Instructors:
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Course Description:
This seminar will reflect on questions of political community, secularism, and the sacred in both critical-theoretical and historical literature. Raising questions about the nature of religion and the secular is of considerable political and theoretical urgency for our era, an era marked by evangelical promises of regeneration, redemption, and apocalyptic rebirth. In theoretical circles, the concept of “political theology” has made a triumphant return in the twenty-first century, not only to address explicit theocracies past and present but also to address the transcendent and semi-divine claims of sovereignty in even the most secular-seeming constitutional settings. Our readings will help us reconsider contemporary currents of thought on both the sacred and the secular, starting from the perspective of history and critical theory. In the process, the seminar will aim to clarify key currents of modernity and consider the ways in which the last century may or may not represent a turning point towards the “postsecular.”

Readings:
You will need to purchase the following books (available at University Coop) or use the copies on library reserve (24-hr period). Some of the titles may be available as E-books through UT library catalog. Additional required readings noted in schedule of class meetings as “selections” will be distributed electronically.

Assignments:

**History of a Class Session:** Each student will sign up to be the official record keeper for one class session. The following week, the student will submit a 4- to 5-page paper reporting on the previous session. That student will also present a 5- to 10-minute report at the beginning of the class session, reminding other students what was discussed the previous week, and what the special points of interest were. These should not simply list discussion points, but should seek to get analytical distance in order to provide a meaningful overview of the reading and discussion. The end result will be an archive of class readings and discussion.

**Presentation:** Each student will present a brief (15-minute) presentation to the class on his/her final project. These presentations need not be written, but they should be well organized so as to educate classmates about the research project.

**Final Essay:** Each student will prepare a final essay of 25 pages. You will have a choice of writing a review essay or a theoretically informed research paper. **Due date:** Last class meeting.

**Grading:**
- History of a Class Session: 20%
- Class Participation and Presentation: 30%
- Final Essay: 50%

Plus/Minus grading will be used for all grading in this course. The grade scale is as follows:

- 100-93% = A;
- 92-90% = A-;
- 89-87% = B+;
- 86-83% = B;
- 82-80% = B-;
- 79-77% = C+;
- 76-73% = C;
- 72-70% = C-;
- 69-67% = D+;
- 66-63% = D;
- 62-60% = D-;
- below 60% = F.

**ATTENDANCE:**
- Attendance, preparation, and active participation in all course sessions are mandatory.
- Religious Holy Days: By University policy, please notify me of your pending absence fourteen days prior to the anticipated date of observance of religious holy days. If you must miss a class, an examination, or an assignment, for religious observance, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

**University of Texas Honor Code:**
The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community. All work for this course will be that of the student and original contributions.

**Disabilities:**
The University of Texas at Austin provides accommodations for students with disabilities. Contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 or 232-2937 (video phone).
TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS
(Subject to Revisions and Changes)

Week 1, September 9
Taylor

Week 2, September 16
Asad

Week 3, September 23
Mahmood

Week 4, September 30
Weber

Week 5, October 7
Durkheim, Caillois, and Bataille (selections)

Week 6, October 14
Freud, LaCapra, Santner (selections)

Week 7, October 21
Benjamin (selections) and Schmitt

Week 8, October 28
de Certeau

Week 9, November 4
Derrida

Week 10, November 11
Arkoun (selections)

Week 11, November 18
Research assignments

Week 12, November 25
Presentations

Week 13, December 2
Presentations
SUGGESTED SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS

- Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*
- ---, *Profanations*
- Talal Asad: *Genealogies of Religion*
- Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess*
- ---, *The Accursed Share*
- ---, *Theory of Religion*
- Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*
- ---, *Vibrant Matter*
- Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*
- ---, ed., *The Desecularization of the World*
- Rajeev Bhargava, ed., *Secularism and its Critics*
- Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimation of the Modern Age*
- Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion*
- Craig Calhoun, et al., eds., *Rethinking Secularism*
- William Connolly, *Why I am not a Secularist*
- Simon Critchley, *Faith of the Faithless*
- Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*
- ---, “Faith and Knowledge: Two Sources of Religion at the Limits of Reason Alone” (in RELIGON, ed. Jacques Derrida &Gianni Vatimo)
- Michel Foucault, *Religion and Culture*
- ---, *Future of an Illusion*
- Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism that is not Humanist Emerges in French Thought*
- Roger Griffin, Robert Mallett and John Tortorice, eds., *The Sacred in Twentieth-Century Politics*
- William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*
- Dominick LaCapra, *History, Literature, Critical Theory*
- Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History*
- Michael Lowy, *Fire Alarm*
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*
- ---, *Genealogy of Morality*
- Vincent Pecora, *Secularization and Cultural Criticism*
- Eric Santner, *On Creaturely Life*
- ---, *The Psychotheology of Everyday Life*
- Baruch Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*
- Hent de Vries and Lawrence Sullivan, eds., *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*
- Michael Warner et al., eds., *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*