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Polsc. 610

Political Theory & Analysis

Spring 2013
BusAd D102
W 6:00-8:30
Office hours:
M+F 11-12:30

I. Description of the Class:

The world is in turmoil and no consolidating master narrative of meaning is in sight to guide us through the global quagmire. The questions I want to raise in the course touch on various civilizational scenarios towards comparable crisis phenomena in the past and the present. Among these responses, a variety of religions play a major role. Christianity and Islam have offered universal projects of pacification which have often derailed in dogmatic and doctrinaire ideological discourse. Books by Jacob Taubes (*The Political Theology of Paul*), Giorgio Agamben (*The Time That Remains*), Elaine Pagels (*Revelations*) and Olivier Roy (*Secularism Confronts Islam*) open up fascinating perspectives on the promise of the three monotheistic religions and their followers. They also make us recognize the failure in their attempts to provide strategies for universal peace and spiritual meaning.

The secular discourse of communism became one of the most powerful and equally universal counter projects for peace and meaning in its various historical manifestations around the world. In addition to the question whether Mao's legacy lives on in contemporary China, as some Sinologists suggest in a daring new scholarly publication (*Mao's Invisible Hand*), we will discuss the question whether the radical analysis of Marx is witnessing in the current global economic crisis a surprising recovery as post-post-modern and neo-Marxist and other unconventional thinkers suggest (Douziness/ Zisek, eds., *The Idea of Communism*).

We will start our *tour de force* with Eric Voegelin's 1964 lectures on *Hitler and the Germans* and conclude the semester with Andreas Kalyas' discussion of the state of exception (*Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary*) that produced Hitler's regime. Both these texts have some bearing on the contemporary conditions of post-genocidal societies.

II. Requirements:

Since the class has a limited membership, I want to keep it open for discussion. For that reason, I encourage the members to read the texts. Students are expected to introduce two texts to the rest of the class and open the discussion with questions of their own. Participation in these discussions will form one part of the grade. A longer paper of about 15 pages, focusing on one of the texts or using one or more as a point of departure for the exploration of a theme, will constitute the other part of the grade. Students should suggest to me early on, in class or in consultation with me in my office, an area of interest for the paper.

III. Calendar of Class:

- 1/9 General introduction.
- 1/16 Religion and Politics: The temptation of Power- the Christian Churches and Nazi Germany: Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*.
- 1/23 Cont'd.
- 1/30 The Question about Paul's Role:
The Founder of Christianity: Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*.
- 2/6 The Jewish Reformer: Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains*.
- 2/13 Cont'd.
- 2/20 Islam's Universalist Claims: Olivier Roy, *Secularism Confronts Islam*.
- 2/27 Cont'd
- 3/6 The Truth Claims of Revelation: Elaine Pagels, *Revelations*.
- 3/13 The Secular Universalism of Communism: Douziness/Zizek, *The Idea of Communism*.
- 3/20 Cont'd.
- 4/3 Failed or Reformed Universalism: Heilmann/Perry, *Mao's Invisible Hand*.
- 4/10 Cont'd.
- 4/17 The Politics of Exception: Andreas Kalyas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary*.
- 4/24 Student Papers.
- 5/1 Student Papers.