

Spring 2015
RSOC 134 – Religion & Secularization

MW 4:45-6:30 | Kenna 308
Elizabeth Drescher, PhD



Course Description

This course explores the relationship between religion and secularism. It begins by exploring the development of religious diversity among (primarily Christian) religious positions in the West in the early modern period (from the Protestant Reformations through the eighteenth-century). It moves to more contemporary themes, including the tension between religious identities and the modern state, the so-called “God debate” by prominent “new atheists,” and other recent global controversies related to religion in a world assumed by many to be largely secular. The course fulfills **RTC3** requirements for the core curriculum.

According to many important nineteenth- and twentieth-century social commentators and scholars, modernization of the world meant its secularization: as the world developed, it would also become more secular—less dependent on and less influenced by religious ideas. By the early twenty-first century, we know that this assumption has turned out to be inaccurate. In the United States, while a growing number of people claim no religious affiliation, the majority of the so-called “Nones” nonetheless believe in supernatural beings or powers. Their spiritual and religious practices

continue to influence American culture, including politics, education, and institutional religion. Elsewhere in the world, religiously influenced violence, as in the Charlie Hebdo attacks in France, continue to challenge assumed boundaries between religion and “the secular.”

In this course we will consider religion and secularity not as binaries, but as existential, social, and political bedfellows that together shape what it means to be both religious and secular in contemporary culture. We will focus on the development of ideas (e.g., “toleration,” “religious freedom,” “diversity”) and critical concepts (e.g., “religion,” “the secular,” “pluralism”) The readings will include texts from religious studies, anthropology, sociology, history, and other disciplines that enable us to examine theoretical approaches to religion(s) and secularism(s) that unfold in various debates and conflicts at the intersections of religion and politics, religion and science, religion and popular culture, et cetera. Case studies will invite students to explore how historical experience and theoretical concepts enter into the lived reality of religion and secularity.

Learning Objectives for Religion, Theology, and Culture 3

- 3.1 Identify diverse perspectives and evaluate ethical positions on contemporary questions.
- 3.2 Evaluate and apply insights from the study of religion to open-ended questions facing contemporary society.

Course Learning Objectives

- 1. Students will gain an awareness of the historical, political, and theoretical roots of secularization in relation to global political, economic, social, and religious change.
- 2. Students will be introduced to the major debates about religion, secularity, and the so-called “post-secular.”
- 3. Students will be able to critically analyze new approaches to religion and secularization in light of relevant sources in religion, anthropology, sociology, history, and other related disciplines.
- 4. Students will apply insights gained from class readings, discussions, and their own resource to questions of religiosity and secularity in American life as they experience and observe it.

Required Texts

Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006). ISBN-13: 978-0618918249

Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). ISBN-13: 978-0300164534

Course Requirements

Class Participation	20% of final grade
Case Study Presentation	25% of final grade
Midterm Paper	25% of final grade
Final Exam	30% of final grade

Class Participation – This is an upper level course, which requires significant engagement by students to achieve learning outcomes. Students are expected to attend *every class*, arrive *on time*, and to *have read* all of the assigned materials, noting significant insights, questions, areas of confusion, agreement, or disagreement raised by the materials. Students should likewise consider how the issues raised in readings and other materials relate to real life contexts, either in their own experience or their observation. Throughout the course, we will apply our understandings of the concepts, issues, and questions raised in the readings to case studies of situations in the recent past in which encounters between religion and secularism were central. In the first half of the quarter, students will prepare individual responses to cases assigned by the instructor (see below). In the second half, we will research these cases in common, exploring news reports, commentary, and academic analysis each week. In preparation for this, students will meet with a research librarian to prepare for the case studies and the midterm paper. This is a mandatory session, and students who do not attend will have a **5 point deduction** from *both* the case study presentation and the midterm paper. (3.1, 3.2)



More than two unexcused absences from class permitted will result in a 5 point deduction from the final grade for each class missed.

Case Study Presentations—Each student will research a case of religious/secular encounter assigned during the first week of class. Research will involve reviewing relevant news accounts, commentary, and academic analysis of the case. Several students (3-4, depending on class size) will work independently on each case, but must coordinate with other case presenters to ensure that there is no overlap in proposed readings. Each student will share her or his informed perspective in class during the assigned week. Students will have 20 minutes to present their insight on the case as it speaks to historical and current questions of religion and secularization. Each student will provide a reading related to the case to the class one week before the presentation of the case in class. The case study work will contribute to students' midterm papers. Guidelines will be provided the first week of class. (3.2)

Midterm Paper – Students will submit a 10-12 page paper in which they apply their informed understanding of theoretical concepts of “religion,” “secularism,” “pluralism,” et cetera to a contemporary case of encounter or conflict between religious and secular viewpoints and practices. The paper will draw upon research for a case study that will be shared in class. Paper guidelines will be shared the second week of class. (3.2)

Final Exam – A final, essay exam will cover key histories, concepts, and insights from the course as they apply to a case study. Students will be asked to select between two case studies on which they will answer four of six essay questions. (3.1, 3.2)

Electronic Device Policy

Students may use a laptop in class with the permission of the instructor. Students may not use smartphones or other electronic devices in class. Students whose use of laptops or other electronic devices in class is disruptive or disrespectful to other students or the professor will be asked to leave the class and will not receive credit for attendance on that day and will have an additional 10 point deduction from their final grade.

Disability Accommodation Policy

To request accommodation for a disability, students must contact Disability Resources located in the Drahmann Center in Benson, Room 214 at 554-4111; TTY 554-5445. Students must provide documentation of a disability to Disability Resources prior to receiving accommodation.

Course Outline

Week 1 : Introduction

Part I. Setting the Stage (Monday, March 30)

- ❖ Introduction of the theme and course overview.
- ❖ Presentation and discussion of small film/documentary snippets of mass religious gatherings.

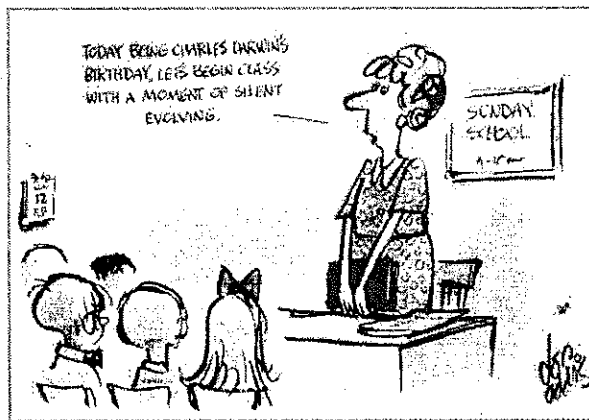
Part II. Historical Contexts (Wednesday, April 1—No fooling!)

1. José Casanova, "Secularization, Enlightenment, and Modern Religion," chapter 1 of *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 11-39.
2. Saba Mahmood, "Can Secularism Be Otherwise?" in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, ed. by Michael Warner, et al (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 282-289.

Week 2: The Secular, Secularization & Secularism: Definitions

Part I. Terminologies (Monday, April 6)

3. Charles Taylor, "Modes of Secularism," in *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. by Rajeev Bhargava, Delhi et al, (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 31-53.
4. Courtney Bender, "Pluralism and Secularism," in *Religion on the Edge: De-Centering and Re-Centering the Sociology of Religion*, ed. by Courtney Bender and Wendy Cage (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 137-158.



Part II. Science, Evolution & Faith: The Dawkins-Eagleton Debate (Wednesday, April 8)

5. Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution, Reflections on the God Debate*, chapters 1 and 2
6. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, chapters 4, 5, and 8.

Week 3: Science and Religion

Part I. Intellectual Legacies (Monday, April 13)

7. Stanley Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990), pp. 1-15.

8. Jay Laycock, "Vampirism and Religion, a Dialogue," chapter 6 of *Vampires Today: The Truth About Modern Vampirism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009), 120-137.

Part II. Case Study. The quest for transcendence: on vampires, magic and modern witches (Wednesday, April 15)

Common case review in preparation for midterm papers and presentations.

Week 4: Current public debates on the salience of Religion and Secularism

Part I. History and universalism: The Asad-Casanova debate (Monday, April 20)

9. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford UP. 2003. (chapter 6: Secularism, Nation-State, Religion, pp. 181-205).
10. Jose Casanova, 'Secularization Revisited: A Reply to Talal Asad', in *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and his Interlocutors*, ed. by David Scott and Charles Hirschkind, Stanford 2006, pp. 12-30.

Part II. Theoretical and Historical Perspectives: Religion, the State & the Secular (Wednesday, April 22)

11. Jean Bauberot's 'The Two Thresholds of Laicization', in Rajeev Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and its Critics*, pp. 94-136.
12. Daniele Hervieu-Léger, 'Individualism, the Validation of Faith and the Social Nature of Religion in Modernity', in *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, Oxford 2001, pp.161-64.
13. Talal Asad, 'Muslims as a "Religious Minority" in Europe', in T. Asad, *Formations of the Secular in Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford 2003, pp. 159-180.

Week 5: Research Preparation

Part I. Library Research Workshop (Monday, April 27)

Meet with humanities librarian to prepare for case studies and research papers. Required of all students.

Wednesday, April 29: No Class Session—Reading and discussion on Camino

Part I. Theoretical and Historical Perspectives: Europe & Eastern Europe (Wednesday, April 29)

14. Emma Loosley, 'Peter, Paul, and James of Jerusalem : the doctrinal and political evolution of the Eastern and Oriental Churches', in *Eastern Christianity in the modern Middle East*, edited by Anthony O'Mahony and Emma Loosley, London: Routledge 2010.
15. Sonja Luehrman, "Introduction: Atheism, Secularity, and Postsecular Religion" in *Secularism Soviet Style: Teaching Atheism and Religion in a Volga Republic*. Indiana University Press 2011.

Week 6: Case Studies

Part I. Case Study: Pussy Riot: Russian Orthodoxy and Human Rights (Monday, May 4)

Student case presentations. Reading provided by case leaders.

Part II. Case Study: Charlie Hebdo: Islam in Europe (Wednesday, May 6)

Student case presentations. Reading provided by case leaders.

Week 7: Religion, the state and the secular: Turkey and Middle East

Part I. Secularism in Muslim Societies (Monday, May 11)

16. Aziz Al-Azmeh, 'The Religious and the Secular in Contemporary Arab Life', in *Islams and Modernities*, 2nd edition, ed. Aziz Al-Azmeh, Verso Books, 1996, pp. 41-58.
17. M. Hakan Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 14-43.

Part II. Case Study: The Arab Spring (Wednesday, May 13)

Student case presentations. Reading provided by case leaders.

*****MIDTERM PAPERS DUE IN CLASS WEDNESDAY, MAY 13*****

Week 8: Colonial legacy: religion and modernity

Part I. Theoretical Approaches: The Indian case (Monday, May 18)

18. Peter van der Veer, "The Moral State: Religion, Nation, and Empire in Victorian Britain and British India," in *Nation and Religion: Perspective on Europe and Asia*, ed. by Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 15-43.
19. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313.

Part II. Case Study. The Secularism Debate in India: Secularism & Pluralism (Wednesday, May 20)

Student case presentations. Reading provided by case leaders.

Week 9: Religion & Secularism in the Public Sphere

MONDAY, MAY 5: NO CLASS—MEMORIAL DAY HOLIDAY

Part I. The Dawkins - Eagleton Debate Redux (Wednesday, May 27)

22. Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution, Reflections on the God Debate*, chapters 3 and 4.
23. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, chapters 9 and 10.

Part II. Student Case Studies: The Bill Nye-Ken Ham Debate (Monday, June 1)

Student case presentations. Reading provided by case leaders.

Week 11. Final Discussion

Part I. Speaking Religiously, Speaking Secularly (Wednesday, June 3)

14. Wendy Cage, "Introduction" to *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*, Talal Asad, Judith Butler, Saba Mahmood, Wendy Brown eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 7-19.

Part II. Student Case Studies: Wendy Doniger and Blasphemy

Student case presentations. Reading provided by case leaders.

Part II: Final Exam (TBD week of June 8)

In class.