

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES (RLST)

**\* RLST 022a / ENGL 031a, Religion and Science Fiction** Maria Doerfler

Survey of contemporary science fiction with attention to its use and presentation of religious thought and practice. Focus on the ways in which different religious frameworks inform the literary imagination of this genre, and how science fiction in turn creates religious systems in both literature and society. Enrollment limited to first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program. WR, HU

**\* RLST 102b / EAST 390b, Atheism and Buddhism** Hwansoo Kim

A critical examination of atheism and religions (Buddhism), with a focus on intellectual, religious, philosophical, and scientific debates about God, the origin of the universe, morality, evolution, neuroscience, happiness, enlightenment, the afterlife, and karma. Readings selected from philosophical, scientific, and religious writings. Authors include some of the following: Charles Darwin, Bertrand Russell, Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Deepak Chopra, Sam Harris, Owen Flanagan, Stephen Batchelor, and the Dalai Lama. HU

**RLST 115b / AMST 116b, How to Build an American Religion** Kathryn Lofton

How communities can be organized through code, charisma, ritual, and cosmology. Topics include strategies for concretizing utopia and establishing communal principles, expanding audiences, and specifying creed. This course serves as an introduction to religion through theoretical readings and specific examples drawn from the transnational American scene, past and present. Discussion of particular leaders, sects, practices, and media will offer insights into how ideas organize societies and individuals establish themselves as icons. Students adapt strategies taught in the course in order to practice their own capacity to foster social movements, develop and critique brands, and consider the relationship between religion, politics, and economy. HU o Course cr

**\* RLST 121b / EALL 296b / EAST 391b, Religion and Culture in Korea** Hwansoo Kim

Introduction to Shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Christianity, and new religions in Korea from ancient times to the present. Examination of religious traditions in close relationships with social, economic, political, and cultural environments in Korean society. Examination of religious tensions, philosophical arguments, and ethical issues that indigenous and foreign religions in Korea have engaged throughout history to maximize their influence in Korean society. HU

**RLST 127a / PHIL 118a / SAST 261a, Buddhist Thought: The Foundations** Staff

This class introduces the fundamentals of Buddhist thought, focusing on the foundational doctrinal, philosophical, and ethical ideas that have animated the Buddhist tradition from its earliest days in India 2500 years ago down to the present, in places such as Tibet, China, and Japan. Though there will be occasional discussion of the social and practical contexts of the Buddhist religion, the primary focus of this course lies on how traditional Buddhist thinkers conceptualize the universe, think about the nature of human beings, and propose that people should live their lives. Our main objects of inquiry are therefore the foundational Buddhist ideas, and the classic texts in which those ideas are put forth and defended, that are broadly speaking shared by all traditions of Buddhism. In the later part of the course, we take up some of these

issues in the context of specific, regional forms of Buddhism, and watch some films that provide glimpses of Buddhist religious life on the ground. HU o Course cr

**RLST 148a / ER&M 219a / HIST 219a / JDST 200a / MMES 149a, Jews and the World: From the Bible through Early Modern Times** Ivan Marcus

A broad introduction to the history of the Jews from biblical beginnings until the European Reformation and the Ottoman Empire. Focus on the formative period of classical rabbinic Judaism and on the symbiotic relationships among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Jewish society and culture in its biblical, rabbinic, and medieval settings. Counts toward either European or non-Western distributional credit within the History major, upon application to the director of undergraduate studies. HU RP o Course cr

**\* RLST 152b, Writing Science and Religion: Interpreting Human Nature** Alison Renna

This intensive writing seminar is an introduction to analysis of “human nature” as the product of a history of scientific and religious thought in the colonial West. We interrogate the ways that different layers of interpretation shape our ideas of human nature—from the historically situated biological paradigms that give us our vision of nature itself, to the ways analysts have theorized the social worlds that create and evoke our “human nature.” This course is not a history of the concept of human nature, but rather a seminar in which students learn to analyze how the history of science and the history of thought have worked together to shape claims about the human’s most essential nature and develop their own positions on how scientific and humanistic thought work together. We ask: In response to which questions does the concept of the human’s nature arise? Why do science, religion, and philosophy feel like good places to look for answers? How do scholars’ interpretive methods shape the concepts of history, data, mind, and freedom that arise out of their studies of human nature? Readings may include: Ludwik Fleck, Sylvia Wynter, Kim TallBear, Blaise Pascal, Ruha Benjamin, Lorraine Daston. WR, HU

**RLST 160a / HIST 280a / ITAL 315a, The Catholic Intellectual Tradition** Staff

Introductory survey of the interaction between Catholicism and Western culture from the first century to the present, with a focus on pivotal moments and crucial developments that defined both traditions. Key beliefs, rites, and customs of the Roman Catholic Church, and the ways in which they have found expression; interaction between Catholics and the institution of the Church; Catholicism in its cultural and sociopolitical matrices. Close reading of primary sources. HU o Course cr

**\* RLST 162a / EP&E 223a / HUMS 183a, Tradition and Modernity: Ethics, Religion, Politics, Law, & Culture** Andrew Forsyth

This seminar is about “tradition” – what it is and what it does – and how reflecting on tradition can help us better understand ethics, religion, politics, law, and culture. We ask: for whom and in what ways (if any) are the beliefs and practices transmitted from one generation to another persuasive or even authoritative? And how do appeals to tradition work today? We traverse a series of cases studies in different domains. Looking to ethics, we ask if rational argument means rejecting or inhabiting tradition. Next, we look at religions *as* traditions and traditions as one source of authority *within* religions. We consider appeals to tradition in conservative and progressive politics. And how the law uses decisions on past events to guide present actions. Finally, we turn to

tradition in civic and popular culture with attention to “invented traditions,” the May 2023 British Coronation, and Beyoncé’s 2019 concert film “Homecoming.” HU

**RLST 165a / HUMS 138a / LITR 428a / MMES 138a / NELC 131a, The Quran** Travis Zadeh

Introduction to the study of the Quran. Topics include: the literary, historical, and theological reception of the Quran; its collection and redaction; the scriptural milieu of late antiquity; education and religious authority; ritual performance and calligraphic expression; the diversity of Muslim exegesis. HU

\* **RLST 175a / EAST 431a, North Korea and Religion** Hwansoo Kim

Ever since the establishment of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 1948 and the Korean War (1950–1953), North Korea has been depicted by the media as a reclusive, oppressive, and military country, its leaders as the worst dictators, and its people as brainwashed, tortured, and starving to death. The still ongoing Cold War discourse, intensified by the North Korea’s recent secret nuclear weapons program, furthers these negative images, and outsiders have passively internalized these images. However, these simplistic characterizations prevent one from gaining a balanced understanding of and insight into North Korea and its people on the ground. Topics other than political, military, and security issues are rarely given attention. On the whole, even though North Korea’s land area is larger than South Korea and its population of 25 million accounts for a third of all Koreans, North Korea has been neglected in the scholarly discussion of Korean culture. This class tries to make sense of North Korea in a more comprehensive way by integrating the political and economic with social, cultural, and religious dimensions. In order to accomplish this objective, students examine leadership, religious (especially cultic) aspects of the North Korean Juche ideology, the daily lives of its citizens, religious traditions, the Korean War, nuclear development and missiles, North Korean defectors and refugees, human rights, Christian missionary organizations, and unification, among others. Throughout, the course places North Korean issues in the East Asian and global context. The course draws upon recent scholarly books, articles, journals, interviews with North Korean defectors, travelogues, media publications, and visual materials. SO

**RLST 180b / HIST 342b / SAST 280b, Mughal India, 1500–1800** Supriya Gandhi  
Exploration of religion and the state in Mughal India, focusing on the period between 1500–1800. Topics include sacred sovereignty, orthodoxy, Sufism, vernacular literary and religious cultures, and the early colonial encounter. HU o Course cr

\* **RLST 183a / SAST 366a, The Gita: Humanities at World's End** Sonam Kachru  
An examination of the Bhagavad Gita in its historical and religious context. Exploration of the major interpretations of this important religious text. All readings in translation. HU TR

**RLST 186b / CGSC 186b / PHIL 113b / SAST 270b, Fear, Suffering, Anger, Love: Buddhist Philosophy of Mind** Sonam Kachru

This course introduces students to classical Indian Buddhist philosophy of mind and the reasons why Buddhists pursued it—“the reinvention of ourselves,” or the pursuit of the transformation of persons from unhealthy to healthy ways of being minded. Class materials are drawn from categories and concerns found in theoretical and practical manuals from roughly the first to the fifth centuries C.E., but the topics are salient, including: What is the difference between mind and consciousness? Is there an

unconscious? How does one model mental actions, such as attention or categorization? Are our minds structured by primal fear? Or anger? Do we ever have reason to be angry? What is cognitive control? Why do minds wander? Should mental dynamics be merely observed or attenuated or sculpted in some other way? What, if anything, is peace of mind? HU

**\* RLST 201a / HIST 232Ja / HUMS 443a / JDST 270a / MMES 342a, Medieval Jews, Christians, and Muslims In Conversation** Ivan Marcus

How members of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities thought of and interacted with members of the other two cultures during the Middle Ages. Cultural grids and expectations each imposed on the other; the rhetoric of otherness—humans or devils, purity or impurity, and animal imagery; and models of religious community and power in dealing with the other when confronted with cultural differences. Counts toward either European or Middle Eastern distributional credit within the History major, upon application to the director of undergraduate studies. WR, HU RP

**RLST 202b / HIST 345b / JDST 265b / MMES 148b, Jews in Muslim Lands from the Seventh to the Sixteenth Centuries** Ivan Marcus

Jewish culture and society in Muslim lands from the time of the Prophet Muhammad to that of Suleiman the Magnificent. Topics include Islam and Judaism; Jerusalem as a holy site; rabbinic leadership and literature in Baghdad; Jewish courtiers, poets, and philosophers in Muslim Spain; and the Jews in the Ottoman Empire. HU o Course cr

**\* RLST 230a / SAST 358a, Yoga in South Asia and Beyond** Supriya Gandhi

The history of yoga practice and thought from the earliest textual discussions of yoga until the present day. Topics include the body, cosmology, cross-cultural interactions, colonialism, and orientalism. This course is not open to students previously enrolled in RLST 018 or SAST 058. HU

**\* RLST 231b / HIST 226Jb / JDST 370b, How the West Became Antisemitic: Jews and the Formation of Europe 800-1500** Ivan Marcus

Students study how Jews and Christians interacted on a daily basis as medieval Europe became more restrictive and antisemitic, a contributing factor to the Holocaust. In this writing seminar, students discuss a variety of primary sources in class#laws, stories, chronicles, images#while researching and writing their own seminar paper structured by sessions on topics, bibliographies, and outlines. WR, HU

**RLST 234a / HIST 234Ja, History of the Supernatural from Antiquity to Modernity** Carlos Eire

This survey course aims to provide an introduction to ancient, medieval, and early modern Western beliefs in supernatural forces, as manifested in saints, mystics, demoniacs, ghosts, witches, relics, miracles, magic, charms, folk traditions, fantastic creatures and sacred places. Using a wide range of primary sources and various historical methodologies, our aim is to better understand how beliefs and worldviews develop and change and the ways in which they shape and determine human behavior. This course is not open to students previously enrolled in HIST 299. HU

**\* RLST 246a, Beyond the Typology: Christian-Buddhist Engagement in Southeast Asia** David Moe

Southeast Asia is one of the most religiously and ethnically diverse regions in the world, yet this region and its religions do not receive sufficient attention. This region is home to three world religions—majority Christianity is mainly found in the Philippines

and East Timor; Theravada Buddhism in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia; Mahayana Buddhism in Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore,; and Islam in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. This course pays particular attention to Christian-Buddhist engagement from the colonial past to the post-colonial present. We consider questions such as, "How did Western missionaries make contact with Buddhists in a colonial period?"; "What is the result of the colonial legacy of foreign missionaries?" and "How do local Christians and Buddhists understand their ethnic identity and religious otherness in a post-colonial period?" Using thematic and comparative approaches, this course will introduce students to Christian-Buddhist origins, movements, teachings, practices, social and spiritual involvements. We fill in some gaps by balancing the nuanced approaches to religious doctrines and lived experiences. We also examine the problem of a misleading typology—exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism—and discern how the interreligious ethics of compassion should serve as a fresh way for a Christian-Buddhist's hospitable engagement and for building a multicultural nation in contemporary Southeast Asia. HU

\* **RLST 249b / GMAN 254b / JDST 335b / PHIL 274b, Jewish Philosophy** Paul Franks  
Introduction to Jewish philosophy, including classical rationalism of Maimonides, classical kabbalah, and Franz Rosenzweig's inheritance of both traditions. Critical examination of concepts arising in and from Jewish life and experience, in a way that illuminates universal problems of leading a meaningful human life in a multicultural and increasingly globalized world. No previous knowledge of Judaism is required. WR, HU

\* **RLST 258a, Black Church Burning** Todne Thomas  
Black churches are vital institutions that have contributed to the spiritual and physical survival of African-descended communities in North America. Nonetheless, the very centrality of black churches to black survival, refuge, development, and flourishing has made them targets for white supremacist and other modalities of violence. This course compels us to turn our attention to the troubling archive of anti-black religious violence manifested in black church bombings, burnings, and shootings in the United States from the antebellum period to the present. More than a survey of the ravages of anti-black religious violence, this course also challenges us to consider the spiritual, experiential, and prophetic significance of fire within the Black Christian tradition. Black Church Burning, then, references the spiritual, symbolic, and material destruction of fire and how it is wielded by black Christian practitioners in relation to regenerative rebukes and potentialities. Course participants survey foundational texts about the significance of African American churches. They also contemplate the offerings and shortcomings of historical, social scientific, theological, and artistic depictions of black church arson and black Christian pneumatic concepts, as well as their moral and material implications. HU, SO

\* **RLST 277a / PHIL 202a, Existentialism** Noreen Khawaja  
Introduction to key problems in European existentialism. Existentialism considered not as a unified movement, but as a tradition of interlocking ideas about human freedom woven through the philosophy, religious thought, art, and political theory of late modern Europe. Readings from Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gide, Heidegger, Fanon, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Césaire. HU

\* **RLST 284a / JDST 129a, Jewish and Christian Bodies: Ritual, Law, Theory** Shraga Bick

This course employs a variety of methodological tools to explore the place and meaning of the body in Judaism and Christianity, by examining several central issues related to the body, such as observing the commandment; Martyrdom; Illness and death; sexuality and gender; and the performance of rituals. HU

**RLST 290a / MMES 290a / PLSC 435a, Islam Today: Modern Islamic Thought** Frank Griffel

Introduction to Islamic thought after 1800, including some historical background. The development of Islamic modernism in the 19th century and of Islamic fundamentalism in the 20th. Islam as a reactive force to Western colonialism; the ideals of Shari'a, Islam as a political ideology, and the emergence of Jihad movements. Different kinds of Salafism, Islamic liberalism, and feminism as well as the revival of Islam's intellectual heritage. HU o Course cr

\* **RLST 324a / HIST 268Ja / JDST 351a / PLSC 466a, The Global Right: From the French Revolution to the American Insurrection** Elli Stern

This seminar explores the history of right-wing political thought from the late eighteenth century to the present, with an emphasis on the role played by religious and pagan traditions. This course seeks to answer the question, what constitutes the right? What are the central philosophical, religious, and pagan, principles of those groups associated with this designation? How have the core ideas of the right changed over time? We do this by examining primary tracts written by theologians, political philosophers, and social theorists as well as secondary literature written by scholars interrogating movements associated with the right in America, Europe, Middle East and Asia. Though touching on specific national political parties, institutions, and think tanks, its focus is on mapping the intellectual overlap and differences between various right-wing ideologies. While the course is limited to the modern period, it adopts a global perspective to better understand the full scope of right-wing politics. HU, SO

**RLST 342b / AMST 234b / ER&M 243b / HIST 188b, Spiritual But Not Religious** Staff

Study of the historical and contemporary "unchurching" trends in American religious life in a comparative perspective and across different scales of analysis in order to think about the relationship between spirituality, formal religion, secular psychology and the self-help industry. HU, SO o Course cr

\* **RLST 343b / EAST 401b, Tibetan Buddhism** Staff

This course is a broad introduction to the history, doctrine, and culture of the Buddhism of Tibet. We begin with the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet in the eighth century and move on to the evolution of the major schools of Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhist literature, ritual and monastic practice, the place of Buddhism in Tibetan political history, and the contemporary situation of Tibetan Buddhism both inside and outside of Tibet. HU

**RLST 347a / HIST 240a / SOCY 331a / WGSS 291a, Sexual Minorities from Plato to the Enlightenment** Staff

This interdisciplinary course surveys the history of homosexuality from a cross-cultural, comparative perspective. Students study contexts where homosexuality and sodomy were categorized, regulated, and persecuted and examine ancient and medieval

constructions of same-sex desire in light of post-modern developments, challenging ideas around what is considered normal and/or natural. Ultimately, we ask: what has changed, and what has remained the same, in the history of homosexuality? What do gays and lesbians today have in common with pre-modern sodomites? Can this history help us ground or rethink our sexual selves and identities? Primary and secondary historical sources, some legal and religious sources, and texts in intellectual history are studied. Among the case studies for the course are ancient attitudes among Jews, early Christians, and Greeks; Christian theologians of the Middle Ages; Renaissance Florence; the Inquisition in Iberia; colonial Latin America; and the Enlightenment's condemnation of sodomy by Montesquieu and Voltaire, and its defense by Bentham.

HU o Course cr

**\* RLST 366a / EAST 400a, Religion and Politics in China, Xinjiang, and Tibet** Staff

This course explores the religious and political interactions among the Chinese, Tibetans, Mongolians, and Muslims living in today's northwest China from the fourteenth to the twentieth century. Focusing on parallel spatial arrangements and historical narratives of these ethnoculturally diverse peoples, the first part of this course investigates the evolving political systems, religious institutions, and social structures in China, Xinjiang and Tibet. Shifting from the center-periphery perspective to the bottom-up perspective, the second part examines major issues associated with interethnic relations. We critically read both primary and secondary sources. Key themes include Chinese imperialism and colonialism, Tibetan Buddhist expansion, Mongolian conquest, Islamization and Muslim resettlement, transregional trade, frontier militarization, ethnic violence, and inter-ethnocultural accommodation. HU

**\* RLST 410b / EAST 405b / RLST 235, Buddhism and Violence** Staff

This course focuses on Buddhism and violence in the modern world, with a particular emphasis on Korean Buddhism. Buddhism is often perceived to be a pacifist religion; however, all across the modern Buddhist world, from Japanese Zen Buddhists during World War II, to Vietnamese Buddhists during the Vietnam War, to Buddhists in the contemporary United States, Buddhists have been complicit in and even supported state-sanctioned violence. Can Buddhism be deemed less (or more) violent than other major religions? We cover introductory topics on Buddhism, going back in history to see the fundamental philosophical debates on violence and killing in the tradition. Using Korean Buddhism as a case study, we explore in what ways, if any, these ancient debates relate to the modern world. HU

**\* RLST 420b / HIST 333b / NELC 320b, Introduction to Syriac Christianity** Maria Doerfler

This seminar aims to introduce students to the literary, historical, and theological tradition of Syriac Christianity and the developing field of Syriac Christian studies. In this vein, students encounter a number of the tradition's key authors; learn to locate its development in the context of different imperial cultures and religious interlocutors, including Judaism and Islam; and explore topics at the vanguard of current scholarship, including distinctive approaches to asceticism, ritual, and historiography. In addition to weekly meetings, the seminar further requires attendance for three special sessions: a visit to the Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscripts Library and its considerable Syriac manuscript holdings; a visit to the Yale University Art Gallery and its collection of relevant artefacts and coins; and an introduction to the use of digital humanities in

Syriac Studies through the Yale Digital Dura-Europos Archive (YDEA). Permission of Instructor is required. HU

\* **RLST 428a / HUMS 397a / PHIL 493a, Neighbors and Others** Nancy Levene  
This course is an interdisciplinary investigation of concepts and stories of family, community, borders, ethics, love, and antagonism. Otherwise put, it concerns the struggles of life with others – the logic, art, and psychology of those struggles. The starting point is a complex of ideas at the center of religions, which are given to differentiating "us" from "them" while also identifying values such as the love of the neighbor that are to override all differences. But religion is only one avenue into the motif of the neighbor, a fraught term of both proximity and distance, a contested term and practice trailing in its wake lovers, enemies, kin, gods, and strangers. Who is my neighbor? What is this to ask and what does the question ask of us? Course material includes philosophy, literature, psychology, and film. WR, HU

\* **RLST 430b / PHIL 429b / SAST 470b, Indian Philosophy in Sanskrit Literature**  
Aleksandar Uskokov  
In this course we focus on issues of philosophical significance in Sanskrit literature of "non-standard" philosophical genres, i.e., other than the treatise and the commentary. Specifically we read from canonical Hindu texts such as the Upani#ads, Mahābhāra, Rāmāya#a, Bhāgavata Purā#a, Bhagavad-gītā, and Yogavāsi##ha; the classical genres of drama and praise poetry; and hagiographical literature, all in English translation. Attention is paid not only to substance but also form. The selection of philosophical problems includes philosophy of mind and personal identity; allegory; the ethics of non-violence; philosophy, politics, and religious pluralism; the highest good; theodicy; philosophical debate; etc. HU

\* **RLST 431a / HSAR 350a / HUMS 425a / LITR 399a, Reality and the Realistic**  
Noreen Khawaja and Joanna Fiduccia  
A multidisciplinary exploration of the concept of reality in Euro-American culture. What do we mean when we say something is "real" or "realistic?" From what is it being differentiated—the imaginary, the surreal, the speculative? Can we approach a meaningful concept of the unreal? This course wagers that representational norms do not simply reflect existing notions of reality; they also shape our idea of reality itself. We study the dynamics of realism and its counterparts across a range of examples from modern art, literature, philosophy, and religion. Readings may include: Aimé Cesaire, Mircea Eliade, Karen Barad, Gustave Flaubert, Sigmund Freud, Renee Gladman, Saidiya Hartman, Arthur Schopenhauer. Our goal is to understand how practices of representation reveal something about our understanding of reality, shedding light on the ways we use this most basic, yet most elusive concept. HU

\* **RLST 488a and RLST 489b, Individual Tutorial** Staff  
For students who wish, under faculty supervision, to investigate an area in religious studies not covered by regular departmental offerings. The course may be used for research or for directed reading. A long essay or several short ones are required. To apply, students should present a prospectus with bibliography of work they propose to undertake to the director of undergraduate studies together with a letter of support from the faculty member who will direct the work.



\* **RLST 490b, Religion and Society** Maria Doerfler

Seminar on religion and society. Topics covered vary by year, but may include one or more of the following: ritual and its social functions, different concepts of social life, the operation of violence in social relationships, religion as both champion and critic of society, and theoretical models of religion and society.

\* **RLST 491a and RLST 492b, The Senior Essay** Staff

Students writing their senior essays meet periodically in the fall and weekly in the spring for a colloquium directed by the director of undergraduate studies. The essay, written under the supervision of a member of the department, should be a substantial paper between 12,500 and 15,000 words.