

RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT

EPICS OF ANCIENT INDIA: THE MAHABHARATA AND RAMAYANA

REL 101-7-20

Mark McClish

TTH 2:00-3:20pm



Ancient India produced two of the world's great epics: the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa. The former tells the story of an apocalyptic civil war within a ruling dynasty that comes to engulf all of the peoples of the world. The latter tells the story of the righteous king, Rāma, and the abduction of his beloved wife, Sītā, by the demon-king Rāvaṇa. Both stories have edified audiences, in different versions, for over two-millennia, and both are considered by many to be sacred texts that reveal deep truths about the nature of human existence. In this course, we will read abridged translations of the classical Sanskrit versions of both stories, reflect on their meaning, and explore their continuing significance in different forms to audiences today.

Fall 2024

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT

LEARNING SPACES & LEARNED BODIES

REL 101-7-21

Shira E. Schwartz

MW 11:00-12:20pm



This is a college seminar on the relationship between the body, space, and learning. While education and college are often presented as primarily intellectual activities, we will pay attention to the spatial and bodily dynamics that shape how we create, share and access knowledge. Using a range of creative assignments and multi-modal interdisciplinary sources, we will approach the body and space as places where learning happens, and therefore as categories through which we can analyze how learning happens, including in our very own classroom and on campus. Students will learn to ask how the body shapes and is shaped by its learning environment through categories like gender/sex and sexuality, race/ethnicity and religion, ability and access, and how fields like architecture, design, technology and media influence the enterprise of learning.

Students will learn to re-examine their most basic assumptions about learning in a variety of expected and unexpected settings, like libraries and maker spaces, rabbinic bathrooms and football fields, science labs and ancient Greek life, in order to prepare for a range of learning experiences that they may encounter at Northwestern, and beyond.

The course will guide students to be more attuned to the social and material dynamics that may otherwise go unrecognized in these experiences, teaching critical skills that will prepare them to be more conscious learners.

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT

INTRODUCTION TO HINDUISM

REL 200-20

Mark McClish

TTH 9:30-10:50am



One of the largest and most ancient of all religions, Hinduism comprises a family of related traditions. Over the last 5000 years, the Hindu traditions of South Asia have developed a remarkable diversity of rituals, beliefs, and spiritual practices and a pantheon of hundreds and thousands of gods and goddesses, from the elephant headed Ganeṣa to the fierce goddess Kālī as well as many local deities. This course will examine the breadth of the Hindu traditions as they have developed over time, highlighting the major elements that characterize them collectively, such as ritual sacrifice (yajña), world renunciation (saṃnyāsa), law (dharma), spiritual discipline (yoga), devotion (bhakti), worship (pūjā), and theology. During the course we will explore both the scriptures of Hinduism as well as its practices. We will pay particular attention to how these traditions have contributed to the development of modern Hinduism.

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT

INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM

REL 210-20

Kevin Buckelew

MW 12:30-1:20pm



This course offers an introduction to Buddhist history, culture, philosophy, and practice. We explore the major doctrinal varieties of Buddhism, from its inception through the rise of the Mahayana and Tantric or Vajrayana traditions.

At the same time, we also investigate Buddhist visual, material, and ritual cultures—which offer windows onto aspects of Buddhism as a lived religion not always visible in scriptural sources. In the process we engage themes like the meaning of suffering, the cosmology of cyclical rebirth, the social role of monasticism and its intervention in traditional family structures, the place of women and gender in Buddhism, the relationship between religious ideals and everyday life, the question of self-reliance versus divine assistance, and the power of images and icons. Our readings of primary sources offer close engagement with Buddhist ideas and practices, allowing us to understand how the religion shaped the ways people in pre-modern Asia saw and interacted with their worlds. Readings in secondary scholarship help us set these materials in historical context and connect them to the bigger picture of Buddhism's spread across Asia.

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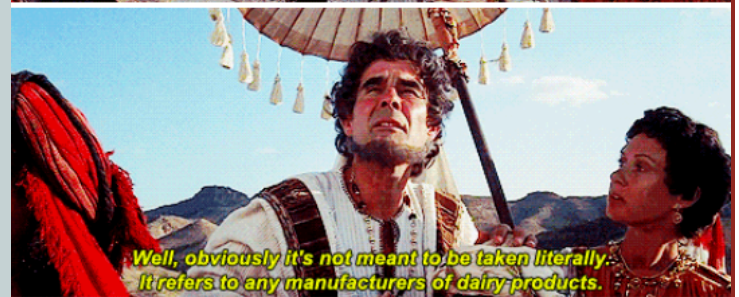
RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

REL 221-20

Dr. Lily Stewart

MW 11:00-12:20pm



The New Testament has influenced the lives and experiences of individuals and communities across the globe for thousands of years. It has served as a source of structure, meaning, and hope for many while also influencing ideologies and practices of bigotry and violence. But what do we really know about the world in which the New Testament was produced? What was the project of Jesus and his followers and why was it so polarizing? What authors composed the New Testament's texts and what can we glean about their audiences and motivations? Why were some texts chosen for the canon of the New Testament and others left out? This course will consider the New Testament from a range of vantage points. We will use historical methodologies to explore the complex networks of religious practices, cultural ideologies, and political actors that influenced its production. We will also consider how the New Testament has been read and reproduced in the past 2000 years. We will discuss a range of theological perspectives, analyze the impact of the New Testament on art and literature, and assess its role in global politics.

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT

INTRODUCTION TO ISLAM

REL 250-20 / MENA 290-5-1

Usman Hamid

MW 2:00-3:20pm



This course is an introduction to the study of Islam, one of the major religious traditions of world history. It adopts an interdisciplinary framework for understanding Islam as a lived tradition by focusing on the debates and practices that have animated Muslim religious life across time and geography. We will examine religious texts alongside material evidence, historical research, and ethnographic studies. Particular attention will be paid to the ways in which Muslims have engaged with the Qur'an and the life and legacy of the Prophet Muhammad, the practice of Islamic ritual, piety, and devotion, as the place of Islamic law in everyday life. Through this course, students will develop critical vocabulary necessary for understanding Islamic discourses and practices, as well as facility with the theoretical language in the study of religion.

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT

FATE, FORTUNE AND KARMA IN EAST ASIA

REL 318-20

Kevin Buckelew

MW 3:30-4:50pm



Are our actions free or fated? What larger forces shape the choices we make? To what do we owe our successes, and what is to blame for our mistakes? In East Asian religions, such questions have been answered with reference to a variety of different concepts of fate, fortune, and karma. These concepts shape not only how people have viewed the world, but also how they have made their way through life. This class focuses on religious approaches to questions of destiny in premodern East Asia. We begin by studying Indian Buddhist ideas of karma and early Chinese notions of fate and fortune preceding Buddhism's arrival in China, then turn to the ways people in China and Japan negotiated these various concepts over the many centuries following the arrival of Buddhism. In the end, we discover important throughlines amid the diversity of religious responses to the problem of destiny in East Asian history.

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT

SAINTHOOD AND THE BODY (RHM, RSG)

REL 345-20

Dr. Lily Stewart

MW 2:00-3:30pm



What kinds of bodies can be saintly? How do saintly people interact with their bodies? What do modern celebrities like Beyonce and Tupac Shakur have in common with the saints? Why is there a patron saint of stomachaches? This course explores the complex relationship between saints and their bodies in Christian history. Saints have long represented the extremes of Christian excellence, in large part because their lives and bodies interrogate the boundaries between heaven and earth, spirit and flesh, masculine and feminine, holy and transgressive, life and death. Saints facilitate incredible miracles, perform painful and sometimes disgusting acts of asceticism, and experience mystically erotic relationships with the divine. Even as saints live to deny their bodies, their bodies are nevertheless foundational to their sanctity, both before and after death. Our class will explore case studies from the ancient to the modern world, with a special focus on the middle ages.

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SUFISM

REL 354-20

Usman Hamid

TTH 3:30-4:50pm



This course introduces Sufism, the 'mystical' tradition of Islam. After critically examining the concept of 'mysticism' within Religious Studies, we will examine the historical origins of Sufism, its emergence from and relationship to foundational discourses within Islam, its engagement with the Qur'an, and the figure of the Prophet Muhammad in Sufi devotions. We will then investigate notions of 'sainthood' in Islam, the roles of Sufism in popular Muslim piety, the centrality of the body and bodily disciplines in Sufi practice, and the writings produced by Sufis, their supporters, and critics. Particular attention will be paid to the study of Sufi literature both in prose and poetry. The course will offer a broad introduction to the historical and geographic range of Sufism in Islam, but will give special attention to Sufi traditions in the Indian subcontinent and the broader Persianate world.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT

THE STUDY OF BLACK RELIGION & THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES

REL 360-20

KB Dennis Meade

MW 11:00-12:20pm



Black and Caribbean Studies are vibrant fields in the digital humanities. The study of religion in the digital humanities, however, remains an emergent field. This course is an ambitious attempt at interdisciplinarity, or more aptly what Tracy Hucks and Dianne Stewart refer to as transdisciplinarity--inquiry driven research that transcends disciplinary silos. This course centers religion as the primary lens to excavate and recover representations of Afro-Caribbean religions and their North American cognates using archival sources, fiction, film, and art. Religion will serve as the framework to interrogate what counts as data, the sources in which we can locate this data, its deployment and (re)presentation. Our aim is to gain a landscape view of Caribbean religious history through key moments and themes from the period of enslavement and what Rinaldo Walcott refers to as the long emancipation. The course will provide students the opportunity to explore current digital projects and learn digital tools to generate their own inquiries.

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THE SPIRIT OF HORSES

REL 371-20

Sarah Taylor

F 12-2:30pm



It is often said that in riding a horse “we borrow freedom.” From winged Pegasus of Greek mythology, to mystical Kelpies of Celtic lore, to the Hippogriffs in Harry Potter, horses hold a special allure for humans that transcends cultures. Come explore the power of the sacred human-horse bond as represented in art, film, and popular culture. Come learn about the use of horses in healing veterans with PTSD as we visit “Brave Hearts,” the country’s largest healing horsemanship program right here in Illinois. Do “horse whisperers” truly exist? What do we make of divine horses portrayed in myth and symbol, horses as spiritual teachers, practices of horse meditation and healing, spiritual journeys with horses, ghost horses, and those who practice horsemanship as a spiritual life path? Delight in discovering just what it is about horses that fascinates us, captures our hearts, and fuels our imaginations.

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REL 379-20 /

BLK_ST 315-20/ KB Dennis-Meade MW 2-3:20pm

LATIN_AM 391-2

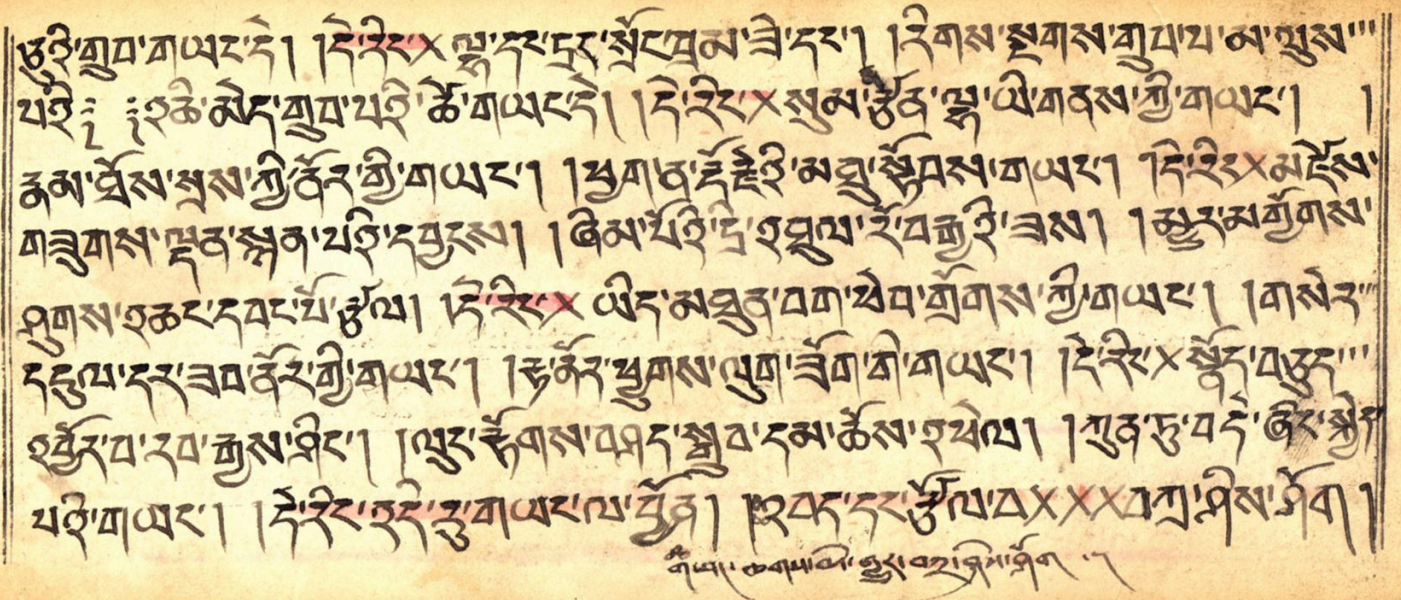


RELIGION, CULTURE, AND RESISTANCE IN THE CARIBBEAN

The Caribbean constitutes a unique space to understand the history of resistance and social change in the Black Atlantic world. Going beyond the tropes of reggae, Rastafari, and tourism--this course provides an introduction to the diversity of religious traditions in the region, with a particular focus on Afro-Caribbean religious practices and spiritual technologies. Students will explore the cosmological features and embodied expressions that characterize these traditions. Through presentations, discussions, and writing assignments students will reflect on concepts such as belonging, migration, colonialism, race, class, and gender to understand the political and cultural implications of religion in the region.

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READINGS IN TIBETAN LITERATURE

This course explores a variety of Tibetan-language genres of writing such as history, poetry, philosophy, doctrine, narrative literature, and more, with attention to their form and content. All course readings are in Tibetan, presuming at least an intermediate ability to read Tibetan. Students will focus on Tibetan-English translation techniques while broadening their knowledge of Tibetan literary genres. Course readings will vary depending on enrolled students' specific areas of interest.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT

EMBODIMENT/ MATERIALITY/ AFFECT

REL 471-20 /

GNDR_ST 490-27 /

HIST 405-28

J. Michelle Molina

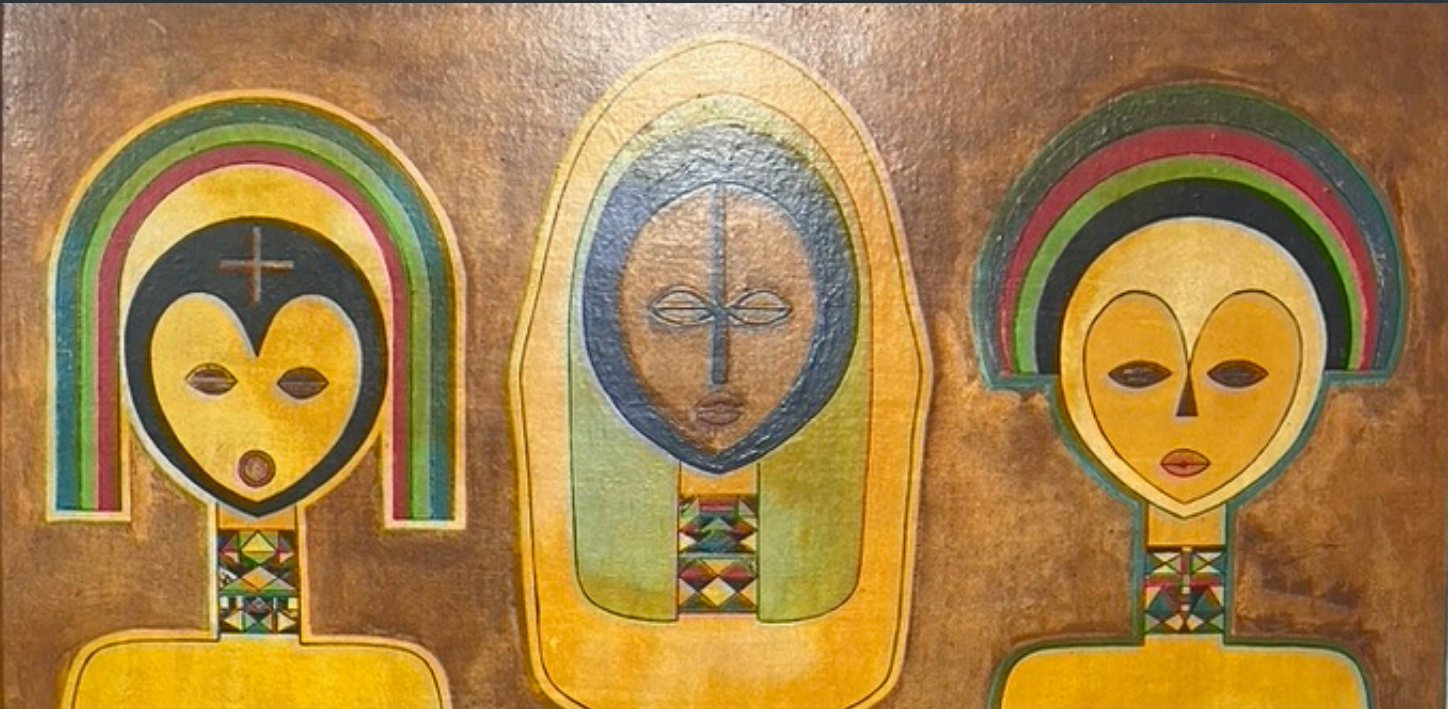
T 3:00-5:30pm



This seminar explores theoretical approaches to the problem of body/embodiment/materiality. One aim of the course is to examine various methodological approaches to embodiment and materiality, making use of sociology and philosophy (Pierre Bourdieu, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Baruch Spinoza, and Bruno Latour). The second and closely related aim is to situate bodies in time and place, that is, in history. Here we look to the particular circumstances that shaped the manner in which historical actors experienced their bodies in the Christian west (Peter Brown, Mary Carruthers, Michel Foucault, among others). Ultimately, we will be examining theoretical tools while we put them to work. The goal: how to use these theorists to write more dynamic, creative, interesting scholarship?

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RELIGION AND POLITICS: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

This course offers students tools for thinking in a critical and comparative way about the intersections of religion, law, and politics from a global perspective. Much ink has been spilt considering and reconsidering definitions of religion, secularism, and politics, and how these concepts work to shape each other and the worlds we inhabit. This course asks, what comes next in the study of religion in politics? What does it look like to not only globalize this question by asking about a wider diversity of contexts and histories beyond Europe and its settler colonies but also to move beyond vocabularies that have framed and limited discussions of these questions for decades? This transdisciplinary seminar is an experiment in thinking the question of religion and politics in modernity anew. Themes to be considered through this prism include sovereignty, governance, coloniality, borders, Indigeneity, human movement, race, and law.