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

JPR 458/2058 – POSTSECULAR POLITICAL THOUGHT
SYLLABUS 2017
Fall Term - Monday, 4:00-6:00, Room 317 JHB

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Hours: Thurs. 10:00 -12 or by appointment

THEMES:

While political modernity may have its roots in Europe, its institutions and central concepts are now universally shared. Thinking about political life anywhere in the world today thus means thinking about the ways in which political concepts such as the state, sovereignty, democracy, citizenship, civil society, the public sphere, the subject, the individual, human rights and the rule of law, remain tied not only to long European intellectual and theological traditions, but also a process of elaboration through colonial conquest and imperial rule. One of the most enduring conceits of European thought is the idea that political modernity is entirely a European creation, as if its concomitance with imperialism, European encounters and engagements with colonial ‘others’ were a mere footnote in the story of its intellectual development.

Another enduring hallmark of the Enlightenment heritage is the assumed centrality, indeed necessity, of a secular, rationalist model of the human for progressive and democratic thought, and of the ideological and institutional arrangements of secularism. For most of the 20th century, leading social and political theorists worked under the assumption that secularization and the decline of religion would be an inevitable, and desirable, global consequence of political ‘modernization’. However the resurgence of religion as a public, political force around the world has helped reveal the ideological or “mythological” nature of the secularization narrative. The ongoing salience of religion, the visibility of old and new politico-religious entanglements, especially as read in the light of over a century of engaged colonial and postcolonial scholarship, profoundly challenge these assumptions, and open the question of the “postsecular.” Post-secular ‘criticism’ entails, among other things, an interrogation of the post-Enlightenment assumptions and binaries that inform the doctrine of secularization and the category of the secular, new questions about history, time and the subject, and a questioning of the politics of scholarly ‘religion-making’. The urgency of this interrogation is underscored by a growing crisis in democratic politics and the inability of liberalism to respond to the challenges of religious radicalism, as well as new forms of nativism and ethnonationalism.

The term “postsecular” is highly ambiguous, employed in multiple ways across a range of disciplines, and thus may prove to have little critical or analytic value. Here it simply stands as a place-holder that might mark a new theoretical ‘problem-space’ that prompts a range of questions: about the relationship between the religious and the political, about colonial and post-colonial difference and history, about the politics of knowledge-making, about reading ‘in translation’, about the ‘grounds’ of comparison, about expanding lexicons of political and religious reflection, among others.
AIMS:
This interdisciplinary course will take-on the problem-space of postsecular thought from the perspective of the shared global time-space of the colonial and postcolonial, by focusing on thinkers, texts and movements in the colonial and postcolonial world that offer a direct, and often radical engagement with European, colonial and imperial categories, theoretical traditions, institutions and modes of governance. The aim is to enable the recognition of political modernity as a violent venture whose universalization does not entail a relation of exteriority between a “hyper-real” ‘West’ and the ‘rest’, but rather a complex, albeit profoundly unequal, collaboration. Such a relation of exteriority is the colonial premise par excellence, and lives on even today in many intellectual projects in political theory and religious studies that have as their aim to ‘de-orientalize’, expand, diversify, or decolonize their fields. The course aims are considerably more modest than an “impossible” project of “provincializing Europe,” since, as Chakrabarty argues, such a project refers to a history “which does not yet exist”, and “Europe' cannot after all be provincialized within the institutional site of the university.” Rather, the course hopes to open students up to the problems and questions such a project poses, and to:
1. introduce students to a selection of seminal thinkers, texts and movements in the colonial and post-colonial world, attending to the ways in which they refuse, contest or engage with the secular premises of modern political concepts and institutions, elaborating new and challenging visions of the political in the light of pre-colonial and colonial histories and religious traditions.
2. consider how to read these thinkers and contemplate this period of history in order to gain critical purchase on the pieties of secular rationalism, political liberalism and the futures of democracy, emancipation, justice.
3. begin to learn how to read differently, with attentiveness to the implicit political and epistemological assumptions of projects of comparison and translation and to consider what is or is not required to read, understand or “know” these texts, and what such understanding demands of us ethically and politically, as well as intellectually.

REQUIREMENTS:
1. 5 response papers to readings, maximum 700 words. Weight: 30%
Students will write bi-weekly critical reflections based on the week’s readings. The object of these reflection papers is to: 1. demonstrate your grasp of central issues in the week’s readings; 2. bring the readings into critical conversation with one another and with the central themes of the week and the questions opened up by the first two weeks’ readings; 3. develop a critical evaluation of one or more of the readings’ central contributions. Papers should NOT summarize readings, but demonstrate a critical engagement with them. Response papers must be posted on Blackboard’s Discussion Forum no later than 6:00 p.m. on the day before class and are to be read by all clas members before critical discussion. You must indicate which group you intend to post in before the second week of class – the class will be divided into two equal groups. Group 1 will begin posting in Week 2, Group 2 in Week 3. Once you have opted for a group, you must stick to the bi-weekly schedule.
2. Active 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. Missed classes require a documented excuse.
3. Final Paper, 20-25 pp. Due: at 5 p.m. April 11 Weight: 55%
Late work and papers will NOT be accepted. If you require an extension for serious, documentable reasons, you must arrange it in good time with the instructor.

WEB SITE & EMAIL:
The Blackboard web site will be used to post the syllabus, some readings, response papers, discussions, announcements, and other relevant items. You must have a valid UTOR email registered on Blackboard and should consult Blackboard regularly. I’m happy to answer emails about the course, but please don’t expect me to respond to requests for information available on Blackboard. Matters of substance concerning the course material, essays or personal issues should be discussed in person during office hours, or by appointment.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:
Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will be dealt with accordingly. Students must read “Tips for Avoiding Academic Misconduct” http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/students/avoid-misconduct/tips-for-avoiding-academic-misconduct and the University’s “How not to Plagiarize” document, http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize and are encouraged to discuss with the instructors if they are unsure of what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty. Plagiarism does not only apply to essays, but of course the reading responses as well.

UNDERGRADUATE SECTION POLICY:
This is primarily a graduate seminar with an undergraduate section, and thus the level and quantity of the readings are primarily selected with graduate students in mind. Undergraduates in the JPR458 section are expected to do the same amount of reading and written work as graduate students, and participate actively in discussion. The grading scale will be modified to take into account their undergraduate status. Undergraduates who are willing and able to put in the time and effort will find being in a class at this level a very exciting and enriching learning experience.

READING LIST: (SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION)
All readings listed below are required, and you must read all the readings for each week before the class. Readings average around 150 or so pages per week, so plan your reading in advance.

Much of the material is challenging, and you must be prepared to read and re-read attentively. Your ability to discuss in class and your participation grade depend on a good familiarity with the readings. Do not come to class without the week’s reading materials, as we will refer to the texts throughout the class.
WEEKLY THEMES AND READINGS:

Week 1: Introduction to course themes.

Week 2: Problems, Questions, Methods I
Jurgen Habermas. “Notes on a post-secular society” 18/06/2008
http://www.signandsight.com/features/1714.html

Week 3: Problems, Questions, Methods II

Week 4: Gandhi on Swaraj, Democracy and Ethics

Week 5: The Bhagavad Gita and Modern Political Thought

F. Devji and S. Kapila, “Introduction” ix-xv
A. Kumar, “Ambedkar’s Inheritances”. 127–154
V. Chaturvedi, “Rethinking Knowledge with Action: V. D. Savarkar, the Bhagavad Gita and Histories of Warfare”, 155–176

**Week 6: Reconstructing Islam, Imagining Pakistan**


Iqbal - speeches/addresses: “Sir Muhammad Iqbal’s 1930 Presidential Address to the 25th Session of the All-India Muslim League Allahabad, 29 December 1930” and “‘Islam as an Ethical and a Political Ideal’ Lahore, 1908.


**Week 7: Emergent Islamist Thought**


- Introduction – 1-46
- Chapter 2 - Hasan Al-Bana, 1906-1949; ‘Toward the Light’ – 49-56
- Chapter 3 – Sayyid Abu’l-A’la Mawdudi, 1903-1979; ‘The Islamic Law’ – 56-79

Hasan Al-Banna, “To What do We Invite Humanity”
Sayyid Abu’l-A’la Mawdudi, “The Political Theory of Islam”
Sayyid Abu’l-A’la Mawdudi from “The Moral Foundations of the Islamic Movement” (renamed by this translator) Chapters 1-3.

**Week 8: Sayyid Qutb, Radicalism and the Limits of Rationalism**

Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (available online, edition TBA)


**Reading Week. No Class**
Week 9: The Islamic Revolution: State and Democracy


Week 10: Indigenous thought from Turtle Island


Week 11: Liberation Theology in Latin America


Week 12: From Black Liberation Theology to African Pentecostalism

James H. Cone. *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Orbis, 1970), Selections