Contemporary Religion and Public Life* (RS-659)

Fall 2015

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Office: Budd Building, Room 8
Office hours: Mondays and Tuesdays, from 12:00 pm to 2:20 pm

Class Location and Time

Wednesdays from 4:30 pm to 7:30 pm
Location TBD

Description

This course looks behind the headlines that speak of the religious resurgence in contemporary politics and examine the thorny issues that arise when the boundaries between the “church” and “state” inevitably collide. What is “religion” and what is its place in late modern societies? What is unique and problematic about religious participants in public life? And what do perceptions of religion tell us about the constantly shifting “rules of the game” in contemporary democratic societies? These questions will be at the core of our examination of theoretical engagements with the concepts of religion, secularism, modernity, tradition, democracy and human rights. Our case studies will be from American and global contexts.

Evaluation

Grading will be based on

1. Weekly reflections/”talking points” (30%)
2. Mid-term essay (20%) – due on November 18
3. Class presentations (10%)
4. Final essay (30%) – due on December 23
5. Class participation (10%).

Logistics

1) Weekly Reflections:

You will be expected to analyze and discuss the assigned readings at each session. Weekly reflections will be your “talking points.” They will help you organize your thoughts and prepare for each class.

Our class meets on Wednesdays at 4:30 pm, and you are required to email me your reflection by 12:00 pm on the day of the class. Each reflection must be around 2 pages (a bit less or a bit
more does not matter). Please approach each reflection as a dialogue between you and the readings. In other words, what are your thoughts on one or two points an author makes? What are some questions that have arisen while you read the assignment?

It is up to you to shape each reflection. Some possible ways may be to

- Reflect on an idea you found intriguing
- Explore how an author presents a particular theme
- Think through implications of a particular idea (don’t make it too broad)
- Compare between this and previous weeks’ readings.
- Trace how this week’s reading speaks to a theme we have encountered earlier.

This is important: End each reflection with 2 or 3 questions you would like to ask in class.

You will be required to start submitting reflections as of our 2nd session. The grade for this assignment will be based on the quantity and quality of your submissions. I will return printed copies of your reflection with a grade of either a “+” or a “-.” Plus stands for pass, and minus for fail.

The scale for the final evaluation will be as follows:

- A=11 passing entries
- B=8 passing entries
- C+= 6 passing entries
- C=5 passing entries
- F=4 or fewer passing entries.

No late submissions will be accepted. There will be no way to make up for missed reflections.

Note that each student will be asked to formally present their reflection and serve as a respondent to another student’s reflection once during the semester.

2) Midterm and Final Essays:

You will have to submit two essays during the semester. The midterm essay should be 5-7 pages in length. The final essay should be 10-12 pages.

I will assign the topic for the midterm paper. However, you will be responsible for selecting the subject of your final essay.

Please feel free to contact me with your ideas for both papers at any stage of preparation.

Grading standards for the essays will be:

- A = Excellent. Excellent presentation and analysis that demonstrates original interpretation.
B = Good. Solid command of facts and good attempt at analysis.
C+ = Adequate in the sense of doing minimal compliance with the assignment.
C = Poor; did not complete the assignment adequately but shows some effort.
F = Failing; did not complete the assignment.

3) Class Presentation:

At the end of semester, we will hold three sessions where each student will present and defend their proposal for the final essay. In the week when you present your proposal, you will not be required to submit a reflection. Instead, you will e-mail me your proposal, which must include:
a) preliminary title; b) thesis statement (1 paragraph); c) brief outline of your analysis; d) bibliography.

Required Texts


Additional material will be assigned and posted on SONISWEB throughout the course.

Schedule

1) September 9:

2) September 16:
   • Charles Taylor, Modern Social Imaginaries, pp. 1-100
3) September 23:

- Taylor – the rest of the book, pp. 101-197

4) September 30:


- Bakhtin, Mikhail. “The Problem of Speech Genres” and “Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences” in *Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences. Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986 (posted on SONISWEB)

5) October 7:


6) October 14:


7) October 21:

- Armando Salvatore, “Power and Authority within European Secularity: From the Enlightenment Critique of Religion to the Contemporary Presence of Islam” (posted on SONISWEB)


8) October 28:

9) November 4:


10) November 11:

- Asad – the rest of the book, pp. 127-256.

11) November 18:


**Midterms are due on Wednesday, November 18**

Email your papers to yuskaev@hartsem.edu

**November 25: Reading day/no classes**

12) December 2:

- Jose Casanova, “Civil Society and Religion: Retrospective Reflections on Catholicism and Prospective Reflections on Islam.” (posted on SONISWEB)
- Mary Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy.” (posted on SONISWEB)
- Chapter 4, “Politics,” from Timur R. Yuskaev, *Speaking Qur’an* (posted on SONISWEB)
- View two online videos by Hamza Yusuf
  a) “Making Sense of Our Past” (There are many places one can find it. One of them is on http://www.aswatalislam.net/FilesList.aspx?T=Video&C=Lectures&T1=Hamza%20Yusuf)
b) “Give and Take for God’s Sake” (you can find this one easily on YouTube and elsewhere)

13) December 9: concluding discussions and student presentations


14) December 16: concluding discussion and student presentations

Final paper due: December 23
Email the paper to yuskaev@hartsem.edu