

**RELG 205: Morality, Ethics, and Religion**  
**(generic syllabus)**

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**Bulletin Description**

Values and ethics as developed, contested, and transmitted through a variety of religious practices.

**Course Overview**

This course offers a critical approach to the convergence of religion, the development of values, ethics, and social responsibility. We examine the costs and benefits of equating religious practice with moral/ethical practice and we consider ways that religion can function to authorize and legitimate certain ethical norms. We will discuss the social implications for deviating from norms associated with divine or otherwise supernatural origins and, finally, we inquire about the extent to which religion is necessary for moral and ethical development.

**Learning Outcomes**

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Discuss the sources or origins of values and ethics as transmitted through various religious configurations;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the different ways that religious practice shapes human attitudes toward values, ethics, and social responsibility;
- Explain how religious values impact personal decision-making, self-identity, and individual well-being;
- Analyze the influence of religious values upon community ethics and decision-making in contemporary society.

**Texts**

Annie Blazer. *Playing for God: Evangelical Women and the Unintended Consequences of Sports Ministry* (NYU Press, 2015)

Jennifer Knust. *Unprotected Texts: The Bible's Surprising Contradictions about Sex and Desire* (Harper One, 2011)

H. H. Dalai Lama. *Beyond Religion: Ethics for the Whole World* (Mariner Books, 2011)

Bruce Lincoln. *Holy Terrors: Thinking About Religion after September 11*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (University of Chicago Press, 2006)

Frans de Waal. *The Bonobo and the Atheist: In Search of Humanism Among the Primates* (W. W. Norton & Co., 2014)

## **Requirements**

- **Quizzes:** 34% of final grade

Students should come to each class meeting prepared to take a short quiz. I recommend preparing for each class session in the following manner: read the assignment with the Discussion Questions (DQs) close at hand; make notes about how you would answer the questions; bring the notes and the assigned text to class with you. Although there will only be 10 (unannounced) quizzes over the entire semester, you should be prepared the same way for each class because you will frequently discuss the questions in small groups or with the class as a whole.

- **Midterm Exam:** 33% of final grade

There will be an in-class, written midterm exam. Students should prepare for the midterm by reviewing the assigned readings, the DQs, and their class notes. Questions about films, video clips, or other media used in class may also appear on the midterm.

- **Final Exam:** 33% of final grade

There will be a written, comprehensive final exam. Students should prepare for the final by reviewing the assigned readings, the DQs, and their class notes. Questions about films, video clips, or other media used in class may also appear on the final.

## **Grading Scale**

Grading will be on a 100-point scale as follows:

A, 90-100 / B+, 87-89 / B, 80-86 / C+, 77-79 / C, 70-76 / D+, 67-69 / D, 60-66 / F, 59 or less

## **Attendance Policy**

University Attendance Policy, found in the Bulletin on the Registrar's site, requires that students miss no more than 10% of a course's semester class hours (3.5 hours for a 3-credit course). The policy for RELG 205 is that missing more than 3 class meetings puts the student at risk to lose 10 points from the earned final grade for each missed class exceeding 3. Roll will be taken at the beginning of class. If you arrive late, please see me after class to let me know you were there. On days with quizzes, I will use the quizzes to mark attendance as I grade them.

Aside from the above-stated University policy and unless a student misses more than 3 class meetings, attendance does not contribute directly to the final grade. Missing a quiz without prior consent, however, will yield a score of zero for that quiz. Unless there has been prior consent to make up a quiz, or unless the student has a compelling reason for not doing so, quizzes may not be made up.

## **Accommodations**

The University of South Carolina provides high-quality services to students with disabilities and I encourage qualified students to utilize them. Students with disabilities needing academic or physical accommodations should: 1) Register with and provide documentation to the Office of Student Disability Services (803-777-6142) in LeConte College Room 112A, and 2) Let me know the type of accommodations you need. Please do both of these items as soon as possible.

## **Classroom Behavior**

Students are expected to conduct themselves in a respectful and mature manner. Sometimes the subject matter of a Religious Studies course (especially one on morality and ethics) can cause students to feel uncomfortable or even emotional. This does not have to be the case. I hope that this course will enable you to feel confident and become more articulate when discussing a range of potentially sensitive/volatile issues. Disagreements will inevitably arise and when they do, please show respect for each other. You do not have to agree with everyone but please voice your disagreements in a civil manner: you just might learn something new from someone who holds an opinion that diverges from your own.

This course is not aimed at determining the truth-value of certain claims or positions. Rather, we will examine how, why, and in what contexts people associate morality with religion. We will seek to gain clarity on how humans use common social practices, techniques, and strategies to develop, contest, and transmit values, ethics, and expectations about social responsibility.

As for more mundane matters, please demonstrate common courtesy toward each other and your professor. Please refrain from whispering, sleeping, newspaper reading, wearing headphones unless needed for a medical condition, vaping, tobacco chewing, crunching, texting, tweeting, or any similar activity should be avoided. Laptops and cell phones should be put away during class. If you need to use your laptop for note taking, please speak with me to obtain permission.

## **Schedule**

### Week 1

Course Introduction  
Concepts & Terminology

### Week 2

Lincoln, *Holy Terrors* 1-32, 97-107  
Lincoln, *Holy Terrors* 33-50, 108-111

### Week 3

Lincoln, *Holy Terrors* 51-76  
Lincoln, *Holy Terrors* 77-95

### Week 4

Knust, *Unprotected Texts* 1-22  
Knust, *Unprotected Texts* 47-77

Week 5

Knust, *Unprotected Texts* 79-112

Knust, *Unprotected Texts* 187-235, 237-248

Week 6

Blazer, *Playing for God* 1-37

Blazer, *Playing for God* 37-77

Week 7

Blazer, *Playing for God* 78-118

Blazer, *Playing for God* 118-156

Week 8

Blazer, *Playing for God* 157-193

Midterm Exam

Week 9

Film or case study

de Waal, *The Bonobo & the Atheist* 1-54

Week 10

de Waal, *The Bonobo & the Atheist* 55-111

de Waal, *The Bonobo & the Atheist* 113-147

Week 11

de Waal, *The Bonobo & the Atheist* 149-187

de Waal, *The Bonobo & the Atheist* 189-240

Week 11

H. H. Dalai Lama, *Beyond Religion* 1-40

H. H. Dalai Lama, *Beyond Religion* 41-81

Week 12

H. H. Dalai Lama, *Beyond Religion* 83-136

H. H. Dalai Lama, *Beyond Religion* 137-188

Week 13

Students' Choice

Course Wrap-Up

Week 14

Reading Day

Final Exam