Religious Studies Courses

Fall 2021

Against Religion

Dead Sea Scrolls: History & Scams

Dying for God

The Ethics of Thomas Aquinas

Introduction to New Testament

Occult America

Saints & Sinners in Muslim Literature

Varieties of Christian Ethics
Is religion a suicide of the intellect (Nietzsche)? A mass delusion (Freud)? The opiate of the people (Marx)? Does it mistakenly credit gods with humanity’s own best achievements (Feuerbach)? In this course you can read these and other scathing indictments of religion in the context of larger arguments, parodies, and polemics. Special attention to the groundwork that arguably set the stage for state atheism in communist China: a literary tradition of satirizing charming practices.

**DEAD SEA SCROLLS: HISTORY & SCAMS (FSHT)**

RELG 210-03/04 • TR 1:30–2:45; 3:00–4:15

William Kelly

Nine hundred Jewish manuscripts sat untouched in caves near the Dead Sea for almost two thousand years. Their discovery in the mid-20th century revolutionized our understanding of the history of the Bible, Judaism and Christianity—and caused major scandals: forgeries, conspiracy theories, copyright disputes, looting, laundering and black markets. This course introduces the Dead Sea Scrolls in their historical context and traces their influence in contemporary issues related to cultural heritage, antiquities trade, Israel and Palestine, and the role of the Bible in American public life.

**INTRODUCTION TO NEW TESTAMENT (FSHT)**

RELG 241-01/02 • TR 12:00–1:15; 1:30–2:45

Stephanie Cobb

This course invites students to study the earliest Christian writings from a historical perspective. Students will work together to discuss, debate, and puzzle over texts that are foreign even as they may also—for some—be familiar. The fun and the challenge of this course is considering texts from new perspectives and asking unfamiliar questions of well-known stories to understand better the origins of Christianity and the difficulties it faced.

**OCCULT AMERICA (FSHT)**

RELG 210-01/02 • MW 3:00–4:15; 4:30–5:45

Douglas Winiarski

How do historians study the unseen, mysterious, or “occult” forces that animated the worlds of Native Americans, enslaved Africans, and European settlers in early America? “Occult America” introduces students to historical methods through an investigation of selected eighteenth-century supernatural and preternatural phenomena ranging from witchcraft, hauntings, ventriloquism, and spirit possession to occult healing, poisoning, and charming practices.

**SAINTS & SINNERS IN MUSLIM LITERATURE (FSLT)**

RELG 288-01/02 • TR 9:00–10:15; 10:30–11:45

Mimi Hanaoka

Explores the twin concepts of sainthood and sinfulness in Islamic thought and society from their early iterations to their later developments. Discusses how, when, and why the categories of Sunni, Shi’a, and Sufi developed in the Islamic tradition while introducing their relationships to concepts of sainthood and sinfulness. In the context of discussions about saints and sinners in the Islamic tradition, addresses Muslim understandings of God, humanity, and community and considers differences across time and place.

**AGAINST RELIGION (FSLT)**

RELG 268-01/02 • MW 12:00–1:15; 1:30–2:45

Jane Geaney

This course examines the forms that Christian ethics has taken in select times and places. It emphasizes the differing approaches Christian thinkers have taken to issues such as war, abortion, and bioethics. Readings will be drawn from such classic authors as Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, and Martin Luther, as well as such 20th- and 21st-century thinkers as Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Ramsey, Lisa Cahill, and Gilbert Meilaender. In addition, we will draw on classic texts in history, psychology, and sociology to illustrate the approaches and methods available for social analysis.

**INDEPENDENT STUDY**

RELG 395-01/02

**THE ETHICS OF THOMAS AQUINAS**

RELG 367-01 • MW 1:30–2:45

Scott Davis

For over 700 years Thomas Aquinas has been one of the defining figures in Western ethics and moral theology. The renewed emphasis on Aristotle in the last 40 years has sparked new interest in Aquinas as one of the preeminent interpreters of the philosopher. This course sets Thomas Aquinas’s moral thought in context, looks in detail at his moral psychology and treatment of select virtues, and concludes with two opposed contemporary readings of Aquinas as a guide for moral philosophy.

**DYING FOR GOD**

RELG 393-01 • W 3:00–5:40

Stephanie Cobb

Did the Romans persecute early Christians? Was Christianity illegal? Why would early Christians willingly submit to execution for their faith? “Dying for God” tackles the fascinating phenomenon of martyrdom in early Christian history. It examines the history of the relationship between the Roman Empire and the Christian faith, as well as the literature Christians produced to tell the stories of their religious heroes. The course has no pre-requisites. All students are welcome!