

REL 6498

POLITICAL THEOLOGY

T 3:30-6:15pm

Dodd 207

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Office Hours: W 9:30am-12pm, and always by appointment

Perhaps there will still come a moment at which we can speak about what is to me the most significant Jewish as well as Christian political theology, Romans 9-11.

-Jacob Taubes, in a letter to Carl Schmitt

COURSE DESCRIPTION: Everyone who's anyone is invoking the category of "political theology" these days. It covers discussions of *laïcité* in France, of "political Islam," of the power of American evangelical Christians, reconciliation efforts in Africa, and then some. It has become shorthand for "that which shows that liberal democracy is not the natural telos of a political order" or something like that. The term, however, has a determinate history, originating in the writings of the Weimar (and, later, National Socialist) jurist Carl Schmitt (1888-1985). And so this course is a survey of the theorization of political theology in Schmitt and after, focusing on European intellectuals in the twentieth century. After getting a handle on important Schmittian categories and arguments—e.g. the friend/enemy distinction and antagonism in general as that which is constitutive of societies, the state of emergency/exception, the nature of secularization and the repression of theology in modern liberalism—we will look at similar critiques of liberalism (and critiques of Schmitt) in the social theorists Karl Löwith and Hans Blumenberg, and the political philosopher Leo Strauss. From there, we move to more specifically Jewish understandings of the relationship between theology and politics in the work of Gershom Scholem and Walter Benjamin. The last half of the course will be occupied with the appropriation of the Pauline epistles for political ends, and the issue of whether they represent a better political theology (or even a different political theology) than the political theologies of the Jewish tradition.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- To gain familiarity with major figures in contemporary philosophy and their writings on the relation between political and theological discourse
- To deepen the question of how politics and theology are intertwined—i.e. to ask whether they are essentially intertwined categories if we cannot point to natural grounds for a political order, but (if we are liberals) posit a ground that is not empirically verifiable
- And as always, for you to improve your skills in close reading, writing, and oral presentation.

PREREQUISITES:

This course assumes no prior knowledge of philosophy or theology. Nevertheless, it assumes that you have the patience to read material several times, take notes on it, and thereby figure out what is at stake in the text—all before entering the seminar room. It also assumes that you are not afraid to express your views on the reading and its arguments, even if those views later turn out to be imprecise). One of the great things about a seminar is that it demonstrates that thinking with others is more productive than thinking alone.

REQUIREMENTS:

- Attend class. Always. Duh.
- Actively participate in class discussion. Double duh.
- Offer two presentations during the course of the term. When preparing your presentation, remember that your instructor and classmates are just as literate as you are. No one is interested in your summary of the text. What is interesting is what you think is at stake in the text, and the specific textual evidence you bring to the table in support of your arguments. There is absolutely no reason why presentations should last any longer than seven minutes.
 - Offer two initial responses to the presenter. Your duties here are to pin down the presenter's claims, agreeing/disagreeing with and/or deepening the presenter's claims, and/or making connections between the presenter's textual evidence and other textual evidence that you'd like to bring to the table - in short, something that ensures that discussion is generated. There is absolutely no reason why your response should be longer than the original presentation.
 - Graduate students must write a seminar paper of at least 6300 words, due on the last Friday of classes. I do not recommend taking incompletes (and I *definitely* do not recommend having more than one at a time), but if the vagaries of your schedule lead you to request an incomplete, I will grant it. However, if you would like to hand in your paper after **October 2, 2009** you must ask Prof. Kelsay (qua convener of REP) for a further extension. **Students who do not hand in a paper by the end of the term must hand in a prospectus with bibliography by the last day of classes; there is no set length for this.**

INSTRUCTOR CONTACT

My office hours are listed on the first page of this syllabus. I strongly encourage you to make appointments to meet with me if your schedules conflict with my office hours. I read my email regularly.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

University regulations stipulate that no student shall be penalized for missing class due to a religious holiday. Please let me know if a religious holiday you plan to observe falls on a day scheduled for class.

SPECIAL NEEDS

Students with special needs should contact either the instructor of the Student Disability Resource Center (sdrc@admin.fsu.edu; 644-9566) during the first week of class.

HONOR CODE

Please review, once again, FSU's Honor Code online. Plagiarism will not be tolerated in any form. If you are concerned about what plagiarism actually means, read the account at the history department's website (<http://www.fsu.edu/~history/plagiarism.html>).

GRADING CRITERIA

An A paper displays solid argumentation rooted in close reading of the text. An A-paper usually is well-written and well-structured, but doesn't unpack as well as it might, or it assumes that the instructor is living inside the student's brain and therefore the paper doesn't need to make its argument clear every step of the way. Papers with lower grades have structural problems in its argument, make demonstrably false claims, or are content merely to restate author's claims as opposed to analyze them.

TEXTBOOKS

The following required texts are available at the usual bookstores:

Carl Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*
Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*
Karl Löwith, *Meaning In History*
Heinrich Meier, *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue*
Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*
Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*
Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains*
Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*
Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*
Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet And The Dwarf*

I will distribute other readings through email at least one week in advance.

SMALL PRINT

A syllabus is a legally binding document, and therefore I reserve the right to make appropriate changes in the readings, requirements, and policies of this course. It is your responsibility to keep yourself updated on course information.

The Academic Honor Code states that "violations of the Academic Honor Code shall include representing another's work or any part thereof, whether published or unpublished, as one's own." In accordance with this policy, I would like to credit the following scholars who, either in person or through their own classes, have assisted me in crafting this syllabus: Leora Batnitzky (Princeton University), Jonathan Boyarin (UNC-Chapel Hill), Nancy Levene (Indiana University), and Randi Rashkover (George Mason University).

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

May 12	Organizational Meeting & Introduction Ben Lazier, "On The Origins Of 'Political Theology'" Hent de Vries, Introduction to <i>Political Theologies</i>
May 19	NO CLASS (Instructor out of town) But start reading for May 26

- May 26** Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*
Carl Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*
- June 2** Karl Löwith, “The Occasional Decisionism of Carl Schmitt”
(from *Martin Heidegger & European Nihilism*, 137–59)
Karl Löwith, *Meaning In History*
- June 9** Hans Blumenberg, *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 3–120
Carl Schmitt, “On the Current Situation of the Problem: The Legitimacy of Modernity”
(from *Political Theology II*, 116–30)
- June 16** Leo Strauss, Preface to *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*
(*Jewish Philosophy & The Crisis of Modernity*, 147–77)
Strauss, Introduction to *Philosophy & Law* (21–39)
Strauss, “Jerusalem and Athens” (*JPCM* 377–405)
Strauss, “Reason and Revelation”
(from Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, 141–80)
Heinrich Meier, *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue* (including appendices)
William E. Connolly, “Pluralism and Faith”
(in de Vries, ed. *Political Theologies*, 278–97)
- June 23** Gershom Scholem, “Toward An Understanding Of The Messianic Idea in Judaism”
Scholem, “Redemption Through Sin”
Scholem, “Revelation and Tradition as Religious Categories”
(from *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 1–36, 78–141, 282–303)
Eric Jacobson, “Gershom Scholem’s Theological Politics”
(from *Metaphysics Of The Profane*, 52–81)
- June 30** Eric Jacobson, “The Messianic Idea in Walter Benjamin’s Early Writings” (from *MOTP*, 19–51)
Walter Benjamin, “Critique Of Violence”
(from *Reflections*, 277–301)
Eric Jacobson, “Judgment, Violence & Redemption”
(from *MOTP*, 193–232)
Jacques Derrida, “Force Of Law” (from *Acts of Religion*, 230–98)
Marc de Wilde, “Violence in the State of Exception: Reflections on Theologico-Political Motifs in Benjamin and Schmitt”
(from *Political Theologies*, 188–200)
Judith Butler, “Critique, Coercion, and Sacred Life in Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’” (from *Political Theologies*, 201–19)

- July 7** Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*
- July 14** Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*
- July 21** Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains*
- July 28** Agamben, *Homo Sacer*
Agamben, *State of Exception*
- August 4** Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet And The Dwarf*
Sarah Kay, *Žižek: A Critical Introduction*, 1-47