

BRIDGING VOICES: A Proposal to Link Orthodox Jewish Women Studying Social Science Theory in Israel and U.S. Students Studying the Sociology of Religion

Instructors:

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Institution: Neve Yerushalayim College, Jerusalem, Israel

COURSE SYLLABUS SOCI 4260: SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is an upper-level survey of the sociology of religion. While that in itself should be fairly descriptive, most students will likely be a bit uncertain as to the actual content of the course and the things they will take from it. That uncertainty is understandable because 1) sociology is a very broad discipline with a variety of tools and approaches used to study society, and 2) religion is not just a social institution, but a powerful influence on our overall world view, a lightning rod for opinion and prejudice, and a phenomenon so linked to the unmeasurable and unobservable dimensions of life that some argue it's not even a legitimate subject of sociological study. Of course, I believe it's one of the richest subjects of sociological study and cite as evidence the work of virtually all of the early sociologists who shaped the discipline as well as the remarkable body of literature that has accumulated over the last century. So, what can you expect from this class? First, you can expect a review of the common sociological dimensions of all religions such as moral definitions, group membership and dynamics, prescribed ritual practices, definitions of the sacred, etc. In this part of the course we also will look at some of the writings of early sociologists such as Durkheim and Weber who pioneered the sociology of religion and whose classical definitions still impact the field. In the latter half of the course we will use these tools and perspectives to review the major world religions, with particular emphasis on Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. An important theme that will run throughout this course is the relationship between social science and religion, a relationship that has always been tenuous at best. We will explore the history of that relationship, what assumptions in a number of philosophical areas have caused social scientists to dismiss religion and faith, and how a new dialogue can emerge. We will be exploring these ideas together with a class of Orthodox Jewish women at Neve Yerushalayim in Jerusalem, Israel who are studying sociological theory, and will throughout the semester exchange our thoughts and ideas with them.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Johnstone, Ronald L. 1997. *Religion in Society: A Sociology of Religion*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Kurtz, Lester. 1995. *Gods in the Global Village: The World's Religions in Sociological Perspective*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

A set of readings that focus on the social science/religion debate will also be required and may be purchased in the UNT bookstore.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. Become familiar with the classical treatments of religion by sociologists, including the early works of Comte, Durkheim, and Weber, as well as classical works on the relationship between social science and religion.
2. Develop a working knowledge of the principle terminology in the sociology of religion and be able to use it effectively in original analyses of religion and religious groups and phenomena.
3. Be able to demonstrate a working knowledge of the classical and contemporary issues that have characterized sociology's treatment of religion, including theoretical and methodological assumptions that have influenced such treatments.
4. Understand the sociological dimensions of changes in the American religious mosaic over the past century, with particular attention to the controversy of "secularization", the emergence of extreme pluralism, and the persistence of conservatism and fundamentalism.
5. Understand the sociological dimensions of most major world religions and be able to compare and contrast religions according to sociological principles.
6. Grow in appreciation for the power of religion in defining the human experience and directing the course of human history. This includes a greater understanding of religions' capacity to both heal and hurt, inspire peace and war, bring alienation and community:

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Science and Religion Essays 25%
Exams (2 @ 15%) 30%
Reports (4 @ 5%) 20%
Final Exam 25%

Each student will be required to write five three-page essays on science and religion questions addressed in class. Any five of the ten guiding questions may be used. In addition, each student must write four three-page, typewritten reports, to be submitted on the dates outlined in the class schedule. These may come from three different sources, with at least one coming from each source. First, you may attend a religious service of a religion with which you currently are not familiar and write a report on your experience and an analysis of the service in light of the sociological principles we discuss in class.

You may want to interview a leader in the religion (e.g., a priest, elder, rabbi, or imam) in order to get a more complete understanding of what you've observed. Second, you may write a book report on a work in the sociology of religion. A list of suggested books will be distributed within the first few weeks of the semester. Third, you may analyze your own religious group using sociological principles discussed in class. You should attempt to make this a fresh look at something with which you are already very familiar but not accustomed to viewing sociologically.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Week #1 Introduction: The Sociology of Religion: What it is, what it isn't.

Week #2 Religion: Group Phenomenon vs. Individual Experience; Beliefs, Rituals, and Institutions; The Power of Myth, Mythos, and Logos Natural Science, Social Science and Religion

Week #3 The Religious Identity and Socialization; The Religious Ethos Order and Chaos in Social Science and Religion Report #1 due Week #4 Churches, Sects, and Cults: Conformity, Fundamentalism, and Innovation Free Will and Determinism in Social Science and Religion Exam #1

Week #5 Religion and Conflict; Religion and Politics / Politics and Religion Ontology and Meaning in Social Science and Religion Report #2 due

Week #6 Religious Fundamentalism: Conservatism in an Age of Relativism Religion and Social Class: Why is There a Correlation? Epistemology in Social Science and Religion

Week #7 Religion and Race in the U.S.: The Importance of Ethnicity and Culture Anti-Intellectualism and Religion in American History Report #3 due

Week #8 A Global View of Religion Social Science and Religion as Social Institutions Exam #2

Week #9 World Religions and Science and Social Science: Variations Religion and Social Science as Communities

Week #10 Judaism: A Historical Overview Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform: Uniqueness and Assimilation Innovation and Acceptance in Science and Religion

Week #11 Buddhism: A Historical Overview Readings: Selections from The Compassionate Buddha East vs. West: The Faces of Buddhism in Sociological Perspective Report #4 due

Week #12 Hinduism: A Historical Overview Readings: Handout; Selections from the Bhagavad Gita Pluralism in Social Science and Religion

Week #13 Christianity: A Historical Overview Exam #3

Week #14 Islam: A Historical Overview Readings: Handout; Selections from the Qu'ran Eschatology and Views of the Future in Social Science and Religion.

Week #15 Modernity in American Religion Class Discussion: Science vs. Religion - The State of the Debate Report #5 due

COURSE SYLLABUS

SOCI 5150: CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY UNT/NEVE YERUSHALAYIM

INSTRUCTOR David A. Williamson, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Sociology University of North Texas Denton, Texas

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to provide students with an understanding of and an appreciation for the use of sociological theory in social interventions such as counseling. In the tradition of clinical sociology, the course lectures, discussions, and readings will be oriented toward the application of sociological concepts to the solution of real-life problems. They are intended to help students gain a new appreciation for the variety and complexity of social factors that can contribute to social and family problems and assist students in developing intervention strategies that take those factors into account. While the course does not directly address such strategies, its approach to each school of theory is guided by an awareness of the practical ends to which students will want apply them. In a larger historical context, the theories covered in this class are certainly contemporary--or at least contemporary versions of ancient ideas. However, much of the theory covered in this course had its contemporary origins in the late 18th and 19th centuries B.C.E. Concurrent with the beginning of sociology as a discipline, a collection of ideas about how society works (or doesn't work) began to emerge. As with other social sciences, sociology has borrowed liberally from the theoretical foundations of other disciplines such as economics, psychology, anthropology, and history in defining its body of literature and thought. Central to this course is an analysis of the dialogue between the views of social science as captured in theoretical statements and their treatment of religion. From the pre-Enlightenment assumptions of a Creator of all things, physical and social, to the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment skepticism of all that is not easily measured and tested, we will explore the various ways that sociology and religion have interacted throughout the discipline's history and how greater dialogue between the two can enhance the contributions that each can make to the other.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Winton, Chester A. 1995. *Frameworks for Studying Families*. Guilford, CT: The Dushkin Publishing Group, Inc.

Klein, David M. and James M. White. 1996. *Family Theories: An Introduction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Two notebooks of additional readings will be available, one dealing with theory and the other focusing on the issues of science and religion. Students may copy the readings or read and take notes on them without taking them away from campus.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

In order to successfully complete this course, students must complete the following:
Papers: Each student will prepare five mini-papers (5 to 7 pages in length) during the semester, due on the dates specified on the class schedule. Four of the papers should deal specifically with application of major schools of theory to a substantive clinical or social problem of your choice. (i.e., one paper for functional/structural functional/systems theories; one paper for conflict/critical theories; one paper for interactionist theories; and one paper for exchange theories.) The fifth paper should combine or compare/contrast two types of theory in application to a clinical or social problem, and may also include, in addition to the four types of theory listed above, role theory, developmental theory, or theories of deviance. In addition, each student will submit a two to three page essay on each of the questions regarding science and religion. These essays should reflect an awareness of the arguments proposed in the required readings and careful and critical thoughts regarding the guiding questions. They will be due the week after each guiding question is addressed in class discussion.

GRADING:

Grades will be determined according to the following schedule:

Mini-papers (5 @ 10%) 50 %

Essays on Science and Religion (5 @ 10%) 50%

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Session #1: Introduction and Orientation

Session #2: The Origins of Sociological Theory Classical Schools of Sociological Theory
Natural Science, Social Science, and Religion

Session #3: Developmental Theories Overview; Early Systems Theories Order and Chaos

Session #4: Durkheim, Social Facts, and External Control Free Will and Determinism

Session #5: Systems Theory; Systems Dynamics as Control; Ontology and Meaning in
Religion and Science Paper #1 due (functional/structural functional/systems)

Session #6: Marx, Material Dialectic, and External Control Epistemology in Science and
Religion

Session #7: Freud and Psychological and Cultural Explanations of External Control Paper #2 due (Marxist/conflict/critical theory)

Session #8: Weber and Simmel -- Transition to Agency Social Science and Religion as Social Institutions

Session #9: Pareto to Homans -- Human Rationality Religion and Science as Communities

Session #10: Families as Exchange-Based Groups Innovation and Acceptance in Science and Religion

Session #11: Symbolic Interaction -- Origins and Classical Statements Paper #3 due (exchange theory)

Session #12: Symbolic Interaction -- Contemporary Statements Pluralism in Science and Religion

Session #13: Deviance Paper #4 due (interactionist theory)

Session #14: Stratification Eschatology and Views of the Future in Science and Religion

Session #15: A Clinical Application of Sociological Theory Paper #5 due