

**HISTORY 274:  
PLURALISM AND IDENTITY IN AMERICAN RELIGION,  
1870s-1930s**

Matthew Pehl  
*Augustana University, Fall 2019*  
*Tuesday/Thursday, 1:00-2:20, Madsen 255*



IMAGE: *A scene from the World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893*

After the Civil War, America's overwhelmingly Protestant culture was transformed by encounters with religious "others": by Catholic and Jewish immigrants pouring into the country, and by encounters with Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims around the world. Americans confronted vital questions of religious difference, tolerance, and pluralism. How do we live as equals with people who hold radically different core beliefs? Could (or should) religious identities be disentangled from ideas about race and nationhood? What did it mean to be "American," if it no longer meant "Anglo-Saxon Protestant"? And, how could a person honestly assert "their" religion as "true," if multiple valid pathways to spiritual enlightenment existed? This class will give students a historical perspective on elemental questions of belief, identity, pluralism, and citizenship.

**Instructor:** Professor Matthew Pehl  
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Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 11 AM—1 PM. If possible, please schedule yourself in advance using my Google appointment calendar. A link is on Moodle, at the top of the page.

### **Required Texts and Technology:**

- 1) Harold Frederic, *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (a free version is available from Project Gutenberg—I've provided a link on Moodle. You might prefer to have a physical copy)
- 2) Abraham Cahan, *Yekl* (a free version is also available of this text, and I've put the link on Moodle)
- 3) William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (ed. Robert Azbug. While there are many editions of James's book, you will need to purchase this specific edition. It has been edited for concision, and contains a very useful introduction and annotated footnotes throughout the text).
- 4) Jeffrey P. Moran, *The Scopes Trial: A Brief History with Documents*

### **Course Objectives**

By the end of this semester, students should:

1. Demonstrate significant knowledge of the major ideas and debates, particularly those involving questions of diversity and pluralism, within American religion.
2. Further develop general skills associated with a liberal arts education, such as critical reading, writing, thinking, and communication.
3. Acquire comfort with some particular analytical concerns of historians, such as contextualizing sources, explaining change or continuity over time, assessing important "turning points, accounting for contingencies, etc.

### **Course Policies**

**Attendance:** I hate attendance policies, because they always sound hectoring and patronizing; they assume an adversarial relationship between you as students and me as your instructor. Nevertheless, here we are. The policy is this: because this is a seminar that depends on your active participation, you should always attend class, be fully prepared and mentally present, and actively contribute to the work of the class. **After three missed (unexcused) classes, your grade will drop by a half-letter for each additional class you miss. If you are evidently unprepared for class, I reserve the right to request additional assignments from you to demonstrate that you are learning the material.** But what I really want to say is: this class is a terrific opportunity, and should be a wonderful experience for you! Be open! Be curious! Explore new ideas! This isn't a gulag; don't turn it into one.

**Late work policy:** Late homework will be docked one-half letter grade for each 24-hour period. Late essays will be docked by a full letter grade for each 24-hour period.

## Graded work

**20%: Reading quizzes and participation grade.** You will often be given short, in-class quizzes to test your retention and comprehension of the assigned reading.

**35%: Weekly Forum posts:** Each week, I am asking you to contribute to **two** Forums, available on Moodle. The **first post** is due between the first class of the week (on Tuesday), and our second class on Thursday. This post is meant to be quite general, and is used to gauge everybody's comprehension of and interest in Tuesday's topic. The **second post** is expected to be written in formal academic prose, and should be more refined and thoughtful. These second posts should establish a thesis, and use evidence from the week's readings/discussions to support the main idea. These posts will be a minimum of 500 words, and are due before class the following Tuesday.

**15% (5% each): Three mini-papers.** We will read a handful of complete books this semester, including two novels and a landmark work of psychological philosophy. Because these books involve more reading than normal, I will be asking you write a 1500 word response to each of these texts. Prompts will be provided, and the papers will be submitted on Moodle.

**30% Final.** Your final will consist of a take-home essay.

### Grading Scale (percentages)

	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69	
A	93-100	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	63-66
A-	90-92	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	60-62
					F	59 and below	

### Accessibility

Augustana welcomes students with disabilities to participate in all of its courses, programs, services, and activities. If you have a documented disability and are requesting accommodations, please contact Susan Bies, Director of Accessibility and Academic Support. Her office is located in the Student Success Center (Edith Mortenson Center, Suite 100) and she may be reached at 605-274-5503 or [susan.bies@augie.edu](mailto:susan.bies@augie.edu).

### Honor Code

As a community of scholars, the students and faculty at Augustana University commit to the highest standards of excellence by mutually embracing an Honor Code. The Honor Code requires that examinations and selected assignments contain the following pledge statement which students are expected to sign:

“On my honor, I pledge that I have upheld the Honor Code, and that the work I have done on this assignment has been honest, and that the work of others in this class has, to the best of my knowledge, been honest as well.”

Faculty members are responsible for investigating all instances involving any student who does not sign the Honor Pledge or who bring forward an academic integrity concern. The complete Honor Code can be found at [www.augie.edu/honor](http://www.augie.edu/honor).

### **Commitment to Diversity**

Augustana University is committed to creating and fostering a learning and working environment based on open communication and mutual respect. This is an integral part of the academic mission to enrich our students' educational experiences and prepare them to live in and contribute to a global society. If you encounter sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, sexual assault, or discrimination please contact the Title IX Coordinator at [605-274-4044](tel:605-274-4044) or [belam@augie.edu](mailto:belam@augie.edu). If you make a report of this nature to a faculty member, they must notify the Title IX Coordinator about the basic facts of the incident (you may choose whether you or anyone involved is identified by name). For more information about options at Augustana, please visit [www.augie.edu/titleix](http://www.augie.edu/titleix).

### **Turnitin**

Turnitin is an originality detection service. Its use in this class is both to prevent plagiarism and to help the student improve his or her writing. [Turnitin.com](http://Turnitin.com) compares a document with its extensive database of submitted papers, published works, and documents from the internet. Turnitin issues a “similarity score.” Your instructor will review the similarity report and make any determinations about any improper citations, missing citations, or plagiarism. Student papers will be retained in the global Turnitin repository for future comparisons.

### **Weekly Schedule:**

#### **Week One: August 29**

Intro: Thinking about Religious Pluralism

#### **Week Two: Imaging Religious Pluralism**

Tuesday, September 2: Theron Ware’s encounter with pluralism

Read: Harold Frederick, *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (parts one and two)

Thursday, September 4: Theron Ware’s encounter with pluralism

Read: Frederick, *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (parts three and four)

#### **Week Three: Inventing Religious Pluralism**

Tuesday, September 10: Pluralism at the Parliament of World’s Religions

Read: Carrie Tirado Bramen, *The Uses of Variety: Modern Americanism and the Quest for National Distinctiveness*, chapter 6 (on Moodle)

**DUE: Response essay to *The Damnation of Theron Ware***

Thursday, September 12: The “Universality” of “World Religions”

Read: David Mislin, *Saving Faith* (excerpts on Moodle)

#### **Week Four: A Philosophy for Pluralism**

Tuesday, September 17: Psychology, Philosophy, and Religion

Read: William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (pgs. 1-67)

Thursday, September 19: Psychology, Philosophy, and Religion

Read: William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (pg. 68-160)

#### **Week Five: “Progressivism” and Pluralism**

Tuesday, September 24: The “Progressive” approach to pluralism

Read: Jane Addams, “The Subjective Necessity of Social Settlements”  
and excerpt from Hilda Satt Polachek, *I Came a Stranger*

**DUE: Response essay to *The Varieties of Religious Experience***

Thursday, September 26: Inventing “humanitarianism”

Read: Heather D. Curtis, *Holy Humanitarians*, Intro (rec.) and chapter 2  
(required)

#### **Week Six: American Indians and the Problems of Pluralism**

Tuesday, October 1: “Kill the Indian, Save the Man”

Read: Jennifer Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country*, chapter 5

Thursday, October 3: Indians Talk Back to “Civilization”

Read: “Talking Back to Civilization” and “Going to the Source” (on Moodle)

#### **Week Seven: Race, Religion, and the Problem of Missions**

Tuesday, October 10: The “Black Church” in the South

Read: W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, chapters 1 and 10 (link to the full text on Moodle)

Thursday, October 12: Encountering Africa

Read: Paul W. Harris, “Racial Identity and the Civilizing Mission,” and Alexander Crummell and Henry McNeal Turner, from Sernett’s volume (on Moodle)

### **Week Eight: Americans in the World**

Tuesday, October 17: Encountering India

Read: Stephen Prothero, *The White Buddhist* (excerpt) and “Mother India” (both on Moodle)

Thursday, October 19: Encountering Japan

Read: *Asian Religions in America* (excerpt; on Moodle).

### **Week Nine: Catholics in America**

Tuesday, October 22: FALL BREAK

Thursday, October 24: Catholicism: The “Immigrant Church”

Read: James O’Toole, “The Faithful” (excerpt; on Moodle)

### **Week Ten: Catholics in America**

Tuesday October 29: Religious Boundaries and Catholic Identity

Read: Robert Orsi, “The Religious Boundaries of an In-Between People” (on Moodle)

Thursday, October 31: Catholics and Race in the South

Read: James B. Bennett, “Catholics, Creoles, and the Redefinition of Race in New Orleans” (on Moodle)

### **Week eleven: Jews in the North**

Tuesday, November 5: Jews in America

Read: Abraham Cahan, *Yekl* (chapters 1-5; link on Moodle)

Thursday, November 7: The Jewish Metropolis

Read: Abraham Cahan, *Yekl* (chapter 6-10)

### **Week twelve: Jews in the South**

Tuesday, November 12: Jews in the South

Read: Stella Suberman, *The Jew Store*, chapters 1, 12-13.

View: “Mapping Jewish Charleston” (in-class exercise; link on Moodle)

Thursday, November 14: Jews in the South

Reading: Eric Goldstein, "Now Is the Time to Show Your True Colors"  
(on Moodle)

**Week Thirteen: Modernism and Its Discontents**

Tuesday, November 19: Setting the Stage for the "Monkey Trial"

Read: Moran, *The Scopes Trial*, pages 1-72

Thursday, November 21: Fundamentalism and the "Money Trial"

Read: Moran, *The Scopes Trial*, pages 171-199

**Week Fourteen: Pluralism and Its Discontents**

Tuesday, November 26: NO CLASS

Tuesday, December 3: Fundamentalism and the "Money Trial"

Read: Moran, *The Scopes Trial*, pages 199-215

Thursday, December 5: The Contested Legacy of the First Age of Pluralism

### Some intellectual advice on how to approach this class:

I've never done this in a syllabus before, but for all of our sakes I wanted to clearly articulate some of the intellectual assumptions that undergird the way I've designed this class. I am hoping that I might anticipate some of your own questions and preconceptions about what this class will be like, and reframe them for you here.

- **On the difference between revelation, theology, and history:**
  - Many of the great religions of the world are “revealed” religions: meaning, they have a founder or founders who claim to have a truth that transcends human time, or cleaves human time neatly into “before” and “after.” In Christianity, for instance, the key event in history is Jesus’s resurrection. Everything before was leading up to it, and everything after is cast in relation to it. Theologians examine the sacred and “timeless” texts of religious tradition in order to create ethical, philosophical, and rational systems of thought that are faithful to the intent of these texts (and thus, presumably, to the divine).
- ***History, as we practice it in this class, is almost exactly the opposite***
  - History is concerned exclusively with human events, which demonstrably took place in a specific time and place, and to specific people.
  - While many historians are personally religious, history as a discipline is entirely agnostic about the truth claims of any particular religion. A religion might be true, or it might not: we don’t presume to know. That’s because historians are interested in the *human actors* involved with religion, and the *human societies and cultures* that religion shapes, not in “proving” or “disproving” the underlying belief system. Whether a religion is “true” or not is beyond the historian’s ability to prove, and is irrelevant to the human story anyway. If people *act* as if they accept a belief system, and if religions shape human societies, then the subject is historical—i.e., rooted in a particular time and place—and thus worthy of study.
  - Historians assume that societies and ideas change over time, and adapt to specific cultural needs. The idea of religion as “timeless,” “eternal,” or “transhistorical” is a tough one for us. Speaking personally, I’m entirely unpersuaded by claims to timelessness.
  - ***The most important component of a historian’s analysis is context!*** In other words, we ask: what did this document, or this action, or this belief, mean to people in the *particular* place, time, and culture that we are studying? A sermon delivered in Bremen in 1520 may have almost identical words as one delivered in Philadelphia in 1790, but the political, social, and economic context suggests that the words would mean very different things to these two different audiences. So we cannot ever consider texts or beliefs *alone*, only texts or beliefs *in context*.

(Theologians are somewhat exempted from this dilemma because, after all, they believe that their sacred texts are valid in all times and contexts. Not us!)

- On miracles, visions, prophecies, etc.:
  - In this class, we will encounter people who will claim to have had some kind of direct relationship or experience with a supernatural force—a conversion, vision, miracle, etc. Should we believe them? Or should we agree that witches obviously don't exist, and God clearly doesn't appear in pillars of fire, so sources that relate these experiences can be safely ignored as unreliable (if not fraudulent)? In this class, we will assess these experiences and sources with *agnosticism and empathy*. In other words, we cannot presume to judge whether a supernatural event did or did not happen, but will instead be sympathetic to the people who *believed that they experienced* a supernatural event, and sensitive to the ways in which this experience impacted their lives. Peoples' ideas and actions *in response* to the supernatural event is what really interest us, because those reflect historical social and cultural systems.
- On relativism:
  - Some of you might be hard-pressed to separate your personal religious beliefs from the content of the class. After all, it's your religion—you believe it to be true. It's one thing to be detached and analytical about Buddhism if you are not a Buddhist; but can you really treat your own beliefs as the mere product of human culture? That might feel unnatural or uncomfortable, and you may be tempted to engage in special pleading for “your” truth. Conversely, some of you might conclude that all these religions look pretty much the same, so the differences don't matter. Some of you might go even further and say that, because they all have equal claims to truth (or, they are equally deficient in their truth claims), none of them can ultimately be true. All of these reactions are understandable. In fact, you will discover that the people we are studying this semester experienced exactly the same challenges in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There aren't easy answers here, but I do expect everyone to be open-minded and respectful of different positions.
  - And, keep in mind: *we are not ultimately adjudicating the truth of ANY religion!* Rather, we are asking:
    - Why did the social and economic conditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century produce so much interreligious contact?
    - What were the social, political, and cultural consequences of this interreligious contact (for people on all sides of the encounters)?
    - How did people theorize and understand religious pluralism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? Did these ideas change over time, and if so, from what to what?

- Which legacies of this 19<sup>th</sup> century story are still relevant today? How might we use our knowledge of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to inform current debates over pluralism, truth, and national identity?