

STPH4880: Political Theologies
Tuesdays 2:10-5:00
Mudd 102

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Course Description

The recent resurgence of the language of religion in the public sphere calls for a re-examination of the relationship between theology and political theory. What are the connections between ideas of God and power, especially in an age of *secularism*? Is the theological always political? And, can the political ever be considered a-religious? If “modern theories of the state are secularized theological concepts” (Schmitt) how can one rethink and critique either state or theology? This course explores the idea of *political theology* by engaging a wide range of texts, including Paul’s letter to the Romans and Jacob Taubes, Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politico*, Simone Weil, Hannah Arendt, and Vincent Lloyd.

Student Learning Outcomes

This course offers students an opportunity to survey works in political theology (its methods, sources and manifestations), gain an understanding of their significance, and develop the critical skills necessary for making constructive theological arguments. After successfully completing this course with a grade of B or better, students will be able to:

- (1) Describe different ways of conceptualizing the theological/political. This will be demonstrated in class discussions and in the written assignments.
- (2) Understand the relationship between political theologies and other theological topics such as revelation, salvation, and anthropology. This will be demonstrated in class discussions and in the written assignments.
- (3) Identify and analyze the methodological intersections between political theologies and ideas of divine revelation (especially in terms of the dynamic *immanence/transcendence*). This will be demonstrated in class discussions and in the written assignments.
- (4) Interpret texts critically—with precision and depth—and in relation to the historical identity of both the text and the reader; paying attention to issues of race, sexual and gender orientation, ethnicity, class, culture, nationality and religious affiliation. This will be demonstrated in all the assignments.

These learning outcomes are consistent with PSR’s educational values and its direction statement (<http://www.psr.edu/direction-statement>).

Course Expectations

Attendance and Participation: All students will be expected to contribute to the success of this course by attending every class and arriving on time; reading the assigned materials and thinking critically about them; listening respectfully and contributing to discussion.

Honor Code: Cheating and plagiarism are not tolerated at PSR or GTU. Please refer to your student handbook for more information about PSR's plagiarism policy or contact me if you have any questions.

For more information see <http://www.psr.edu/plagiarism-policy>

Students with differing/special needs: Students with particular needs should speak to the instructor during the first week of class, so that we can arrange for any academic accommodations.

PSR Policy for Students for whom English is a second language (ESL): Upon request by the ESL student to the PSR faculty, the faculty member will extend the deadline for papers one week to allow time for editing. 2. Upon request by the ESL student, PSR faculty will allow twice as much time for ESL students to complete in-class written exams. Note: This is not automatic. You, as the student, must contact the professor and get permission.

Technology: Please be aware of the following PSR policies regarding technology in the classroom. **1)** Students may not use any hand held devices in the classroom without the explicit permission of the instructor. All hand held devices should normally be turned off and packed away during class sessions. **2)** The use of computers in the classroom is a privilege, not a right. **3)** Students who need to use voice recorders for class lectures must receive the explicit permission of the instructor in order to do so. **4)** Students may not post ANY material from classes on the internet or other personal networking sites without the explicit, written permission of the instructor and all other class participants. For the complete policy, see <http://www.psr.edu/use-technology-classroom>.

Course Requirements and Grading

The relative weight of each criterion in the final grade will be:

1. Readings

Read all assigned materials carefully with enough time to really think about them. Take notes that will help you engage in class discussions. Active and informed participation in class is indispensable. According to PSR policy, one three credit hour course requires a minimum of 12 hours of work per week (3 instructor mediated hours plus 9 outside study hours. For more, see <http://www.psr.edu/credit-hour>.

2. Class Participation (30%)

Class sessions are work sessions in which students will be asked to contribute to the discussion, respond to questions, write short reflection papers, etc. In order to prepare for class, read all assigned materials carefully and take notes that will help you engage in discussion. **Bring at least two specific questions to class that are drawn from the week's readings.**

3. Paper(s) (40%)

M.Div. and M.A. students should write two 8-10 page papers (due March 21 and May 20). The first paper will be worth 15%, the second 25%.

Ph.D. students will write a 20-25 page paper. A one page paper including bibliography should be submitted by March 21. The paper is due May 20th.

4. Class Presentation (30%)

Students will each lead either one or two class session discussions. This will involve raising relevant questions about the readings, drawing out important distinctions from them, and raising points of interest. The presentation is limited to 10 minutes and should not include a summary of the material.

On the day that you are presenting, please submit a one page summary or outline of the material to the instructor.

For additional information see the PSR grading policy: <http://www.psr.edu/grades>

Course materials:

Paul's letter to the Romans
Michael Kirwan, *Political Theology* (Fortress Press)
Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politico* (Hackett)
Simone Weil, *Need for Roots* (Routledge)
Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics* (Schocken)
Mendieta, Eduardo (ed.), *Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*

Recommended:

Michael Jon Kessler, *Political Theology for a Plural Age*
Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*
Catherine Keller, *God and Power: Counter Apocalyptic Journeys*

Course Schedule

Feb 4 Introduction

I. TOPICS in POLITICAL THEOLOGY

Feb 11 What is Political Theology?
Michael Kirwan, *Political Theology*

Feb 18 What is Political Theology? (cont'd)
Schmitt, *Political Theology* (excerpts)
Kessler, *Political Theology for a Plural Age*, Chpts 1 and 4
Vincent Lloyd, *The Problem with Grace*, "Introduction"

Feb 25 What is Political Theology? (cont'd)
Questions of the secular and the relationship of secular/sacred
Kessler, *Political Theology for a Plural Age*, Chpt 2
José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Ch 1
Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, Ch 6

Recommend:
Talal Asad, "Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category" in
Genealogies of Religion.

March 4 What is Political Theology? (cont'd)
Questions about Language
Charles Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, Ch 6
Ernesto Laclau, "On the Names of God"
Recommended: Claude LeFort, *The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?*

II POLITICAL THEOLOGIES

March 11 Paul's letter to the Romans
Jacob Taubes *The Political Theology of Paul* (Moodle)

March 18 Excerpts from Hobbes' *Leviathan*

March 21 FIRST PAPER OR PAPER PROPOSAL DUE

- March 25** **NO CLASS – Spring Break**
- April 1 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* Preface 1, 2, 4, 6
Recommended: Balibar on Spinoza
- April 8 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* 7, 12-17, 19, 20
- April 15 Simone Weil, *Oppression and Liberty* (excerpts)
- April 22 Simone Weil, *Need for Roots* (excerpts)
Radzins, “Simone Weil’s Political Theology”
- April 29 Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*
The Promise of Politics, Truth and Politics
- May 6 *Race and Political Theology* (ed. Lloyd)Intro (Llyod)
Introduction and “From Political Theology to Vernacular Prophecy: Rethinking
Redemption” (George Shulman)
The Problem with Grace, Chapter 8
- May 13 *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*
(ed: Mendieta and VanAntwerpen)
- May 20 ***Final Paper Due***

Course schedule is a guideline and is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor

Claude Lefort “The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?” in *Democracy and Political Theory* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988) pp. 213–55.

?????Gil Anidjar, “Secularism,” *Critical Inquiry* 33:1 (Fall 2006)

Supplementary: Olivier Marchart *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* Introduction, pp.53-60; Chapter 4. pp. 85-108.

Giles Labelle, “Can The Problem Of The Theologico-Political be Resolved? Leo Strauss And Claude Lefort” *Thesis Eleven*, vol. 87, no. 1, November 2006. pp. 63-81

CUT: Aquinas, *St Thomas Aquinas on Politics and Ethics* (Moodle)

**CUT: Augustine, *City of God*, excerpts from Books 1, 6-7, 13-15, 18-19
Kirwan, *Political Theology*, Ch 4**

**CUT: Luther, “On Secular Authority”
Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV Ch 20
Weber, “Politics as Vocation”**

Natality and Finitude (Anna O-Byrne)
New York Review of Books (on Arendt)
Sontag on questioning everything -

Benjamin, “Critique of Violence”
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”

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).