This is a course about how to read a book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902) by William James* (1842-1910). How do you talk about religion after Darwin, when for many people science has replaced religion as the authoritative discourse, but most people everywhere adhere to some sort of religious belief? William James devised a new and original way to talk about religion, by ignoring the truth claims made by religion and focusing on the *experience* of the *individual*. Even if the origin of the experience is questionable, for the individual that experience is undeniably as real as any experience or perception that a non-religious person might have, leading James to use the tools of the new discipline of *psychology* to study individuals and their experiences … especially individuals who have left detailed *historical records* of intense religious experiences. Apart from reading *The Varieties of Religious Experience* chapter by chapter, we will also take off from his text to look at other writers who have further elucidated these important issues. William James invented a creative way of studying the history of religion, and his insights have a direct application to anyone living today.

The topics next to the Roman numerals below are the chapter titles of William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. As we will be reading the book together in class, you should have the book with you at all times. Copies will be available for purchase at the Brandeis University Bookstore. Many editions of the book exist, but make sure that you have the most common one, with the original pagination. The book you buy should have 626 pages (the last page of the index). As the book is out of copyright, you can also find it on the internet, for example at https://archive.org/details/texts

Most of the other readings will be available via a link appended or on LATTE.

Please find below the syllabus and bibliography. In addition to the sources listed below, you will be expected to have read the relevant chapter in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* before each class.

- **29 Aug / 3 Sept:** I. Religion and Neurology
  [i.e. neurosis = insanity … methodology = empirical method = experience = history = biography → psychology]
• William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology: And to Students on Some of Life’s Ideals* (New York, 1899), chapter 14 = https://archive.org/details/talkstoteachersso00jameiala


**SUPPLEMENTARY READING**


• Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), *Les Confessions* = published after his death in 2 parts, each consisting of 6 books: (1-6 written 1765-7 and published in 1782; 7-12 written 1769-70 and published in 1789)


• Edward Young (1681-1765), *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759)

### 5 Sept / 10 Sept: II. Circumscription of the Topic

[what is religion and what kind of religion will WJ discuss in these lectures?]


• Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82), ‘Divinity School Address’ (15 July 1838) at Harvard Divinity School = https://emersoncentral.com/texts/nature-addresses-lectures/addresses/divinity-school-address/

• Tina Turner, ‘What’s Love Got To Do With It?’, written by Terry Britten & Graham Lyle (1984) = https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mw78mrc6K5A

**SUPPLEMENTARY READING**


• J.G. Frazer (1854-1941), *The Golden Bough* (1890=2v; 1906-15=3rd edn=12v)

• Élie Halévy (1870-1937), *Histoire du peuple anglais au XIXe siècle* (1913-46) and [‘The Birth of Methodism in England’], *La Revue de Paris* (1906)

### 12 Sept / 17 Sept: III. The Reality of the Unseen

[=essence of religion → psychological peculiarities]

**SUPPLEMENTARY READING**


**19 Sept / 24 Sept: IV & V. The Religion of Healthy-Mindedness**

[of the once-born]


**SUPPLEMENTARY READING**

- George Berkeley (1685-1753), *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713)

- Thomas S. Kuhn (1922-96), *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* [1st edn (Chicago, 1962)]
  (3rd edn. Chicago, 1996)

- Walt Whitman (1819-92), *Leaves of Grass* (1855, w/6 further editions to 1891)

**FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE**

**26 Sept / 8 Oct: VI & VII. The Sick Soul**

[of the twice-born = those who need religion for relief of their distress by being born again]

- Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), letter to his cousin Mrs St John, 13 October 1638.

**SUPPLEMENTARY READING**

- J.G.A. Gaskin, *The Quest for Eternity: An Outline of the Philosophy of Religion*
  (Harmonsworth, 1984), pp. 119-129.

- David Hume (1711-1776), *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779), Parts X-XII.

- Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal* (1710)

- Walt Whitman (1819-92), *Leaves of Grass* (1855, w/6 further editions to 1891)

**10 Oct / 17 Oct: VIII. The Divided Self, and the Process of its Unification**

[via conversion & self-surrender = cure for sick soul]

- Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94), *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) =

**22 Oct / 24 Oct: IX & X. Conversion**

[i.e. religion moves from subconscious to center of consciousness]


**SUPPLEMENTARY READING**

- Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), *Sartor Resartus* (1833 / 1836 / 1838)

**SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE**


**SUPPLEMENTARY READING**

- Frederick Denison Maurice (1805-1872), *The Religions of the World* (1847).

• John Henry Newman (1801-90), Discourses on the Scope and Nature of University Education Addressed to the Catholics of Dublin (Dublin, 1852) and/or The Idea of a University (1852 & 1858), Discourse 3: ‘Bearing of Theology on Other Branches of Knowledge’ = http://www.newmanreader.org/works/idea/discourse3.html.

19 Nov / 21 Nov: XVIII. Philosophy
[proofs of God’s existence; His metaphysical & moral attributes & Idealism]

26 Nov / 3 Dec: XIX. Other Characteristics
[sacrifice, confession & esp. PRAYER; automatisms]

5 Dec / 10 Dec: XX. Conclusions & Postscript

**SUPPLEMENTARY READING
• Ernest Renan (1823-92), Vie de Jésus (1863).
• Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917), Primitive Culture (London, 1871).
• Edward Burnett Tylor, Anthropology (London, 1881), esp. p. 344, and chapter 14 generally.
Learning Goals:
1. To learn how to perform ‘close reading’ of a key text in the history of ideas.
2. To develop research skills.
3. To appreciate the ethos of historical research and writing: never accept what anyone says until you have seen and understood the original source.
4. To be able to express the results of your reading and thinking in academic form and written in an approachable literary style.
5. To engage with the intellect of one of America’s most powerful thinkers.

Prerequisites: none.

Changes to the Syllabus … due to snow days or the natural evolution of discussion in class: check your messages to see if this has happened.

Summary of Requirements: Two short papers (5-7 pages) (30%); informed class participation, (30%); and final research paper of 15-20 pages (40%), RESEARCH PAPER DUE ON THE LAST DAY OF CLASS. For this four-credit course, students should assume that they will spend a minimum of nine hours of study time per week in preparation for this class. As this is a seminar, lively discussion is crucial in order to make it a valuable experience. I expect you to come to class each day with a printed page on which you have written what you think are the key issues in the texts we are reading and how you relate to them. You may be called upon to share your thoughts with your fellow students. Furthermore, each session will have a designated ‘discussion leader’, someone who has read more carefully and thought more deeply about the day’s material.

Research Paper: Perhaps the most useful life-skill you learn by studying history is the ability to do research. This means not just looking up the subject on Google, but finding and exploiting the raw materials of history, both primary and secondary, organizing and crafting your findings into a well-written literary construction including footnote source citation in a uniform style. We will need to meet individually at least once to focus on a topic, and to agree on a basic outline. I will be available for guidance as your work evolves.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in any form. Professors develop a keen eye for nuances of language and tone that give away even the most subtle of cut-and-paste attempts. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS - Library guides.

Attendance: This is a seminar: attendance is mandatory and will be recorded. Students will be permitted a maximum of two unexcused absences, after which the overall participation grade will be lowered by 1/3 of a letter grade for each day missed. Excused absences, which require
notes from University Health Services or resident deans, must be discussed with me. Please be on time, and don’t leave early. If it happens too often, it will affect your grade.

ABOUT NOT LEAVING YOU TO YOUR OWN DEVICES: NO COMPUTERS IN CLASS. I notice that some students become very pious in seminars: they have their hands together and bow their heads, as if praying. I suspect they may be looking at their phones. Many students using laptops pretend to listen but are actually checking their email, looking at WhatsApp, scrolling through Facebook, and laughing at YouTubes of hamsters wearing hats. A study showed that students seated near laptop users were also negatively affected, like people sitting next to smokers. A study by a team of professors at the US Military Academy showed that students who used tablets or laptops did not do as well as students in sections where electronics were banned. There is much evidence showing that taking notes on your computer is not a good way to learn. If you have a documented learning issue for which you require a device, please come talk to me to discuss this.

OFFICE HOURS: My office hours are TBA. That being said, I try to be at the University most days, so email me and perhaps we can find a time to meet that suits us both. The best way to get in touch with me is by email: davidkatz@brandeis.edu.

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.