



FRAMING THE DEBATE

This week

- Intersectionality (from last week's slides)
- What is religion, and how do we study it?
- Terms of debate:
 - *Culture or religion?*
 - *Cultural relativism or universalism?*
 - *Tradition or interpretation?*

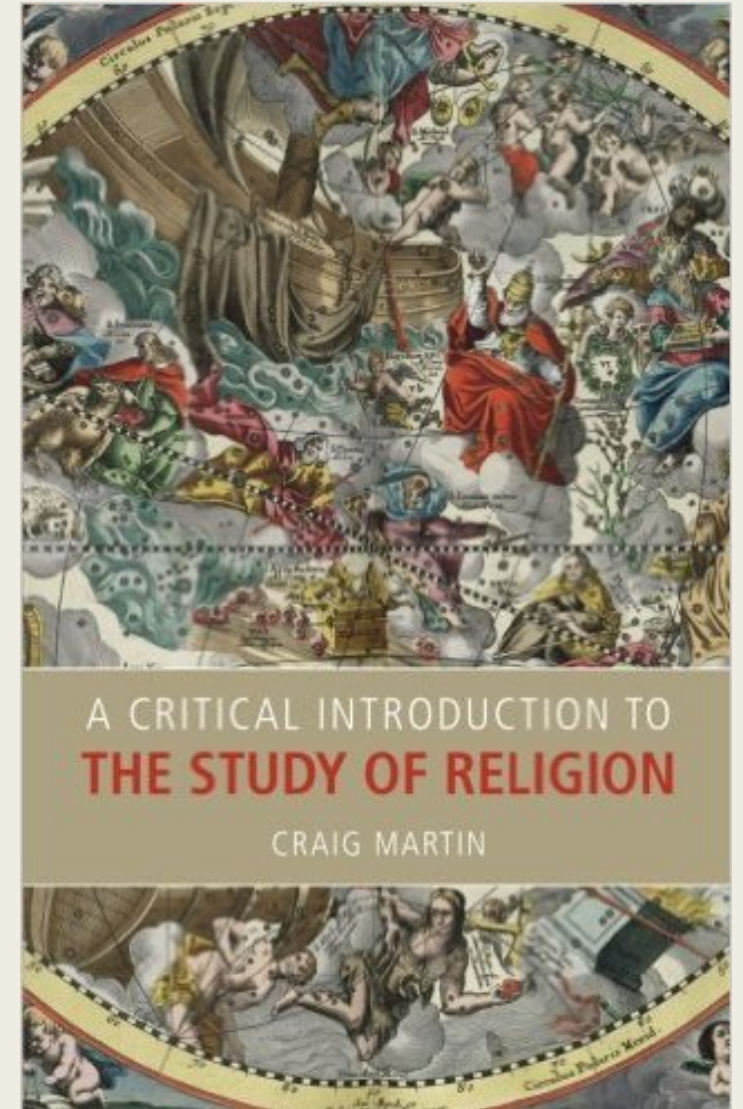
What is religion?

- A system of beliefs and practices organized and observed by a community.
- Usually involves rituals and traditions that acknowledge, communicate with, or approach the sacred, divine, or ultimate truth/reality.
- Upholding a moral code of belief and behaviour
- Often associated with faith – in a divine being, set of principles, or truths.
- Religions may hold as sacred a set of scriptures or teachings.



Why is “religion” so hard to define?

- There are no features that are *uniquely common* to all the traditions we typically call religions.
- We cannot always distinguish “religion” from other cultural traditions.
- We cannot make generalizations about those traditions we identify as “religion”.
- Avoid saying “All religions are...” – because they probably aren’t.



Avoiding generalizations

Diversity within religions – avoid statements such as ‘Muslims are...’ (they probably aren’t) or ‘Judaism is...’ (it possibly isn’t)

- *Most members of religious groups do not share an exact-same, fixed belief system.*
- *Religious practitioners will usually have beliefs and will practice behaviours that contradict the ‘official’ beliefs of their stated faith.*
- *Most religious practitioners are influenced by other things apart from their faith (cultural, social, political, etc.)*



Hermeneutic of suspicion

- Hermeneutic = method of interpretation.
- Hermeneutic of suspicion – approaching the object of study with scepticism, rather than accepting everything at face value – I.e. don't believe everything you hear.
- Methodological atheism – taking an “outsider” [etic] view, rather than “insider” [emic]. What ideologies and beliefs do we bring to class?
- We are interested in the *cultural functions* and the *implications* of religious engagements with gender and sexuality.

Questions we will ask about a religious text, tradition, teaching, etc:

- Who is speaking? And who is silent?
- Who is being addressed? Who is absent from the audience?
- What is the context of the views being put forward?
- What interests are being protected/promoted?
- What rhetoric is being used? [I.e. how are the audience being persuaded?]
- What are the consequences – what function is being served?
- Who wins, and who loses? [or ‘who has the power in this relationship?']

Culture or religion?



Cultural, social, political and economic factors may also be involved.

Rescuing . . . or colonizing?



Cultural relativism...

... vs. universalism



Universal rights for women

‘When feminists appeal to notions of equality and liberty ... they do standardly get accused of Westernizing and of insufficient respect for their culture, as if there were no human suffering, no reasons for discontent, and no criticism until aliens invaded the peaceful landscape. We should ask whose interests are served by this nostalgic image of a happy harmonious culture, and whose resistance and misery are being effaced.’

Martha Nussbaum, ‘In Defence of Universal Values’, p. 4.

<http://philosophy.uchicago.edu/faculty/files/nussbaum/In%20Defense%20of%20Universal%20Values.pdf>



Peter Tatchell @PeterTatchell · Mar 9

Why so few western #feminist protests
against forced veiling, #FGM & 'honour'
killing in #Muslim countries?

#InternationalWomensDay ♀ #IWD2017 ♀





Richard Dawkins ✓
@RichardDawkins



Following

Islam needs a feminist revolution. It will be hard. What can we do to help?

RETWEETS

682

FAVORITES

1,109



1:31 AM - 23 Jul 2015



‘Concerns’ about gender/sexual inequalities often serve particular agendas.



msg @msgtiren · 23 Jul 2015
[@RichardDawkins](#) This is what Kurdish feminists do.



YPJ: The Kurdish feminists fighting Islamic State

All-female militia is protecting the Kurdish population from militants – as well as challenging gender roles

[theweek.co.uk](#)



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Ruwayda Mustafah @RuwaydaMustafah · 27 Jul 2015
[@RichardDawkins](#) Fund research on feminism and Islam, enabling critical discourse to take place, deconstructing patriarchy.



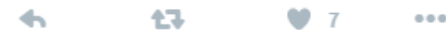
kaam jawaan ki mauth @naziasmirza · 24 Jul 2015
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Fredrik Andersson @enFredrikA · 24 Jul 2015
[@naziasmirza](#) [@DanielWickham93](#) [@RichardDawkins](#) Who is "we"? Are you the voice of all muslim women? And why don't you(singular) want help?



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kaam jawaan ki mauth @naziasmirza · 24 Jul 2015
[@fredrik77a](#) [@DanielWickham93](#) [@RichardDawkins](#) but despite not being a Muslim women you feel you understand us better then I do?



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Transgender Model To Caitlyn Jenner: 'We Do Not Need You To Save Us'

Isis King. Dayum, girl.



By James Michael Nichols

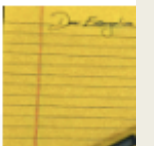


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TRENDING

Dear Evangelicals, I
Don't Think You Realize
How You Sound To
Everybody Else



Tradition or (mis)interpretation?

When we look at the social or cultural expression of religious faith and practice, are we studying the actual religion, or the *(mis)interpretation* of that religion?

What other factors also come into play in people's religious beliefs? Religious communities and their members do not exist in a vacuum. And, religion can serve as a 'prop' to validate *cultural* attitudes and discourses.

We need to remember there are many different interpretations of religious teachings and texts – in a sense, we can only speak in generalizations, and have to recognize this diversity.



Robert Jeffress on What Jesus Thinks About the Transgender Debate



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BY [STOYAN ZAIMOV](#) , CHRISTIAN POST REPORTER

May 16, 2016 | 12:07 PM

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What Does the Bible Say About Same Sex Marriage? Is it Sin?





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On Transgender Identity

Baltimore, MD - 2014

- Who is speaking? And who is silent?
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