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 and Nancy.

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:

Required texts: (These books will be available at the University bookstore and on reserve at the Bird Library. We will read significant portions of these books but not all of them)


Readings available on Blackboard under ‘Content-Readings’

2. Selections from Plato’s *Republic*
5. Selections from Kant. *Political Writings & The Conflict of the Faculties*.
6. Selections from Habermas. *Religion and Rationality and Between Naturalism and Religion* and “Religion in the Public Sphere”
8. Selections from *Democracy in What State* by Alain Badiou and Jean-Luc Nancy

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)

1. Class attendance and participation
   a. Worth 50% of your participation grade.
   b. 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.

2
Important Note: Missing more than 1 class except for valid and documented conditions may result in your loss of the whole participation grade.

2. **Blackboard participation**
   a. **Worth 50% of your participation grade**
   b. Every week you are required to make a post on Blackboard in the ‘Discussion’ section. The Post should reflect what you found most interesting about the week’s readings. Posts will be due at the end of every week by **Saturday at 5 pm**
   c. Your post can be either an expression of your own reflection on the text, a question the readings raised in your mind or a response to a colleague’s question/comment

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

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
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<td>A</td>
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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](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. 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 14\textsuperscript{th} January through Tuesday 21\textsuperscript{st} 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 14\textsuperscript{th}: General Introduction and Way into the Republic (summary of books of I-II to be handed out in class)
January 16\textsuperscript{th}: Selections from the Republic Books IV (435c to end; 10 pages) and V (462c9-480a9; 17 pages)

Tuesday 21\textsuperscript{st} January through Tuesday 28\textsuperscript{th} 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 21\textsuperscript{st}: 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 23\textsuperscript{rd}: Selections from the Republic Books VIII (all; 24 pages + analytical summary handed out in class) and IX (beginning till 584e; 12 pages)

Tuesday 28\textsuperscript{th} January through Tuesday 4\textsuperscript{th} 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)

January 28\textsuperscript{nd}: Selections from Aristotle’s Politics Book I (1-13; 17 pages) and II (1-6; 7 pages)
January 30\textsuperscript{th}: Selections from Aristotle’s Politics Book III (1-13; 22 pages) and IV (1-13; 22 pages)
Tuesday 4\textsuperscript{th} February through Tuesday 11\textsuperscript{th} February

Aristotle’s \textit{Politics}: The empirical critique of Plato and the re-casting of the relations between the political subject (microcosm) and the body politic (microcosm)

Feb 4\textsuperscript{th}: Selections from Aristotle’s \textit{Politics} Book VII (all; 30 pages) and VIII (all; 14 pages)

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

Feb 6\textsuperscript{th}: Selections from Al-Farabi \textit{Political Writings}: “The Enumeration of Sciences” (p. 69-85; 16 pages)

Tuesday 11\textsuperscript{th} February through Tuesday 18\textsuperscript{th} February

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

Feb 11\textsuperscript{th}: Al-Farabi \textit{Political Writings}: “The Book of Religion” (p. 85-100)
Feb 13\textsuperscript{th}: Al-Farabi \textit{Political Writings}: “The Book of Religion” (p.100-115)

First paper due on Feb 13\textsuperscript{th}

Tuesday 18\textsuperscript{th} February through Tuesday 25\textsuperscript{th} February

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

Feb 18\textsuperscript{th}: Aquinas \textit{On Law, Morality and Politics}: On Law: Q. 90-93 (p. 10-40)
Feb 20\textsuperscript{th}: Aquinas \textit{On Law, Morality and Politics}: On Law: Q. 94-97 (p. 40-75)

Tuesday 25\textsuperscript{th} February through Tuesday 4\textsuperscript{th} March

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

Feb 25\textsuperscript{th}: Aquinas \textit{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: \textit{Theological Political Treatise} pantheistic rational materialism and the promise of secularism

Feb 27\textsuperscript{th}: Spinoza’s \textit{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 4\textsuperscript{th} March through Tuesday 11\textsuperscript{th} March

Early Modern Materialist Rationalism—Spinoza: \textit{Theological Political Treatise} pantheistic rational materialism and the promise of secularism

March 4\textsuperscript{th}: Spinoza’s \textit{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 6th: 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)

Second paper due on March 6th
Tuesday 11th March through Tuesday 18th March

Spring Break: March 9th through 16th March

Tuesday 20th March through Tuesday 27th March

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

March 20th: Kant, selections in his Political Writings: “What is Enlightenment?” & “On Orientation in Thinking” (p. 54-61 & p. 235-250)
March 22nd: Kant, selections from the Conflict of Faculties (p. 247-293)

Tuesday 27th March through Tuesday 1st April

Part III: Contemporary Perspectives

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

March 27th: Selections from Carl Schmitt’s Political Theology (preface & Ch.1 and Ch. 2; 36 pages)
March 29th: Selections from Carl Schmitt’s Political Theology (Ch. 3; 17 pages)

Tuesday 1st April through Tuesday 8th April

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

April 1st: Selections from Carl Schmitt’s Political Theology (Ch. 4; 14 pages)

Anthropological Blurring of the Boundaries between the Secular and the Religious

April 3rd: Talal Asad, Formations of the Secular in Christianity and Islam (Ch. 1 & 2. Through p. 79; 56 pages)

Third paper due on April 3rd.

Tuesday 8th April through Tuesday 15th April

Anthropological Blurring of the Boundaries between the Secular and the Religious
April 8th: Talal Asad, selections from *Formations of the Secular in Christianity and Islam*. (Ch. 4 and 6; 54 pages)
April 10th: Talal Asad, selections from *Formations of the Secular in Christianity and Islam*. (Ch. 7)

**Tuesday 15th April through Tuesday 22nd April**

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

April 15th: 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 Harkheimer” (15 pages)
April 17th: Habermas’ *Religion in the Public Sphere* (25 pages)

**Tuesday 24th April through Tuesday 1st May**

Existentialist and Leftist Perspectives—Agamben, Badiou and Jean-Luc Nancy

April 22th: Agamben, selections from *Homo Sacer* (p. I, Ch. 1-4 & Part II Ch. 1-3; 60 pages)
April 24th: Agamben, selections from *Homo Sacer* (p. III Ch. 1-6 & Threshold; 49 pages)

**Tuesday 1st May**

Existentialist and Leftist Perspectives—Agamben, Badiou and Jean-Luc Nancy

April 29th: Badiou, “The democratic emblem” & Nancy, “Finite and Infinite Democracy” (24 pages)

**Final Paper is due on May 9th by email to aelsayed@syr.edu by 11:59 EST.**