Mondays, 7:30 PM
Laurie L Patton
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Course Description
What does it mean--intellectually, socially, morally, to compare religions? In the last few decades, theoretical critiques of comparison have argued that it emerges from an exclusive Christian basis, and that its history is grounded in both colonialism and missionizing. This course will engage that critique, and begin to explore theories that offer constructive alternatives to the earlier forms of comparison. We will begin with basic reading in the philosophy of comparative thought. We will then read the earlier comparative theorists of religion and consider the epistemological bases upon which they compare. In addition, we will be engaging the critiques of comparative work, particularly those who work with historical, ethnographic, postcolonial approaches to religious phenomena. Finally, we will read those who wish to defend comparison upon new and entirely different political and epistemological grounds--ranging from cognitive, textual, ethnographic, aesthetic, and philosophical defenses of the comparative enterprise. We will also focus on particular case studies of the comparative method.

Texts (along with several relevant essays):
Wendy Doniger, The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth
Jonathan Z Smith, Imagining Religion,
Van Der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation,
Benson Saler, Conceptualizing Religion
Pascal Boyer, Religion Explained
Patton and Ray, Eds. A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age
Francis Clooney, Theology After Vedanta, An Experiment in Comparative Theology
Jose Cabezón, Scholasticism: Cross Cultural and Comparative Perspectives
Nathan Katz, Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty First century: A View from the Margin
Russell McCutcheon, Critics not Caretakers
Tomoko Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism
**Requirements:**

1) Regular class participation, including attendance, class presentations (at least two per student), and engagement in class discussion (50% of the grade)
2) Weekly Case Study Journal (ungraded, but without which a passing grade will not be given)
3) Final Paper (50% of the grade)

**August 26th**

**Session I: Introductions and General Discussion:**

**Issues of Comparison in the Study of Religion**

**September 9th**

**Session II: Introducing Incommensurability (And Related Issues of Comparison) in Scientific Writing**


**September 16th**

**Session III**

**Early Writing in Phenomenology of Religion**

Selections from:
- Gerardus Van Der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation

**September 23**

**Session IV**

“Middle” Writing in Phenomenology of Religion
Selections from:
- Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*
- W.C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*

**September 30th**
**Session V**
**The Critiques**
- JZ Smith, “In Comparison a Magic Dwells”
- Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*

**October 7th**
**Session VI**
**The Critiques Continued**
- Russ McCutcheon, *Critics Not Caretakers*

**October 21**
**Session VII**
**The Responses: Comparison Between Two Traditions**

**October 28**
**Session VIII**
**The Responses: Comparative Theology**
Selections from:
- Francis Clooney, *Theology After Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology*
- Jose Cabezon, *Scholasticism: Cross Cultural and Comparative Perspectives*

**November 4th**
**Session IX**
**The Responses: Comparative Religions in a New Key**
- Patton and Ray, *A Magic Still Dwells*

**November 11th**
**Session X**
**The Responses: Comparative Religions in a New Key II**
- Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider*
- Readings from the series, (Patton and Griffiths, eds.) *Toward a Comparative Philosophy of Religions*

**November 18th**
**Session XI**
**The Responses: Anthropological/Cognitive Perspectives**
Selections from:
- Benson Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion*
- Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained*
- Daniel Miller, *Why Do Eight Comparative Ethnographies?*
- [http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/social-networking/2012/12/08/why-do-eight-](http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/social-networking/2012/12/08/why-do-eight-)
comparative-ethnographies/
Michael Shanks, Michael Herzfeld on Comparative Ethnography

**November 25 or possibly the 26th!**

**Session XII**
Comparative/Commensurability from Contemporary Literary Theory/Cultural Studies

Jan Ziolkowski, “Always Beyond Compare: The Past, Present, and Future of Comparative Literature”
http://www.academia.edu/2646400/Always_Beyond_Compare_The_Past_Present_and_Future_of_Comparative_Literature


Natalie Melas, All the Difference in the World Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison

**December 2nd**

**Session XIII**
The Responses: A Debate on Pluralism and the Comparativist Legacy
Selections from:

Tomuko Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism


**December 9th**

**Session XIV:**
Class Presentations