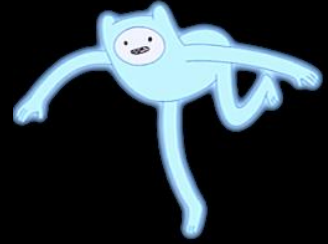


# Irreligious and Secular Traditions

REL 179: Spring 2020

Andrew Monteith / Spence 210

Office Hours: M 1:30-2:30, Th 2-3, and by appointment



This course investigates traditions that—in many cases—would not identify themselves as “religion,” or which attempt to reject “religion” as a concept. Examples of such traditions include New Atheism, Satanism, the veneration of social and political systems, Scientology, and even some religions identified as “joke” religions, such as Pastafarianism. Additionally, this course examines how the conditions of secularism have cultivated new forms of religion in the United States. *Also counts towards Interreligious Studies and American Studies.*

## Student Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students should:

- 1) Be able to explain what secularism is.
- 2) Identify how the conditions of secularism have shaped and cultivated new forms of religion.
- 3) Understand and explain how “spirituality” can reproduce religious effects, affects, and constructs.
- 4) Explain how and why atheism, humanism, and satirical religions intervene in socio-religious arenas.

All materials for this class are available on Moodle.

## Grades and Assignments

- 1) Reading responses, 20%. For most readings, you will have a place on Moodle where you answer a question dealing with that day’s readings. These will be graded on a scale of 0-3, with “0” being “nothing turned in” and “3” being “thoughtful/proficient response.” These questions need to be answered *before* you come to class. These do not need to be lengthy; please keep them limited to a paragraph.
- 2) Attendance, 5%.
- 3) Informal paper #1, 2 pages, 5%. How does Charles Taylor understand “secularism”? What does this term mean to him? How might this help you understand the Washington and Leadbeater readings?

As an informal paper, I will not be grading style conventions, citations, etc. This assignment is

meant to demonstrate proficiency with SLO #1, and to establish a foundation for moving forward in the course. This paper may not use outside readings, and it should not extend past the page limit. Due Tuesday, February 18.

- 4) There will be a short, in-class quiz, 10%. This will have a few multiple choice questions and a few short answer questions. It will not have an essay portion (the informal papers do that job instead.)
- 5) Midterm exam, 20%. This will consist of multiple choice questions, some short answer questions, and one essay question relating to a major course theme. March 12.
- 6) Informal paper #2, 2-4 pages, 10%. When someone says that they are “spiritual, but not religious,” what do they mean by this? How would you compare the kinds of activities and self-understandings done in SBNR to other religions that we have seen in this course? Do you think that SBNR is religiously neutral? Why or why not? Due Thurs, May 7.

Final exam, 30%. Same format as the midterm, only a little longer. May 19.

**Tues, Feb 4**

Welcome – Syllabus, handout, discussion of terms

**Thurs, Feb 6**

Read Charles Taylor, 1-9

**Tues, Feb 11**

Read Peter Washington, *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon*, 5-25

**Thurs, Feb 13**

Read Charles Leadbeater, *An Outline of Theosophy*, 1-12, 42-52; and Charles Leadbeater, *The Astral Plane*, 9-16

**Tues, Feb 18**

Read Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 25-40; Watch “[Voodoo vs. Hoodoo](#)”  
**Informal Paper #1 Due**

**Thurs, Feb 20**

Read Christine Hoff Kraemer, *Seeking the Mystery*, 21-38; and Isaac Bonewits, *Neopagan Rites*, 13-25

**Tues, Feb 25**

Read Jennifer Snook, *American Heathens: The Politics of Identity in a Pagan Religious Movement*, 27-47; and *The Poetic Edda*, “*Voluspa*,” 3-13

**Thurs, Feb 27**

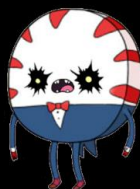
Read Hugh Urban, “Rastafari: Messianism, Music, and Ganja” 114-134

**Tues, Mar 3**

Read Anton LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 37-54, 106-118

**Thurs, Mar 5**

Read Alan Ginsberg, “Howl”; and selection from Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*



**Tues, Mar 10**

Read Devin Lander, "Start Your Own Religion: New York State's Acid Churches"

**Thurs, Mar 12**

**Midterm**

## **SPRING BREAK**



**Tues, Mar 24**

Read Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, 71-102

**Thurs, Mar 26**

Read Terence McKenna, *The Archaic Revival*, 90-103

Listen to Terence McKenna, "The DMT Experience" (mp3 file)

Optional: Terence McKenna, *the Archaic Revival*, 34-47

**Tues, Mar 31**

Read Lee Harrington, *Sacred Kink: The Eightfold Paths of BDSM and Beyond*, 3-27, 47-49, 140-151 [Note: this reading involves explicit discussion of assorted sexual practices, oftentimes using strong language. We are reading this text because it represents a serious engagement of our course issues/themes and is a worthwhile area for academic study.]

**Thurs, Apr 2**

Read Melissa Wilcox, *Queer Nuns*, 1-30

**Tues, Apr 7**

Read Gloria Steinem, "How I Got Into This Room" (Address to the American Humanist Association, 2012); and Kurt Vonnegut, "Address at Cluweg Hall," 15-31; and Kurt Vonnegut, "Spoils," 145-152

**Thurs, Apr 9**

Read Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great*, 63-71

View Neil deGrasse Tyson, "Religion vs. Science"

**In Class Quiz**

**Tues, Apr 14**

No class (Prof. Monteith is in Liverpool)  
time reallocated to May 17 review session

**Thurs, Apr 16**

No Class  
Read Katie Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon*, 51-81

**Tues, Apr 21**

Read Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*, 9-16, 22-34, 147-167

**Thurs, Apr 23**

Read Robert Fuller, "Subtle Energies and the American Metaphysical Tradition," 375-385; and  
Marcus and Maria Webb, *Healing Touch*, 10-17; and  
Elanor McKenzie, *Healing Reiki*, p. 7, 18-19

**Tues, Apr 28**

No class – SURF Day

**Thurs, Apr 30**

No Class  
Read Robert Fuller, "Spiritual, But Not Religious"; and  
Melissa Lamson, "Spirituality in Business"; and "Spirituality in Education"  
look through the website; what do they seem to mean by "spirituality?" What do they want to do with this spirituality in schools, and why?]

**Tues, May 5**

Read Hugh Urban, Hugh Urban, "The Church of Scientology: New Religions and Tax Exemptions," 135-156;  
Short excerpt from L. Ron Hubbard (TBA)

**Thurs, May 7**

Read George Dvorsky, "Better Living Through Transhumanism"; and  
Hava Tirosh-Samuels, "Transhumanism as a Secularist Faith"

**Informal Paper #2 Due**

**Tues, May 12**

Read Emilio Gentile, "Civil Religions and Political Religions," 16-44

**Sunday, May 17 (10:30am)**

Final Exam Review Brunch  
McEwen Dining Engagement Room

**Tues, May 19 (11:30am)**

**Final Exam**

