

RELI 205 - Religion and Its Critics
Spring 2011--Vassar College
MW 3:10-4:25
Mudd 317

Jonathon Kahn—Office: Blodgett Hall 203
Office Phone: (845) 437-5521
Email: jokahn@vassar.edu
Office Hours: Tues, 4:30-6, Weds 10-12

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is “modernity”? Here’s how the philosophy of religion might answer that question. Western modernity emerges when the relationship between reason and revelation, once thought to be compatible, becomes fraught, contested, and even downright nasty. This class explores the modern tensions between reason and religion: The ways in which moderns in the west cast critical philosophical doubts about the supernatural and the religious traditions that support it, and the ways religious moderns with their own philosophical tools rebuild religious orientations. Theists, atheists, and skeptics author the texts we will be examining. Many of them—feminists, race-theorists, and ethicists—consider the social and political ramifications of the tension between the claims of reason and revelation. Finally, we will also be considering classic filmic representation of these tensions.

REQUIRED TEXTS

AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE AT THREE ARTS BOOKSTORE ON COLLEGE VIEW

- David Hume, *Dialogues and Natural History of Religion* (Oxford)
- Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (Cambridge)
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Penguin Classics)
- Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (Yale)
- Blaise Pascal, *Pensees and Other Writings* (Oxford)
- Tamar Ross, *Expanding the Palace of Torah* (Brandeis)
- Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Penguin)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Requirements include careful reading of weekly assignments, avid class participation, respectful and passionate exchange of ideas, 3 short papers, (3 pages), and final take home. Final grades will be tabulated according to the following formula, class participation, 15%; short papers 45%; final, 40%

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

“Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please schedule an appointment with the instructor early in the

semester to discuss any accommodations for this course which have been approved by the Director of Disability and Support Services as indicated in your accommodation letter.”

NOTE ON USE OF PERSONAL COMPUTING DEVICES IN CLASS

You may use a laptop in class for note-taking only. All other forms of Internet carousing—whether on your laptop or some other sort of gadgets—are not allowed. Think of our time together here as time we need to protect from the technological diversions of our modern age.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Thurs Jan 20: Introduction

Tues Jan 25

- Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Q1 and Q2
- Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 181-182, 279-280 [**M**]

Thurs Jan 27

- John Sommerville, *The Exhaustion of Secularism*”
- David Brooks, “The Arena Culture”
- William Deresiewicz, “Solitude and Leadership,” *The American Scholar*.org, Spring 2010
- George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language,” (1946)

Tues Feb 1

- Blaise Pascal, *Pensees and Other Writings*, (items, not pages) 32-36, 78, 80, 112-114, 117, 124-127, 142-198, 221-223, 226, 228-277, 480, 630, 637, 655, 661, 680, and “The Memorial” (p. 178)
- Dostoyevsky, a selection from *The Brothers Karamazov*, in *The Problem of Evil*, 277-282

Thurs Feb 3

- Pascal, *Pensees*

Monday Feb 9, Paper Due

Tues Feb 8

- Hume

Thurs Feb 10

- Hume

Tues Feb 15

- Kant

Thurs Feb 17

- Kant

Tues Feb 22

- Kant

Thurs Feb 24

- Marx

Monday February 28, Paper Due

Tues March 1

- Film, Pier Paolo Pasolini (Dir) *The Gospel According to Saint Mathew* (1964)

Thurs March 3

- Cornel West, “Genealogy of Modern Racism,” “Prophetic Afro-American Christian Thought and Progressive Marxism” and “Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity,” in *Prophesy Deliverance!*
- J. Kameron Carter, “Religion, Race, and the Contradictions of Identity” *Modern Theology* 21:1, January 2005, pg. 37-65
- J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*, Interlude, Chapter 6, Epilogue

SPRING BREAK

Tues March 22

- Schliermacher

Thurs March 24

- Schliermacher

Tues March 29

- Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, First and Second Essay

Thurs March 31

- Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Third Essay

Tues April 5

- Ross

Thurs April 7

- Ross

Tues April 12

- Kierkegaard

Thurs April 14

- Kierkegaard

Monday April 18, Paper Due

Tues April 19

- Film: Lars Von Trier (Dir), *Breaking the Waves* (1996)

Thurs April 21

- Irena Makarushka, “Transgressing Goodness in *Breaking the Waves*,” *Journal of Religion and Film*, 2.1 (1998) <http://www.unomaha.edu/~jrf/breaking.htm>
- Alyda Faber, “Redeeming Sexual Violence? A Feminist Reading of *Breaking the Waves*,” *Literature and Theology*, 2003 17(1): 59-75 [M]
- Nancy Jay, “Theories of Sacrifice” and “Conclusion” in *Throughout Your Generations Forever* 128-150

Tues April 26

- Eagleton

Thurs April 28

- Eagleton

Tues May 3

- James Alison, “Theology amidst the Stones and Dust” [M]
- Wrap up