

This syllabus is for a psychology of religion class directed toward Juniors and Seniors. Typically about ½ of the students in the class are religion majors; the remaining students are from majors in the humanities and social sciences. The course emphasizes psychoanalytic theory; I prefer to engage students deeply in an express instance of the psychology of religion rather than in a “survey” of varied approaches to the psychology of religion.

So also does the course feature two books not written for undergraduates (see my statement on teaching for rationale). I assist students in grasping the ideas in these books by preparing worksheets that guide their reading. Students are assigned to small groups for the semester and each group is assigned a portion of the worksheet questions to report on to the class. Their reports enable students to put into their own words portions of the reading and to come to class prepared to offer classroom leadership in discussion of their assigned questions. In turn, their presentations of worksheet answers enable me to gauge reading comprehension levels. I work course discussion and supplementary lectures (as needed to clarify confusion and misunderstanding) in around group reporting of homework answers. To see a sample worksheet, please visit the course website:

<http://www.uni.edu/reineke/new.htm>

**COURSE:** Why We Believe

**DATE:** Fall, 2011

**COURSE #:** RELS 4130

**INSTRUCTOR:** Dr. Martie Reineke

**TIME:** T/H 9:30 a.m..

**PHONE:** 273-6233 or 6221

**OFFICE HOURS:** 11-noon T/H, 3:30-4:00p.m. T

Other hours by appt.

**OFFICE:** Baker 151

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**WEB SITE:** <http://www.uni.edu/reineke>

## **BOOKS:**

### **Books available from University Book and Supply:**

Beal, Timothy. *Religion and its Monsters*, New York: Routledge, 2002.

Kearney, Richard. *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, New York: Routledge, 2003.

Rizzuto, Ana-Maria. *The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*.

### **Essay on library reserve:**

Chapter 8 from *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views* by David Wulff. New York: Wiley and Sons, 1997, pp. 317-368, excluding 331-336 and 348-361.

### Essay packet from U. Book and Supply:

- 1) Meissner, W. W. "Toward a Psychology of Religious Experience;" in *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience* by W. W. Meissner, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, pp. 3-19.
- 2) Wulff, David M. "Chapter 7: The Perspective of Sigmund Freud" in *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997, pp. 258-319.
- 3) Kinsley, David R. "Kali," in *Encountering Kali: in the Margins, at the Center, in the West*, Eds. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal, Berkeley, U. of California Press, 2003, pp. 23-38.
- 4) Jonte-Pace, Diane. "At Home in the Uncanny: Freudian Representations of Death, Mothers, and the Afterlife," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LXIV/1, Spring, 1996, pp. 61-88.
- 5) Johnson, Barbara, "My Monster/My Self" in *Diacritics*, Vol. 12, pp. 2-10, 1982. Available electronically at JSTOR.
- 6) Rubenstein, Marc A. "My Accursed Origin:" The Search for the Mother in Frankenstein," in *Studies in Romanticism* 15/2, Spring, 1976, pp.165-194.

### COURSE PHILOSOPHY:

In this course, students are encouraged to place critical thinking skills at the center of their course goals. When we place a priority on critical thinking, we do not mean that we want to become experts at "finding fault" with persons or ideas. In the context of a university, when we try to think critically, we mean that we make an effort to "illuminate a previously hidden topic or experience by means of careful judgment and evaluation." For example, as you begin the course, you may have very little awareness of how psychologists and psychoanalytic theorists think about the origins of the capacity for religious belief. You may not know that they often link that capacity with the development of human creativity. By the end of the course, major themes and issues in the psychology of religion will have been illuminated: what was previously in the shadows will stand forth brightly in your thoughts and you will be able to offer thoughtful analyses and comments about how psychologists understand the origins of the human capacity for religious belief and the creative imagination. As we work on our critical thinking, we will express a commitment to the pedagogical values listed below:

- Critical thinking is a learnable skill. A professor and her or his students collaborate as resources for each other in learning this skill. We are all learners.
- Problems, questions, and issues serve as the source of motivation for learners in this class.
- The goals, methods, and evaluative components of this course emphasize using content rather than simply acquiring it.
- Learning is strengthened when students formulate and justify their ideas in writing and through oral communication.
- Learning is strengthened when students exercise sophisticated skills in observing the environment around them.
- Learning is strengthened when students exchange information and resources with each other rather than work in isolation from each other or sit passively listening to the professor talk.

Students who wish to learn more about my philosophy of teaching may wish to look at my statement on this subject under "Teaching and Learning" on my web site. Comments there

explain how students across the spectrum of higher education—from first year to graduate students—can experience success in this course. I explain also why I select challenging texts for my courses. Students are invited on the web site to associate risk taking with positive learning experiences.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

Students in this course will:

- Develop intellectual skills of reading, comprehending, analyzing, and evaluating representative texts and major themes associated with the psychology of religion, especially psychoanalytic theory. As we read representative texts and listen to leading scholars in the field, you will want to consider the content of each author and speaker's reflections. What is being said? Do various points fit together? What is still unclear about what the author or speaker has said? Jot down your questions as you read the texts and listen to a speaker. Be prepared to share them in the next class period.
- Explore a variety of learning processes that contribute to the development of the described intellectual skills and gain facility in using these processes. These will include:
  - engaging in effective oral and written communication
  - preparing descriptive and reflective accounts
  - problem-solving
  - implementing and sustaining critical analyses: what are the strengths and weaknesses of each author or speaker's argument? To what do you react positively? Why? To what do you react negatively? Why? What elements of their argument are insightful? What elements are problematic?
- Enhance your understanding of how scholars who engage in the psychoanalytic study of religion think. Throughout the semester you will be introduced to "tools" of analysis of central importance to them. You will grow in awareness of these tools and take preliminary steps toward using these tools in your own reflections.

### **COURSE THEME: The Psychoanalytic study of Religion**

*We cannot understand fully what compels human beings to seek after that which they name 'God' until and unless we understand something about our relationship to our teddy bears. - John McDargh*

In this course, we will explore from a psychoanalytic perspective the emergence of the capacity for religious belief in children. In particular, we will study the writings of three groups of psychoanalytic theorists: scholars who closely follow Freud, "object relations theorists" who comprise the British school of psychoanalysis, and "Lacanian" who comprise the French school of psychoanalysis. Defining "religious belief" as "meaning-making oriented toward ultimacy," with these three groups of theorists, we will trace its origins to very early childhood.

Reading writings by object relations theorists, we will explore the emergence of religious belief in children. Where do these theorists locate the origins of religious belief? Winnicott and others trace the impulse for ultimacy to the child's transitional object, a favorite toy or blanket from which the child is inseparable. *Ernest and Celestine* (by Gabrielle Vincent, William Morrow &

Company, 1982), tells the story of a child's love for just such an object. Celestine, a child-mouse, has a favorite toy, a stuffed bird she has named Gideon. Celestine takes Gideon everywhere with her. When she loses him while out for a walk, she is devastated. You may recall your transitional object from your own childhood!

Based on their examination of the role of the transitional object in the life of the child, object relations theorists assert that, in growing up and taking a place in the world as children, infants are not so much driven by the question of "what is there?" as by the question "who is there for me?" As a consequence, object relations theorists associate the emergence of religious belief, the birth of God, as it were, with the transitional object. By means of this object the child frames its initial response to the question, "who is there for me?" When the child places her or his trust fully in the "always thereness" of the favorite toy, the child is experiencing in a preliminary way what for adults will become the experience of God. When a child loses a favorite toy, the child's grief is analogous to that of the adult who, experiencing the "deep night of the soul," considers whether God is dead.

After exploring the route the child takes from the undifferentiated matrix of infancy to individuation in the world and focusing on ways in which that route is marked by exercises in meaning-making oriented toward ultimacy--transitional objects--we will follow the child as she/he develops and matures. We will observe that the impulse for ultimacy is linked with the emergence of a mythic imagination. Rizzuto, one of the major figures in our study, will be our inspiration for a closer study of the mythic imagination. In her book, *The Birth of the Living God*, Rizzuto observes that young children's lives are filled with a "colorful cast of characters:" monsters, devils, heroes, superheroes, witches, gnomes, fairies, and many others. "God" arrives in children's lives together with this colorful crowd (pp. 192-94). For her part, Rizzuto focuses on the development of the God concept. She argues that because parents treat "God" differently than the gnomes, fairies, and monsters who children observe surrounding God on a common stage, children learn to discriminate between "God," who holds favor with their parents, and these other characters, who do not. Because children eventually elevate God to a special place in their lives, Rizzuto follows their lead in her research, focusing on "God" in children's and adult lives. While appreciating Rizzuto's significant contribution to our knowledge of the development of belief in God among children, in this course, we will continue to hang out with that colorful crowd who Rizzuto leaves behind.

As a consequence, in the second half of the course, we will address the question of witches, monsters, violence and evil in the adult world. Do children really leave superheroes, witches, and monsters behind as they develop their capacity for religious belief? Does the work that these characters do—confronting evil, creating evil, working violence, bringing chaos into our lives—truly fall outside the sphere of children's ultimate concern as "God" takes center stage? What evidence may we find that the stage of the imagination remains rather more crowded and "messy" for growing children and even for adults than Rizzuto has allowed?

As we explore these questions, central to our inquiry will be *symbols*, which attest to the human capacity to create meaningful space oriented toward community. Symbol-making follows infant play with transitional objects that are first exercises in world-forming and relationship-making activities. Beliefs in monsters and witches, symbolically articulated in sacred scriptures, fairy tales, ritual practices, and popular culture, extend into the world of language work that the transitional object previously has performed. "Enchantment" (Bettelheim) describes the process by which children who engage the characters of fairy tales and their ilk are able to "compose an ultimate environment and orient themselves toward the being or beings that constitute their

character." Within this environment are patterns of meaning that, augmented and transformed by adults within communities of faith, are typically associated with religious belief and ritual practice.

In order to explore these questions, we will read a book by Timothy Beal on religion and monsters. We will take particular note of two topics that engage Beal. First, we will look at Kali, the monster goddess of Hinduism. Second, we will look at Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, in which are reflected the mythic dreams and fears of modern culture. Several subthemes will characterize our explorations. We will attend systematically to the role of sexual difference in the child's quest for ultimacy. We also will address the pervasiveness of violence in work undertaken by the mythic imagination.

We will conclude the course by reading philosopher Richard Kearney's book on how human identity is shaped by three powerful forces: the figure of the stranger, the image of the monster, and the concept of God. Kearney's work focuses not so much on the individual (Rizzuto) or on cultural myths (Beal) but on our cultural unconscious: our collective efforts to confront and interpret death, deity, sublimity, trauma, and terror. Written in the shadow of 9/11, Kearney's reflections raise the stakes for our reflections together on the origins of the human capacity for religious belief.

Throughout the semester, the essays and books we read will enable us to uncover a vibrant matrix of meaning-making in play, fantasy, and creativity out of which the human orientation toward religious belief emerges. Our overriding goal as students of psychoanalysis will be to illuminate more of the landscape of the religious imagination than has Rizzuto in order to understand better by the end of the semester than we do at the beginning how the religious universe of adults remains haunted by the creatures who filled our dreams and nightmares as children, shaping who we were then and who we are now as religious and cultural beings.

### **EVALUATION AND CLASS PROCEDURES:**

The study of religion works best when it is pursued as a communal, conversational effort. Class discussions will comprise a major part of this course and evaluations will reflect this focus. Units of the course are as follows:

1. Homework and informal study questions (3-8 points each): If not already listed on the syllabus, these projects will be assigned in class. Some will be completed in class.
2. Take-home essay exams (35-50 points each): On the essay exams, students will have some choices for framing and organizing reflective and critical essays on the assigned readings. See my guide to Critical Writing Skills on my web site or more information about exam format.

**NOTE:** You will find it helpful to be extremely organized in collecting and maintaining a file of assignments in this course. Plan to have a loose-leaf notebook, with pockets. Save all handouts, written assignments, and class notes. You may find that you want to use them later in the semester.

## OTHER POLICIES:

**Late work:** You are urged to remain current with assignments. If you have not completed a **daily homework assignment** or class project on the day I request that you submit it to me, you will be ineligible for points on that assignment. Students often have very good reasons for missing class (e.g., illness, car accidents, etc.). **Even so, late submissions will not be accepted for points because they are associated with group work in class.** Homework points are awarded not so much for the written material that a student brings to class as for the contributions the student is able to make in class because she/he has the written work on which to draw in discussion. If a student's very good reason for missing class leads her or him to miss more than two consecutive class sessions, the student should consult with me about compensating for the loss of worksheet points. I will work with the student to develop alternative opportunities for points so that his/her grade is not unduly impacted.

**Late essay exams:** exams may be accepted late; however, specific rules for late submissions will be issued with each exam and must be followed closely.

**Course Technology:** This course relies heavily on access to computers, specific software, and the Internet. At some point during the semester you WILL have a problem with technology: your laptop will crash, a file will become corrupted, a server will go down, or something else will occur. These are facts of life, not emergencies. Technology problems will not normally be accepted as excuses for unfinished work. Count on 'stuff' happening and protect yourself by doing the following:

- Plan ahead – start early, particularly if scarce resources are required
- Save work often – at least every ten minutes
- Make regular backups of files in a different location from the originals. ALWAYS backup your essay exams and keep a backup copy until you see that a grade has been entered for the course at the end of the semester
- Save drafts of work at multiple stages
- On your personal computer, install and use software to control viruses and malware.

**E-mail Accounts:** It is **required** that you obtain and use your university e-mail account for this class. I will use e-mail to communicate with you periodically about changes to the syllabus, assignments, etc. As a general rule, you should check your e-mail DAILY for class announcements that may be sent to you from any of your professors.

**E-mail submissions:** Course work may be submitted by e-mail only with prior permission of the professor. A paper copy MUST always follow an e-mail submission for which you have received prior permission.

## RECOMMENDATIONS ON ATTENDANCE:

In my years of teaching, students in my courses for the major have had virtually perfect attendance. Why do students regularly make this commitment to daily attendance?

First, students in the class experience disappointment when others in the class are missing. As the semester progresses, each of you find the presence of all the others an aspect of the course

experience that means a lot to you. Because we do small group work almost daily, the absence of a person from a group is really noticed. Because students value others' presence, you come to feel that you would be letting down your classmates were you to miss class.

Second, students realize that your degree of understanding plummets when you miss class. The working assumption in the class, for students and for the professor, is that when you enter class on a given day, the reading assignment will be fairly much a mystery to you. You will have only a glimmer of what you think the text is saying. By the end of a class session, everyone will have moved forward in your understanding to the point where you have a basic sense of what is being argued in a text. Because what we do in class does make a difference in your understanding, you make a commitment to daily class attendance.

Finally, there is a third, pragmatic reason for coming regularly to class. Because I accept homework only on the day it is due, and not later, if you don't keep up with the homework assignments, your grade is substantially impacted. For example, a person who has missed a significant number of the 3-point homework assignments but gets A's on all the exams will still get a B or C in the course.

Why are the homework points so important? More than the exams, a course is the learning community we create in conversation with each other. In my experience, our conversations are stronger when we go into them with a piece of written reflection in our hands. Because I think your written work gives such a wonderful focus for our conversations with each other (secondarily if helps me check in with you individually to confirm your progress in understanding), the written homework assignments are a key feature of the course.

A note on cell phone addictions: Your professor believes that her students have not ponied up their tuition dollars to watch their professor check her e-mail, surf the internet, and answer text messages during class; therefore, your professor summons her self-control and does not do these things while class is in session. Students in previous semesters have reported that they find their classmates' e-mailing, surfing, and texting during class to be annoying and distracting. Please respect your classmates' desire to get the most bang for their tuition bucks and don't distract them by doing such things as checking your e-mail, surfing, or texting during class. Phones should be off and out of view throughout the class hour.

### **CHEATING:**

Any documented instance of cheating will be reported to the Office of Academic Affairs and will result in a grade of "F" for the course. In this course, UNI's Academic Ethics Policies are strictly enforced. These Policies are posted in the current University Catalog of Programs and Courses. Students are responsible for knowing these policies. Students will submit all essay exams to Turnitin.

### **THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990 (ADA)**

The ADA provides protection from illegal discrimination for qualified individuals with disabilities. Students requesting instructional accommodations due to disabilities will want to arrange for such accommodation through the Office of Disability Services. The ODS is located in 213 Student Services Center (273-2676). Assistive Testing Services are provided to enrolled students approved by the University of Northern Iowa Office of Disabilities Services for accommodations. Alternative testing formats, as well as auxiliary aids such as readers, scribes, or assistive

technology, are available. Tests are to be scheduled in advance with the Department of Academic Services -- Examination Services office. The test service is provided for University course tests and final examinations (not quizzes) to students enrolled in classes that are unable to provide the approved accommodations (i.e. extended time, large print options, reader/recorder, or computer testing). Course testing accommodations are based on disability documentation as determined by the University of Northern Iowa Disabilities Services.

## CALENDAR:

8-23	Introduction to the Course; Draw a picture of God
8-25	Video on Freud; complete Rizzuto questionnaire
8-30	Essay packet: Meissner, "Toward a Psychology of Religious Experience;"
9-1	Essay packet: Chapter 7 on Freud from <i>Psychology of Religion</i>
9-6	Chapter 7 continued
9-8	Library reserve: Chapter 8 on object relations theory from <i>Psychology of Religion</i> (We will be skipping 331-336 and 348-361)
9-13	Chapter 8 continued
9-15	Rizzuto, 3-11, 41-53
9-20	Rizzuto, 75-84, Ch. 5 (no written homework for Ch. 5)
9-22	Rizzuto, Ch. 6, 7
9-27	Rizzuto, Ch. 8 and 9
9-29	Rizzuto, Ch. 10. Exam assigned.
10-4	Exam due. Complete video on Freud.
10-6	Beal, 1-55 (Refer to Bible texts as you read and bring a Bible to class. If you don't own a Bible, borrow one from a friend or check one out from the library.)
10-11	Beal, 71-85, 103-117
10-13	Essay Packet: "Kali" by David R. Kinsley; Video: "Ball of Fire: The Angry Goddess"
10-18	Beal, 123-40; 173-96
10-20	<i>Frankenstein</i> by Shelley. Quiz.
10-25	<i>Frankenstein</i> by Shelley Quiz.
10-27	Essay packet: Jonte-Pace: "At Home in the Uncanny: Freudian Representations of Death, Mothers, and the Afterlife."
11-1	Essay packet: "My Monster, My Self" by Johnson; Rubenstein, "My Accursed Origin:" The Search for the Mother in Frankenstein." Exam assigned.
11-3	Alien 3
11-8	Exam due. Complete Alien 3
11-10	Kearney, 3-19; 26-42
11-15	Kearney 49-52; 61-62; 65-82
11-17	Kearney 11-122
11-29	Kearney, 123-137
12-1	Kearney, 163-178
12-6	Kearney, 179-190; 213-220
12-8	Kearney, 221-232 Exam assigned.
	Without regard for your course, students may attend any consultation in Lang 20: 9-9:50 a.m. Tuesday, December 13 5-6 p.m. Tuesday, December 13 9-9:50 a.m. Wednesday, December 14 Final essay due under my door (Baker 151) by 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, December 14.

**COURSE:** Why We Believe  
**COURSE #:** 640: 158g  
**PHONE:** 273-6233 or 6221

**DATE:** Fall, 2009  
**INSTRUCTOR:** Dr. Martie Reineke

**OFFICE:** Baker 151  
**E-MAIL:** [martha.reineke@uni.edu](mailto:martha.reineke@uni.edu)

**MAILBOX:** Baker 135

**Essay packet from U. Book and Supply:**

1. Meissner, W. W. "Toward a Psychology of Religious Experience;" in *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience* by W. W. Meissner, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, pp. 3-19.
2. Wulff, David M. "Chapter 7: The Perspective of Sigmund Freud" in *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997, pp. 258-319.
3. Kinsley, David R. "Kali," in *Encountering Kali: in the Margins, at the Center, in the West*, Eds. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal, Berkeley, U. of California Press, 2003, pp. 23-38.
4. Jonte-Pace, Diane. "At Home in the Uncanny: Freudian Representations of Death, Mothers, and the Afterlife," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LXIV/1, Spring, 1996, pp. 61-88.
5. Johnson, Barbara, "My Monster/My Self" in *Diacritics*, Vol. 12, pp. 2-10, 1982.
6. Rubenstein, Marc A. "My Accursed Origin:" The Search for the Mother in Frankenstein," in *Studies in Romanticism* 15/2, Spring, 1976, pp.165-194.