

Religious Dimensions in Human Experience: Between Animals and Gods

RELS 4080 (CRN 87941) & RELS 6080 (CRN 87942)

Fall 2015 / Religious Studies / Georgia State University / Office; 1719 in 25 Park Place
MW 1:30-2:45 in Classroom South 409

Dr. Molly Bassett / mbassett@gsu.edu / 404.413.6134

Appointments by email / Meetings in person or via Skype

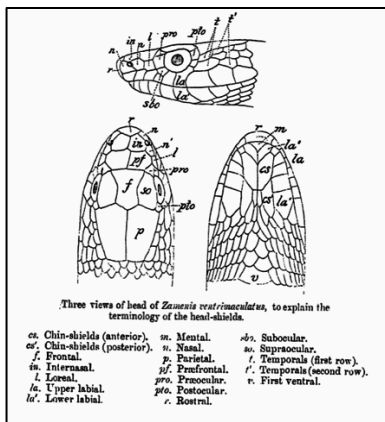
Course webpage: <https://mhbassett.wordpress.com/rels-40806080/about-2/>

“Despite scholarly preoccupation with theory, theory can only illumine religious data; it can never ‘explain’ human religiousness—not because religiousness is inherently mystifying, but because it responds to mystery, and because its data are always proliferating and changing the landscape of what can be known and hence interpreted.”

Kimberly C. Patton in *Religion of the Gods: Ritual, Paradox, and Reflexivity* (8)

Course description

Are people born to sort, organize, classify, and order their environments? Do we impose order on nature, or do we observe an order inherent in nature? To what degree are our systems of classification culturally dependent? How do people negotiate competing ways of ordering the world?



A line diagram from G.A. Boulenger's Fauna of British India (1890) illustrating the terminology of shields on the head of a snake.

In this course, you will explore questions like these in relation to two populations against which we humans define ourselves: animals and gods.

Wendy Doniger notes that “animals and gods are two closely related communities poised like guardians on either side of the threshold of our human community, two others by which we define ourselves” (“The Four Worlds” 2). Taking Doniger’s observation as our guide, we will explore how different religious traditions construct relationships between humans and animals, on one hand, and humans and gods, on the other. Elizabeth Kolbert’s *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (2015) will provide a contemporary context for – and lend a sense of urgency to – our discussions of animals and gods in Hindu and Mesoamerican religions. Our approach will be interdisciplinary and comparative, and it will lead us to reflect on the similarities and differences among categories like human,

animal, god, and machine in religions.

Some Specifics

This is a writing-intensive course. Students enrolled in the course will be issued University-owned iPads to assist in research, writing, and producing podcasts (audio recordings). Podcasts and the work of creating them constitute a major portion of the coursework in RELS 4080/6080.

There will be two field trips: one to ZooAtlanta in September and another to Emory University’s Michael C. Carlos Museum in October. These trips will take place during class time. Both institutions are waiving their entrance fees.

Course Objectives

Course objectives are the learning goals for you in this course. By the end of this semester, students who successfully complete the course will have practiced and improved:

- Reading for deep understanding in different academic disciplines, including religious studies, anthropology, and the natural sciences;
- Writing that demonstrates deep reading, contemplation, synthesis or analysis, and an educated use of college-level English;
- Independent research leading to expert commentary on topics related to the course; and
- Collaborative planning, writing, and recording short podcasts.



Eastern Indigo
[Courtesy](#)

Course Materials

Purchase these texts. Any edition in any condition (new/used) and format (paper/electronic) will work. (Even though we're using iPads, I encourage you to buy paper copies of these books. It'll make it easier to be on the same page in class.)

- Greene, Harry W. [*Snake: The Evolution of Mystery in Nature*](#). Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Gross, Aaron. [*The Question of the Animal and Religion: Theoretical Stakes, Practical Implications*](#). New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Some assigned texts will be on [Electronic Reserve](#) through our library. The password is [REDACTED] (case sensitive).

Course Requirements

- Timeliness and attendance. Each student may miss two (2) classes. Each additional absence reduces your final grade by three (3) percentage points.
- Materials. Bring the day's reading(s), your reading notes, your iPad, paper and a writing instrument to every class meeting.
- Readings. All assigned readings should be completed before class. Note that undergraduate and graduate students occasionally read different excerpts or materials.
- Podcasts. Occasionally you'll listen to a podcast episode as an assignment. If you're not already listening to podcasts or public radio, I encourage you to cultivate a listener's ear this semester. Here are some great shows:
 - [RadioLab](#), science writing for everyone
 - [This American Life](#), a weekly show on a theme
 - [Sex, Death & Money](#), three things we think about a lot, but don't talk about enough
 - Marc Maron [interviews President Obama](#)
 - [OnBeing](#) with Krista Tippett, opens up the animating questions at the center of human life
 - [Stuff You Should Know](#) (these guys live in Decatur, GA)
 - [The Gist](#), a daily news show
 - [Maltin on Movies](#), "he's just such a nice guy"



Mural de Quetzalcóatl en la Exekatlkalli (Casa de los Vientos), elaborado por Diego Rivera entre 1956 y 1957 en Acapulco, Guerrero, México. Courtesy of Nam from D-Block, USA.

- Field trips. We will visit ZooAtlanta on September 16 and Emory University's Michael C. Carlos Museum on October 28 during our regular class meeting. Add these dates to your calendar now. As with each class meeting, attendance these days is required. Both institutions are providing complimentary admission.
- Assignments. Students will work in small groups to research, write and produce short podcasts. See the podcast assignment handouts for more information. All group members will submit both self-assessments and assessments of the other group members' contributions. The instructor will take this feedback into consideration in grading. More details are in the guidelines. All students will also write a final essay that integrates written and audio materials. Students may volunteer or be asked to lead a discussion or in-class segment.

- Late work. No late work will be accepted without prior arrangements made in writing and confirmed by the instructor.

Also ...

- Email is the best way to contact Dr. Bassett and Clare. Please allow 24-48 hours for a reply. When she is not in class, Dr. Bassett checks email most weekdays between 6:30 am and 3:30 pm.
- Please tell the instructor if you have a documented disability that needs to be accommodated.
- The last day to withdraw from a course with the possibility of receiving a 'W' is October 13, 2015. If you withdraw by this date but are failing the course, you will receive a 'WF.' All students who withdraw after this date will receive a 'WF.'

- Violations of the academic dishonesty rules – see the University’s Policy on Academic Honesty (Section 409) – are grounds for receiving an “F” in the course. You are responsible for reading and understanding the Academic Honesty Policy.
- Your constructive assessment of this course plays an indispensable role in shaping education at Georgia State. After completing the course, please take time to fill out the course evaluation.

This is a Writing Across the Curriculum supported course!

WAC courses incorporate multidisciplinary writing, sequenced assignments, peer review, revision, and student assistance from a writing consultant. We are very fortunate to have an excellent writer and a Religious Studies graduate student as our consultant. Clare VanHolm is our WAC consultant, and Clare will be supporting the undergraduate writers enrolled in this course. (She will not provide writing consultations for her graduate student peers.) You can reach Clare at <cvanholm1@student.gsu.edu>. Please allow 24-48 hours for a reply.

Course Grades*

This is a dual-level course. Undergraduate and graduate students will be assessed separately. Graduate students are expected to participate as professionals and submit professional-level work. Undergraduates are expected to participate as engaged and educated adults and submit the polished work of student-scholars.



Serpent Deity Reliefs at Hampi, Karnataka
Courtesy of Dineshkannambadi at en.wikipedia

	Points toward Final Grade
Attendance & Participation – You’re here on time. – You sign in. – You demonstrate that you’ve done the reading and are prepared for class. – You listen to others and respond to their observations. – You lead a class discussion or an in-class segment.	280 points
Podcast #1	240 points
Podcast #2	240 points
Final Reflection	240 points
TOTAL POSSIBLE	1000 POINTS

In accordance with department policy, I use a +/- scale: A+ 97-100; A 93-96; A- 90-92; B+ 87-89; B 83-86; B- 80-82; C+ 77-79; C 73-76; C- 70-72; D 60-69; F 0-59.

Course Schedule

**The schedule below is a guide that is subject to change at the instructor’s discretion. Changes will be announced in class and posted on the course website.

August 24	Introductions & Course Preview Kolbert, Elizabeth and Michael Novacek. <i>The Sixth Extinction with Elizabeth Kolbert</i> , podcast audio, The American Museum of Natural History, MP3, accessed July 16, 2015, http://www.amnh.org/explore/news-blogs/podcasts/the-sixth-extinction-with-elizabeth-kolbert Bassett, Molly. <i>Introductions</i> , podcast audio, RDHE Podcast. Available in SoundCloud: https://soundcloud.com/religious-dimensions/introductions-rdhe/s-yNsBi
August 26	Our Focus: Why animals? Doniger, Wendy. “Epilogue: Making Animals Vanish” in <i>Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies</i> . Aaron Gross and Anne Valley, editors. New York: Columbia University Press. 348-353. Gross, Aaron. “Introduction and Overview: Animal Others and Animal Studies,” in <i>Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies</i> . Aaron Gross and Anne Valley, editors. New York: Columbia University Press, 1-9. Yoon, Carol Kaesuk. “The Strange Case of the Fish that Wasn’t” in <i>Naming Nature: The Clash Between Instinct and Science</i> . New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009. 3-22.

August 31	<p>Our Focus: Why gods?</p> <p>Latour, Bruno. "On the Cult of the Factish Gods," in <i>On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods</i>. Translated by Catherine Porter and Heather MacLean. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010. 1-7.</p> <p>López Austin, Alfredo. "The Nature of the Gods III," "Order," and "Classifications," in <i>The Myths of the Opossum: Pathways of Mesoamerican Mythology</i>. Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano and Thelma Ortiz de Montellano, trans. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993. 140-180.</p>
September 2	<p>Our Methods: An Ensemble Approach to Writing for Listeners Instructional Design Visits (with iPads) and WAC Workshop</p> <p>Updike, Nancy. "Better Writing Through Radio, Part 1" and "Better Writing Through Radio, Part 2," Available online: http://transom.org/2006/nancy-updike/ AND http://transom.org/2006/nancy-updike/-part-2</p>
September 7	<p>Labor Day Holiday – No class</p>
September 9	<p>Snakes in Western Science: What's a snake? What's a reptile?</p> <p>Greene, Harry. "Introduction," and "Classification and General Biology," in <i>Snakes: The Evolution of Mystery in Nature</i>. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. 1-34.</p>
September 14	<p>Snakes in Western Science: The Eastern Indigo</p> <p>"Snakes Alive" available online via Georgia Public Broadcasting: http://www.gpb.org/georgia-outdoors/season-20/episode/snakes-alive</p> <p>"Eastern Indigo Snake," available via the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory. Accessed June 3, 2015. http://srelherp.uga.edu/snakes/drycou.htm</p> <p>Stevenson, Dirk J., et al. "Survey and Monitoring of the Eastern Indigo Snake in Georgia." <i>Southeastern Naturalist</i>. 2(3): 393-408.</p>
September 16	<p>Snakes in Western Science: Research Scientists at Work</p> <p>Mendelson, Joseph R. "Discovering and Naming New Species of Amphibians." <i>IRFC Reptiles & Amphibians</i>. 16(2), June 2009. 83-89.</p> <p>Greene, Harry. "Snakes and Others: Past, Present and Future," and "Epilogue: Why Snakes?," in <i>Snakes: The Evolution of Mystery in Nature</i>. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. 285-306.</p>
September 21	<p>Non-Western Scientific Perspectives</p> <p>Atran, Scott. "Folk Biology," in <i>MITECS: The MIT Encyclopedia of Cognitive Science</i>. Available online: http://ai.ato.ms/MITECS/Entry/atran.html</p> <p>Berlin, Brent, et al. "General Principles of Classification and Nomenclature in Folk Biology." <i>American Anthropologist</i>. 75, no. 1. (1973): 214-242.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4080: Read 214-222 and skim 223-242 • 6080: Read all <p>Medin, Douglas L. and Scott Atran. "Introduction" in <i>Folkbiology</i>. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1999. 1-17.</p>
September 23	<p>WAC Workshop – Planning the Podcasts</p> <p>To be announced.</p>
September 28	<p>Snakes in India</p> <p>Das, Indraneil. "Herpetology of an Antique Land: Herpetological Explorations and Knowledge in India and South Asia." <i>Bonner zoologische Beiträge</i>. Band 52 (2003). Seiten 215-229. Available here: http://www.zoologicalbulletin.de/BzB_Volumes/Volume_52_3_4/215_229_BZB52_3_4_Das_Indraneil.PDF</p> <p>Thurston, Edgar. <i>Ethnographic Notes from Southern India</i>. Madras, India: Government Press, 1906. 283-293. Available here: https://archive.org/details/ethnographicnot00edgagoog</p>
September 30	<p>Snakes in Mesoamerica</p> <p>Ruiz de Alarcón, Hernando. "First Treatise, Chapter 9," in <i>Treatise on the Heathen Superstitions that Today Live among the Indians Native to This New Spain, 1629</i>. Translated by J. Richard Andrews and Ross Hassig. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984. 68-70.</p> <p>Sahagún, Bernardino de. <i>Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain: Book 11: Earthly Things</i>. Translated by Charles E. Dibble and Arthur J. O. Anderson.</p>

	Vol. 11 of 12 vols. Santa Fe, NM: The School of American Research and the University of Utah, 1963. 67-87.
October 5	Podcast Session
October 7	Podcast Session
October 12	Animal Studies & Religious Studies Gross, Aaron. <i>The Question of the Animal and Religion: Theoretical Stakes, Practical Implications</i> . New York: Columbia University Press, 2014. 81-94.
October 14	Animals in Hinduism Doniger, Wendy. "The Four Worlds," introduction to <i>Animals in Four Worlds: Sculptures from India</i> , by Stella Snead. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989. 2-23. Nelson, Lance. "Cows, Elephants, Dogs and Other Lesser Embodiments of Ātman: Reflections on Hindu Attitudes Toward Nonhuman Animals," in <i>A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science & Ethics</i> . Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. 179-193.
October 19	Animals in Mesoamerican (Nahua) Religions García Garagarza, León. "The Year the People Turned into Cattle: The End of the World in New Spain, 1558," in <i>Centering Animals in Latin American History</i> . Martha Few and Zeb Tortorici, eds. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013. 31-61. "Snakes" in <i>Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures</i> . David Carrasco, ed. Vol. 3 Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 138-139.
October 21	Religious Perspectives: Gods & Effigies Vivieros de Castro, Eduardo. "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism." <i>Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute</i> . 4, no. 3. September 1988. Oxford, Blackwell Publishers. 469-488. Available on campus at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3034157
October 26	Religious Perspectives: Gods in Hinduism Davis, Richard H. <i>The Lives of Indian Images</i> . "Biographies of Indian Images," and "Living Images." Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. 6-8, and 17-37. Doniger O'Flaherty, Wendy. "Other People as Animals: Rudra, Lord of Sacrificial Beasts," in <i>Other People's Myths: The Cave of Echoes</i> . Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995. 75-96.
October 28	Religious Perspectives: Gods & Effigies To be announced.
November 2	Religious Perspectives: Snakes & Gods in Hinduism Doniger, Wendy. "Introduction: Sex, Text, and Masquerade," "Waking Up in Bed with an Animal," and "Approach Three: Zoology," in <i>The Bedtrick: Tales of Sex and Masquerade</i> . Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000. 1-11, 105-117, and 129-139
November 4	Religious Perspectives: Snakes & Gods in Hinduism Allocco, Amy. "Snakes in the Dark Age: Human Action, Karmic Retribution, and the Possibilities for Hindu Animal Ethics," in <i>Asian Perspectives on Animal Ethics: Rethinking the Nonhuman</i> . Neil Dalal and Chloë Taylor, eds. London: Routledge, 2014. 179-201. Allocco, Amy. "Fear, Reverence and Ambivalence: Divine Snakes in Contemporary South India." <i>Religions of South Asia</i> . 7 (2013), 230-248. Available on campus at: http://ezproxy.gsu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001967731&site=eds-live <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4080: Optional • 6080: Required
November 9	Religious Perspectives: Gods in Mesoamerica Bassett, Molly. "Divining the Meaning of Teotl" and "Gods in the Flesh," in <i>The Fate of Earthly Things: Aztec Gods and God-Bodies</i> . Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015.

	<p>99-123. Clendinnen, Inga. Excerpt from <i>Aztecs</i>. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. 248-253. Houston, Stephen, et al. "The Vital Image" in <i>The Memory of Bones: Body, Being, and Experience Among the Classic Maya</i>. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006. 72-76.</p>
November 11	<p>Religious Perspectives: Snakes & Gods in Mesoamerica</p> <p>Matos Moctezuma, Eduardo. "The Templo Mayor, The Great Temple of the Aztecs," in <i>Aztecs</i>. London: Royal Academy of the Arts, 2002. 48-55. Matos Moctezuma, Eduardo. Excerpts from "Aztec History and Cosmovision," in <i>Moctezuma's Mexico: Visions of the Aztec World</i>. 2nd ed. David Carrasco and Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, eds. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2003. 7-20. "Serpent" in <i>An Illustrated Dictionary of The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya</i>. Mary Miller and Karl Taube, eds. London: Thames & Hudson, 1993. 148-151.</p>
November 16	<p>Religious Perspectives: Snakes & Gods in Mesoamerica</p> <p>Bassett, Molly. "Meeting the Gods: Apotheoses and Exchanges of the Early Encounter." <i>Material Religion</i>. 8(4) December 2012, 416-438.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4080: Optional • 6080: Required <p>Carrasco, David. "Quetzalcoatl's Revenge: Primordium and Application in Aztec Religion." <i>History of Religions</i>. 19(4) May 1980, 296-320. "Feathered Serpent," in <i>Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures</i>. David Carrasco, ed. Vol. 1 Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 397-400. "Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl," in <i>Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures</i>. David Carrasco, ed. Vol. 3 Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 246-247.</p>
November 18	<p>WAC Workshop</p>
November 23	<p>Thanksgiving Break – No class</p>
November 25	<p>Thanksgiving Break – No class</p>
November 30	<p>What Makes a Perspective "Religious?" Animals, Gods & Machines</p> <p>Abumrad, Jad and Robert Krulwich. "Talking to Machines," from Radiolab (podcast). Season 10, Episode 1. June 1, 2011. Accessed June 7, 2015. Available online. Bekoff, Marc. "Wild Justice, Social Cognition, Fairness, and Morality: A Deep Appreciation for the Subjective Lives of Animals," in <i>A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science and Ethics</i>. Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. 461-480.</p>
December 2	<p>Podcast session</p> <p>Carrier, Scott. "And Then What Happened?" Transom.org. Available at: http://transom.org/2011/and-then-what-happened/</p>
December 7	<p>Podcast session</p>
Final Reflections	<p>Your final reflections are due to Dr. Bassett via GSU email by 6:am December 10.</p>