Preliminary Syllabus

Hartford Seminary, Fall Semester 2016

SECULARISM AND RELIGION-STATE RELATIONS AROUND THE WORLD
Professor Barry A. Kosmin

Introduction

The primary focus of this inter-disciplinary social science course, touching on history, politics and sociology, is the evolution and present condition of political and constitutional secularism. The effort to design and justify the establishment and functioning of secular governments free from religious domination first arose during the American and French revolutions. Political secularism offers varied justifications and mechanisms for distancing government from religion and displaying legal neutrality towards, and relative independence from, religions. However, secularism is not a synonym for atheism. Today because of the large powers and broad influences of governments there are many sorts of entanglements with religious practice and beliefs. We shall examine the many ways that states accomplish both separation and entanglement by examining selected countries around the world. Political secularism is a rapidly expanding topic because there are now so many kinds of governments, old and new, creatively designing ways to meet expectations for secular governing within various cultural and religious contexts. The course will focus in-depth on a comparative analysis of secularism and religion-state relations in states with historic ties to different religious and political traditions – primarily the U.S.A. (Protestant Christianity), plus France (Catholicism), Russia (Orthodoxy/Marxism), Turkey (Islam), Israel (Judaism), India (Hinduism) and China (Daoism/Buddhism/Marxism).

Secularism is hard to disentangle from associated notions such as toleration, religious liberty, pluralism, modernization, free inquiry and human rights. So in order to understand its political role, at the outset of the course we will have to examine some of secularism’s cognates in the realm of sociology:

The Secular and Social Secularity

The “secular” refers to human activities, social institutions, and cultural processes conducted primarily or exclusively in pursuit of worldly and temporal aims. The “secular” serves as a contrast term to the “sacred,” the “religious” and to “religion.” Religions offer rewarding relationships (through participation in religious practices) with a more supreme reality. The secular by contrast lacks an orientation to other-worldly or after-life matters or to possibilities for transcending the limitations of physical bodies. Secularity can be objectively observed, measured in conjunction with such fields as history, cultural anthropology, sociology, economics, and political science. The history of a country displays the degree of its cultural secularity: how some aspects of a country’s culture are more a matter of religious responsibility and influence and how other matters are not. The humanistic study of a society can discern how secular modes of artistic creativity and expression have gradually emerged across cultures. The sociological study of a society can reveal how social institutions are independent from religious control and which remain under religious influence.
Secularization

Secularization refers to the dimensions of social institutions and cultural practices which tend to increase in secularity over time. Indirectly, secularization can also refer to growth of personal secularity, by pointing out ways that individuals live their lives in increasingly secular ways and intents. Secularization is a complex multi-dimensional process, involving many institutions and strata of society simultaneously to differing degrees, and it is hardly any sort of inexorable process since it can observably ebb and wane. The oft-cited “secularization hypothesis” linking modernization and growing secularity is a matter for careful empirical confirmation or disconfirmation across the world’s countries. Differing modes of social secularization must be discriminated and evaluated separately. Examples include economic secularization, such as joint stock companies, corporations, and other economic entities can operate in markets beyond religious scrutiny; political secularization, as governments disentangle from religion and avoid religious preferences; educational secularization, as many schools, colleges, and universities serve public needs without reference to religious affiliation; and civic secularization, as public spaces, public institutions, and public works from hospitals, museums, theaters, and gyms to sport stadiums and monuments, have increasing secular roles and funding.

Secularists and Secularism

Secularists advocate some sort of philosophical secularism: a system of intellectual justifications for advancing secularization in society and personal secularity for one’s self. There is no single thing as “secularism” – a large variety of distinct belief systems can fall under that general category. Secularism is distinct from secularization. Secularization can occur in the course of human history without any explicit or organized efforts to justify or advance it. Where some degree of secularization already exists, secularists typically work to sustain and enhance that secularization against what they take to be opposed social and intellectual forces (such as religious institutions and theologies). Across human history and cultures, there have been phases and modes of secularism operating in resistance to religious conceptions, institutions, and social forces. Four major modes of modern western secularism stand out: economic secularism, political secularism, scientific secularism, and ethical secularism. Economic secularism advocates capitalist economic systems in markets beyond religious control. Political secularism advocates robust secular government of democratic countries. Scientific secularism advocates unfettered scientific inquiries into all areas of human experience and exploration, including scientific explanations for religion and religious phenomena. Ethical secularism explores naturalistic understandings of morality and offers justifications and motivations for morality on secular grounds.

Course texts:

These will be used in class and copies will be distributed to students at no charge on enrollment. They are also available for free download at http://www.trincoll.edu/Academics/centers/isssc/Pages/Publications.aspx

Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, eds., Secularism & Secularity: Contemporary International Perspectives (ISSSC 2007)


**Recommended Preliminary Readings** include:

Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford U. Press 2003);
Peter Berger, *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Eerdmans 1999);
Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Wiley-Blackwell 2002)
Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago 1994);
Noah Feldman, *Divided by God: America’s Church-State Problem* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2006);
Ali Isra Gungor, *Sekulerlesme Ve Dini Canlanma*, (TDTDY, Ankara 2008);
Anthony Gill, *The Political Origins of Religious Liberty* (Cambridge 2008);
Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge 2002);
Marci Hamilton, *God vs. The Gavel: Religion and the Rule of Law* (Cambridge 2005);
Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (Oxford 2009);
Ahmet Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey* (Cambridge 2009);
Bruce Ledowitz, *Church, State and the Crisis in American Secularism*, (Indiana U. Press, 2011)
Geoffrey Levey and Tariq Madood, ed., *Secularism, Religion, and Multicultural Citizenship* (Cambridge 2009);
Michael Siam-Heng and Ten Chin Liew, ed., *State and Secularism: Perspectives from Asia* (World Scientific 2010);
Steven Smith, *The Disenchantment of Secular Discourse* (Harvard 2010);
Charles Taylor and Jocelyn Maclure, *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience* (Harvard 2011);
Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard 2007);
Phil Zuckerman, *Society without God*, (NYU Press, 2008)
Course Details

Class will meet on five Thursdays 9 a.m.-5.30 p.m.
   1. September 8
   2. September 29
   3. October 30
   4. November 17
   5. December 8

Each of these classes will be divided into a morning and afternoon session consisting of:
A) Lecture; B) Class discussion of the required readings and supplementary texts.

The discussion format for the course requires that readings be completed prior to each meeting.

Course Objectives

1) Students should understand the concept of secularism and the intellectual and political forces which give rise to it in different cultures and societies.
2) Students should understand the historical and societal contexts in which secularism evolved
3) They are expected to gain an acquaintance with and be able to distinguish the arguments for various types of secularism.
4) They should also be able to have an informed opinion on debates about religion-state relations in different religious traditions.
5) They should be able to benefit from the methodological approaches adopted in these classes and apply them to their own studies and/or research projects.

Course Requirements

1) It is strongly recommended that the students arrive at the first class already having completed some of the preliminary recommended readings. They should have thought about the issue of church-state separation in the U.S. and be comfortable discussing its merits since active participation in class discussions is required.

2) Attendance in class is required. Missing a class will result in an automatic lowering of your final grade by 20%. Missing two or more classes will result in automatic failure of the course.

3) Assessment:
   A. For classes 2-5, students shall prepare a summary of some of the reading assignments and their own research on the topic (around 750-1,000 words) and be ready to speak about them in class. Each student must provide 4 submissions.

   B. A final research paper of approximately 2,500 words on a topic relating to political or constitutional secularism in a modern state. The topic should be chosen by the end of class 4 in consultation with the Professor. This paper will be due by December 16.
C. The final grade will be based upon the following: Summaries (25%), class participation (25%), final paper (50%).

* All written work is to conform to the seminary writing guidelines, which can be found online at: http://www.hartsem.edu/student/forms/researchpaperguide.pdf. It must be run through a grammar and spell-check program or read by the writing tutor if necessary before submission.

IMPORTANT: Plagiarism, the failure to give proper credit for the words and ideas of another person, whether published or unpublished, is strictly prohibited. All written material submitted by students must be their own original work; where the words and ideas of others are used they must be acknowledged. Credit will not be given for work containing plagiarism.

Email policy
The instructor will use the official Hartsem student email addresses for all communications. Please check your Hartsem email account regularly