

University of Toronto
Department of Political Science
Department for the Study of Religion

JPR 2057H /457H – DEMOCRACY AND THE SECULAR
SYLLABUS 2010-11

Fall Term Wed. 2-4:00

Instructor: Professor Ruth Marshall
Office: 300, Jackman Humanities Building, 170 St. George St.
Email: ruth.marshall@utoronto.ca
Hours: Thurs. 2-3:30 or by appointment

THEMES:

The dramatic resurgence of religion in the public sphere and in political discourse and practice around the globe demands a critical reappraisal of the relationship between the religious and the political. The urgency of this interrogation is underscored by the growing crisis in democratic politics and the inability of liberalism to respond to the challenge of the religious. This seminar in theory will explore contemporary dilemmas of democracy, sovereignty, community, justice and violence with a view to a critical theoretical reappraisal of the relationship between democracy and the secular; an inquiry into the theologico-political.

The theologico-political poses itself as a question, which both the doctrine of secularism and liberal political theory, with its Kantian heritage, has obscured: the persistence of the theological or the religious in the political. Engaging with the question of the theologico-political entails rethinking the secular 'all the way down': beyond current denunciations of the ideological or coercive aspects of the secularization narrative, it requires a critical engagement with the onto-theological roots of contemporary 'secular' political forms and concepts, an engagement beyond the antinomies which have constituted the 'great divide' between faith and reason, transcendence and immanence. If there is a nexus that binds the theological to the political, is there, or should there be, a way to *sever* it? How can the exploration of this relationship enable us not only to undertake a critique of religion, but also appreciate the ways in which the religious or theological can contribute to a critique of the politics of our time?

Some of the specific questions we will consider include democracy's relationship to monotheistic ideas of salvation—the safe, sound, immune, holy - and the connections between its 'secular' concept of sovereignty and the most sovereign Sovereign, the Abrahamic God. Is sovereignty always inextricable from onto-theology, even in democracies? How can we rethink democracy's 'perfectibility' and its relationship to an idea of justice to come beyond the historical figures of Judeo-Christian messianism? Can there be a thought of community that escapes the problem of identity, which is to say, a

metaphysics of origin and incarnation? What is the relationship between a finite, immanent law and an infinite, transcendent justice? Is there a way in which we can re-ground ethics and politics in order to avoid the risk of 'the worst' violence, or does democracy imply the impossibility of ground and the necessity of risk?

Recent work in continental political philosophy has engaged with these questions, re-interrogating the Western theoretical tradition from deconstructionist, left post-Schmittian and post-Heideggerian perspectives, as well as reconsiderations of its Abrahamic religious heritage, including a series of re-readings of St. Paul. Readings will be drawn from this body of critical thought.

This course is jointly offered by the Departments of Political Science and Study of Religion, and seeks to create an innovative space for critical interdisciplinary reflection and debate.

REQUIREMENTS:

Attendance and active participation in discussion is required.

An extra hour of discussion will be scheduled after each weekly seminar for those who wish to pursue discussion beyond the 2 hour class; this hour is optional and will **not** be included in the participation grade.

1. 5 response papers to readings, 2 pp each.

Weight: 25%

Students will write a critical reflection based the week's readings in their assigned weeks beginning in Week 2. Response papers must be posted on Blackboard no later than noon on the day before class and are to be read by all class members before presentation and critical discussion.

2. Participation in discussion

Weight: 15%

Students are expected to attend every class prepared to critically discuss the required readings, and to participate fully in the discussion through both attentive listening and speaking.

3. Final Paper. 20-25 pp. Due: Dec. 7

Weight: 60%

A **two page** paper proposal is due **November 3**, including a thesis statement or organizing question, an outline of your argument, and a brief annotated bibliography of primary and secondary sources.

Late papers will NOT be accepted.

WEB SITE & EMAIL:

The Blackboard web site will be used to post the syllabus, readings, response papers, discussions, announcements, and other relevant items. You must have a valid UTOR email and should consult Blackboard regularly.

READING LIST:

All primary readings are required. Supplementary readings are strongly recommended. While the volume of suggested supplementary readings means you will not be able to cover them all, a selection will help elucidate aspects of the primary reading you find particularly challenging or interesting. Other supplementary articles may be obtained from the Instructor on request. In addition to the items listed below, other readings may be posted on the course web site and treated as required. The weekly distribution of readings is subject to modification.

Much of the material is complex and challenging, and you must be prepared to read and re-read attentively. Do not come to class without the week's reading materials, as we will refer to the texts throughout the class.

See Blackboard for where to obtain books and readings.

Background Reading:

Hent de Vries, Laurence Sullivan, "Introduction" *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-secular World*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

Olivier Marchart *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* Introduction, pp.53-60.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS

Week 1 – Introduction:

In light of the 12 week term, you should have read the Background Reading before the first class, available on Blackboard or from the Instructor by email request.

Week 2

Carl Schmitt *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, ed. G. Schwab, T. Strong, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005)

----- *The Concept of the Political*, ed. G. Schwab, T. Strong, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) pp.19-79.

Supplementary:

Jason Frank, Tracy McNulty. "Taking Exception to the Exception", *Diacritics*. Summer 2007. Vol. 37, Iss. 2/3; p. 2 -12.

S. Zizek, 'Carl Schmitt in the Age of Post-Politics' in C. Mouffe (ed.), *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (London: Verso, 1999) pp.

Bonnie Honig, "The Miracle of Metaphor: Rethinking the State of Exception with Rosenzweig and Schmitt" *Critical Inquiry* Volume 36, Number 2, Winter 2010.

Heinrich Meier, *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt: Four Chapters on the Distinction between Political Theology and Political Philosophy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994)

Week 3

Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence' in M. Jennings ed. *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, (Cambridge Mass: Belknap, 1996) pp.236-52.

----- "On the Concept of History". Blackboard

----- "Theologico-Political Fragment". Blackboard.

Supplementary:

Judith Butler "Critique, Coercion and Sacred Life in Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence'" de Vries and Sullivan eds. *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*.(New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

Marc de Wilde "Violence in the State of Exception: Reflections on Theologico-Political Motifs in Benjamin and Schmitt" de Vries and Sullivan eds. *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*.(New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

Samuel Weber, "Taking Exception to Decision," in *Diacritics*, vol. 22, no. 3-4 (Autumn-Winter 1992)

Tracy McNulty, "The Commandment against the Law: Writing and Divine Justice in Walter Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence'" *Diacritics*, Volume 37, Number 2-3, Summer-Fall 2007. pp.34-60

Week 4

Giorgio Agamben *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998)

Supplementary

G. Agamben, excerpts from *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 2005). See Blackboard.

Jeffrey S Librett. "From the Sacrifice of the Letter to the Voice of Testimony: Giorgio Agamben's Fulfillment of Metaphysics" *Diacritics*. Summer 2007. Vol. 37, Iss. 2/3; p. 11-35.

Brian Britt, "The Schmittian Messiah in Agamben's Time that Remains." *Critical Inquiry* Volume 36, Number 2, Winter 2010.

Week 5

Jacques Derrida, *Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority* in Derrida, Anidjar, *Acts of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

Supplementary for Weeks 5-8

John Caputo, "Without Sovereignty, Without Being: Unconditionality, the Coming God and Derrida's Democracy to Come" *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 4.3, 2003

John Caputo *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*. (Indiana University Press, 2003)

Pheng Cheah and Suzanne Guerlac, eds. *Derrida and the Time of the Political*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

Jacques Derrida "Force and Signification" and "Violence and Metaphysics" in *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1978).

- selections from *Politics of Friendship* and *Spectres of Marx* – see Blackboard.

Martin Hägglund *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2008)

Steven Shakespeare, *Derrida and Theology*. (Continuum Press, 2009)

Week 6

Jacques Derrida "Faith and knowledge: the two sources of 'religion' within the limits of mere reason." *Religion*. ed. J. Derrida and G. Vattimo. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998). 1–78.

Weeks 7-8

Jacques Derrida *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

Weeks 9-10

Jean-Luc Nancy *The Dis-enclosure; The Deconstruction of Christianity* (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2008).

Supplementary for Weeks 9-10

Olivier Marchart *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* Chapter 3, pp. 61-84.

Marie-Eve Morin "A melee without Sacrifice: Nancy's Ontology of Suffering against Derrida's Politics of Sacrifice" *Philosophy Today* Vol. 50 pg. 139-45.

Andreas Wagner, "Jean-Luc Nancy: a negative politics?" *Philosophy & Social Criticism* (January 2006), 32 (1), pg. 89-109.

Laurens ten Kate "Intimate Distance: Rethinking the Unthought God in Christianity" *Sophia* (2008) 47:327–343.

Week 11

Slavoj Zizek, Eric L. Santner, Kenneth Reinhard *The Neighbour: Three Inquiries in Political Theology*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Supplementary:

Nicholas Brown “ $\{\emptyset\} \in \{\$\}$? Or, Alain Badiou and Slavoj Zizek, Waiting for Something to Happen” *The New Centennial Review* (February 2004), 4 (3), pg. 289-319

Eric Vogt, “Exception in Zizek’s Thought”, *Diacritics*, Volume 37, Number 2-3, Summer-Fall 2007. pp. 61-77

Week 12

Alain Badiou. *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*; (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003)

Slavoj Zizek, “The Politics of Truth, or, Alain Badiou as a Reader of St. Paul,” in *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Core of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso, 1999) pp. 127-170.

Supplementary

Olivier Marchart *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* Chapter 5, pp. 109-133.

Colin Wright, “Event or Exception?: Disentangling Badiou from Schmitt, or, Towards a Politics of the Void” *Theory & Event* (June 2008), 11 (2)

Ed Pluth, “The Pauline Event?”, *Theory & Event*, Volume 3, Issue 3, 1999 (Review)