

Psychology 435
Psychological Science and Religion

Instructor: Daryl R. Van Tongeren, Ph.D.

Office: Schaap Science Center 1169

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:00am-12:00pm

Office Phone: 395-7432

Email: vantongeren@hope.edu

Class Meeting Time/Location: 12-12:50pm on MWF

Class Purpose: The purpose of this course is to provide a broad overview of psychological perspectives to religion and the religious experience. This class is intended to survey key concepts and central theories in the psychology of religion, focusing on both the methodology and applicability of empirical findings. Lectures and readings will familiarize students with the concepts and research, while journal articles and scholarly chapters will serve to engage students' critical thinking and increase their proficiency in becoming educated consumers of psychological research. Class discussions are meant to enrich and deepen students' understanding of the complex relationship between psychological science and the religious experience. Finally, this course is intended to prepare students to thinking critically about better understanding the role of religion and spirituality in their lives.

Course Objectives: Upon successful completion of the course, students should be able to:

1. Understand the various psychological theories related to religion
2. Critically analyze and reflect upon religious experiences in light of psychological science
3. Understand how to empirically investigate religion using principles of psychological science
4. Critically analyze, evaluate, and reflect upon primary readings
5. Think critically about religion
6. Cultivate a personal interest in understand religion and spirituality in a global society

Texts: Hood, R.H., Hill, P., Spilka, B. (2009). *The psychology of religion: An empirical approach*. (4th Edition). New York: Guilford Press. ISBN: 978-1-60623-303-0

Jeeves, M. J., & Ludwig, T. E. (2018). *Psychological science and Christian faith: Insights and enrichments from constructive dialogue*. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press.

Selected journal article readings provided by the instructor

Inclusive Classroom Statement: It is my sincere desire to create a classroom atmosphere that respects and values all students. My intent to is serve all students from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives, being attentive and respectful to diversity across a range of intersecting identities, including gender identity, gender expression, sexuality and sexual orientation, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, and culture. I want you to know that you are welcome here. If there are ways that I can improve the effectiveness of this course, please let me know. I also acknowledge that I, too, am a learner and will not always do this perfectly. I am open to your suggestions, comments, and ideas of ways that I can engage in this process more fruitfully—so please feel free to reach out, as I am eager to learn. My hope for this class is that we can all learn from one another and engage in humble, thoughtful, and open dialogue.

University Policies: The last day to add or drop this class is February 3. The last day to withdraw from this class with the grade of "W" is April 8. Hope College values diversity, inclusion and equitable learning environments and strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers due to a disability (including mental health, learning disabilities, and chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, I will request that you first register with Disability and Accessibility Resources (DAR) and then arrange with me to discuss approved accommodations so that we can implement them as soon as possible. Accommodations are not arranged retroactively. Students can call 616-395-7925 or visit the DAR website: <https://hope.edu/offices/disability-services/> to request accommodations. The only accommodations for tests (e.g., time, location) that I provide must come through the Academic Success Center.

Honor Code and Academic Integrity: This course adheres to the Hope College Honor Code: It is a violation to:

1. Give, offer, or receive aid on examinations other than that specifically allowed by the professor.
2. Do course work in a manner that is inconsistent with the standards of conduct set forth by the professor.
3. Falsify or fabricate data. This has particular applications to laboratory work and research.
4. Engage in conduct that destroys another person's work or hinders another in his or her academic endeavors. This has particular application to computer files, library resources, and laboratory or studio work.
5. Knowingly represent the work of others as his or her own. This includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism.

Any form of cheating or plagiarism will be dealt with severely. When you write papers, you should (a) use your own words to express your own ideas; (b) use your own words to express someone else's ideas and cite the source (in APA format); and/or (c) put quotes around someone else's words and cite the source (in APA format). When conducting research, fabrication or falsification of data is plagiarism and will be dealt with severely. If you violate any of these rules, you will receive a zero on the assignment/exam or fail the class, depending on the severity of the infraction. If you violate these rules on more than one assignment/exam, you will fail the class. Students who are unsure about their use of citations, or are in need of general writing assistance, are encouraged to visit the Center for Writing and Research. You are responsible for understanding all forms of plagiarism; unintentional plagiarism is no excuse. Regarding all papers, the ideas and the writing must be your own. Regarding all quizzes and exams, I encourage you to study together, but the answers on the tests must be your own and provided without assistance.

Course Expectations: This is an intensive, discussion-based seminar. This requires you to be an active participant in all aspects of the class, be proactive to ask questions when you do not understand, and work efficiently to keep up with the demands of this course. You are expected to read all assigned material prior to its discussion in class, attend every class meeting, and participate in class discussions. The amount and range of reading is extensive, the required level of critical thinking is very high, and the nature of discussion is vigorous. The success of this course, and your own personal learning, is highly dependent on each student fully committing to the tasks of the course, completing and critically reflecting on the readings of the course, and taking serious the opportunity to reflect on, and critically analyze, your religious and spiritual beliefs and practices in a way that is humble, open, and respectful to others.

Technology: You must have a Hope College email account and check your email daily. You must be familiar with Moodle and Zoom.

Classroom and Email Etiquette: Comments and questions are welcome in class. Classroom discussion is an important part of this course. I already know what I think about these issues; I want to know what you think. Please share your ideas and opinions. Your feedback on the course is also welcome. Out of consideration for the other students, you are asked not to record lectures, to refrain from conversation during lecture, and to set cell phones (and other personal electronic devices) to silent. If you are persistently distracted or engaged in something else during class, I may ask you to leave (and you will be counted absent that day). Recordings that accommodate individual needs must be approved by me in advance and may be used for personal use during the semester only; redistribution is prohibited.

You are encouraged to contact me via e-mail, if you have a question that can be answered in one paragraph or less. Individual tutoring will not be provided over email. Be sure to include a meaningful subject line (including the course number and section number) and include your full name. Use standard spelling and grammar; text message language and abbreviations are not acceptable. If your question cannot be answered in one paragraph or less, please set up a time to talk during office hours. Please do not assume your e-mail has been received unless/until you receive a response.

Participation and Discussion (100 points): I expect that students will be actively engaged and participate in every class session, and I expect that they will demonstrate sufficient mastery over the concepts and material through discussion in class, and communicate their ideas with respect and humility. One of the primary goals of this course is to help you develop the skills to critically analyze religion, reason about this view cogently, and express it humbly. Accordingly, you are expected to treat other students and their views with respect and open-mindedness. Because of the interactive nature of this class, your grade will suffer if you do not attend each class, and students are responsible for all material covered and assignments due during the class they miss. Attendance is worth 50% and participation is worth 50% of this category. Merely showing up without contributing will earn you a 50% (F) in this category.

Critical Reaction Papers (50 points): Students are expected to read the weekly readings and prepare for class in advance. In order to facilitate a thoughtful discussion in class, students must complete five 2-page, single-spaced, typewritten reaction papers discussing a set of assigned readings and **upload it to Moodle by 8am on the day it is due.** There will be one reaction paper due for each unit of reading. The reaction paper must: (a) identify three readings from that unit, (b) briefly summarize each of the readings, (c) critically reflect on the readings by assessing the logic of the arguments/findings, (d) connect the readings to other concepts discussed in this class and other courses, and (e) must include at least one discussion question to be brought up during that week's class session. You must go beyond simply whether you "liked" or "disliked" the reading; you should not be shallow in your analysis. Rather, your reaction to these readings needs to be thoughtful, engaged, and well-written, demonstrating a high level of understanding and critical thinking—moreover, you must write *concisely*. You must critically engage the material in ways that demonstrate connections to other themes in class or current culture. Late reaction papers are not accepted. Each paper will be graded using the following scale:

- 10 = thoughtful, extensive analysis, cogently argued, connected to several concepts, excellently written
- 8 = solid analysis, well-argued, connected to another concept, well-written
- 6 = good analysis, minor errors in arguments, tenuous connections, a few minor writing errors
- 4 = average analysis, some flaws in arguments, lacking solid connections, writing errors, or missing articles
- 2 = poor analysis, missing the main point of the readings, or having substantial flaws in the argument
- 0 = late or missing

Book Analysis (50 points): In addition to the weekly readings, students will read a book on psychological science and Christian faith (Jeeves & Ludwig, 2018) and provide a written book analysis. For this book analysis, students should (a) provide a broad summary of the book that explains the main themes of the book, (b) make detailed connections to specific concepts and themes covered in the course, (c) explicates their view of psychological science and religious faith, and (d) discuss how the book is relevant to current culture and topics in our society. The quality of the writing is more important than the quantity of the pages; I am more interested that you did a thorough and thoughtful job engaging with the material and making connections to the course material. However, it is likely that this book review will likely be an average of **4-6 pages**. This paper should be uploaded to Moodle before 11AM on their due date. **Due via Moodle before 11AM on Friday, February 19.**

Reflection Journal (50 points): This class discusses religion, a near-universal human experience across cultures that has existential ramifications and is often deeply personal. I want this class to be personally meaningful to you. I anticipate that you will be exposed to perspectives that will challenge what you think about religion, your own beliefs, or how you view the world. Toward that end, you will be expected to keep a weekly journal of your thoughts and reflections generated from the readings and class discussion. These are held strictly confidential, and they offer a place where you can process your experiences from the class. Each week, you should write ~ 1/2 page (single-spaced) of reflections from that week's classes, specifically detailing: (a) what resonated with you, (b) what challenged you, (c) how did you feel, and (d) what lingering questions remain? You will turn in the first half of your journal entries **via Moodle before 11AM on Friday, March 19** and your full set of journal entries **via Moodle before 11AM on Friday May 7.**

Research Paper (100 total points): Students will summarize what we have covered in this course and propose a research project for further empirical investigation of religion from a psychological perspective. Toward that end, students will write a research proposal and present this proposal to class. First, students will identify a theory from which they are working and submit a 1-page pre-proposal. Once this proposal is approved, students will write a **7-10 page** research proposal that includes: (a) A thorough summary of the relevant research from this theoretical perspective, including 6-10 citations; (b) a clear description of the psychological phenomenon you wish to investigate, including your hypothesis; (c) a detailed proposal of a study methodology to test your hypothesis; (d) your expected results, and (e) the implications of this study if your expected results are found.

Your 1-page pre-proposal (10 points) is due **via Moodle by 11AM on Friday, April 9**

Your proposal (90 points) is due **via Moodle by 5PM on Monday, May 10**

Exams (400 points total): There will be four exams encompassing content covered in class and in the text. Exam dates are not flexible—you should plan to take the exam on the dates provided in this syllabus. However, if you know that you are going to miss the class because of an academic or college athletics-related reason, you must notify me at least one week prior to the test day so that alternative arrangements may be made (e.g., taking the test before you are absent). If there is a true emergency and you cannot provide advance notification of an absence, you should notify me as soon as

possible to make alternative arrangements to complete the exam. Make-up exams may be in any format, which may differ from the format given in class on exam day (e.g., essay, short answer, multiple-choice). As reminder, the only testing accommodations (e.g., more time, different location) I provide for exams must come through Academic Support Services.

Course-related papers will be kept for 31 days after grades are posted, after which time they will be destroyed.

Grading Criteria: The standard grading criteria will be used for this course:

Course Activity	Possible Points	Grading Scale
Participation and Discussion	100	A 94%-100% 705 points
Critical Reaction Papers (5 x 10)	50	A- 90-93% 675 points
Book Analysis	50	B+ 87-89% 653 points
Reflection Journal	50	B 83-86% 623 points
Research Pre-Proposal	10	B- 80-82% 600 points
Research Proposal	90	C+ 77-79% 578 points
Exam 1	100	C 73-76% 548 points
Exam 2	100	C- 70-72% 525 points
Exam 3	100	D+ 67-69% 503 points
Exam 4	100	D 63-66% 473 points
		D- 60-62% 450 points
		F below 60% <450 points
Total	750 points	

Tentative Course Schedule

Date	Class Topics	Reading Due	RP Due
UNIT 1: Theoretical Foundations			
Jan 25 – M	Introduction to the class, syllabus review		
Jan 27 – W	What is religion? Definitional Issues	Hood Ch 1	
Jan 29 – F	How do people study the psychology of religion? Research Methods (part 1)	Hood Ch 2	
Feb 1 – M	How do people study the psychology of religion? Research Methods (part 2)		#1
Feb 3 – W	Theoretical Approaches to Religion (part 1): Social and Existential	Reading 1	
Feb 5 – F	Theoretical Approaches to Religion (part 2): Cognitive, Coping, and Meaning	Reading 2	
Feb 8 – M	Theoretical Approaches to Religion (part 3): Compensatory Control	Reading 3	
Feb 10 – W	Reading Day (Dr. VT organizes SPSP religion preconference)		
Feb 12 – F	What is God? God concepts and the LAMBI approach	Reading 4	
Feb 15 – M	Exam #1		
UNIT 2: The Religious Experience			
Feb 17 – W	Religious Orientations (part 1): Intrinsic, Extrinsic, Quest, Fundamentalism	Reading 5	
Feb 19 – F	Religious Orientations (part 2): Security vs. Growth; Book Analysis Due	Reading 6	
Feb 22 – M	Religious Orientations (part 3): Atheists and nonreligious	Reading 7	
Feb 24 – W	Religious conversion, deconversion, and switching (part 1)	Hood Ch 8	#2
Feb 26 – F	Religious conversion, deconversion, and switching (part 2)	Reading 8	
Mar 1 – M	Religion and culture	Reading 9	
Mar 3 – W	Western religions (part 1): Christianity		
Mar 5 – F	Western religions (part 2): Judaism		
Mar 8 – M	Eastern religions (part 1): Buddhism		
Mar 10 – W	Eastern religions (part 2): Hinduism		
Mar 12 – F	Exam #2		
UNIT 3: Functions of Religion			
Mar 15 – M	Religion, cognition, and emotion	Reading 10	
Mar 17 – W	Religious and spiritual struggles and anger at God	Reading 11	
Mar 19 – F	Supernatural attributions; First half of journals due	Reading 12	
Mar 22 – M	Prayers and rituals	Hood Ch 11	#3
Mar 24 – W	Religion and coping with suffering	Reading 13	
Mar 26 – F	Religious meaning-making	Reading 14	
Mar 29 – M	Religious nationalism	Reading 15	
Mar 31 – W	Exam #3		
Apr 2 – F	Good Friday – NO CLASS		
UNIT 4: Religious Expressions			
Apr 5 – M	Easter Monday – NO CLASS		
Apr 7 – W	Religion and health	Reading 26	
Apr 9 – F	Religion and prejudice; Research Pre-Proposal due	Hood Ch 12	
Apr 12 – M	Religion and aggression	Reading 17	
Apr 14 – W	Religion and virtue (part 1): forgiveness and humility	Reading 18	#4
Apr 16 – F	Religion and virtue (part 2): positive psychology and morality	Reading 19	
Apr 19 – M	Religion and attachment	Reading 20	
Apr 21 – W	Religious extremism and cults	Chapter 9	
Apr 23 – F	Exam #4		
UNIT 5: Critical Issues			
Apr 26 – M	Religion and gender	Hood Ch 6	
Apr 28 – W	BREAK DAY – NO CLASS		
Apr 30 – F	Religion, sex, and the body		
May 3 – M	Religion and therapy	Hood Ch 13	#5
May 5 – W	Free will		
May 7 – F	Wrap-Up; Journals due		
May 10 – M	Research Proposal Due via Moodle by 5PM		

Note: This is an intended guide for the semester. We may get ahead or behind, but exam dates are firm and will not change.

Reading List:

1	Batson, C. D., & Stocks, E. L. (2004). Religion: Its core psychological functions. In <i>Handbook of experimental existential psychology</i> , edited by J. Greenberg, S. Koole, and T. Pyszczynski (pp. 141–55). New York: Guilford Press.
2	McIntosh, D. N. (1995). Religion as schema, with implications for the relation between religion and coping. <i>The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion</i> , 5, 1-16.
3	Kay, A. C., Gaucher, D., McGregor, I., & Nash, K. (2010). Religious belief as compensatory control. <i>Personality and Social Psychology Review</i> , 14, 37-48.
4	Johnson, K. A., Okun, M. A., Cohen, A. B., Sharp, C. A., & Hook, J. N. (2019). Development and validation of the five-factor LAMBI measure of God representations. <i>Psychology of Religion and Spirituality</i> , 11, 339–349.
5	Altemeyer, B., & Hunsberger, B. (1992). Authoritarianism, religious fundamentalism, quest, and prejudice. <i>The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion</i> , 2, 113-133.
6	Van Tongeren, D. R., Davis, D. E., Hook, J. N., & Johnson, K. A. (2016). Security versus growth: Existential tradeoffs of various religious perspectives. <i>Psychology of Religion and Spirituality</i> , 8, 77-88.
7	Gervais, W. M., Shariff, A. F., & Norenzayan, A. (2011). Do you believe in atheists? Distrust is central to anti-atheist prejudice. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i> , 101, 1189–1206.
8	Van Tongeren, D. R., DeWall, C. N., Chen, Z., Sibley, C. G., & Bulbulia, J. (in press). Religious residue: Cross-cultural evidence that religious psychology and behavior persist following deidentification. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i> .
9	Roberts, S. O., Weisman, K., Lane, J. D., Williams, A., Camp, N. P., Wang, M., Robison, M., Sanchez, K., & Griffiths, C. (2020). God as a White man: A psychological barrier to conceptualizing Black people and women as leadership worthy. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i> , 119(6), 1290–1315.
10	Van Cappellen, P., Saroglou, V., & Toth-Gauthier, M. (2016). Religiosity and prosocial behavior among churchgoers: Exploring underlying mechanisms. <i>International Journal for the Psychology of Religion</i> , 26, 19–30.
11	Exline, J. J., Pargament, K. I., Grubbs, J. B., & Yali, A. M. (2014). The religious and spiritual struggles scale: Development and initial validation. <i>Psychology of Religion and Spirituality</i> , 6, 208–222.
12	Barrett, J. L. (2000). Exploring the natural foundations of religion. <i>Trends in cognitive sciences</i> , 4, 29-34.
13	Hall, M. E. L., Shannonhouse, L., Aten, J., McMartin, J., & Silverman, E. J. (2018). Religion-specific resources for meaning-making from suffering: defining the territory. <i>Mental Health, Religion & Culture</i> , 21, 77-92.
14	Park, C. L. (2005). Religion as a meaning-making framework in coping with life stress. <i>Journal of Social Issues</i> , 61, 707-729.
15	Johnson, M. K., Rowatt, W. C., & LaBouff, J. (2010). Priming Christian religious concepts increases racial prejudice. <i>Social Psychological and Personality Science</i> , 1, 119-126.
16	Ellison, C. G., & Levin, J. S. (1998). The religion-health connection: Evidence, theory, and future directions. <i>Health Education & Behavior</i> , 25, 700-720.
17	Pyszczynski, T., Rothschild, Z., & Abdollahi, A. (2008). Terrorism, violence, and hope for peace: A terror management perspective. <i>Current Directions in Psychological Science</i> , 17, 318-322.
18	Davis, D. E., Worthington Jr, E. L., Hook, J. N., & Hill, P. C. (2013). Research on religion/spirituality and forgiveness: A meta-analytic review. <i>Psychology of Religion and Spirituality</i> , 5, 233.
19	McKay, R., & Whitehouse, H. (2015). Religion and morality. <i>Psychological bulletin</i> , 141, 447.
20	Rowatt, W., & Kirkpatrick, L. A. (2002). Two dimensions of attachment to God and their relation to affect, religiosity, and personality constructs. <i>Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion</i> , 41, 637-651.