that draws on neuroscience, consciousness studies, and ethology, in addition to surveying the varieties of religious phenomena discovered through ethnography and comparative and historical studies. The format of the class will be a combination of lectures, general discussions, and focused group learning.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- * - gain knowledge of the variety of religious and spiritual phenomena.
- * - gain knowledge of the relation between biology and culture in regards to religion.
- * - gain knowledge of the relation between religion, politics, and economics.
- * - gain knowledge of human consciousness.
- * - develop critical thinking skills.
- * - develop capacity for comparative and culturally relative understanding and analysis.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. *Supernatural is Natural: A Biocultural Approach to Religion* by Michael Winkelman & John R. Baker (2008) Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall. ISBN: 978-0-13-189303-0.
2. *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*. edited by Michael Lambek, Wiley/Blackwell Publishers. Either edition.
3. Additional readings as indicated, available electronically via Angel.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Two exams, one midterm (in-class) and final (take-home). The midterm will count as 25% of your final grade, and the final exam will count for 25% of your final grade. The final exam will not be cumulative, but cover only the material assigned after the midterm.
2. One research paper, approximately 8 pp. in length, examining a particular religious practice or phenomena from a biocultural perspective. The paper will count as 20% of your grade. There will be several target dates for this assignment: thesis, bibliography, rough draft, and final draft. A handout with guidelines and possible topics will be distributed during the third week of class.
3. Attendance & Participation, 15% of your grade. You are expected to complete the readings and assignments as scheduled in the syllabus, and come to every class prepared to discuss them, as well as participate in all classroom activities, including discussions, debates, peer review, etc. I encourage you to regularly bring questions with you, based on your reading of the assigned texts.
4. Six quizzes totaling 15% of your grade. These will be in-class and take-home. Make-ups for missed quizzes will be granted only upon proof of a legitimate excuse: death or medical emergency.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS:

Week 1: Introduction

8/31 (Monday): Overview of the course and syllabus.

9/2 (Wednesday): “The Academic Study of Religion” by Sam Gill (e-reading).

9/4 (Friday): “A Grand Bargain Over Evolution” by Robert Wright (e-reading), & *Supernatural is Natural*, Preface and Introduction.

Week 2: Anthropology and Religion

9/7 (Monday): *Labor Day*. NO CLASS

9/9 (Wednesday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 1: “Anthropology and the Study of Religion,” pp. 5-15.

9/11 (Friday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 1: “Anthropology and the Study of Religion,” pp. 15-30.

Week 3: Religion and Science

9/14 (Monday): *Reader*: Tylor – “Religion in Primitive Culture”.

9/16 (Wednesday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 2: “Our World and How We Know It,” pp. 31-40.

9/18 (Friday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 2: “Our World and How We Know It,” pp. 40-59.

Week 4: Body and Mind

9/21 (Monday): Sir James Frazer and *The Golden Bough* (e-reading), & *Reader*: Wittgenstein – “Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*”.

9/23 (Wednesday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 3: “Consciousness and Spiritual Experiences,” pp. 60-74.

9/25 (Friday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 3: “Consciousness and Spiritual Experiences,” pp. 74-87.

INITIAL THESIS DUE

Week 5: Dueling Anthropologists

9/28 (Monday): *Reader*: Geertz - “Religion as a Cultural System”.

9/30 (Wednesday): *Reader*: Asad - “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category”.

10/2 (Friday): Class Debate: Asad vs. Geertz

Week 6: The Biocultural Basis of Symbolism

10/5 (Monday): *Reader*: Ortner - “On Key Symbols;” & Wolf - “The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol”.

10/7 (Wednesday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 4: “Ritualized Animal Behaviors and the Roots of Religiosity,” pp. 88-101 .

10/9 (Friday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 4: “Ritualized Animal Behaviors and the Roots of Religiosity,” pp. 101-116.

Week 7: The Shamanic Core of Religion

10/12 (Monday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 5: “The Origins of Shamanism and the Flowering of Religiosity,” pp. 117-135.

10/14 (Wednesday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 5: “The Origins of Shamanism and the Flowering of Religiosity,” pp. 135-149.

10/16 (Friday): MIDTERM EXAM (in-class)

Week 8: Trickster!

10/19 (Monday): Fall Break. NO CLASS.

10/21 (Wednesday): *Reader*: Radin - "The Winnebago Trickster Figure".

BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE

10/23 (Friday): movie: Popul Vuh

Week 9: The Vital Function of Religion: Healing

10/26 (Monday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 6: "The Origins and Functions of Religious Healing," pp. 150-165.

10/28 (Wednesday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 6: "The Origins and Functions of Religious Healing," pp. 165-177.

10/30 (Friday): *Reader* (pp. 398-418): Boddy - "Spirits and Selves in Northern Sudan: The Cultural Therapeutics of Possession and Trance".

ROUGH DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE

Week 10: Thinking Religion

11/2 (Monday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 7: "Religion and Cognition: How Religion Shapes the Way We Think," pp. 178-193.

11/4 (Wednesday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 7: "Religion and Cognition: How Religion Shapes the Way We Think," pp. 193-208.

11/6 (Friday): *Reader*: Evans-Pritchard - "The Problem of Symbols".

Week 11: Feeling Religion

11/9 (Monday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 8: "Religion and Emotions: How Religion Shapes the Way We Feel," pp. 209-222.

11/11 (Wednesday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 8: "Religion and Emotions: How Religion Shapes the Way We Feel," pp. 222-239.

11/13 (Friday): *Reader*: Turner - "Liminality and Communitas".

FINAL DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE

Week 12: Religion and Other People

11/16 (Monday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 9: "Religion and Society: How Religion Shapes our Relations with Others," pp. 240-256.

11/18 (Wednesday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 9: "Religion and Society: How Religion Shapes our Relations with Others," pp. 256-269.

11/20 (Friday): *Reader*: Durkheim - "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life."

Week 13: The Dark Side of Religion

11/23 (Monday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 10: "Supernatural Evil," pp. 270-282.

11/25 (Wednesday): *Thanksgiving holiday*. NO CLASS.

11/27 (Friday): *Thanksgiving holiday*. NO CLASS.

Week 14: AAA & SVA Conference week/ Movie week

11/30 (Monday): movie, t.b.a.

12/2 (Wednesday): movie, t.b.a.

12/4 (Friday): movie, t.b.a.

Week 15: Dark Side continued, & Conclusions

12/7 (Monday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 10: "Supernatural Evil," pp. 282-296.

12/9 (Wednesday): *Supernatural is Natural*, CHAPTER 11: "Conclusions: Religion in Evolutionary Perspective".

12/11 (Friday): Review.

Week 16: FINALS WEEK

Take-home final due on Wednesday, December 16, by 4PM.