**Secularism, Democracy, and Violence**

Fall 2015

Tuesdays, 2-5 pm

Selznick Seminar Room, 2240 Piedmont Avenue

Course Syllabus

Instructor: Kathryn Heard

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Course website: <https://bcourses.berkeley.edu>

**Course Description**

This course probes the relationship of secularism, democracy and violence through consideration of eighteenth and nineteenth century texts on liberalism and religion as well as more contemporary works on secularism, war, religious freedom and human rights. The fundamental conceits of Western liberal democracy that this course aims to challenge are the ideas that secularism is religiously and culturally neutral, that secular democracies are pacific, and that the current Western ambition to "secularize" the non-West is itself non-violent. The point of the course is not simply to refute these conceits but rather to examine their historical foundations and contemporary reiterations.

Some of the questions we will explore in this course are: How has the relationship between secularism and freedom been imagined in certain traditions of liberal thought? What is the place accorded to religious difference in these traditions? How does the recent scholarship on secularism help us rethink some of these earlier formulations? What are the historical conditions that make the relationship between nation-state, human rights, and secularism seem necessary? What forms of coercion, violence and freedom are central to producing this truth? We will explore such questions through an engagement with philosophical, historical, and ethnographic texts. We will conclude the semester by reflecting upon how America’s current wars in the Middle East provoke a rethinking of the relationship between each of the three terms of this course: violence, democracy, secularism.

**Course Schedule**

Week I: September 1st

No readings – course introduction

Week II: September 8th

Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, Chs. 1-6

Week III: September 15th

John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*

Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* Ch. 2.

*Suggested reading:* Kirstie McClure, “Difference, Diversity, and the Limits of Tolerance.”

Week IV: September 22nd

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Writings*, Chs. 1-4

Akeel Bilgrami, “Secularism, Liberalism, and Relativism” (distributed via bCourses)

*Suggested reading:* Uday Mehta, *Loberalism and Empire: A Study in 19th Century British Liberal*

*Thought*, Chs. 2-3

Week V: September 29th

Winnifred Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*, Chs. 1-4

Steven Shiffrin, *The Religious Left and Church-State Relations*, Introduction and Chs. 1-3

Saba Mahmood, “Politics of Religious Freedom” (distributed via bCourses)

*Suggested reading:* Peter Danchin, “Of Prophets and Proselytes,” pp. 249-321

Week VI: October 6th

Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France*, Chs. 7-11

Week VII: October 13th

Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question” and “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right: Introduction*”

Week VIII: October 20th

Ludwig Feuerbach. *The Essence of Religion*.

Week IX: October 27th

Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Chs. 1-3, 8.

Week X: November 3

Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Introduction and Ch. 1

Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Introduction and Ch. 4

*Suggested reading:* Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Ch. 1

Week XI: November 10th

Mahmood Mamdami, *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror*

Michael Ignatieff, *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry*, pp. 3-98

Wendy Brown, “The Most We Can Hope For…”

Week II: November 17th

Hannah Arendt, “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of Rights of Man”

Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations*

Robert Meister, *After Evil: A Politics of Human Rights*, Introduction and Ch. 1

Week XIII: November 24th

Talal Asad, “Thinking about Terrorism and Just War”

Additional readings related to war drawn from the news (distributed via bCourses)