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Polsc. 610

Political Theory & Analysis

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We will discuss in this class a range of conceptual, historical and philosophical issues that have tremendous importance for contemporary epistemological debates in the social sciences. We will begin with the question whether we should replace the conventional notion of Western modernity with an understanding of the world being shaped by a plural field of modernities. Peter Wagner's book, *Modernity* (2012), provides a complex map of the variety of modernity.

Connected with the Western notion of modernity has always been the understanding that the modern world was enabled by the disenchantment of the cosmos. The removal of the gods and all spiritual entities from the world and envisioning a transcendent ground of being made it possible for humans to take charge of and remake the world without being stopped by any divine prohibitions. This central thesis of Max Weber's understanding of occidental modernity was reinforced by Juergen Habermas in his mid-life writings. Though he hasn't become religious, Habermas has shown a growing openness towards and acceptance of spiritual truth quests. His discussions with Judith Butler, Charles Taylor and Cornel West in *The Power of Religion and the Public Sphere* (2011) will provide a frame for the further investigation of the attempts at re-enchanting the universe. John Grimm and Evelyn Tucker engage in this kind of questioning in their book *Ecology and Religion* (2014). The Grimm/Tucker perspective sheds light also on the ongoing Mauna Kea debate in Hawai'i.

A radical spiritual revisioning of the thinking about violence we will encounter in Rene Girard's *The One by Whom Scandal Comes* (2014). The secular approach towards our understanding of mass violence is presented by Christian Gerlach in his book *Extreme Violent Societies* (2010) that covers rather unfamiliar ground like Armenia, Indonesia and Bangladesh. Gerlach's case studies lead themselves to making connections with the larger and more familiar cases in the 20th century. But these studies will also facilitate our understanding of movements like ISIS/ISIL in the present. The particularly American curse of racism is picked up by Kwame Appiah in his *Lines of Descent* (2014) where he traces the depressing journey of the most influential African-American intellectual in the first half of the 20th century, W. E. B. Du Bois, from the U.S. to Germany at the end of the 19th century and finally to Ghana at the end of his life.

We will finish the semester program with the question concerning Martin Heidegger whose peculiar attraction for post-modern, post-colonial and feminist intellectuals in the U.S. and other parts of the world had always to cope with the embarrassing biographical detail that this unquestionably brilliant philosopher fell at one point in his life for the Nazis considering them to herald a cosmological paradigm shift. This embarrassment has recently become sharpened by the publication of the so-called 'Black Notebooks.' We will discuss the Heidegger question in connection with the essays in *The Question Concerning Technology*.