

**RELS 1271**  
**SEX IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM**  
**FALL 2015**  
**MON & WED 2:50-4:30**  
**CHURCHILL HALL 101**

Instructor: Professor Elizabeth Bucar

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Office: 373 Holmes

Office hours: 4:30-5:00pm Mondays and Wednesdays (sign-up sheet on my door)

**INTRODUCTION: RELATION OF CLASS TO TOPIC OF ENHANCING LIFE**

This course will use a comparative method to describe and explain the role human sexuality in the understanding of the enhancement of life of three religious traditions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Students will be introduced to the academic study of religion and ethics and gain an introductory knowledge of the three traditions. We will consider a number of case studies including divorce, same-sex acts, circumcision, and transsexuality. Special focus will be on considering how these traditions understand various sexual acts and aspects of human sexuality to enhance life. Course requirements include class participation, three short essay exams, and a final research paper on a topic approved by the instructor.

Throughout the semester, students explore theological and ethical roles of “the body” that are important to enhancing life studies. Our guiding principle is that since religious ethical theories have been trying to remake humans for centuries, through disciplinary practices and moral teachings, they have useful intellectual resources for the contemporary assessment the role of the body in the enhancement of life. We consider if diverse conceptions of human sexual embodiment are key to unlocking the “spiritual laws” that imagine, plan, measure, and assess forms of body modification made in the name of human perfection.

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to **describe** basic categories central to sexual ethics in three traditions, to **identify** major themes and “spiritual laws” raised in debates about sexual religious ethics, to **identify** key and distinctive religious arguments about sex, to **interpret** religious literary texts in light of their historical contexts and be able to **compare** them and **distinguish** different emphases over time and in different social and cultural contexts, and **display** habits of critical and appreciative understanding of people different from themselves, particularly in regards to the enhancement of life

**TEACHING METHODS**

This course will be primarily discussion based. The instructor will provide mini-lectures as needed each week to contextualize readings.

**GRADING**

Final grades will be determined by the following components.

Weekly participation in class discussion (20%)

- Each student is responsible for bringing texts and questions to each discussion section.
- You will be graded on your participation in class discussions including in class small group activities like “World Café”; this evaluation will be based on the development of

your habits of inquiry, your understanding of the material, and your ability to express your ideas clearly in speech. To receive full credit students must bring a hard copy of the reading to class, positively contribute to the discussion, and complete in-class writing assignments.

- See “Active Reading” handout.

#### Tests (60%)

- There will be three tests for this course, each one asking you to identify and explain key passages from the readings.
- Your goal on these tests is to say how the quotation fits into the text’s argument as a whole: what leads up to the quotation, and what flows from it. What kind of a step is the quotation in the argument’s reasoning? How does it belong in what text is trying to prove?
- Do not attempt to show what you like or dislike, believe or disbelieve: attempt to show how you have read and thought about the author’s reasoning.

#### Final Paper on Homosexuality or Transsexuality (20%)

- Each student will write a final paper (5-7 pages) that analyzes one of 4 films in light of a suggested class reading. The papers should clearly articulate and evaluate the religious arguments about sexual ethics made (or performed) by one or more characters in the film in light of class readings. Questions to consider include: What acts are contentious in terms of the enhancement of life? What would it mean to fully enhance the life of a homosexual person in the context of a community that judges her sexuality activity a violation of life? What modifications to our sexed bodies do various religious communities, thinkers, or believers see as enhancements to life? Which others are considered violations?

### **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

No more than four absences will be allowed without penalty to your grade--regardless of excuse. After the fourth absence your final grade will be reduced by a third of a grade for each additional absence. After the sixth absence the instructor reserves the right to drop you from the course. Roll will be taken at the beginning of class.

### **REQUIRED READINGS**

All readings are posted on blackboard under course documents/course materials. You must print these and bring them to class (or bring them on your laptop or digital reader). Failure to do so will result in the lowering of your grade at the instructor’s discretion.

### **COURSE SCHEDULE**

#### Introduction to the Course

9/9

- Course syllabus overview
- Handouts: “What is Religious Ethics?” and “Active Reading”

9/14

- Freitas, “Introduction, “Sexual Activity, Who’s Really Doing it, and the Virgin Gap,” and “The Rare Sexual Sage: Cara Walker,” in *Sex and the Soul*, 1-9; 161-164; and 167-172.

#### Introduction to Jewish Ethics

9/16

- Newman, "Judaism and Jewish Ethics," 30-55.

9/21

- Newman, "Sources of Jewish Ethics," 56-83.

### Introduction to Christian Ethics

9/23

Canceled

9/28

- Corrigan et al, "Scripture and Tradition in Christianity," *Jews, Christians, Muslims: A Comparative Introduction to Monotheistic Religions* (Prentice Hall 2012, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition): 20-39.
- Farley, "Sources of Christian Sexual Ethics," 182-196.

### Introduction to Islamic Ethics

9/30

- Denny, "Muhammad and the Early Muslim Community," 49-73.

10/5

- Corrigan et al, "Ethics in Islam" *Jews, Christians, Muslims: A Comparative Introduction to Monotheistic Religions* (Prentice Hall 2012, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition): 241-250.

10/7

- Test 1

10/12: NO CLASS (Columbus Day)

### Creation of Two Sexes

10/14

- Primary sources (Bible, Quran, and Hadith) in Browning collection (read pp. 12-15 and 157-159).
- Quran 7:19-29 [separate PDF]

### Celibacy, Promiscuity, and Lust

10/19

- Anthony Ellis, "In Defense of Promiscuity," in *In Defense of Sin*, ed. John Portmann (Palgrave 2001): 243-262.

### Procreation and Abortion

10/21

- John Paul II, *Humanae Vitae*. [CFC short film in class]
- Louis Newman, "Abortion," 159-169.

### Dating Ethics

10/26

- Margaret Farley, "Commitment," in *Just Love*, 223-226.
- Peterson-Iyer, "Mobile Porn?: Teenage Sexting and Justice for Women," *JSCE* (2013): 92-110.

10/28

IN CLASS REVIEW

11/2

- Test 2

### Marriage and Divorce

11/4: ONLINE CLASS [Instructor lecturing at UC Davis]

- Ali, "Marriage, Money, and Sex," 1-23.

11/9

- Shahla Haeri, "Temporary Marriage," 49-72.

11/11: NO CLASS (Veterans' Day)

### Intersex

11/16

- Hillel Gray, "Not Judging by Appearances: The Role of Genotype in Jewish Law on Intersex Conditions," p 126-148.

11/18

- Cheryl Chase, "'Cultural Practice' or 'Reconstructive Surgery'? US Genital Cutting, the Intersex Movement, and Medical Double Standard," 126-151.

11/23-11/25: NO CLASS [Instructor at Annual Meeting of the American Association of Religion]

### Genital Cutting and Circumcision

11/30

- American Academy of Pediatrics, *Policy Statement: Ritual Genital Cutting of Female Minors* (2010): 1088-1093.
- American Academy of Pediatrics, *Circumcision Policy Statement* (1999): 686-693.
- American Academy of Pediatrics, *Policy Statement: Circumcision* (2012): 585-586.
- Frisch, Morten et al. *Cultural Bias in the AAP's 2012 Technical Report and Policy Statement on Male Circumcision* (2013): 796-800.

12/2

- Test 3

12/7

- Bring print out of essay(s) you are planning to use for your paper. We will split into 4 groups

to discuss films and essays.

12/9

- Draft One Due in Class: Peer Review Workshop

12/11

- Final Paper Due: Hard copies of paper and peer comments can be left in my in box (Holmes 371) or slid under my door (Holmes 373). You can scan comments and email them with final paper if you prefer ([e.bucar@neu.edu](mailto:e.bucar@neu.edu)). If you want to see comments on your final paper please leave me a self-addressed stamped envelope.