

AS070.273 Ethnographies: Everyday Religion and Ethics
TTh 1.30-2.45
Hodson 216
(Thursday sections to meet in Hodson 216 and in Gilman 10)

Instructor

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Description, Pre-requisites and Outcomes:

This course introduces students to the anthropological genre of the ethnography, which may be crudely characterized as a detailed description of a people or a society or a condition at a particular moment in time. We read classic and contemporary ethnographies to ask what are its identifying markers, how have these changed, what comprises evidence, how are theoretical claims made through description, and how are they positioned or mobilized within wider debates and conversations.

The theme of “religion and ethics” guide the choice of ethnographies providing students with the contours of a debate within anthropology conducted through, of course, ethnography alongside more explicitly theoretical anthropological writings and writings from outside of the discipline.

The juxtaposition of ethnography with other modes of writing is to help us to compare and contrast in order to develop a feel for identifying, reading and writing ethnography ourselves. One of our five writing assignments will be explicitly ethnographic. This juxtaposition will also provide us with examples of how ethnography can be made to speak to larger debates and general issues.

Students do not need to have any former knowledge of either anthropology or ethnography or the theme of religion and ethics prior to the course. At the end of the course they should be able to read anthropological texts closely, be familiar with a debate within anthropology and have some experience with doing ethnography.

Organization, Assignments and Grading Rubric:

This course will meet twice per week. In the first class of the week the instructor will lecture for about 30-40 minutes on the reading assigned, introducing concepts, main themes and arguments. The rest of the class will be spent in discussing the reading. This

discussion will continue in further detail within section in the second class of the week in which students will make presentations and also delve into specific parts of texts to attempt close readings. We will be attentive both to the evolution of the debate on religion and ethics within anthropology and how ethnography is crucial to it.

Students are required to attend class and to ensure that they have signed the attendance sheet. Missing two or more classes without permission of the instructor or teaching assistant will result in automatic failure. Students are expected to do the readings assigned for the class and to actively demonstrate that they have done so through their participation in class discussions. Students are expected to sign up to present a week's reading in their individual sections. In their 10-15 minute presentation, they should plan to show a YouTube video that they feel best illustrates the reading for them. Finally, they have to write five response papers of 3-4 double-spaced pages each on prompts provided by the instructor and to be uploaded by set deadlines to blackboard exclusively (neither instructor nor teaching assistant will accept papers sent by email to them).

Each of the 5 papers will count for 15 points for a total of 75

The presentation will be 10 points

Class participation will be 15 points

Course total will be out of 100 points. The instructor retains the right to use judgment in making the final evaluation however.

Resources:

As this is a reading and writing course of medium intensity, students should take advantage of the Johns Hopkins Writing Center located at the Greenhouse Annex. You may make appointments at 410/516-4258 or email writingcenter@jhu.edu. For research purposes you should utilize the resources at Milton Eisenhower Library (MSEL) as much as possible. You may call 410/510-8335, email reference service, or pay the librarians a visit during library hours.

Note on plagiarism:

Any use of another person's ideas or words, taken directly or paraphrased, without citing the source is plagiarism. **This includes taking material from the Internet without citing the website.** Please speak to the instructor or refer to *The Chicago Manual on Style* if you have any questions on how to properly cite your sources.

Required Books (also on reserve at the Sheridan Library):

1. Max Weber Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (Penguin Classics 2002)
2. Winnifred Fallers Sullivan The Impossibility of Religious Freedom (Princeton 2007)
3. Friedrich Nietzsche The Anti-Christ Soho Books 2013
4. Alan Badiou Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil (Verso 2013)
5. Jonathan Lear Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation (Harvard University Press 2008)
6. Jeanne Favret-Saada Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage (Cambridge University Press 1981)

7. Lisa Stevenson Life Besides Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic (University of California 2014)

Required Reading (on e-reserve available through the library website and blackboard):

1. Emile Durkheim Elementary Forms of Religious Life, Book 2, Chapters 1, 6, 7
2. Clifford Geertz “Religion as a Cultural System” from The Interpretation of Cultures (Basic Books any edition) 87-125
3. Talal Asad “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category” from The Genealogies of Religion (Johns Hopkins Press 1993) 27-54
4. Stefania Pandolfo “The Burning: Finitude and the Politico-Theological Imagination of Illegal Migration” Anthropological Theory 2007, 7(3): 329-363
5. Bhriqupati Singh “Agonistic Intimacy and Moral Aspiration in Popular Hinduism: A Study in the Political Theology of the Neighbor” in American Ethnologist 2011, 38(3) 430-450
6. Rachel Sanchez “Intimate Publicities: Retreating the Theologico-Political in the Chavez Regime” in Hent de Vries’ ed. Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World Fordham University Press 2006: 401-426

Part One: Religion and its Critique

Week 1

Jan 27: Introduction:

What is Anthropology? Ethnography? What is the anthropological study of religion?

Jan 29: Emile Durkheim Elementary Forms of Religious Life, Book 2, Chapters 1, 6, 7
What according to Durkheim is the most elementary form of religion? What makes it a form? Where does it reside? In the human mind or...?

Week 2

Feb 3: Max Weber Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

First prompt to be handed out.

Feb 5: Discussion of Durkheim and Weber

How are the Protestants of 19th century America religious? What are their religious practices? What individual, social, economic effects do their practices produce? How are religious practices different from religious form in Durkheim?

Week 3:

Feb 10: Clifford Geertz “Religion as a Cultural System” from The Interpretation of Cultures (Basic Books any edition) 87-125

Talal Asad “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category” from The Genealogies of Religion (Johns Hopkins Press 1993) 27-54

Feb 12: Discussion

How is Geertz’s theory of religion different from Durkheim’s and Weber’s? What does he focus on specifically besides religious form and practices? Why does Asad criticize him? What is the history of the concept of religion that Asad provides?

First assignment due.

Week 4:

Feb 17: Winnifred Fallers Sullivan The Impossibility of Religious Freedom Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 3 (pp1-88)

Second prompt to be handed out.

Feb 19: Discussion

What is the history of the separation between state and religion in the United States that Sullivan provides? Where is law located in this separation?

Week 5:

Feb 24: Sullivan contd. Chapters 4, 5 (89-163). Instructor will be out of town. The teaching assistant will lead class.

Feb 26: Discussion

What is religious freedom? Why is it impossible? What are the effects of the law in this story? How might Asad's history of the concept of religion be relevant for the practice of religion in the United States?

Second assignment due.

Week 6

March 3: Friedrich Nietzsche The Anti-Christ

March 5: Discussion

Why does Nietzsche attack Christianity? How do we make this 19th century philosophical attack relevant to the discussion of 21st century U.S. secularism and religion that Sullivan provides?

Part Two: The Turn to Ethics**Week 7:**

March 10: Alan Badiou Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil

Third prompt to be handed out.

March 12: Discussion

What are human rights? How is it Christian in conception? Why does Badiou attack it? How does this attack compare to Nietzsche's on Christianity? What kind of ethics does Badiou put forward? What are ethics versus religion?

March 16-20 Spring Break

Week 8:

March 24: Jeanne Favret-Saada Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage Part 1 and II (3-96)

Third assignment due.

March 26: Discussion

With Favret-Saada we have yet another picture of religious life, this time within a French Christian context. What is good here and what is evil? What are other forces that operate in the world?

Week 9:

March 31: Favret-Saada contd. Part III (97-224)

April 2: Discussion

How is the anthropologist implicated in this story? How do either Nietzsche or Badiou help or not in understanding the dynamics of forces described? How do these dynamics offer challenges to our understandings of religion and ethics thus far?

Week 10:

April 7: Jonathan Lear Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation

Fourth prompt to be handed out.

April 9: Discussion

What do ethics and politics look like at the edge of the collapse of one's way of life? Is this horizon of extinction present even implicitly in any of our prior readings?

Week 11:

April 14: Lisa Stevenson Life Besides Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic
Prologue, Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 3 (vii-viii, 1-100)

April 16: Discussion

How did the Canadian government care for Inuits? How is it that care can also produce cultural devastation?

Fourth assignment due.

Week 12:

April 21: Stevenson contd. Chapters 4, 5, 6 and Epilogue (103-174)

Fifth prompt to be handed out.

April 23: Discussion

How do we come to care for the life of another? How is the anthropologist implicated in this instance? How is this mode of care different from the one extended by the state? What kind of ethics is this mode of care versus say Badiou's or Lear's?

Part 3: Political Theology: A New Turn?

Week 13:

April 28: Stefania Pandolfo "The Burning: Finitude and the Politico-Theological Imagination of Illegal Migration" *Anthropological Theory* 2007, 7(3): 329-363

Bhriqupati Singh “Agonistic Intimacy and Moral Aspiration in Popular Hinduism: A Study in the Political Theology of the Neighbor” in *American Ethnologist* 2011, 38(3) 430-450

Rachel Sanchez “Intimate Publicities: Retreating the Theologico-Political in the Chavez Regime” in Hent de Vries’ ed. Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World Fordham University Press 2006: 401-426

April 30: Wrap-up Discussion

What is political theology? How might it offer a reply to the study of religion and ethics and their internal contradictions?

Fifth assignment due.