

# RELS 205: Religion and The Good Life

## Fall 2022

**Course Instructor:** Kyle Derkson  
**Instructor Email:** kyle.derkson@ucalgary.ca  
**Teaching Assistant:** TBD

**Course times:** Monday, Wednesday, Friday 2:00-2:50pm  
**Course Location:** ICT 121

**INSTRUCTOR EMAIL POLICY:** I will do my best to respond to emails sent via students' @ucalgary emails within 48 hours. Please note that course communications will be sent to your @ucalgary email.

**COURSE CALENDAR STATEMENT:** An introduction to the academic study of religion with particular emphasis on the nature of religion, its role as a response to existential questions, and the relationship of religion to contemporary thought and culture.

**Course Hours:** 3 units; (3-0)

**Antirequisite(s):** Credit for Religious Studies 205 and 350 will not be allowed.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** What is “the good life?” In philosophy, the good life has been used to question how we ought to live and is a concept dating back to Plato! However, there are MANY answers to this question. Do we live to be moral? Happy? Healthy? Prosperous? This course is divided into three sections. The first will examine what we mean when we say “religion” or “the good life.” The second section will explore different elements that may make an idea of the good life more difficult to access and explore the role of religion within the accessibility of the good life. The course will end by examining what religion and “the good life” might mean when looking at things we may typically see as “non-religious” such as work or what we purchase.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

All materials for this course are readily available online via YouTube, podcasts, and articles. Links are provided in the syllabus and course website for each week's required materials. Articles will be available via D2L.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

- 1) Compare and apply academic definitions of religion and philosophical ideas of the good life
- 2) Identify and understand some of the intersections between religion, class, gender, race, and disability and how they may relate to an idea of the good life
- 3) Recognize and critically engage with texts, images, symbols, and other religious materials within and outside of religious contexts

**LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES AND REQUIREMENTS**

To access the course readings on D2L and submit assignments, you will need to use a computer with internet access. During class, we will use TopHat as one mode of participation. To participate via TopHat you will need a device with a web browser and an internet connection. If COVID-19 protocols move our class to Zoom, you will need access to a computer that has the following:

- 1) A computer with a supported operating system, as well as the latest security, and malware updates
- 2) A current and updated web browser
- 3) Webcam (built-in or external)
- 4) Microphone and speaker (built-in or external), or headset with microphone
- 5) Current antivirus and/or firewall software enabled
- 6) Broadband internet connection.

**GRADING OUTLINE:****Assignment 1 Due September 29 (15%):**

The first assignment corresponds with the first module of the course, focusing on definitions of religion and a brief history of the good life. You will be asked to provide an outline of an essay. A rubric and organized outline will be provided in the first week of class.

**Assignment 2 Due November 2 (35%):**

This assignment builds on the first assignment. Using the foundation built in assignment 1, choose ONE of the themes from module 2 (class, race, gender, disability) and integrate this into your previous outline. Once you have finished this assignment, you will have an organized draft for an entire essay! This draft can then be used as a building block for the essay in the final exam.

**Final Exam (35%):**

The exam will be composed of multiple choice, short answer questions, and an essay. The essay portion will be based upon the outlines you have written for assignments one and three.

**Participation (3x5% = 15%):**

Part way through each module, you will be asked to write a critical reflection on the module. This will include finding a source or an example from outside of the class and relating it to the material presented from the module. These are relatively short assignments that will help you take material we're working on in the classroom and apply it to an example of your choosing.

**CONDUCT**

During class discussions and activities, each member of the course will work to create a positive learning environment by listening respectfully to each other and by refraining from statements that signal judgment or are condescending. We will be discussing material that can be sensitive and about which members of the course may have strong feelings. For this reason, all members of the class will be asked to use vocabulary that signals observation, description, analysis, scholarly argument, and hypothesis formation.

The second module will be dealing with content that may be difficult and bring up previous experiences you'd rather not think about. If you ever do feel that the material of the class is triggering in some way, it is totally okay if you leave to take a breather.

Students, employees, and academic staff are all expected to demonstrate behaviour in class that promotes and maintains a positive and productive learning environment. As members of the University community, students, employees, and academic staff are expected to demonstrate conduct that is consistent with the University of Calgary Calendar, the Code of Conduct and Non-Academic Misconduct policy and procedures, which can be found at: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

**ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT**

Academic Misconduct refers to student behavior which compromises proper assessment of a student's academic activities and includes cheating, fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, unauthorized assistance, failure to comply with an instructor's expectations regarding conduct required of students completing academic assessments in their courses; and failure to comply with exam regulations applied by the Registrar.

For information on the Student Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedure please visit:

<https://ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-academic-misconduct-policy.pdf> <https://ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-academic-misconduct-procedure.pdf>

Additional information is available on the Academic Integrity Website at <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/learning/academic-integrity>.

## **ACADEMIC ACCOMODATION**

It is the student's responsibility to request academic accommodations according to the University policies and procedures listed below. The Student Accommodations policy is available at <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/access/prospective-students/academic-accommodations>.

Students needing an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) in accordance with the Procedure for Accommodations for Students with Disabilities (<https://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/procedure-for-accommodations-for-students-with-disabilities.pdf> ).

Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than Disability should communicate this need in writing to their instructor.

SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For additional information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit [www.ucalgary.ca/access/](http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/).

## **RESEARCH ETHICS (if applicable)**

If a student is interested in undertaking an assignment that will involve collecting information from members of the public, they should speak with the course instructor and consult the CFREB Ethics (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/research/researchers/ethics-compliance/cfreb>) before beginning the assignment.

## **INSTRUCTOR INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY**

Course materials created by instructors (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the instructor. These materials may NOT be reproduced, redistributed or copied without the explicit consent of the instructor. The posting of course materials to third party websites such as note-sharing sites without permission is prohibited. Sharing of extracts of these course materials with other students enrolled in the course at the same time may be allowed under fair dealing.

## **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND PROTECTION OF PRIVACY**

Student information will be collected in accordance with typical (or usual) classroom practice. Students' assignments will be accessible only by the authorized course faculty. Private information related to the individual student is treated with the utmost regard by the faculty at the University of Calgary.

## **COPYRIGHT LEGISLATION**

All students are required to read the University of Calgary policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright (<https://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/acceptable-use-of-material-protected-by-copyright-policy.pdf>) and requirements of the copyright act (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html>) to ensure they are aware of the consequences of unauthorised sharing of course materials (including instructor notes, electronic versions of textbooks etc.). Students who use material protected by copyright in violation of this policy may be disciplined under the Non-Academic Misconduct Policy <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>.

## **MEDIA RECORDING (if applicable)**

Please refer to the following statement on media recording of students: [https://elearn.ucalgary.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Media-Recording-in-Learning-Environments-OSP\\_FINAL.pdf](https://elearn.ucalgary.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Media-Recording-in-Learning-Environments-OSP_FINAL.pdf)

### ***\*Media recording for lesson capture***

The instructor may use media recordings to capture the delivery of a lecture. These recordings are intended to be used for lecture capture only and will not be used for any other purpose. Although the recording device will be fixed on the Instructor, in the event that incidental student participation is recorded, the instructor will ensure that any identifiable content (video or audio) is masked, or will seek consent to include the identifiable student content to making the content available on University approved platforms.

### ***\*Media recording for self-assessment of teaching practices***

The instructor may use media recordings as a tool for self-assessment of their teaching practices. Although the recording device will be fixed on the instructor, it is possible that student participation in the course may be inadvertently captured. These recordings will be used for instructor self-assessment only and will not be used for any other purpose.

### ***\*Media recording for the assessment of student learning***

The instructor may use media recordings as part of the assessment of students. This may include but is not limited to classroom discussions, presentations, clinical

practice, or skills testing that occur during the course. These recordings will be used for student assessment purposes only and will not be shared or used for any other purpose.

### **SEXUAL VIOLENCE POLICY**

The University recognizes that all members of the University Community should be able to learn, work, teach and live in an environment where they are free from harassment, discrimination, and violence. The University of Calgary's sexual violence policy guides us in how we respond to incidents of sexual violence, including supports available to those who have experienced or witnessed sexual violence, or those who are alleged to have committed sexual violence. It provides clear response procedures and timelines, defines complex concepts, and addresses incidents that occur off-campus in certain circumstances. Please see the policy available at

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/sexual-violence-policy.pdf>

### **OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

Please visit the Registrar's website at:

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/registration/course-outlines> for additional important information on the following:

- Wellness and Mental Health Resources
- Student Success
- Student Ombuds Office
- Student Union (SU) Information
- Graduate Students' Association (GSA) Information
- Emergency Evacuation/Assembly Points
- Safewalk

### **CLASS SCHEDULE\***

The course is divided into three modules, each module contains multiple themes that we will explore. For each theme, there is one reading as well as a few podcasts or videos.

**\* Some sections are subject to minor changes and a finalized schedule will be provided the first week of class**

**September 7:** What is YOUR good life?

**Watch:** [70 Women Ages 5-75 Answer: What's a Good Life Mean to You?](#)

We're going to start the course with a bit of self-examination. When we first meet, let's think about the things that would make a good

life FOR US. Rather than thinking about what a particular religion or philosophy may say, I want to ask you what is YOUR Good Life?

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## **Module I: What is Religion? What is “The Good Life?”**

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**SECTION OVERVIEW:** The first section for this course examines the two pieces of the course title in more detail. Here, we will ask what is religion and what is the Good Life? Instead of finding definitive answers, our explorations will see how we've come to make assumptions about what religion and the good life and why ideas of religion and the good life might be related.

### **THEME 1: RELIGION**

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**September 9:** “Religion” Part I

**Podcast:** [Keeping it 101: A Killjoy's Introduction to Religion, Season 1, Episode 2, Who gets left out of “religion?”](#)

**September 12:** “Religion” Part II

Continuation from Part I

**September 14:** “Religion” Part III

**Podcast:** [Keeping it 101: A Killjoy's Introduction to Religion, Season 1, Episode 3, Major religions, minor religions, must we?](#)

### **THEME 2: THE GOOD LIFE**

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**September 16:** “The Good Life” Part I

**Watch:** [The Good Life: Plato](#)

**Read:** Aristotle. “Nicomachean Ethics.” Translated by W.D. Ross. The Internet Classics Archive. Book I.

<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.1.i.html>

**Optional reading**

**September 19:** “The Good Life” Part II and Assignment I overview

Continuation of Part I, introducing Hellenism

**September 21:** “The Good Life” Part III

**Watch:** [What is a Good Life?: Crash Course in Philosophy #46](#)

**Further Reading:** [What does it Mean to Live the Good Life?](#)

**September 23:** Connecting Religion and The Good Life

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## **Module II: A Good Life for Who?**

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**SECTION OVERVIEW:** This section will examine different themes that may be important to the accessibility of the Good Life. In each theme, we keep asking ourselves “what does this tell us about the Good Life?” and “Who is this Good Life for?” In this section we will explore the accessibility of the good life and how that may be related to concepts of religion.

### **THEME 3: CLASS**

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**September 26:** Why Does it Matter and How does it Relate to Religion?

**Read:** Sean McCloud, *Divine Hierarchies: Class in American Religion & Religious Studies* (University of North Carolina Press, 2007). Chapter I: Class Matters, 9-32.

**September 28:** Caste

**Read:** [The Idea of India – Subhash Kak](#)

**Watch:** [Life as an “Untouchable” in India](#)

**September 30: NO CLASS**

**National Day for Truth and Reconciliation**

**October 3:** Canadian health and China's barefoot doctors

**Watch:** [Social Determinants of Health](#)

[Health Inequalities in Canada](#)

### **THEME 4: GENDER**

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**October 5:** What is Gender and why think about it alongside religion?

**Podcast:** [Gender, Sexuality and Religion in What's Now the U.S.](#)

**October 7: American Constructions of Gender**

**Read:** Curtis, Susan. “The Son of Man and God the Father: The Social Gospel and Victorian Masculinity.” In *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America*, edited by Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, 67–79. University Of Chicago Press, 1990.

**October 10: NO CLASS**

**Thanksgiving**

**October 12: North American Indigenous gender identities**

**Watch:** [Native Americans, Gender Roles, and Two-Spirit People](#)

**October 14: Purity and Gender**

**Watch:** [Buddhism has a lot of Hells](#)



## THEME 5: RACE

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### OVERVIEW:

**October 17:** Race in North America

**Podcast:** [Race and Religion in What's Now the U.S.](#)

**October 19:** Race and Religion

**Watch:** [The Religion of Race: America's First Religion \(Dr. Audra Savage\)](#)

**October 21:** Race outside of North America

**Podcast:** [E204: Race & Religion in South Asia &, well, Not-The-US](#)

## THEME 6: DISABILITY AND ABILITY

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**October 24:** Disability and the Good Life

**Read:** Johnson, Harriet McBryde. "Unspeakable Conversations." In *Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Alice Wong, 3–27. New York: Vintage, 2020.

**October 26:** Disability at the intersections

**Watch:** [Black Disability Activism | Black Freedom Lectures | Dr. Moya Bailey](#)

**October 28:** Disability in the Middle Ages

**Podcast:** [Disabilities in the Middle Ages with Kisha Tracy](#)

**October 31:** Intersectionality, Religion, and The Good Life

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## Module II: The Good Life and Religion in "Non-Religious" Things

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**SECTION OVERVIEW:** So far, we've established some of the history of religion and the Good Life, and examined how this may, or may not, be seen in some religious traditions. Now, we're going to start looking at things going on TODAY and how they reimagine the Good Life or even make an entirely NEW idea of what the Good Life may be!

## THEME 3: THE ENVIRONMENT

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**OVERVIEW:** The environment is a hot topic in politics and this topic also finds its way into religion and conceptions of the Good Life! So, what

might we learn from different religious traditions that could help us think about the environment and its place in our good life?

## November 2: Introducing Non-Religious Things

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### TERM BREAK NOVEMBER 6-12

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**November 14:** The Environment and the Good Life

**Podcast:** [The Intelligence of Plants – Robin Wall Kimmerer](#)

**November 16:** Jason Momoa and the Thirty Meter Telescope

**Watch:** [Why Native Hawaiians Protesting Telescope on Mauna Kea Aren't Going Anywhere – NBC Left Field](#)

**Watch:** [Meet the native Hawaiians fighting U.S. occupation](#)

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## THEME 8: CONSUMPTION AND THE GOOD LIFE

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**OVERVIEW:** In North America, especially in the United States, there is a cultural attitude that borders on a metaphysical claim: the universe, however one defines it, is capable of an unlimited amount of wealth, prosperity, and, most of all, happiness.

**November 18:** Consumption as Religion?

**Watch:** [Religion and Consumption – Kathryn Lofton](#)

**November 21:** Oprah

**Read:** [Has Anyone Talked about How it Feels? – Kathryn Lofton](#)

**November 23:** The Christian Music Industry

**Watch:** [The Dark Reality of The Christian Music Industry](#)

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## THEME 9: WORK

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**OVERVIEW:** Some of today's most powerful corporations, from Google to Facebook, employ Chief Happiness Officers. These are executives who encourage work and life to permeate and influence each other with harmony and balance.

**November 25:** Bullshit Jobs and the Good Life?

**Watch:** [On Bullshit Jobs – David Graeber](#)

**November 28:** Fitter, Happier, More Productive?

**Watch:** [Chief Happiness Officer TED Talk](#)

**Watch:** [Karl Marx](#)

**Watch:** [Max Weber](#)

**November 30:** Downside of Happiness?

**Read:** Ahmed, Sara. "Introduction: Why Happiness, Why Now?" 1-20. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

**December 2:** Looking back at "Religion" and "The Good Life"

**December 5:** Wrapping it up!