



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

Religion Political Theory and Policy Challenges - 56861

Last update 27-02-2025

HU Credits: 2

Degree/Cycle: 2nd degree (Master)

Responsible Department: Political Science

Academic year: 0

Semester: 2nd Semester

Teaching Languages: English

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Dr. Charles Lesch

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Coordinator Office Hours:

Teaching Staff:

Dr. Lesch Charles

Course/Module description:

Few political issues generate more controversy, or inspire stronger feelings, than those touching religion: Should religion be involved in politics or kept out of it? What are the appropriate limits to religious toleration? Is it right to break the law if my conscience tells me to? Do we need religion to bind us together? Is it ok for laws to be based on religious values? This course examines these and other enduring dilemmas by situating them within the broader historical, conceptual, and theoretical study of religion and political theory.

Course/Module aims:

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

Students will engage in three primary modes of inquiry in political theory: 1. Interpretation of important texts in religion, politics, ethics, and philosophy. What is the text saying? What is its argument? 2. Critical reflection on ideas and theories contained in these texts. Does the argument make sense? How does it compare to other thinkers or theories? 3. Normative evaluation of central moral and political questions. How should we act? What's the right thing to do?

Attendance requirements(%):

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction:

Course/Module Content:

Meetings will alternate between elucidation of the course texts and discussion of challenging moral and political questions. We will spend between three and four classes working to understand the key ideas and arguments of different texts. We will then devote half a class to collectively debating an important normative question that emerges from them and fleshing out its implications for contemporary policy challenges.

In Unit 1, we probe how "politics" and "religion" came to be conceived as separate spheres of human life and activity by examining core texts from three major religious traditions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Unit 2 moves to consider how religion has been treated in philosophy and political theory, focusing on questions of

toleration, the balance between sacred and secular authority, and how faith can be deployed cynically for social control. Unit 3 shifts from the macro to micro-scale, exploring how religious beliefs inspired important thinkers and activists in their quests for justice. We conclude, in Unit 4, by broadening our perspective to religion and community, examining the effects of disenchantment and secularization on such issues as political legitimacy, social solidarity, and legal discourse.

Required Reading:

- Hebrew Bible, selections from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Judges, Samuel, and Isaiah.
- “The Oven of Akhnai” from the Babylonian Talmud.
- Maimonides, selections from Mishneh Torah
- Christian Bible, selections from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
- Augustine, selections from The City of God.
- Al-Farabi, “The Political Regime” and “The Attainment of Happiness.”
- Ibn Khaldun, selections from The Muqaddimah.
- Machiavelli, selections from The Discourses.
- Rousseau, selections from The Social Contract.
- Hobbes, selections from On the Citizen.
- Locke, “A Letter Concerning Toleration” and selections from Second Treatise of Government.
- Marx, selection from Toward a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right.
- Dostoevsky, “The Grand Inquisitor,” from The Brother’s Karamozov.
- Nietzsche, selections from The Genealogy of Morals.
- Thoreau, “Resistance to Civil Government” and “Slavery in Massachusetts.”
- Gandhi, selections from Essential Writings.
- King, selections from Strength to Love.
- Durkheim, selections from The Elementary Forms of Religious Life.
- Weber, “Science as a Vocation.”
- Rawls, selection from “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited.”
- Sandel, selection from “A Response to Rawls’ Political Liberalism.”

Additional Reading Material:

Grading Scheme:

- Essay / Project / Final Assignment / Home Exam / Referat 50 %
- Submission assignments during the semester: Exercises / Essays / Audits / Reports / Forum / Simulation / others 30 %
- Presentation / Poster Presentation / Lecture 10 %

Attendance / Participation in Field Excursion 10 %

Additional information: