

RLG411H1S
Truth, Religion, and the Public Sphere
Thursday 11am – 1pm
Jackman Humanities Building 214

Instructor

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Office Hour: Thursday 10am – 11am or by appointment

Description

In “Science as a Vocation,” Max Weber famously characterizes the fate of modern times in terms of “rationalization,” “intellectualization,” and the “disenchantment of the world,” by which he meant that our “ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations.” This course will examine this thesis with respect to our most rational and intellectual value: truth. In one sense, Weber’s thesis seems to be contradicted by Enlightenment philosophers’ argument for a public sphere in which truth claims could be openly debated. At the same time, post-Enlightenment philosophers challenged the idea that truths could be and should be publicly accessible and determined. By looking at divergent views about what it means for truth to belong or not to belong in the public sphere, this course will attempt to understand the nature religion within the context of philosophical modernity.

Evaluation

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Participation	15%
4 Response Papers	40%
Presentation	10%
Essay	35%

Seminar Schedule

- 01/09 – Introduction: some ideas about truth and its relation to religion and public discourse
- 01/16 – Weber on science and rationalization
- 01/23 – Kant on Enlightenment reason
- 01/30 – Kierkegaard on inner truth and outer untruth
- 02/06 – Nietzsche on the value of truth
- 02/13 – Simmel on intimacy and secrecy
- 02/20 – READING WEEK
- 02/27 – Strauss on esotericism
- 03/06 – Arendt on the politics of truth
- 03/13 – Levinas on testimony
- 03/20 – Rawls on public reason
- 03/27 – Williams on public deception
- 04/01 – Student presentations (summary of final research project)

Course Material

All of the texts for the course will be available on Blackboard. The weekly readings are substantive. Although it might not be possible to study in advance of our discussion all the texts for a particular week's class, the expectation is that students will do their best to be basically familiar with them.

Transparency & on-going student input

Students, I believe, have the right to inquire about the pedagogical methods and objectives adopted in the course. Although students should not expect everything in the course to be exactly as they would wish, they are entitled to justifications for why I have decided to do things one way rather than another. So please ask at any point during the semester if you are not clear about the purpose or value of a topic, text, or assignment. It is the responsibility of a teacher to accommodate as many learning styles as possible. But this responsibility assumes that students make known their difficulties as soon as they arise.

Email Policy

I try to answer emails as quickly as possible. But bear in mind that I am not always online and that the quantity of emails which I receive is greater at some points in the semester than at others. This is to say: please don't be surprised if I don't immediately reply to all of your emails. Expect an answer within 48 hours, especially if the issue can be handled quickly over email. If you anticipate that an issue requires a discussion (e.g., questions about your essay or an assignment), then it is best to make an appointment to meet with me in person since more involved issues will not be addressed through email exchanges.

Accessibility Services

Students with diverse needs are welcome in this course. Please contact the Accessibility Centre (<http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/>) for needs assessment, referrals and arrangements. The instructors will be glad to provide whatever assistance is necessary.

Plagiarism

From the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters:

“It shall be an offence for a student knowingly:

To represent as one's own any idea or expression of an idea or work of another in any academic examination or term test or in connection with any other form of academic work, i.e. to commit plagiarism. Wherever in the Code an offence is described as depending on 'knowing,' the offence shall likewise be deemed to have been committed if the person ought reasonably to have known.”