ANT 170/REL 170 Myth, Ritual and Magic  
Spring 2012

SECTION 1  
Time: M/W/F 10:30am-11:35am; Location: Bailey 100  
SECTION 2  
Time: M/W/F 3:05pm-4:10pm; Location: WLDC 128+

Instructor: Prof. Peter Bedford  
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Office Hours: M/W/F 4:15-5:30; others times by appointment

Please make use of office hours. Please stop by too if you are interested in advice about other offerings in Religious Studies or how Religious Studies might fit into an undergraduate program. I am very happy to arrange to meet outside of office hours: just contact me!

COURSE DESCRIPTION  
This class explores myth, ritual and magic from historical and anthropological perspectives. It draws on examples of religious expression that highlight the interrelationships of myth, ritual and magic, and discusses their meaning and significance in ancient and modern religious communities. Examples will be drawn from areas including ancient Egypt, shamanism and western esoteric traditions.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS  
Journal  50%  500 words per week x 10 weeks.  
To be handed in weekly.  
See further information on the journal below.

Essay  25%  8-10 pages double spaced.  
See some examples of topics below.  
Due Friday May 18th by 5pm (end of week 8).

Examination  25%  1.5 hours duration. Held during examination week.

TEXTBOOKS (can be purchased from the bookstore)  

Additional Weekly Readings (handed out in class).
ABSENCES AND LATE WORK
No tests may be made up unless arrangements have been made in advance of the scheduled exam. Sick? Going on a field trip? Have an intercollegiate sports commitment? These things happen, but if you wish to have an opportunity to make up a test, you must contact your instructor ahead of time! In respect to the paper, unless you have a very good excuse (like a medical certificate) the paper will be reduced by one grade for every day it is late (that is, an A paper becomes A-, or a B+ becomes B when handed in one day late; an A paper becomes B+ when handed in two days late).

HONOR CODE
Students are expected to uphold the Academic Honor Code. The Academic Honor System of Union College is based on the premise that each student has the responsibility to:

1. Uphold the highest standards of academic integrity in the student’s own work,
2. Refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity in the college community, and
3. Foster a high sense of integrity and social responsibility on the part of the college community.

A full statement of Union’s Academic Honor Code may be found in the Student handbook (http://www.union.edu/Handbook). See also Union’s statement on plagiarism at http://www.union.edu/PUBLIC/LIBRARY/nocheat/statement.htm.

ADA REQUIREMENTS
It is Union College policy to make accommodations for individuals with disabilities. If you have any disability or special concern, please let me know what your needs are in order that they may be accommodated. All discussions will remain confidential to the extent permissible by law.

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodations must also:
1. Register with and provide documentation to the Dean of Students Office.
2. Bring a letter to the instructor from the Dean of Students Office indicating what academic accommodations you require. This must be done within the first two weeks of term

For more information about services available to Union College students with disabilities, please contact the Dean of Students Office:

Shelly Shinebarger, Director of Student Support Services
Dean of Students Office
shinebas@union.edu
(518) 388-6116
Welcome to the class. While we spend the first two weeks examining some theoretical issues surrounding myth, ritual and magic, the bulk of the class is devoted to exploring specific examples of their cultural expression. Rather than divide myth, ritual, and magic, we stress the interconnections between the three and choose examples that bear this out. This means we’re going to be covering a lot of ground both historically and geographically, but it should make for an interesting journey.

There are a few themes running through the class which will be drawn out in the examples week by week. The first pertains to how people make sense of themselves, their society, and the world. Such understanding is commonly expressed in myth and ritual. Myth and ritual make the world a meaningful, liveable place. But as we’ll see, what counts as “meaningful” differs over time and from place to place. If there are different conceptions of “meaningful”, then how do people obtain the reliable, authoritative knowledge about the world and themselves that informs their particular understanding? This question is taken up in the second theme, which develops the first by asking about ways of gaining and organizing knowledge about the world and ourselves. Such knowledge is related to cosmology/belief systems which are expressed in myth and ritual. The third theme focuses on ‘mediation’. Once you have a world view that emphasizes ‘this world’ and the ‘other world’ (the world of gods, etc), then you have an issue with how to get these two realms to interact, including how to gain access to the ‘other world’. Sometimes there are ‘priests’ or the like who can use rituals and magic to do this; sometimes the ‘myth’ informs us of other means to accomplish this goal. This could include transforming your ‘self’ into something that can either travel between the realms or even become the other realm.

The course highlights the occult or esoteric nature of many of the topics we touch upon. In this context “occult” and “esoteric” refer to the hidden or specialised character of the knowledge and techniques we’re expounding in this unit. For example, the divination techniques of ancient Iraq or the ecstatic experiences of shamans and medieval mystics (or the intricacies of modern physics, for that matter) were not commonly known to all members of society. Rather, they were made known to only a select few and were kept hidden from the rest. Why that was the case is something you might usefully reflect upon.

Each week there is a lecture which introduces a topic, and then a tutorial discusses matters relating to that topic before moving on to the next lecture and a new topic. The topics to be covered this term are:

1. Defining myth and ritual
2. Defining magic
3. Death in ancient Egypt
4. Divination in the ancient Near East
5. Shamanism and possession
6. Gnosticism
7. Sufism
8. Kabbalah
9. Alchemy and hermeticism
10. Witchcraft: a history
WEEK 1. DEFINING MYTH AND RITUAL

Introduction to the class
Mar 26, 28 Lecture: Theories of myth and ritual

What are myth, ritual and magic, and why should we be interested in studying them? What are the relationships between myth, ritual and magic? This lecture begins to address these questions by focusing on debates concerning the definition of myth and ritual, and reflects on the ways in which myth and ritual have permeated, and continue to permeate, cultures.

Mar 30 Tutorial: Problems in defining Myth and Ritual

What are the main ways in which myth and ritual have been understood? How does your own understanding of myth and ritual relate to these positions? What do you see to be relationship(s) between religion and myth and ritual?

Reading:
Handout from Prof. Mary Magoulick on ‘Myth’.

WEEK 2. DEFINING MAGIC

Apr 2, 4 Lecture: Theories of Magic

Following on from last week’s lecture, we consider definitions of magic and how magic relates to myth and ritual. We also consider the relationship between magic and religion. We again reflect on the ways in which magic has permeated, and continues to permeate, cultures.

Apr 6 Tutorial: Problems in defining Magic

What are the main ways in which magic has been understood? How does your own understanding of magic relate to these positions? What do you see to be relationship(s) between myth, ritual and magic? How does religion relate to them?

Reading:
WEEK 3. DEATH IN ANCIENT EGYPT

Apr 9, 11 Lecture: Death in Ancient Egypt

Esoteric information might prove useful for this life, but in some world-views it is absolutely indispensable for survival in the next one. Death is always spoken about in the context of rich mythologies that help interpret its meaning. Ritual (including magic) commonly plays an important role in humans’ dealings with death. In considering ‘Death in Ancient Egypt’ we are afforded a wonderful example of the interplay of myth, ritual, magic and esoteric knowledge.

Ancient Egypt has captured the imagination of Westerners for over two millennia. Egypt was always held to be the repository of secret knowledge, and the current generation continues this fixation on Egyptian wisdom in a variety of ways: from the belief that the Pyramids contain the secrets of human history and destiny (which in some versions includes a connection with extra-terrestrial life), to the renewed worship of Egyptian deities such as Isis. While mummification doesn’t seem to have gained much popularity, interest in Egyptian conceptions of death and the afterlife remains high. Archaeological remains and literary texts tell us a considerable amount, and this lecture explores some of that evidence and the ideas expressed therein.

Apr 23 Tutorial: Mythology of the afterlife in ancient Egypt

How was the afterlife conceived of in ancient Egypt, and how was this expressed in myth, ritual and magic? What was the realm of the dead? What did people do when they were in there?

Reading:

WEEK 4. DIVINATION IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Apr 16, 18 Lecture: Divination, Divine Will and Magical Protection

We begin by examining some ways in which humans and the divine or supramundane realms communicate, and what they try to say to each other. Attention is given to how myth underpins these acts of communication, and explores how ritual (including magic) are important mechanisms within the communication system.
This week introduces aspects of communication between the supernatural world and the physical world, a topic to be addressed further in later weeks. That the gods or other supernatural beings can communicate with humans, and humans with supernatural beings, have been central and resilient motifs in most cultures’ understanding of reality. It is of course a notion held widely in Western society today, as evidenced by belief in such widely divergent processes as prayer, dreams, seances, tarot card reading, astrology, astral traveling, spirit possession, and prophetic speech. All these acts of communication are predicated on myth; that is, the articulation of a view (story) of how the natural and supernatural worlds are constructed and related, the modes of communication possible, and the place of specialist intermediaries through whom the communication is channeled.

A related area for discussion is how one can influence the supernatural powers to act in your favour, either by deflecting evil, thwarting enemies and overcoming adversaries, or by helping you attain what you desire (whether it be for yourself or on behalf of a loved one). You can see how the desire to influence supernatural powers is predicated on being able to communicate with them. The means by which one attempts to influence or manipulate the supernatural is ritual; what is commonly called magic. Specialists are again needed for the rituals to be effective and, as noted above, it is all predicated on a particular understanding of reality; specifically, how the natural and supernatural worlds relate to each other, how one can contact the gods, how you can effectively influence them, how they are likely to act. That is, it is all based on myth.

Apr 20 Tutorial: Ritual techniques and ritual technicians in ancient Iraq (Mesopotamia)

An example from antiquity chosen for study is ancient Mesopotamian divination practices. Mesopotamia refers to ancient Iraq. The word “Mesopotamia” means “between the rivers”, those rivers being the Tigris and Euphrates. Mesopotamia is a geographical term; there has never been a nation called Mesopotamia. The main peoples that inhabited this region in antiquity were, in the southern area of Mesopotamia, the Sumerians (in the third millennium BCE) and the Babylonians (second and first millennia BCE), while in the northern area there lived the Assyrians. The Sumerians you may have heard of as the people who developed urbanism and writing. These three cultures were related; the Babylonians and Assyrians both absorbing Sumerian culture. They developed a scholarly tradition over two millennia regarding communication with the divine in which religious specialists were trained. They were adept at obtaining information from deities as well as being skilled interpreters of both solicited and unsolicited messages from the gods.
Extispicy (examination of the entrails of animals), a central form of divination in Mesopotamia, isn’t practiced anymore. Why not? Other forms of ancient divination, such as astrology, still are, so why not extispicy?

Reading:

WEEK 5. SHAMANISM

Apr 23, 25  Lecture: Shamanism and Possession

Reading signs placed by the gods, in the heavens (astrology) or on the entrails of animals (extispicy) or in dreams, is only one mode of communication between the divine realm and the mundane world. Another widely recognized mode is direct contact with the Divine (God, gods, spirits etc.) either by means of spirit possession or through travelling to the divine world. Here technical expertise and religious experience meet. Throughout history, these religious experiences are communicated in particular social and cultural terms to make them meaningful to the individual and to society at large. Shamanism and forms of possession are examples of different social framings of religious experiences. Their often ecstatic character has attracted the attention not only of the Inquisition and later of anthropologists, but also of New Age groups.

Apr 27  Tutorial: Socially Locating Shamanism and Possession

How and why are shamanism and ‘possessed’ persons valued in various societies? Why, for example, are the possessed vilified in some places (or at some times), while in other places (or at other times) they are keenly sought out and valued for their knowledge and access to supramundane power(s)? To what extent do responses to shamanism and the possessed reflect the structure of the moral universe in particular societies? If being a shaman reflects a particular role in a community, to what extent can a Westerner be a shaman?

Reading:
WEEK 6. GNOSTICISM

Apr 30, May 2  Lecture: Gnosticism — Anthropology and Afterlife

Like extispicy and astrology, and like alchemy and hermeticism to be discussed later, Gnosticism claims that we can be deceived by appearances. There are hidden significances to mundane objects; in the case of Gnosticism, the objects are not animal’s organs or the planets, they are human beings themselves.

In a real way most of the topics we look at in this unit can be classed as “Gnosticism”, if by that term you mean knowledge (Greek *gnosis*) that is esoteric, known by only a small group of people, passed on to a select group and otherwise hidden from the general population. But gnosticism also refers, more technically, to a particular world view and mythology that was developed in the ancient Greco-Roman world around the time of Christ. It had some influence on early Christianity and arguably has tendrils that reach down to us today. It was influential in the Renaissance in matters such as alchemy and astrology. In this lecture we are going to be most interested in gnostic myths of creation, anthropology (that is, what a human being is), and, based on these, expectations for the afterlife.

May 4  Tutorial: Modern Gnosticism?

While it’s true that there is great interest in the ancient gnostic gospels (like the Gospel of Thomas), Bloom, in the reading cited below, seems to think that ancient gnosticism resonates with modern Westerners because we share a desire to find or recognize our “true self”. What do you make of this? How closely related are such modern concerns with ancient gnosticism and gnostic mythology? To what extent does gnostic mythology impinge upon modern Western understandings of the afterlife?

Reading:
Shamanism is not the only example of contacting the divine through religious experience. Many religious traditions have exemplars of the same phenomenon. Over the next few weeks we examine “meeting the divine” in Christianity, Islam (Sufism), and Judaism (Kabbalah). Our emphasis is on the mythology/world-view that makes such meetings possible, and we examine the role of ritual (including magic) in facilitating the meetings.

Most modern Western accounts of Sufism, the mystical path of Islam, start with a discussion of the meaning of the mysterious term “sufi” and an examination of possible derivation from (or influences by) other mystical traditions. On the other hand, since we are primarily dealing with mystical states and religious experience one could argue that this academic perspective form outside Sufism will not yield the same type of understanding one reaches through the inside view of the practicing sufi.

Starting from a discussion of this point (“A name or a reality?”) this lecture will explore some of the main aspects of this spiritual way as it is still practiced within the Islamic tradition, including the belief system (doctrinal basis) and the praxis - the method and special techniques - such as the ritual prayer (salat) and ritual remembrance and contemplation of the Divine (dhikr); the recitation of special litanies (wird); participation in spiritual audition (sama), as well as the role of service.

Central to the sufi way is the experience of the dissolution of egocentricity in the state of annihilation (fana) conducive to union with the oneness and uniqueness of Divine Reality. While these mystic experiences remain indescribable, and sufi knowledge can only be transmitted through personal experience and illumination (unveiling), classical sufi literature, especially in poetry, has used symbolic language to convey a taste of these states.

What is the relationship between exoteric and esoteric Islam, sharia and tariqa (sufism)?
Is it possible to practice sufism outside Islam?
Why might Sufism appeal to modern western people more than Islam?
How did Sufism come to the West?
What are the central beliefs and practices of the sufis?
What is the purpose and goal of the sufi Way?
Why has Sufism been variously presented as the religion of love or the transcendence of religion(s)?
WEEK 8. KABBALAH

May 14, 16  Lecture: The Kabbalah: A Ladder between Heaven and Earth

The Kabbalah is synonymous with Jewish mysticism, the quest to come into the presence of, and even unite with, the divine. Technically, it refers to the development, originally in Europe in the medieval (c. 1000-1500 CE) and early modern (c. 1500-1750 CE) periods, of a distinctive Jewish view of the divine nature. It is a mythology that continues to have influence among some Jewish groups such as the Hasidim, and it is also drawn upon by some non-Jewish new religious movements who derive their knowledge via Christian appropriation in the early modern period of some of its more occult elements (Madonna has in recent years allegedly adopted Kabbalism). This lecture will describe the main features of classic kabbalistic myth and, time permitting, examine some of its current expressions.

May 18  Tutorial: Myth and Magic in the Kabbalah

Kabbalists have a very elaborate mythology that explains the nature of the divine and the relationship between divinity and the mundane world. We will reflect on these two aspects in the tutorial and also consider how the kabbalistic world-view relates to their tradition of magical practice.

Reading:

N.B. PAPER DUE MAY 18TH
Alchemy and Hermeticism are related in that they both hold to a notion of transmutation: of base metals into gold; of the physical into the spiritual. In the latter case there is some indebtedness to Gnosticism. How and why does transmutation come about? What world-view underpins such ideas? There are some modern adherents of these perspectives, but this lecture will mostly focus on their classical expression in late antiquity and the Renaissance.

Alchemy and Hermeticism, like astrology, contend that objects can have secret properties and can be spiritually charged. Modern science contends, by contrast, that all objects (metals, planets, people) are simply material. There’s nothing hidden, special or spiritual about them. Time permitting, we will reflect on how the modern Western scientific world-view may, or may not, have had an impact on “magical” world-views. Is it possible for them to co-exist? Is the scientific world-view just another myth to explain the cosmos and ourselves, but of no greater authority than any other myth? Have the natural explanations of science demythologized the universe and left us all struggling to give some higher (deeper?) meaning to our existence?

Alchemy is seen by some as a forerunner to modern experimental science since it attempts to unlock the physical (and spiritual) secrets of ores using laboratory techniques. Is alchemy a type of science? How would you compare the forms of knowledge gained through alchemy with that gained through modern scientific practices and the world-view that underpins them?

Reading:
Much like the term ‘magic’, witchcraft and witches historically have had a negative connotation attached to them. At the heart of defining witchcraft and identifying witches are issues of legitimacy and power. Who can legitimately access the divine realm or call upon spiritual powers? Who knows the ‘proper’ rituals to gain such access? Since the answers to such questions are socially determined, a category is developed for those who ‘know’ and ‘practice’ illegitimately: they are witches. In medieval Europe, for example, women’s expertise in traditional modes of healing was deemed to be illegitimate and thus demonic in its source. The Catholic church was the sole source of legitimate knowledge and power about divine/spiritual matters (including healing), and since these women acted outside the authority of the church they were designated ‘witches’.

While accusations of witchcraft can be a way for those in religious authority to control others in society who act in the ‘wrong’ manner or who have ‘wrong’ beliefs or who have the ‘wrong’ religious experiences, there are other uses of witchcraft. Here we can compare ancient Mediterranean societies (Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome), traditional African society, and modern American society in respect to how being a witch can have positive social roles within a community.

June 1 Tutorial: Witchcraft—Does the term have much utility?

From the lecture and the readings, as well as from your own reflection, one may well ask whether ‘witchcraft’ is a single category or a constellation of social roles and practices. Perhaps the term is too slippery or too amorphous to be useful in academic study. As with a number of central concepts under discussion in this class (‘myth’, ‘ritual’, ‘magic’), ‘witchcraft’ invites us to face squarely problems of definition. What, then, is ‘witchcraft’?

Reading:

ASSESSMENT

JOURNAL:
This is a major assignment which requires a short piece of written work at the end of each week’s study. It should not be regarded as an “extra”, but rather the natural outcome of
your tutorial preparation. Do not leave the journal to the end of the semester and then attempt to ‘catch up’; instead build it up gradually during the course of the semester.

The process is as follows:
For each week of the term you have a tutorial topic for study which takes up an aspect of the previous lecture. Preparation for the tutorial involves not only attending the lecture but undertaking the set readings, bearing in mind the types of issues/questions raised in this outline, and taking notes. Having done the reading and participated in the tutorial discussion, you should write or type up a succinct summary of the basic points and ideas you have learnt and developed. These summaries will then constitute your “Journal”.

You should submit your journal entry each week and comments will be provided by your instructor as to your progress, together with suggestions for improvements in content and technique. This will help to ensure that you are working along the right lines.

How should you construct your summaries? It is crucial that they are succinct, to-the-point, and well-ordered. Each should be only about a single page in length; i.e., 400-500 words. N.B. more lengthy summaries and extraneous material will not gather extra marks, rather they may cause you to lose marks.

The summaries may utilize note- and point-form as well as literary English. However, make sure that the sense is easy to follow. Since each summary will be quite short, it is essential that you really try to focus on what seem to you the most important points. You do not need to try to include everything. Concentrate especially on matters of theory (i.e. how the issues are comprehended) and argument (e.g., does magic work?), and include any interesting insights that you derive from undertaking the readings.

In general, you can expect to be rewarded with a good mark for illustrating such skills as:
* clear comprehension and expression of complex ideas;
* coherent presentation of data;
* analysis and discussion (do not be afraid to take issue with opinions expressed in the readings).

Try to identify what is central and foundational to each week’s readings; i.e., consider what is the point of this particular topic and how the readings relate to it. Do not use up all your space with descriptive material that the tutor could easily read for her- or himself in the readings. Remember that you are trying to make points of weight that evidence your understanding.

ESSAY TOPICS:
Due to the diversity of material covered you will find relevant literature in many different sections of the library; for example, anthropology, sociology, history, religion. Specific references will be given on a week-to-week basis. You should also make regular use of such standard reference works M. Eliade (ed.) (1987) The encyclopedia of religion. New York: Macmillan, especially to begin research on the topics we cover in this class (available in the reference section of the library; [Ref.] BL31.E46 1986). There are also
useful introductory essays in Encyclopedia Britannica; the entry on “Occult” covers a number of topics we touch on in this class. Another useful resource for select topics is W.J. Hanegraaff (ed.) (2005) Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism Leiden: Brill. (Library: [q]BF1407.D529 2005)

1. Discuss the three categories of myth, ritual and magic in relation to religion and culture; and provide a more detailed discussion (with examples) of one of these.

The title probably sounds rather complex: please do not panic! In essence the essay falls into three parts, as follows:

An introductory discussion of the nature of myth, ritual and magic. Here you should attempt to define the three categories (e.g., what is myth, and how do myths differ from other narratives such as folk tales?). Section A of the unit will provide considerable background on this, to point you in the right directions. Try to keep this part succinct by focussing on the question of definition.

As an extension of a) you should continue by relating these three categories to broader notions of religion and culture. Important questions to discuss include: Is magic something different to religion (and if so how would you distinguish them?), or is all religion in some part magical? How do myths underpin what we understand as collective cultures (e.g., all Christian cultures partake in a shared ‘myth’ concerning God, creation, the birth/death/resurrection of Jesus — as related in the biblical authorities)? What is the function of ritual in our personal and collective lives?

In the final part of the essay you should take one example of something that you define as myth (e.g., a creation story) OR ritual (e.g., an initiation) OR magic (e.g., a spell) and use it to expand upon the points you have made in your earlier discussion (parts a and b). That is, you should choose and use this example to provide more depth to your analysis, and as an attempt to try out the argument you have been developing. Your example can be taken from anything with which you are familiar, or which interests you; and it does not require reference to any extra source materials beyond your own life-experience.


What do you understand to be the character and purpose(s) of “myth”? In your answer draw on examples studied in class or of personal interest, and place your views in the context of the academic study of myth.

3. What are divination systems and how do they relate to the cosmology of the community/individual that uses them? What social roles do divination and their practitioners have?
In your answer you should refer to a number of examples of divination systems. In this unit we look at extispicy (the examination of animal entrails), but you could also look at others such as astrology, tarot card reading, palm reading, (runes?), among many others.

4. Discuss the ways in which experiences of religious trance or ecstasy reflect the structure of the moral universe in particular societies.

In the tutorial for topics 5 and 10 we examined shamanism, possession and witchcraft. You could draw on one or more of these, or look to other examples.

5. In consultation with the instructor, choose or adapt one of the tutorial questions for use as an essay question.

6. Feel free to speak with your instructor about devising your own essay question.

ESSAY ADVICE:
In general, use this assignment as an exercise in developing essay writing skills. Here is a list of features basic to any good essay. Check what you are writing to make sure that your essay exhibits them!

— FOCUS: Keep to the point! What is the essay asking of you? Avoid going off at a tangent. Remember: your tutor is looking for a coherent and persuasive answer to a particular question. Your ability to provide this is what will bring you marks.

— STRUCTURE: Follow a logical sequence! Each essay should begin with a clear description of what you understand the question to be asking, followed by a statement as to how you intend to answer it. This is the ‘introduction’. Follow this with a well-ordered discussion of the relevant points. Do not circle round and round, or keep repeating yourself. The essay should then end with a ‘conclusion’; that is, a succinct summary of your argument and what it has found. The conclusion must answer the question set, and so should accord with what you have set out in the introduction.

N.B. Good essay writing requires a single coherent piece of text (i.e., writing). It is not a string of quotations or a collection of notes. You need to absorb what you have read, think it through, then put things in your own words. It is not necessary to break up the essay with sub-headings. Instead, your sequence of paragraphs should provide a clear order to the essay, and indicate the logical development of your discussion.

— ARGUMENT: Try to argue a convincing answer to the question. A good essay is not merely descriptive, rather it should pull the reader along with it, persuading her or him that your understanding of the matters at hand is a satisfactory interpretation of the source material.

— ANALYSIS: To develop an argument you need to analyse the data. Just because someone says something (e.g., that magic is irrational) does not mean that it is right or that you must agree with it. Make up your own mind! DISCUSS the issues at stake and EXAMINE the evidence and arguments used to arrive at a conclusion. After all, different people and cultures may regard different sorts behaviour or activity as rational or useful. Always try to look at both sides of an issue.
— REFERENCES: Illustrate and substantiate your discussion with reference to source material (e.g., books you have read). This has several useful functions: to evidence what you have read; to acknowledge your sources (i.e., the places where you obtained ideas or information); to provide examples for points you wish to make. Note that the references should be secondary to your argument. A good essay is not just made up from the sources you have used. Rather, you construct an argument with regard to the question set, and use references to give it substance and force.

N.B. Always make sure to reference carefully with regard to author, source (book, encyclopaedia, or other), publication details (place [and publisher], date of publication) and page number. There are various reference systems you can use. Make sure, however, that you use only one such system consistently throughout the essay.