

History 283/Religious Studies 400

BELIEF AND UNBELIEF IN MODERN EUROPE

Spring 2017

Tuesdays, 8:50-10:45 a.m., 5257 Mosse Humanities

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Office hours: Tuesdays, 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. and by appointment

Course Description

Modern Europe—the half-millennium from 1500 to the present—saw the growth of new forms of religious belief and identity as well as the spread of alternatives to religious faith, such as agnosticism and atheism. In this seminar we will explore the impact of these changes on the lives of individuals. Examining a range of case studies, we will ask:

- What factors have led people in modern Europe to transition from one set of beliefs and allegiances to another?
- Were there common routes by which individuals took on a new religious identity and belief system (conversion), abandoned a set of beliefs (deconversion), changed their relationship to a religious tradition, or actively embraced unbelief?
- What impact has the experience of religious and philosophical pluralism—defining marks of “modernity” and “secularity”—had on the way in which individuals have held and expressed their most basic life commitments?
- What are some of the typical ways in which people have narrated their spiritual and intellectual journeys? In particular, what function has the genre of autobiography served?

Our common readings will consider men and women who embraced, rejected, or otherwise modified their relationship to Christian (Catholic and Protestant), Jewish, and Islamic traditions. You will also pursue an independent project on a figure or a question arising out of course themes.

Course Objectives

If you invest time, thought, and hard work in this course, you can expect to:

- Become familiar with some of the main challenges and possibilities that modernity has raised for religious belief and unbelief
- Gain practice in reading primary sources from the past contextually, empathetically, and critically and in reading contemporary scholarly writings with understanding and critical insight
- Become a stronger writer of clear analytical and argumentative prose

- Develop your ability to make a historical argument based on original research and analysis
- Acquire skill and confidence in communicating your ideas orally

Course Requirements

1. Read all assigned texts and participate actively in all class meetings. Since this is a discussion-based seminar, your learning experience and the success of the course depend on your attending every session prepared to engage the week's assignment. This means reading each text closely and thoughtfully—taking notes, identifying crucial passages, raising questions, etc.—and coming to class ready to discuss your insights and questions and to engage with those of your peers. You must bring your own copy of the relevant texts to each class. You are expected to attend all class sessions; absences will be excused only in cases of documented illness or emergency. Any unexcused absence will lower your final course grade. Class participation will count for 25% of your final grade.

2. Write eight brief (300-350-word) responses to assigned readings. During the first three-quarters of the course we will spend our meetings discussing the common readings. To help you prepare for class and start pulling together your thoughts, you will write brief responses to the assigned texts (except for two weeks of your choice). Your papers should do three things: (1) identify a question or issue in the reading that you find significant and interesting; (2) begin to address that question by offering analysis and drawing connections to other readings or course themes; (3) pose two other questions raised by the reading suitable for class discussion; these questions should avoid straightforward matters of fact and instead raise larger substantive and interpretive issues about the texts and their significance.

Your response papers will be graded using the following criteria: (1) Does your paper reflect a close reading of the texts? (2) Is your response based on the text itself rather than broad generalizations? (3) Does your paper demonstrate thoughtful, independent analysis? (4) Is it written clearly and concisely? (5) Are your questions substantive and open-ended, lending themselves well to class discussion? Response papers are due in the Dropbox on Learn@UW by 8:00 p.m. on Mondays prior to class meetings. No late papers accepted: if you miss a week, go on to the next. Together the response papers count for 25% of your final grade.

3. Write an analytical paper of 4000-4800 words (12-14 pages) on a topic of special interest to you arising out of course themes. Your paper can take one of several approaches. It may be a piece of original research with a focus on primary sources, or it may be a historiographical or theoretical paper, analyzing how scholars have treated a problem. It may explore further a person, text, or question from our common readings, or it may strike out in a new direction. In March you will get more specific directions for the paper and the criteria for evaluation.

Your paper will be composed in several stages. A statement of your topic and your bibliography will be due in class on April 4. I will meet briefly with you later that week to discuss these. A first draft of your paper will be due on Monday, April 17. I will meet with you individually that week to give you feedback on your draft. On April 25 or May 2 you will make an oral presentation on your topic and answer questions from the rest of the class. The final draft of

your paper will be due at 1:00 p.m. on Monday, May 8. The paper counts for 50% of your final grade, broken down as follows: topic and bibliography, 5%; first draft, 10%; oral presentation, 5%; and final draft, 30%.

Grading Scale

All assignments and your final course grade will be calculated using the following scale:

93-100%=A	83-87%=B	70-77%=C	0-60%=F
88-92%=AB	78-82%=BC	60-70%=D	

Communication and Office Hours

I welcome meeting with students outside of class time. You are encouraged to come to office hours at any time during the semester, whether to discuss a question or problem you've encountered in the course, to get help on a paper, to explore an idea, or simply to chat. I hold regular office hours right after class on Tuesdays, 11:00-1:00, but if you have a schedule conflict at that time we can arrange another time to meet. Generally, the best way to reach me is via email (eric.carlsson@wisc.edu). I check email regularly and will try to respond within 24 hours. Often I can reply sooner than that, but on weekends response time may be up to 48 hours.

Electronic Devices

Since this seminar runs on discussion and face-to-face interaction, I ask that you don't use computers or other electronic devices during our class meetings. Most weeks we will take a five-minute break after the first hour of class, so you can check messages then if necessary. I'll make an exception to the no-computers policy only for accessing electronic copies of readings posted online.

Disabilities and McBurney Students

If you have a disability that requires special accommodations, please let me know at the beginning of the semester and I will be happy to make arrangements.

Academic Integrity

UW-Madison takes academic integrity seriously, and so do I. Plagiarism—representing somebody else's work as your own—will not be tolerated in this course. Your writing must cite sources carefully, whether you repeat someone else's exact words or paraphrase or draw on her or his ideas. If you have specific questions about plagiarism and how to avoid it, please speak with me or consult http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_plagiarism.html. Penalties for plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and other forms of cheating range from failing an assignment or a course to being expelled from the university. For university policies on academic misconduct, see <http://students.wisc.edu/doso/acadintegrity.html>.

Course Texts

The following books, listed in the order that we'll read them, are required and available for purchase at local and online bookstores. Copies are also available on reserve at College Library.

Dominic Erdozain, *The Soul of Doubt: The Religious Roots of Unbelief from Luther to Marx* (Oxford University Press, 2016)

John Newton, *The Life and Spirituality of John Newton*, ed. Bruce Hindmarsh (Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College Publishing, 1998)

Solomon Maimon, *An Autobiography*, trans. J. Clark Murray (University of Illinois Press, 2001)

David Hempton, *Evangelical Disenchantment: 9 Portraits of Faith and Doubt* (Yale University Press, 2013)

Puah Rakovsky, *My Life as a Radical Jewish Woman: Memoirs of a Zionist Feminist in Poland*, ed. Paula E. Hyman, trans. Barbara Harshav and Paula E. Hyman (Indiana University Press, 2003)

Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* Harper (Harper Perennial, 2009)

Muhammad Asad, *The Road to Mecca* (Fons Vitae, 2000)

Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory* (Penguin Classics, 2015)

A few other readings will be available as PDFs on Learn@UW.

Course Schedule

- Jan 17 Course Introduction
Dominic Erdozain, *The Soul of Doubt*, 1-33
- Jan 24 Conscience vs. Creed
Dominic Erdozain, *The Soul of Doubt*, 34-172
Voltaire, selections
William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*, 6-11
- Jan 31 Conversion in an Evangelical Key
Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative* (selections)
John Newton, *The Life and Spirituality of John Newton*
William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*, 12-16
- Feb 7 Silence
*Watch *Silence* (dir. Martin Scorsese)
William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*, 17-23, 32-45, 67-91
- Feb 14 Judaism and Enlightenment
Solomon Maimon, *An Autobiography*
- Feb 21 Modern Atheism
Gavin Hyman, "Atheism in Modern History"
Dominic Erdozain, *The Soul of Doubt*, 221-266

	Ludwig Feuerbach, <i>The Essence of Christianity</i> (selections) Friedrich Nietzsche, selections	
Feb 28	<u>Evangelical Disenchantment</u> David Hempton, <i>Evangelical Disenchantment</i>	
Mar 7	<u>New Jewish Identities</u> Puah Rakovsky, <i>My Life as a Radical Jewish Woman</i>	
Mar 14	<u>“At the intersection of Christianity and . . . not Christianity”</u> Simone Weil, <i>Waiting for God</i> Anne Lamott, <i>Bird by Bird</i> , 16-32	
Mar 21	SPRING BREAK	
Mar 28	<u>Turning to Islam</u> Muhammad Asad, <i>The Road to Mecca</i>	
Apr 4	<u>Whiskey Priest</u> Graham Greene, <i>The Power and the Glory</i>	PAPER TOPIC DUE
Apr 11	<u>No class</u>	
Apr 18	<u>Individual meetings this week to discuss draft</u>	PAPER DRAFT DUE 4/17
Apr 25	<u>Student presentations</u>	
May 2	<u>Student presentations</u>	
May 8	REVISED PAPER DUE AT 1:00 P.M.	