

Religious Studies 237: Self, Society, & Religions

Spring 2017

Prof. Bagger

Manly Hall 315B; Office Hours: T,R 5-6, and by appt.

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This course has no prerequisites.

Course Description

This course examines the very idea of a self and considers how agency and identity constitute the self. It explores the mechanisms of self-management, particularly with respect to religious ideals, models, and institutions. Finally, it considers the political ramifications of religiously identified selves. Students will read philosophical and social scientific works and use what they learn to analyze a prominent text pertaining to issues of religious identity.

Course Objectives

- 1) To gain familiarity with concepts and debates central to the academic discussion of identity.
- 2) To gain practice critiquing theoretical concepts and applying them to texts.

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

- Discuss different models of the self.
- Distinguish and evaluate different techniques of self-management.
- Reflect on the social and political aspects of identity.
- Bring sophisticated concepts to bear on texts of historical significance.

Course Requirements

- An in-class midterm exam (March 2). You will be asked to “identify” five quotations out of twelve taken from the readings. You should have no difficulty recognizing the sources of the quotations. Prepare to explain the import, ideas, and circumstances pertinent to each quotation as fully. This exercise is your opportunity to display what you have learned from the readings and from class. You must bring a bluebook to the exam. If you must miss the exam for a legitimate reason, you may take the exam at a time of mutual convenience. (25%)
- One 2-page paper, hard copy due 3:30 PM Feb 17 in my mailbox in 212 Manly Hall. No electronic submissions. I penalize late submissions ½ letter grade per day. You must compose your own paper topic in consultation with me. This paper affords you the opportunity to critique one of authors or concepts discussed in class. You should feel free to argue for a position with which (you believe) I disagree. Disagreement with me will NOT affect your grade (as long as you take account of the ideas and arguments we have studied). I will grade the papers on a) the quality of your argument, and b) the quality of your prose. Be sure to avail yourself of the writing guidelines I have provided on blackboard. If you do not feel confident in your ability to write this kind of paper, you should seek help from me during office hours. (25%)
- One 5-page paper, hard copy due 3:30 PM May 4 in my mailbox in 212 Manly Hall. No electronic submissions. Select one of the texts from the following list and analyze it using concepts and arguments derived from the assigned readings:
 - **The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*
 - **The Way of the Bodhisattva*, Shantideva
 - **Solomon Maimon: An Autobiography*
 - **Practice in Christianity*, Kierkegaard
 - **The Life of Milarepa*
 - **The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

**The Way of Perfection*, Teresa of Avila

**Radical: My Journey out of Extremist Islam* (Maajid Nawaz)

**The Confessions*, Augustine

You should feel free to argue for a position with which (you believe) I disagree. Disagreement with me will NOT affect your grade (as long as you take account of the ideas and arguments we have studied). I will grade the papers on a) the quality of your argument, and b) the quality of your prose. If you do not feel confident in your ability to write this kind of paper, you should seek help from me during office hours. (50%)

- Students who make positive contributions to the learning environment, particularly through constructive participation in class discussions, may receive a premium of up to 2.5 points toward their final grade.

Texts available for purchase

Asylums, Goffman

Politics of Piety, Mahmood

The remaining readings are available on Blackboard.

Reading Assignments

- 1) Frankfurt—"Freedom of the will and the concept of a person." (Jan. 17)
- 2) Frankfurt—"Identification and externality." (Jan. 19)
- 3) Frankfurt—"The importance of what we care about." (Jan. 24)
- 4) Frankfurt—"Identification and wholeheartedness." (Jan. 26)
- 5) Frankfurt—"Rationality and the unthinkable." (Jan. 31)
- 6) Taylor—"Responsibility for Self." (Feb. 2)
- 7) Taylor—"Self-Interpreting Animals." (Feb. 7)
- 8) Taylor—*The Sources of the Self*, chs 1-2. (Feb. 9, 14)
- 9) Elster—*Ulysses and the Sirens*, ch. 2. (Feb. 16)
- 10) Elster—*Sour Grapes*, ch. 2. (Feb. 21)
- 11) Elster—*Sour Grapes*, ch. 3. (Feb. 23)
- 12) Elster—*Sour Grapes*, ch. 4. (Feb. 28)
- 13) Goffman—"On the Characteristics of Total Institutions." (March 7, 9)
- 14) Bagger—*The Uses of Paradox*. (March 21, 23, 28, 30)
- 15) Mahmood—*Politics of Piety*. (April 4, 6, 11, 13)
- 16) Bilgrami—"What is a Muslim.? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity." (April 18)

Notes

- I expect you to bring the assigned reading to class.
- Responsibility for the success of our discussions rests on your shoulders. If you are not willing to ask questions or converse with one another, the discussions will fail.
- You are responsible for announcements I make in class.
- I use Blackboard as a file distribution system only. If you need to reach me, do not message me through Blackboard. I will not see it.
- You must bring a bluebook to the exam.
- I have no attendance policy. From experience I know you will regret missing class come exam time.

Emergency Contact Information: UA's primary communication tool for sending out information is through its web site at www.ua.edu. In the event of an emergency, students should consult this site for further directions. Additional course information will be posted using Blackboard Learn.

Severe Weather Guidelines: The guiding principle at The University of Alabama is to promote the personal safety of our students, faculty and staff during severe weather events. It is impossible to develop policies which anticipate every weather-related emergency. These guidelines are intended to provide additional assistance for responding to severe weather on campus.

UA is a residential campus with many students living on or near campus. In general classes will remain in session until the National Weather Service issues safety warnings for the city of Tuscaloosa. Clearly, some students and faculty commute from adjacent counties. These counties may experience weather related problems not encountered in Tuscaloosa. Individuals should follow the advice of the National Weather Service for that area taking the necessary precautions to ensure personal safety. Whenever the National Weather Service and the Emergency Management Agency issue a warning, people in the path of the storm (tornado or severe thunderstorm) should take immediate life saving actions.

When West Alabama is under a severe weather advisory, conditions can change rapidly. It is imperative to get to where you can receive information from the [National Weather Service](http://www.nws.gov) and to follow the instructions provided. Personal safety should dictate the actions that faculty, staff and students take.

The Office of University Relations will disseminate the latest information regarding conditions on campus in the following ways:

- Weather advisory posted on the UA homepage
- Weather advisory sent out through UA Alerts to faculty, staff and students
- Weather advisory broadcast over WVUA at 90.7 FM
- Weather advisory broadcast over Alabama Public Radio (WUAL) at 91.5 FM
- Weather advisory broadcast over WVUA-TV/WUOA-TV, and on the website at <http://wvuatv.com/content/weather>. WVUA-TV Home Team Weather provides a free service you can subscribe to which allows you to receive weather warnings for Tuscaloosa via e-mail or cell phone. Check <http://wvuatv.com/content/free-email-weather-alerts> for more details and to sign up for weather alerts.

In the case of a tornado warning (tornado has been sighted or detected by radar; sirens activated), all university activities are automatically suspended, including all classes and laboratories. If you are in a building, please move immediately to the lowest level and toward the center of the building away from windows (interior classrooms, offices, or corridors) and remain there until the tornado warning has expired. Classes in session when the tornado warning is issued can resume immediately after the warning has expired at the discretion of the instructor. Classes that have not yet begun will resume 30 minutes after the tornado warning has expired provided at least half of the class period remains.

Policy on Academic Misconduct: All students in attendance at The University of Alabama are expected to be honorable and to observe standards of conduct appropriate to a community of scholars. The University of Alabama expects from its students a higher standard of conduct than the minimum required to avoid discipline. At the beginning of each semester and on examinations and projects, the professor, department, or division may require that each student sign the following Academic Honor Pledge: "I promise or affirm that I will not at any time be involved with cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, or misrepresentation while enrolled as a student at The University of Alabama. I have read the Academic Honor Code, which explains disciplinary procedure resulting from the aforementioned. I understand that violation of this code will result in penalties as severe as indefinite suspension from the University."

See the [Code of Student Conduct](#) for more information.

Disability Statement: If you are registered with the Office of Disability Services, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss any course accommodations that may be necessary.

If you have a disability, but have not contacted the Office of Disability Services, please call (205) 348-4285 (Voice) or (205) 348-3081 (TTY) or visit 1000 Houser Hall to register for services. Students who may need course adaptations because of a disability are welcome to make an appointment to see me during office hours. Students with disabilities must be registered with the Office of Disability Services, 1000 Houser Hall, before receiving academic adjustments.

UAct: Ethical Community Statement: The University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The UAct website (<http://www.ua.edu/uact>) provides a list of reporting channels that can be used to report incidences of illegal discrimination, harassment, sexual assault, sexual violence, retaliation, threat assessment or fraud.