

## MTSO DS-682, Unitarian Universalist Special Topics

### Special Topic: Post-Christian and Poststructuralist Theologies

J-Term 2016; January 9-13, 2016, 8:00 AM-5:00 PM

Gault Hall 150

Rev. Dr. Susan Ritchie, Director of the Unitarian Universalist House of Studies, MTSO

[sritchie@mtso.edu](mailto:sritchie@mtso.edu); 614-309-5168

### Generic Description

This course will focus on special topics in Unitarian Universalist identity as well as topics of Unitarian Universalist expertise of interest to a wider ecumenical population. These course will include but not limited to UU History, UU Polity, Religious Humanism, Poststructuralist and Post Christian theologies, Animal Liberation Theologies, Faith Formation and Religious Education in Multi-Religious Contexts. Topic and credits will vary by term. Course may be repeated as topics change. 1-3 credit hours.

### Special Topic Description

Poststructuralism, the distinctive philosophy of postmodernism, is often construed as an enemy of faith, a sign of the increasingly secular, post-Christian times that must be resisted for religion to survive. For this reason, much of our thinking about ministry, worship, culture, prophetic power, and revelation remains firmly rooted in poorly aged modern assumptions, even as hardly anyone denies that we are living in radically new historical conditions. What if this new historical moment represents an opening of vistas for that otherness, that way of knowing most persistently pathologized by modernity: theology? In this course, we will explore together how understanding poststructural currents might liberate stale practices and theologies, and lend vibrant new agency to our ministries and missions. We will explore the postmodern theologians (and the thinkers that inspired them) who see possibilities—for theology, for personal faith, and for social justice--in the depletion of the modern insistences on quasi-scientific certitude, difference obscuring metanarratives, and other outmoded-thinking.

### Advance Work and Schedule

Given the extremely intense nature of the both the material and the week long schedule, students are advised to do as much reading ahead as possible. At the same time, some students unfamiliar with postmodern thought might find it easier to complete the more advanced reading after we have had conversations about core principles in class. Consequently, you should have a complete as a minimum the required reading for the first three units before attending class. This, however, does leave a fair amount to be read in the evenings after full days of class. Please responsibly asses your own reading speed, energies, schedule and learning styles in order to make a decision about whether you would benefit from reading the material for the final four units before class or during the week that class meets. If you get stuck as you work through your preliminary reading, I am happy to make myself available for a conversation and clarifications.

In class, we will cover:

Monday—Units One and Two

Tuesday—Unit Three  
Wednesday—Units Four and Five  
Thursday—Unit Six  
Friday—Unit Seven

## Special Note for Unitarian Universalist Students

This course meets the UUA Ministerial Fellowship Committee requirement for coursework in: Liberal and/or Liberation Theologies

It furthermore addresses these areas of competence:

### FOUR: SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

Can apply the lens of power and privilege in the areas of antiracism, anti-oppression, and multiculturalism.

### SIX: SERVES THE LARGER UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FAITH

Articulates historical influence of Christianity on North American culture, including Unitarian Universalism.

## Special Note for non-MTSO residential Students

For students traveling from out of town for the week, the UU House of Studies at MTSO is committed to radical hospitality. Extremely comfortable overnight accommodations are available on campus for \$28/night. Inexpensive, healthy, and delicious meals will be provided. The nearest airport is Columbus, Ohio; the UU House is happy to arrange complimentary transportation to and from campus (about a thirty minute drive). Please just let Dr. Ritchie know of your intention to travel in as soon as you can.

## Required Books

Michel Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, Jeremy Carette, editor (NY: Routledge, 1999). 978-0415923620

John D. Caputo, *Hoping Against Hope: Confessions of a Postmodern Pilgrim* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015). ISBN 978-1-4514-9915-5

David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). ISBN 978-019511274

Sharon Welch, *Towards a Feminist Theology of Risk* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press: 1990). ISBN: 978-0800631857.

## Assignments & Grading

Reading Journal – 20%; Due Jan. 9 as a physical print out brought to the first day of class

For the materials read before the beginning of class (Units 1-3), assemble some very brief notes, indicating for each required reading one (or more if necessary) points of question or clarification,

and one (or more if necessary) points of engagement with the reading. These points of engagement might be flashes of insight; moments of disagreement; a provocative idea that deserves further exploration; anything about which you think classroom conversation would be beneficial/interesting.

#### Class participation-30%

This grade is a measure of good citizenship during our times together. Does the student participate when appropriate? Encourage the participation of others, when appropriate? Show some ownership for the overall group process?

#### Engagement with Materials-20%

Through class participation, reading, and the final project, the student demonstrates that they have read and engaged seriously with the required materials.

#### Final Project-30%; Due Jan. 31, 2016, as an electronic submission to [sritchie@mtso.edu](mailto:sritchie@mtso.edu)

A paper of 2000-2700 words that demonstrates your engagement with any of the learning goals listed below for each unit in the "Learning Agenda." For example, you could construct an intellectual genealogy of a point of convergence or difference with poststructural theology and another theological school; write an autobiographical essay that shows your own engagement with your theological past, presents, and the postmodern condition; debate the secularization thesis; participate in the theological conversation on love....

## Learning Agenda

### Unit One

#### *The Depletion of the Modern: The Death of God & The Secularization Thesis*



#### Learning Goals:

At the conclusion of the unit, students will be able to narrate:

- the historical and philosophical conditions of late 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism that caused many to think that the very premises of theology, particularly in relation to God, needed to be drastically reconsidered
- the basic elements of secularization theories that posit the arrival of a "Post-Christian" age

#### Required Reading:

*Time Magazine*, "Is God Dead?" Friday, April 8, 1966. Available here:

<http://kelvinho-kh.blogspot.com/2009/05/is-god-dead-april-8-1966-time-magazine.html>

Harvey Cox: "Introduction to the New Edition" "The Secular City Twenty-Five Years Later," and "Introduction: The Epoch of the Secular City," in *The Secular City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

For "Introduction to the New Edition":

<http://nuuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CoxSecularCityNewestIntroduction.pdf>

For, "The Secular City Twenty Five Years Later:"

<http://nuuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CoxSecularCityOldNewIntroduction.pdf>

For, "Introduction: The Epoch of the Secular City":

[http://nuuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CoxSecularCity\\_Part2.pdf](http://nuuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CoxSecularCity_Part2.pdf)

**Material for Reference (we'll use this in class, no need to review it ahead of time, but if you'd like to revisit it later here is the link):**

Charles Taylor and Rabbi Johnathan Sachs, television interview and conversation, *The Future of Religion in a Secular Age* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RV2fDNVb1sc>

## Unit Two

### *Introductions to Postmodernism and Poststructuralism*

#### **Learning Goals:**

At the completion of this unit students should be able

...to identify:

- the main characteristics of the postmodern era
- the main characteristics of poststructuralism & deconstructionism as postmodernisms' defining philosophies

...to employ and deploy:

- John Caputo's methodology for using postmodern theology to revitalize theological thought and religious practice, and for investigating one's own personal faith journey

#### **Required Reading:**

Kevin Vanhoozer, "Introduction," *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Available at this link:

<http://nuuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Vanhoozer.pdf>

John D. Caputo, *Hoping Against Hope: Confessions of a Postmodern Pilgrim* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015). ISBN 978-1-4514-9915-5

## Unit Three

### *Demonstrations: Poststructuralist Ideas as Applied in Social Justice Work and Practical Theology*

#### **Learning Goals:**

At the completion of this unit, students will be able to recount how and why poststructuralism inspired:

- the queer liberation movement, queer theology, and other models of postmodern social justice work
- Sharon Welch's womanist-motivated theology of hope in the face of white, middle-class despair over the environmental crisis

### Required Reading:

If you know nothing about Foucault, and would appreciate a gentle introduction, you can check out:  
<https://binarythis.com/2013/05/21/foucault-explained-with-hipsters/>

David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Sharon Welch, *Towards a Feminist Theology of Risk* (Fortress Press: 1990).

## Unit Four

### Intersections & (Post) Intersectionalities

#### Learning Goals:

At the completion of this unit, students should be able to construct a genealogy of ideas that plots the convergences and diverges of poststructural/postchristian theologies with process theology, liberation theologies, feminist theologies, postcolonial theologies, ecotheologies, and queer theologies.

#### Required Readings:

##### Intersections with Postcolonialism:

Kwok Pui-lan, "What Has Love to Do with It? "Planetary, Feminism, and Theology," in *Planetary Love: Spivak, Postcolonialism, and Theology*, Mayra Rivera and Stephen Moore (Fordham, 2011).

Located at:

<http://nuuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Pui-Lan-1.pdf>

##### Intersections with Process Theology

Carol Wayne White, "Processing Henry Nelson Wieman: Creative Interchange among Naturalism, Postmodernism, and Religious Valuing," in *White, Poststructuralism, Feminism, and Religion* (NY: Humanity Books, 2002). Available here:

<http://nuuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/WhiteProcess.pdf>

##### Intersections with Queer & Liberation Theology:

If you are totally new to Queer Theology, please enjoy this tiny little piece on explaining the thinking of Judith Butler—with cats:

<https://binarythis.com/2013/05/23/judith-butler-explained-with-cats/>

Then read:

Kwok-Pui-lan, "Liberation Theology in the Twenty-First Century," from *Opting for the Margins: Postmodernism and Liberation in Christian Theology*, Georg Rieger, editor (Oxford, 2003).

Available here:

<http://nuuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Pui-lanLiberation.pdf>

## Unit Five

### Foucault and Poststructuralism: Again, Now in Depth

#### Learning Goals

At the completion of this unit, students, after engaging with Foucault as a primary text, will be empowered to engage their own personal theologies with poststructuralism—as challenge, encouragement, or best yet, both/and.

#### Required Readings:

Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power” from *Power and Knowledge*.

Available here:

<http://uwf.edu/dearle/foucault.pdf>

Introduction to Foucault (McClintock Fulkerson and Dunlap) and selections from “The History of Sexuality”; from *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*, Graham Ward, ed. (Blackwell, 1997): 116-135.

Introduction here:

<http://nuuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/FoucaultIntro.pdf>

Excerpt here:

<http://nuuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/FoucaultExcerpt.pdf>

## Unit Six

### Deconstructive Theologies: Again, Now in Depth

At the completion of this unit, students, after engaging with deconstructive theological primary texts, will be empowered to engage their own personal theologies with poststructuralism—as challenge, encouragement, or both.

Derrida, Jacques, “On the Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy,” *Semeia* 23 (1982) 63-97.

Available here:

<http://nuuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/DerridaApocalypticTone.pdf>

Jean Luc-Nancy, “Preamble” and “Concluding Dialog” from *Retreating Religion* (Fordham, 2012).

Preamble available here:

<http://nuuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Nancy-Preamble.pdf>

Concluding Dialog available here:

<http://nuuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/NancyDialogue.pdf>

## Unit Seven

### Constructive Theology in the Postmodern Age: A Love Collaboratory

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Serene Jones, Kwok Pui-lan, Catherine Keller, Stephen D. Moore, "Love: A Conversation" in *Planetary Love: Spivak, Postcolonialism, and Theology*, Mayra Rivera and Stephen Moore (Fordham, 2011).

Available here:

<http://nuuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/SpivakLove.pdf>

## Institutional Matters

Please see Student Handbook for sections providing policy details on the following:

**ADA**—MTSO seeks to remove barriers to inclusion in its learning communities. Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs at the beginning of the semester. Please contact the Director of Student Services to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Any accommodation must be agreed upon prior to the due date of the affected course requirement.

**Class attendance**—Regular attendance is expected in all classes. During unavoidable absences, students are responsible for missed work. An excessive number of absences may result in grade reduction or course failure, despite successful completion of all assigned work. In most cases, a student will not be allowed credit for a course if he or she is absent for 25% of the class sessions.

**Electronic Devices**—Turn mobile devices off or "vibrate only" during class. Browsing the Internet or engaging in email or social network conversations during class is discouraged. Instructors have the right to impose grading penalties for disruptions due to electronic devices.

**Human Subjects Research**—Research by MTSO faculty, students, or affiliated personnel that collects non-public information from and/or about living individuals or contemporary organizations/groups for purposes of publication or public presentation (including class assignments) must be approved by the Human Subjects Research Committee. MTSO faculty, students, or affiliated personnel should err on the side of caution and apply for committee approval of any activity that may fit this description.

**Inclusive Language**—In accordance with MTSO's policy on inclusive language, all students are expected to use gender inclusive or gender neutral language in their writing and in the classroom discussions when referring to human beings.

**Incompletes**—To receive a course grade of Incomplete, students must submit the petition form from the Registrar with all signatures to the Dean's Office before the last day of regularly scheduled classes. See Student Handbook for intensive term deadlines. Any petition submitted without a due date for outstanding work will be denied. If work is not complete by the due date the Registrar will record the grade of F for the course.

**Pass/Fail**—The decision to exercise this option must be made before the end of the second week of the course by completing the appropriate form available through the Registrar. To receive a grade of "pass" the student must do at least the equivalent of C minus work in the course.

Plagiarism—Plagiarism is a serious matter of academic, professional, and personal integrity. All students at the masters level are expected to understand the requirement to provide attribution when the work of others is used. Students are also expected to be familiar with and understand the school's policy on Academic Misconduct found in the Student Handbook. If a student has questions about attribution, citation, and how to avoid plagiarism they should consult the course instructor, the school's writing instructor, or library staff. When in doubt it is better to provide attribution even if one is uncertain about the proper citation form. Plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct that results in disciplinary actions per the Student Handbook that may range from failing an assignment or course to expulsion.