

## **Psych 410/510: Psychology of Religion Syllabus Spring 2009**

### **Instructor Information:**

Instructor: Robert C. Gordon, Ph.D.  
Lectures: 9 a.m. M W F 129 McKenzie Hall  
Office Hours: Monday 11-12 Tuesday 12-1  
Instructor Office: 356 Straub Hall  
Instructor email: [rcgordon@uoregon.edu](mailto:rcgordon@uoregon.edu)  
Instructor Phone: 346-4819  
Graduate Teaching Fellow: Daniel Jaster  
GTF email: [jaster@uoregon.edu](mailto:jaster@uoregon.edu)  
GTF Phone: 346-0839

### **Course Description**

Religion is one of the most powerful forces animating the world today. This course will explore the psychology behind this propulsive power. The course will not only introduce students to classic figures in the field such as William James, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Abraham Maslow, it will also explore why individuals become so strongly wedded to their religious beliefs, and the ways in which religious institutions channel human activity. Finally, it will examine the rise of religiously inspired terrorism, and its implications for the future.

The course will approach psychology of religion from three different but complementary perspectives -- phenomenological, empirical and sociological. The first part of the course will study psychology of religion from a phenomenological perspective. This approach will help us understand just what we mean by religious experience considered psychologically. Our phenomenological exploration will depend heavily on William James' classic *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. It has been said that all of Western philosophy is a footnote to Plato. It can equally as well be said that all of the psychology of religion is a footnote to William James because he explores most of the salient issues that have become important to the field. Students will also have the opportunity to study James' Pragmatism. He is well known for his pragmatic assessment of religion, holding that if religious beliefs and practices produce positive practical effects, then that fact is grounds for considering religious beliefs to be true. Students will learn how significantly James' pragmatic approach has influenced empirical studies in the psychology of religion.

The second phase of the course will study the empirical approach to psychology of religion. It will center on the question: How do we measure religious experience and its effects? It will explore methodological and ethical issues unique to the psychology of religion, explicating how it is that we can scientifically measure religious attitudes, thoughts, behaviors and experiences. It will present psychological research concerning

religion and human development, mystical experience, conversion, new religious movements, mental/physical health, and personality and religion.

The final phase of the course will explore psychology of religion from a sociological perspective. It will center on the question: What are the social effects of individual religious psychologies? This section of the course will be concerned with studying how individual religious belief translates into group action AND how the religious ideology of the group shapes the religious psychology of the individual. It will briefly survey the history of the religions of Abraham – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – and the socio-political effects of their ideology of religious conquest.

Finally, insights from the phenomenological, empirical and social approaches to the psychology of religion will inform an examination of the roots and rise of religious terrorism.

### **Required Textbooks:**

Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer*

William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

Raymond Paloutzian, *Invitation to the Psychology of Religion*

### **Grading:**

Grades will be based on a mid-term examination (1/3 of your grade), a final examination (1/3 of your grade), and a 5-8 page research paper (1/3 of your grade). Details of the requirements for the research paper will be presented in class.

## **Schedule of Lectures**

### **Week I (Mar 30 – Apr 3)**

General Introduction and Religious Autobiography

Pragmatism and Religion

Institutional Religion vs Individual Religious Experience

**Reading:** James, *Varieties*, (pp. 1-95).

### **Week II (Apr 6 – Apr 10)**

The Religion of Healthy-Mindedness

The Sick Soul

The Divided Self, and the Process of Unification

**Reading:** James, *Varieties*, (pp. 96 –192).

### **Week III (Apr 13 – Apr 17)**

Conversion

Saintliness

Mysticism

**Reading:** James, *Varieties*, (pp. 193 – 318).

**Week IV (Apr 20 – Apr 24)**

Sacrifice, Confession, and Prayer  
William James and the Future of Religion  
Sigmund Freud and the Origins of Religion

**Reading:** James, *Varieties*, (pp.339 – 390).

**Week V (Apr 27 – May 1)**

Freud and the Future of an Illusion  
Dark Night of Behaviorism  
Mid-Term Examination (Friday April 1)

**Reading: (No Assignment – review James for mid-term)**

**Week VI (May 4 – May 8)**

Carl Jung and the Search for Soul  
Abraham Maslow and Peak Experience  
Empiricism and the Psychology of Religion

**Reading:** Paloutzian, *Invitation*, (pp. 1 – 80).

**Week VII (May 11 – May 15)**

Social Influence Theory and Correlational Studies in the Psychology of Religion  
Religion and Health  
Behavioral Studies in the Psychology of Religion  
The Neurophysiology of Mysticism

**Reading:** Paloutzian, *Invitation*, (pp. 81 – 174).

**Week VIII (May 18 – May 22)**

Fundamentalism and Authoritarianism  
The Psychology of the True Believer  
Understanding Religiously Inspired Violence

**Reading:** Paloutzian, *Invitation*, (pp. 175 – 270).

**Week IX (May 25 – May 29)**

No class Monday May 25 (Memorial Day)  
Deuteronomy and the Traditions of Abraham  
Christianity and Religious Conquest  
Jihad and the Expansion of Islam

**Reading:** Hoffer, *True Believer*, (pp. 1 – 53).

**Week X (Jun 1 – Jun 5)**

The Apocalypse and Religious Violence  
General Characteristics of Holy War  
The Clash of Civilizations and Future Religious Possibilities

**Reading:** Hoffer, *True Believer*, (pp. 54 – 168).

**Finals Week (Jun 8– Jun 12)**

Final Examination: Thursday June 11 @ 10:15 a.m.