Module Description

This course will explore "classic" attempts to develop theories of religion, mainly from a religious studies' perspective. Reflecting on religion has been an important element of the intellectual history of European modernity. Thinking about religion also meant to think about societies and power, about culture and what makes a human being human. We will reconstruct the transformations of the concepts of religion within the early study of religion and identify the historical, philosophical and social contexts. While most of the course is dedicated to these classical positions, we will keep track of how the theories responded to the problems of their time, and how they have shaped our understanding of religion until today.

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this course, students will be able to:
• Identify presuppositions and core tenets of key thinkers in modernity on religion.
• Understand and distinguish typical concepts and approaches in theories on religion.
• Identify the relevance and consequences of theorizing in the study of religion.
• Discuss the changing relationship between religion and society in different eras.
• Distinguish between scholarly, religious, atheist, philosophical and common sense perspectives, and understand them as a response to the problems of their time.
• Present and discuss critiques of the approaches, highlighting methodological strengths and weaknesses.

Indicative Reading

Assessment: One 3,000 word essay

Name of Lecturer:
Prof Alexandra Grieser