
Honours Colloquium

260-555B

McGill University, Faculty of Religious Studies

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How 'to talk religion'? Of religion? Singularly of religion, today? How dare we speak of it in the singular without fear and trembling, this very day? And so briefly and so quickly? Who would be so imprudent as to claim that the issue here is both identifiable and new? Who would be so presumptuous as to rely on a few aphorisms? To give oneself the necessary courage, arrogance or serenity, therefore, perhaps one must pretend for an instant to abstract, to abstract from everything or almost everything, in a certain way. Perhaps one must take one's chance in resorting to the most concrete and most accessible, but also the most barren and desert-like, of all abstractions.

Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge" (1998)

Course Description

This colloquium closely examines some of the philosophic sources that have formed contemporary academic reflection on religion. The traditions in question are western: so-called Continental thought on the philosophy side, as it were, and the Abrahamic faiths on the religion side. The primary objective is to come to an understanding of the philosophic sources informing contemporary discussions of religion (genealogy, deconstruction, post-colonialism, feminism). An outcome of the analysis should also be critical appreciation of contentious issues such as relativism and pluralism, subjectivity and objectivity, among others. Even if the featured religions are Judeo-Christian (for obvious historical reasons), students are encouraged to draw parallels with other religious traditions, mindful of the differences. Intense, thoughtful student participation is presumed.

Evaluation

1) *Class participation (20%)*: Class participation is based on "the seminar model." Students' presence at each seminar is expected. More than three absences will result in the forfeiture of 10%. Also expected is that assigned readings for seminar discussions are read. At each class students will be asked to comment on the readings, i.e., what they find interesting, puzzling, or problematic about them. All of these are crucial ingredients for meaningful seminar discussion.

2) *Assignments (35%)*: There are three assignments. Page length should not exceed four pages (Times New Roman, 12 point font, double-spaced). Approximately one week before assignments are due, students will be provided with one or two questions to answer concerning the readings. Except for valid medical or personal reasons (illness or death in the family), late papers will not be accepted.

3) *Presentation (20%)*: Presenters are to lead a seminar discussion based on a five-to-six page paper (Times New Roman, 12 point font, double-spaced). The presentation is to address some aspect of the seminar readings. It is recommended that presenters draw critically from secondary sources to help organize their thoughts. Presenters should also prepare questions for group discussion. Papers are to be submitted to the instructor at the end of class. The grade is assessed as follows: 10% for the quality of the presentation (clarity, coherence, poise, etc.); 10% for the quality of the written paper (form and content—see “Faculty of Religious Studies Style Sheet” available at the Faculty of Religious Studies and on the Faculty web site <ww2.mcgill.ca/religion/style.htm#style%20sheet>).

4) *A ten-page, typed research paper (Times New Roman, 12 point font, double-spaced) (25%)*: A number of options are available to students. They may either (1) extend the research of their presentation; (2) compare a seminar author with another of their choice, seminar or otherwise; and (3) discuss the relevance of a particular theme or concern vis-à-vis a religious tradition of their choice. Due dates will be announced in class.

Required Texts

Anderson, Pamela Sue. *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion [FPR]*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998. — On reserve (McLennan)

Derrida, Jacques. “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone.” In *Acts of Religion*. Ed. Gil Anidjar. New York and London: Routledge, 2002, 42-101. — Handout

Foucault, Michel. *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault [RCMF]*. Ed. Jeremy R. Carrette. New York: Routledge, 1999. — On reserve (McLennan)

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “The Exemplary Significance of Legal Hermeneutics (*Truth and Method* (II.II.2c).” n *Primary Readings in Philosophy for Understanding Theology*. Ed. Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springsted. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992, 263-80

Hegel, G.W.F. “*Phenomenology of Spirit* (“Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Relations of Master and Servant”); “*Encyclopaedia* (Introduction and selections from “Logic”); “Who Thinks Abstractly?”; “Reason in History: A General Introduction to the *Philosophy of History* (Chapters 1-3)”); “*Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.” In *Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*. Philosophic Classics, Volume IV. Ed. Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997, 36-96.

Heidegger, Martin. “The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics.” In *Primary Readings in Philosophy for Understanding Theology*. Ed. Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springsted. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992, 248-62.

Kant, Immanuel. “Pure Reason and the Question of God (*Critique of Pure Reason*).” In *Primary Readings in Philosophy for Understanding Theology*. Ed. Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springsted. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992, 172-209. — Handout

Lonergan, Bernard. "Philosophy and the Religious Phenomenon." *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 12/2 (1994) 121-46. – Handout

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *A Nietzsche Reader [NR]*. 1977. Selected and Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Penguin Books. – On reserve (McLennan)

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 1978. New York: Pantheon Books. – On reserve (McLennan)

Smart, Ninian. "Some Thoughts on the Science of Religion." In *The Sum of Our Choices: Essays in Honour of Eric J. Sharpe*. Ed. Arvind Sharma. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1996, 15-25. – Handout

Course site:

WebCT <webct3.mcgill.ca/>: WebCT (Web Course Tools) is an on-line course management system. It allows instructors to create and manage Web-based or Web-enhanced courses. Via WebCT students may access important course information, read recent announcements for their course, have real-time discussions with other class participants, keep track of their grades, and so on. All McGill students are entitled to use WebCT and have, in fact, been assigned a Global UserID based on their official McGill records.

Class Schedule and Assigned Reading

Jan.	7, 9, 14:	Topic: Kant Reading: Handout
	16, 21, 23:	Topic: Hegel Reading: Handout
Feb.	28, 30, 4:	First assignment due
	4, 6, 11:	Topic: Nietzsche Reading: <i>NR</i> , pp. 15-52, 53-70, 71-124, 167-93, 197-231
	13, 18, 20:	Topic: Heidegger Reading: Handout
	25, 27:	Study Break
March	4:	Second Assignment due
	4, 6, 11:	Topic: Foucault Reading: <i>RCMF</i> , pp. 50-71, 85-103, 106-30, 135-52, 154-97
	13, 18, 20:	Topic: Derrida Reading: Handout

25, 27: Topic: Said
 Reading: *Orientalism* (TBA)

April 1: **Third assignment due**
1, 3: Topic: Anderson
 Reading: *FPR* (TBA)

8, 10: Topic: Lonergan and Smart
 Reading: Handout