

Department of Religion
Syracuse University
REL 371/PHI 319/PSC 399: God in Political Theory
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Office hours: TU 10:00 am-11:00 am & Fr 11:30 am-12:30 pm & by appointment
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God in Political Theory

Course Description

To what extent has religion or more generally metaphysics and theology affected the political sphere and the civil order of society? What intermediary domains allow for such influence? Is it ethics and morality, aesthetics or the systems of knowledge (epistemology)? We will address these questions both historically and thematically.

Historically we will start with a brief overview of Greek antiquity looking closely at the relation between metaphysics or theology and politics in the Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics*. We will then turn to the theistic appropriation of the classical view of the relation between theology and politics in the medieval period by Muslim and Christian thinkers. In this respect, we will focus on the political thought of two towering figures of medieval Muslim and Christian thought: Abu Nasr al-Farabi (d. 950 C.E.) and St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274 C.E.). Subsequently we will move to early modern philosophy, its critique of the classical and scholastic views and the foundation of its call for secularism, examining Spinoza's *Theological Political Treatise*. Following early modern thought, we will explore the development of the conception of the relation between religion and politics in the Enlightenment movement through the work of Immanuel Kant. Turning to the 20th century, we will examine Carl Schmitt's critique of the modern state in general and how it appropriated the main characteristics medieval European theocracies in particular. Finally, we will investigate contemporary post World-War II critiques of the modern and enlightenment discourse and the re-assessment of the relation between religion and politics in the work of Talal Asad, Jürgen Habermas, Badiou, Agamben.

Thematically, we will trace the paradigmatic shifts in the formulation and the responses to key questions at the heart of the problematic relation between religion and politics. Among these questions is that concerning the concepts of power and the access to power and how the relation between religion and politics colored them? To what extent is the call for secularism and the form it assumed in the modern theory of state specific to the Western condition? Further we will examine the problem of normativity in politics and society and the degree to which the presence/absence of religion and religious sentiments play in shaping it. We will also place special emphasis on the effect religion may have on the conception of the relation between the private and the public spheres.

Course Objectives:

1. Exploring how religion affects our conception of the political sphere on the theoretical and practical levels
2. Understanding the implications of positing the idea of an absolute to political cognition and agency.
3. Acquiring a critical attitude towards the presumed dichotomy of the secular and the religious.

Readings and Required Texts:

All readings will be available on 'Blackboard' under the folder 'Readings' under the 'Content' folder. Further I will be posting the class discussion points under the folder 'Weekly Discussion Points.' **The weekly discussion points will be posted on Friday of every week.** I will post guide sheets for selected readings under the folder 'Guide Sheets and Handouts' which will also be available under the 'Content' folder.

1. Selections from Spinoza. *Theological Political Treatise*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
2. Selections from Carl Schmitt. *Political Theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
3. Selections from Talal Asad. *Formations of the Secular*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
4. Selections from Aristotle. *The Politics and The Constitution of Athens*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
5. Selections from Plato's *Republic*
6. Selections from Al-Farabi. *The Political Writings*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.
7. Selections from St. Thomas Aquinas. *On Law, Morality and Politics*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002.
8. Selections from Kant. *Political Writings & The Conflict of the Faculties*.
9. Selections from Habermas. *Religion and Rationality and Between Naturalism and Religion* and "Religion in the Public Sphere"
10. Selections from Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer*.
11. Selections from *Democracy in What State* by Alain Badiou

Course Requirements and Grading

A. Three essay papers (60% of the grade—each worth 20% of the grade)

1. **The drafts of each of these papers will be handed back a week from submission; you will then have another week to work on their rewrites. The rewrite can only improve your original grade by two letter grades—for e.g. if your draft grade is B- the maximum grade you can earn on your rewrite is an A-**
2. Each paper should be 1500-2000 words in length.
3. The essay must be double spaced in 12-pitch font.
4. Papers will be graded based on content, ability to show critical skills, organization and rigor of the argument.

B. Final essay papers (30% of the grade)

5. The paper should be 2000-2500 words in length.
6. The essay must be double spaced in 12-pitch font.
7. The papers will be graded based on content, ability to show critical skills, organization and rigor of the argument.

C. Class participation (10% of the grade)

Regular attendance and constructive class participation are both course requirements. Your participation grade will be based on your attendance as well as on the quality and quantity of your contributions to class discussion.

Important Note: Missing more than 1 class except for valid and documented conditions may result in your loss of the whole participation grade.

D. Letter/Number Grade Conversion Table for This Course:

	B+ 80-84	C+ 65-69	D+ 54-56
A 90-100	B 75-79	C 60-64	D 50-53
A- 85-89	B- 70-74	C- 57-59	

E. A final word about Grades

You must complete all of the course requirements by the end of the semester in order to receive a passing grade. Incompletes will be granted only in cases of actual emergency.

Course Policies

1. Paper Submission: You should plan to submit a print out of your report/paper on the day it is due. However, if for any reason you cannot print out either of them, you may email it to me before class. I will correct, comment on and grade electronically submitted reports/papers electronically as well and email them back to you.
2. Academic Honesty and Plagiarism: The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort.
For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>. Students found to cheat will receive an F for that assignment. Students have a right to appeal.
3. Disability: Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, [315-443-4498](tel:315-443-4498). Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review those accommodations with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary. For further information, see the ODS website, Office of Disability Services <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/>
4. New Policy Regarding Faith Tradition Observances: This fall is the first semester in which SU will not have non-instructional days for any religious holiday and the first semester in which students must notify instructors by the end of the second week of classes when they will be observing their religious holiday(s). SU's religious observances policy, found at http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of

classes. Students will have access to a notification form through MySlice for two weeks beginning the first day of class. On Monday, September 12, instructors will have continuous access via a religious observances icon in Faculty Services/Faculty Center to a list of students in each class they are teaching who have provided notification.

Weekly Reading Schedule

Part I: Classical View and its Medieval Christian and Muslim Receptions

Tuesday 19th January through Tuesday 26th January

Plato's *Republic*: The relation between the political subject and the governance of the body politic and why metaphysics/theology is needed to orient the political domain.

January 19th: General Introduction and Way into the *Republic* (summary of books of I-II to be handed out in class)

January 21st: Selections from the *Republic* Books IV (435c to end; 10 pages) and V (462c9-480a9; 17 pages)

Tuesday 26th January through Tuesday 2nd February

Plato's *Republic*: The relation between the political subject and the governance of the body politic and why metaphysics/theology is needed to orient the political domain.

January 26th: Selections from the *Republic* Books VI (the nature of the philosophers and the best constitution—all + analytical summary handed out in class; 25 pages) and VII (cave allegory 514a-520a; 5 pages)

January 28th: Selections from the *Republic* Books VIII (all; 24 pages + analytical summary handed out in class) and IX (beginning till 584e; 12 pages)

Tuesday 2nd February through Tuesday 9th February

Aristotle's *Politics*: The empirical critique of Plato and the re-casting of the relations between the political subject (microcosm) and the body politic (microcosm)

February 2nd: Selections from Aristotle's *Politics* Book I (1-13; 17 pages) and II (1-6; 7 pages)

February 4th: Selections from Aristotle's *Politics* Book III (1-13; 22 pages) and IV (1-13; 22 pages)

Tuesday 9th February through Tuesday 16th February

Aristotle's *Politics*: The empirical critique of Plato and the re-casting of the relations between the political subject (microcosm) and the body politic (microcosm)

February 9th: Selections from Aristotle's *Politics* Book VII (all; 30 pages) and VIII (all; 14 pages)

Islamic Reception: Al-Farabi and the Islamic harmonization of Plato and Aristotle

February 11^h: Selections from Al-Farabi *Political Writings*: "The Enumeration of Sciences" (p. 69-85; 16 pages)

Tuesday 16th February through Tuesday 23rd February

Islamic Reception: Al-Farabi and the Islamic harmonization of Plato and Aristotle

February 16th: Al-Farabi *Political Writings: “The Book of Religion”* (p. 85-100)

February 18th: Al-Farabi *Political Writings: “The Book of Religion”* (p.100-115)

First paper due on Feb 18th

Tuesday 23rd February through Tuesday March 1st

Christian Reception: Aquinas and the reign of theology over the political domain

February 23rd: Aquinas *On Law, Morality and Politics: On Law: Q. 90-93* (p. 10-40)

February 25th: Aquinas *On Law, Morality and Politics: On Law: Q. 94-97* (p. 40-75)

Tuesday 1st March through Tuesday 8th March

Christian Reception: Aquinas and the reign of theology over the political domain

March 1st: Aquinas *On Law, Morality and Politics: Tolerance and Church-State Relations & Practical Wisdom and Statecraft* (p. 190-211)

Part II: The Modern Turn and the Enlightenment

Early Modern Materialist Rationalism—Spinoza: *Theological Political Treatise* pantheistic rational materialism and the promise of secularism

March 3rd: Spinoza’s *Theological Political Treatise*: 1. On prophecy; 2. On the prophets; 3. On the divine laws; 4. On the divine law; 6. On miracles (70 pages)

Tuesday 8th March through Tuesday 15th March

Early Modern Materialist Rationalism—Spinoza: *Theological Political Treatise* pantheistic rational materialism and the promise of secularism

March 8th: Spinoza’s *Theological Political Treatise*: 7. On the interpretation of Scripture; 12. On the true original text of the divine law; 13. Where it is shown that the teachings of Scripture are very simple; 14. What faith is; 15. Where it is shown that theology is not subordinate to reason (53 pages)

March 10th: Spinoza’s *Theological Political Treatise*: 16. On the foundation of the state; 17. Where it is shown that no one can transfer all things to the sovereign power; 19. Where is shown that authority in sacred matters belongs wholly to sovereign powers; 20. Where it is shown that in a free state everyone is allowed to think what they wish (47 pages)

Tuesday 15th March through Tuesday 22nd March

Spring Break

Tuesday 22nd March through Tuesday 29th March

Enlightenment Protestant Liberalism—Immanuel Kant: politics and the rational limits of moral religion

March 22nd: Kant, selections in his *Political Writings*: “What is Enlightenment?” & “On Orientation in Thinking” (p. 54-61 & p. 235-250)

March 24th: Kant, selections from the *Conflict of Faculties* (p. 247-293)

Second paper due on March 24th

Tuesday 29th March through Tuesday 5th April

Part III: Contemporary Perspectives

Theoretical and Philosophical Blurring of the Boundaries between the Secular and the Religious—Carl Schmitt

March 29th: Selections from Carl Schmitt’s *Political Theology* (preface & Ch.1 and Ch. 2; 36 pages)

March 31st: Selections from Carl Schmitt’s *Political Theology* (Ch. 3; 17 pages)

Tuesday 5th April Tuesday 12th April

Theoretical and Philosophical Blurring of the Boundaries between the Secular and the Religious—Carl Schmitt

April 5th: Selections from Carl Schmitt’s *Political Theology* (Ch. 4; 14 pages)

Anthropological Blurring of the Boundaries between the Secular and the Religious

April 7th: Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular in Christianity and Islam* (Ch. 1 & 2. Through p. 79; 56 pages)

Tuesday 12th April Tuesday 19th April

Anthropological Blurring of the Boundaries between the Secular and the Religious

April 12th: Talal Asad, selections from *Formations of the Secular in Christianity and Islam*. (Ch. 4 and 6; 54 pages)

April 14th: Talal Asad, selections from *Formations of the Secular in Christianity and Islam*. (Ch. 7)

Tuesday 19th April through Tuesday 26th April

Critical Theory Perspective—Jürgen Habermas: the rational communicative basis of restoring religion to politics

April 19th: Habermas, selections from *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Ch. 8; 39 pages) + “To seek to salvage an unconditional meaning without God is a futile undertaking: reflections on a remark of Max Horkheimer” (15 pages)

Third paper due on April 19th

April 21st: Habermas' *Religion in the Public Sphere* (25 pages)

Tuesday 26th April through May 3rd

Existentialist and Leftist Perspectives—Agamben

April 26th: Agamben, selections from *Homo Sacer* (p. I, Ch. 1-4 & Part II Ch. 1-3; 60 pages)

April 28th: Agamben, selections from *Homo Sacer* (p. III Ch. 1-6 & Threshold; 49 pages)

Tuesday May 3rd

Existentialist and Leftist Perspectives—Badiou

May 3rd: Badiou, 'Democratic Emblem', from *Democracy in What State*

Final Paper is due on May 11th by email to aelsayed@syr.edu by 11:59 EST.