

Theology 300 Level Course Descriptions

Fall 2024

THEO 280-01W: Theology & Interdisciplinary Study

Dr. Lauren O'Connell

Tuesday 4:15PM – 6:45PM

Topic: Apocalyptic Rhetoric in Politics

This course will explore the use of rhetoric of 'apocalypse' as it is seen in ancient religious texts and modern political movements. Language of 'good vs. evil' has long been utilized as a political tool, especially in times of distress, precarity, or deep polarization. While many scholars agree that this rhetoric largely functioned as a source of comfort in ancient religious texts, to promote the promise of God's eventual justice for oppressed or struggling communities, its modern political use has been critiqued as a source of potential danger and for being ethically reductive. Drawing on examples from 2nd Temple Jewish Literature, the Bible, and other non-canonical Christian texts, as well as examples from modern political movements, we will examine the cultural events that lead to the popularity of such language in political contexts and the real-world consequences of its persistent and pervasive use. This course satisfies the Tier II CORE requirement and has the prerequisite of THEO 100, 107 or equivalent (HON 100D or THEO 190).

THEO 280-02E: Theology & Interdisciplinary Study

Dr. Hans Svebakken

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 1:40PM – 2:30PM

This course explores the threat of science denial through a series of three questions. **First, what is science denial?** This first phase will analyze science denial as *the unwarranted rejection of scientific consensus* on a range of issues (e.g., evolution), identifying some of the faulty rationales used for rejecting consensus. **Second, what motivates science denial?** The presumption of conflict between science and faith motivates much (but not all) science denial, so this second phase explores the "Conflict Model," using detailed case studies of "creationism" and "scientism" to illustrate how the assumptions, methods, and rhetoric of these two views work to perpetuate conflict and facilitate science denial. **Third, what mitigates science denial?** If conflict facilitates science denial, then peaceful co-existence between science and faith can mitigate the problem. So the final phase of the course will propose the late Stephen Jay Gould's model of "Non-Overlapping Magisteria" (NOMA) as a viable public model for framing a relation between science and faith that all civic stakeholders can endorse and support for the common good. The "Undergraduate Research" E-L designation of this course aims (1) to understand, analyze, and evaluate science denial, (2) to understand, analyze, and evaluate Gould's original NOMA model and its reception and (3) to revise Gould's NOMA into a more effective analytical tool.

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THEO 331-001: Theology of Secularization

Dr. Colby Dickinson

Tuesday, Thursday 2:30PM – 3:45PM

Atheism has quickly risen to become one of the largest categories of (non)belief in our current global society. Yet despite its obvious appeal, many questions remain to be answered, such as: what exactly does it mean to profess an atheist worldview? Is atheism simply a reaction to religious belief, or can it be a positive contribution to human meaningfulness (a 'secular humanism')? Is atheism itself a religion? Can it establish a community of like-minded individuals? How is atheism distinct from, but also conjoined with, the secularization of our world? Is there anything religious persons can or should do in response to the rise of atheism? This course will examine the historical rise of atheism in the modern period and its various manifestations and positions established in opposition to religious belief, especially insofar as it shares a certain trajectory with secularism today. We will look at a variety of texts that explore the topic of atheism, including intellectual histories of atheism in the modern period as well as more popular works on non-belief and secular humanism in the present era, in order to gain a better understanding of what constitutes atheism today and what future it might have in relation to traditional religious practices, beliefs and communities throughout the world.

Course texts

- De Botton, Alain. *Religion for Atheists: A Non-believer's Guide to the Uses of Religion*. New York: Pantheon, 2012. ISBN 978-0-307-37910-8
 - Kasselstrand, Isabella, Phil Zuckerman and Ryan T. Cragun, *Beyond Doubt: The Secularization of Society*, New York: New York University Press, 2023. ISBN 978-1479814282
 - Lee, Lois. *Recognizing the Non-religious: Reimagining the Secular*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015. ISBN 978-0-19-873684-4
 - Luhrmann, T.M., *How God Becomes Real: Kindling the Presence of Invisible Others*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020. ISBN 978-0-69-116446-5
- Paulos, John Allen, *Irreligion: A Mathematician Explains Why the Arguments for God Just Don't Add Up*, New York: Hill and Wang, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8090-5919-5
- Whitmarsh, Tim, *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World*, New York: Vintage, 2015. ISBN 978-0-307-94877-9

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THEO 353-001: Religious Traditions

Dr. Bret Lewis

Thursday 4:15PM – 6:45PM on the WTC

Topic: Zen Buddhism

This course is designed to explore the history, ideas, concepts, and practices of Zen Buddhism. The first part of the semester will engage commentaries and classic texts emerging out of the Indian and Chinese contexts. In the second part of the semester, we will turn our attention to East Asia and the United States - while paying close attention to the areas of institutional religion, gender roles and identity, sexual ethics, and Western constructions of Zen. While a number of lenses will be applied in our study of Zen, including that of anthropology, sociology, psychology, and gender studies, the greatest focus will be placed on the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of Zen as a religious practice and identity. The course seeks to encourage reflection on the nature and category of religion while appreciating the forces of time and place in shaping its diverse manifestations.

THEO 378-001: Theology and Culture

Combined with

THEO 477-001: Fem Issues: Theology and Ethics

Dr. Sandra Sullivan Dunbar

Tuesday, Thursday 10:00AM – 11:15AM

Topic: Theology and Culture: Religion and Reproductive Justice

****Cross-listed with Women's and Gender Studies and Bioethics**

Reproductive justice is a framework developed by women scholars and activists of color that attends to all aspects of reproductive lives and places reproductive ethics in a complex historical, legal and social justice context. The reproductive justice framework gives particular attention to the ways in which reproductive lives have been structured by race, gender and class—and the ways in which reproductive laws, policies, and practices have shaped and reinforced race, gender and class structures.

We will explore the RJ framework in dialogue with approaches to reproduction, reproductive ethics and social justice found in several religious traditions, including diverse and nuanced approaches within religious traditions. We will also attend to the history of reproductive policies in the United States and the evolving engagement of religious groups with those policies and policy debates. The greatest focus will be on Protestant Christianity, Roman Catholic Christianity, and Judaism, but we will also give some attention to other traditions, including Islam and Native American approaches to reproductive justice.

This integrated and interdisciplinary course is cross-listed for credit towards WSGS and bioethics programs.

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Most readings will be available on Sakai or as online library resources. Students should expect to purchase the Roberts book (list price \$18.00) and the Peters book (list price \$18.00).

- Course texts will include selections from the following books:
- Loretta Ross et. al. *Radical Reproductive Justice: Foundations, Theory, Practice, Critique*
- Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*
- Rebecca Todd Peters, *Trust Women: A Progressive Christian Argument for Reproductive Justice*
- Michael Raucher, *Conceiving Agency: Reproductive Authority Among Haredi Women*
- Margaret Kamitsuka and Rebecca Todd Peters, *The T&T Clark Reader in Abortion and Religion: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Perspectives*
- We will also read a range of other sources on religion, reproductive ethics, and reproductive justice, including primary sources, scholarly essays, and personal narratives.