OVERVIEW

At least since Nietzsche, we have been hearing reports of the death of God. How, then, is religious belief still possible? Under the conditions of postmodernity, religious questions and themes about God, the good life, suffering and evil, enlightenment, and what being “human” means have been reclaimed and given new expression. This is the subject of this course. Most authors who might be situated as religiously postmodern write out of the Jewish and Christian traditions, for the postmodern situation arose out of those traditions. But wouldn’t a consistent postmodern ethic be one that seriously engages “religious” perspectives outside the scope of these Abrahamic traditions? Affirming this, we’ll also read Buddhist thinkers who employed philosophical therapies that exposed the error of assigning permanence where it does not reside, as in one’s self. The problem of suffering associated with reified thinking—turning processes into “things”—will serve as one guiding theme throughout our class. Other topics include: God without being; ethics without metaphysical foundations; the secular as sacred; mysticism of “unsaying;” deconstruction and shunyata (emptiness) as shared ways of reading texts and seeing the self and world as both impermanent and interdependent; and, meditation and mindfulness practices as bridging this world and the theoretical. To help identify some roles that power and transformation play in postmodern religious thought, this class will collaborate and share some readings with Prof. Bradley Lewis’s “Foucault: Biopolitics and Cares of the Self.”

ASSESSMENTS

• Regular attendance and participation in class discussions 25%
  Three or more unexcused absences will result in a failing grade for the course. Please email requests for permission before the date of your absence. Participation means preparing the readings for discussion and bringing your books to class. Please note: your active participation in seminar discussions will have a significant impact on your final grade.

• “Insights and Blind Spots” 25%
  Five one page, single-spaced papers on a question or set of questions posed by me.
Seven will be assigned, so you may pass on two papers without penalty. As a critical component of this exercise, you’ll meet and discuss your papers at dedicated class sessions. **Late papers and electronic submissions will not be accepted.**

- **First Paper:** 5 - 7 pages in length. Please refer to guidelines.  
  Due: Thursday, March 8\(^{th}\) (Please place in my Gallatin mailbox by 3 pm.)  
  25%

- **Second Paper:** 7 - 10 pages in length. Due: last day of class.  
  25%

**IN-CLASS REQUIREMENTS**

Always bring your reading materials with you to class.
Laptops and all handheld electronic devices may not be used during class time.

Please take note of Gallatin’s policy on academic integrity:

_As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy._

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear And Trembling*  
Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*  
John Caputo, *Philosophy and Theology*  
Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*  
Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*  
John Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, *After the Death of God*  
Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*  
Thich Nhat Hahn, *Essential Writings*

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

Note: Readings marked with a bullet (•) will be posted to blackboard.

**Week 1 (1/26)**  
**What is Postmodernism? What constitutes Religion?**

• John Macquarrie, “Postmodernism in Philosophy of Religion and Theology”
• Jean-Francois Lyotard, “Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?” in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, 71-82

**Week 2 (2/2)**

**Søren Kierkegaard: Truth as Subjectivity and the Suspension of the Ethical**

Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Preface, Exordium, Eulogy on Abraham, Preliminary Expectoration, Problema I, Problema II, and Problema III)

• Jacques Derrida, “Whom to Give to (knowing Not to Know),” and “The Test of Secrecy: For the One as for the Other,” in *The Gift of Death*

**Week 3 (2/9)**

**Friedrich Nietzsche: Slave Morality, Ressentiment, and Bad Conscience**


• Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (selected aphorisms: 108, 125, 341)

**Week 4 (2/16)**

**Martin Heidegger and the God of Western Metaphysics**


• Richard Kearney, “Eschatology of the Possible God,” in *The Religious*
• Herbert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 1-40

**Week 5 (2/23)**

**A Conversation with Brad Lewis’s “Foucault: Biopolitics and Cares of the Self”**

John D. Caputo, *Philosophy and Theology*
**Week 6 (3/1)**

**Jacques Derrida: Deconstruction and The God Effect**


- Jacques Derrida, “‘My Religion’: Selections from Circumfession”
- John D. Caputo, “*God is Not Différance*”

**Week 7 (3/8)**

**Emmanuel Levinas: Time, the Infinite, and the Other**

Emmanuel Levinas, “Time and the Other,” “Ethics as First Philosophy,” “God and Philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader; Ethics and Infinity*, Selections

- Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” in *Writing and Difference*
- Luce Irigaray, “Questions to Emmanuel Levinas on the Divinity of Love,” in *Re-reading Levinas*, [recommended]
- Richard J. Bernstein, “Levinas: Evil and the Temptation of Theodicy,” in *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation* [recommended]

**First Paper Due: Thursday, March 8th**

March 10th – March 18th  
**SPRING BREAK**

**Week 8 (3/22)**

**Gianni Vattimo: Nihilism, Religion as Interpretation, and the Secular as Sacred**

Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*

John Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, *After the Death of God*

**Week 9 (3/29)**

**Gianni Vattimo and John Caputo: After the Death of God**

John Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, *After the Death of God*

- Vattimo, *After Christianity*, selections
Week 10 (4/5)
Jean-Luc Marion: God Without Being and The Gift of Love

Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*


Week 11 (4/12)
Jean-Luc Marion, continued

Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*


Week 12 (4/19) Buddhist “Postmodern” Religious Thought: Nagarjuna and Some Buddhist Replies to Nietzsche, Derrida, and Heidegger

• Nagarjuna, *Mulamadhyamikakarikas*, Selections
• Masao Abe, “Zen and Nietzsche: Philosophy and Deconstruction,” in *Zen and Western Thought*, 135-51

Week 13 (4/26)
A Conversation on the writings of Thich Nhat Hanh and Mindful Practice with Brad Lewis’s “Foucault: Biopolitics and Cares of the Self”

Thich Nhat Hanh, Essential Writings (entire). Please pay close attention to sections beginning on the following pages: 42, 67, 88, and Chapter 4, “The Path of Return”
• Thich Nhat Hanh, “Happiness: Essential Mindfulness Practices”

Week 14 (5/3)
Last Day of Class: Roundtable Discussion

Students will deliver a précis of their work.

Final Paper Due on Thursday, May 5th, 5 pm (Mailbox on 4th Floor, Gallatin)