

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

History/Religious Studies 209

WESTERN INTELLECTUAL AND RELIGIOUS HISTORY SINCE 1500

Spring 2025

Tues & Thurs, 9:30-10:45 a.m.

6102 Sewell Social Sciences Building

Prof. Eric Carlsson

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Office: 5217 Mosse Humanities Building

Office hours: Tuesdays 11:00-1:00 and by appointment

Course Description

In Europe in the year 1500, it has been argued, it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, whereas in today's pluralistic society many people find that option easy, even inescapable. How did a varied but widely shared religious worldview of the late Middle Ages give way to the diverse beliefs and ethical frameworks that define the modern West? And how did the seismic social, political, and intellectual changes of the modern era affect how Europeans have held and expressed their religious, philosophical, and ethical commitments? Those big questions set the agenda for this course.

Over the semester we will consider rival ways in which scholars have tried to explain shifts in religious belief and behavior in the modern period; here the concept of secularization looms large. We will explore big trends in modern European thinking about religion, often focusing on specific individuals and texts as windows into broader movements. We will consider changes within Christianity and Judaism as well as critiques of religion and the rise of secular thought. Throughout, we will explore how people have made sense of the world and their place in it, their visions of the good life, and their approaches to society and meaningful action in the world.

Learning Outcomes

The main objectives of this course are to spark and nourish your fascination with modern European intellectual history and religious thought and to help you grasp their relevance for understanding the contemporary world. If you invest time, thought, and hard work in the course, you will also improve your ability to:

- identify and explain the significance of key trends, movements, thinkers, and texts in modern European intellectual and religious history
- understand and evaluate some of the scholarly debates surrounding these movements
- interpret complex writings from the past contextually, critically, and empathetically
- construct strong historical arguments based on evidence and careful reasoning
- compose clear analytical and argumentative written prose

Requisites, Course Attributes, and Workload

To enroll in this course, you must have sophomore standing or have completed three credits in History or Religious Studies. The course is three credits, intermediate-level, Humanities- or Social Science-breadth, and confers Liberal Arts & Sciences credit in L&S.

The course meets for two 75-minute periods each week over the semester and carries the expectation that you will spend an average of three hours outside of class for each class meeting. In other words, plan to allot about six hours per week for reading, writing papers, and preparing for class meetings.

Course Requirements

1. Class participation: Read all assigned texts, attend class, and contribute actively to class discussions. In opting to take this course you are committing yourself to be present and an active participant in class. I will take attendance throughout the semester. If you become ill or face an emergency that forces you to miss a class session, please email me as soon as possible. More than two unexcused absences will reduce your participation grade.

Every class session will include discussion of the day's assigned readings. On occasion we may also do brief in-class writing exercises based on assigned readings to spur thought and discussion. You are expected to read all required texts closely beforehand and to come ready to voice your insights and questions and to engage with those of your classmates. *You must bring a paper copy of texts to class on the day they will be discussed.*

Your class participation will be evaluated based on the following components:

- Attendance (50% of participation grade)
- Contributions to class discussion, including participation in small groups (30%)
- Demonstration of close and thoughtful reading of assigned texts (20%)

If you find it difficult to speak up in a larger class such as this one, please come to office hours at the start of the semester and we'll discuss strategies for making this easier. Demonstrating your engagement with the readings in office hours will also raise your class participation grade.

You will receive a participation grade (on a 10-point scale) three times during the semester: on February 20, April 1, and May 1. Attendance and class participation count for 15% of your final grade.

2. Write five 250-300-word responses to assigned readings. All prompts are posted on Canvas. You will have the option to write on most texts and you may choose which readings you respond to. If you wish, you may write up to eight response papers; if you do, the five highest grades will count. Responses will be graded using the following criteria:

- Did you answer the question clearly and directly?
- Does your response reflect a close, careful reading of the whole of the relevant text(s)?

- Is your paper based on the text itself rather than generalizations or things you may have read about the text elsewhere?
- Is it written in clear and concise prose, free of typos and grammatical errors?

To get credit for a response, submit it on Canvas by 11:00 p.m. the night before the text will be discussed in class. No late papers accepted. You must complete the first response by February 5, the second by March 3, the third by March 19, the fourth by April 14, and the fifth by April 30. Together, the five responses make up 20% of your final grade.

3. Write two analytical essays of 1400-1600 words (4-5 pages) each. You will submit two versions of each essay. On February 10 you will turn in a complete draft of your first paper. The following week you will meet individually with your Writing Fellow (WF) for comments and feedback on your draft (see below for more on WFs). On February 24 you will submit a revised version of your essay that takes your WF's feedback into account. The schedule for the second paper is similar: first draft due on March 17, meeting with your WF the week after spring break, revised version due on April 7. Each part of the process (draft, meeting, revision) will form part of your final grade on each essay. Details about the process and evaluation criteria will come with the first essay assignment. Each paper counts for 20% of your course grade.

4. Write a take-home final essay exam of 1600-1800 words (5-6 pages). Prompts will be distributed during the last week of class and your essay will be due on Canvas at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, May 5 at 7:00 p.m. The final paper counts for 25% of your course grade.

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	0-59% = F
88-92% = AB	78-82% = BC	60-69% = D	

Honors Credit

Students taking the course for honors credit will pursue an independent project arising out of course topics and their own interests. This may take the form of a research paper or scholarly review. For those interested in literature, art, film, or other media, there are other possibilities. If you are taking the course for honors, please come to my office hours by February 11 to discuss options, determine a project, and set a schedule for completing it.

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 an assignment, to explore an idea, or simply to chat. I hold regular office hours in 5217 Mosse Humanities after class on Tuesdays, 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. If you have a schedule conflict then, let me know and we can arrange another time to meet. The best way to reach me is by 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.

Writing Fellows

We are fortunate to have three Writing Fellows working with us this semester: Wylie Dituri (dituri@wisc.edu), Evie Erickson (emerickson4@wisc.edu), and James Rollins (jprollins2@wisc.edu). These undergraduates are skilled writers who have been chosen through a competitive selection process and given intensive training on how to offer constructive criticism during the writing process. Each of you will work with one of the Writing Fellows individually on your first two papers. They will read your drafts closely, offer detailed comments, and meet with you individually to make suggestions for how your drafts can be improved.

Experienced writers know that all good writing involves extensive revising. The most effective way of re-seeing one's work is by getting feedback from an intelligent reader. That is what the Writing Fellows provide. They are not experts in the subject matter of the course and will generally not offer substantive critiques of your paper. Nor will they grade your papers. Instead, they will help you see where your argument and presentation could be clearer and more effective, and they will flag logical and conceptual problems in your prose. All of us, no matter how much experience we have as writers, can benefit greatly from the kind of engagement with our work that the Fellows will offer you. I urge you to make the most of this opportunity.

Policy on Late Papers

Because the Writing Fellows will be reading papers on a tight schedule, it is important that you submit them on time. If you face a situation that makes it impossible for you to complete your paper drafts on schedule, please contact me immediately to arrange for an extension. Submitting your draft late without prior permission will result in a reduced grade for the paper.

The History Lab

The History Lab is an excellent resource for writing history papers. Trained Ph.D. students in history will help you regardless of your stage in the writing process—formulating a thesis, developing your argument, citing sources, revising your drafts, and more. The History Lab is located in 4255 Mosse Humanities Building. For instructions on how to schedule an appointment with a Lab TA, or to find tips, guides, and other resources for all of your history assignment needs, visit <https://history.wisc.edu/undergraduate-program/the-history-lab/>.

Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, you agree to uphold the high academic standards of UW–Madison. All work you submit must be your own. In your papers you must cite them carefully, whether you repeat someone else's exact words or paraphrase or draw on their ideas. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism. Submitting work generated by AI also constitutes plagiarism. (We will discuss AI use in more detail when the first paper assignment is distributed.) If you turn in plagiarized work, you will earn a zero on the assignment, an academic misconduct report will be filed, and you may fail the course. For university policies on academic misconduct, see <https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-misconduct/>.

Electronic Devices

A large body of research shows that students process information more thoughtfully, grasp concepts better, focus their attention more sharply, and as a result earn better grades when they take notes with pen and paper rather than on a computer. For this reason, and because the temptation to get distracted by matters unrelated to class is great, I strongly encourage you to refrain from using laptops during class. If you do choose to take notes on a computer, please turn off all notifications and shut down your Internet browser to avoid distractions to yourself and classmates. Phones should be silenced and put away before class starts.

Learning Accessibility

If you have an instructional need that requires accommodations, please inform me of this at the start of the semester or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will then either work directly with you or coordinate with the McBurney Center to provide reasonable accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

UW–Madison Statement on Diversity

Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW–Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. UW–Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background—people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

Course Texts

All required readings for the course are individual articles or excerpts from longer works. Most of these are collected in the course reader, which you can purchase from the L&S Copy Center, 6120 Social Sciences Building. Each text is also posted as a PDF file on Canvas. Note that you will need to bring a hard copy of most assigned readings to class on the day we will discuss them, so you will need to buy the course reader unless you prefer to print out the texts individually.

One other book is required: Peter Fritzsche, ed., *Nietzsche and the Death of God: Selected Writings* (Waveland Press, 2013). You can buy this at the University Book Store or online.

We will also read several chapters of this book (and still others are recommended): Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton University Press, 2011). The text is available as a free e-book via UW Libraries and posted on Canvas, but you may wish to purchase a hard copy.

All recommended readings are posted on Canvas. In the "Course Documents" module on Canvas you will find full bibliographical information for all required and recommended texts.

COURSE SCHEDULE

- Jan 21 Course Introduction
- Jan 23 Mapping Modernity: Secularization Stories
 - Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*
 - Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*

Recommended: Margaret C. Jacob, *The Secular Enlightenment*, Prologue & ch. 1;
Jon Butler, "Disquieted History in A Secular Age"
- Jan 28 The Protestant Revolution
 - Alec Ryrie, *Protestants*, ch. 1
 - Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian"

Recommended: Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years, 604-629*; Dominic Erdozain, *The Soul of Doubt*, ch. 1
- Jan 30 Reformation Legacies
 - Brad S. Gregory, "The Reformation and Modernity"
 - Peter Harrison, "Protestantism and Science"

Recommended: Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years, 629-654*
- Feb 4 Persecution and Toleration
 - Dominic Erdozain, *The Soul of Doubt*, ch. 2
 - Sebastian Castelleo, "About Heretics: Should They Be Persecuted?"

Recommended: Perez Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West*, ch. 4; Benjamin J. Kaplan, "Coexistence, Conflict, and the Practice of Toleration"
- Feb 6 Catholicism, Mysticism, and the Supernatural **Response 1 due 2/5**
 - *The Life of Saint Teresa of Ávila by Herself*
 - Carlos Eire, "Redefining the Sacred and the Supernatural"

Recommended: Robert Bireley, SJ, "Redefining Catholicism: Trent and Beyond"
- Feb 11 New World Encounters **Paper 1 draft due 2/10**
 - Bartolomé de Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*
 - Michel de Montaigne, "On the Cannibals"

Recommended: Carlos Eire, *Reformations*, ch. 18; Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, ch. 3
- Feb 13 Religion and the Scientific Revolution
 - Galileo Galilei, "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina"

- Francis Bacon, *Novum Organon*

Recommended: John Henry, "Religion and the Scientific Revolution"; Ann Blair, "Science and Religion"; Maurice A. Finochiarro, "The Galileo Affair"

Feb 18 How Do We Know? **Paper conferences this week**

- René Descartes, *A Discourse on Method*
- John Locke, *An Essay on Human Understanding*

Recommended: Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, ch. 9

Feb 20 Secularizing Politics

- Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, ch. 2

Recommended: Justin Champion, "Godless Politics"

Feb 25 Enlightened Faith **Revised paper 1 due 2/24**

- John Robertson, *The Enlightenment*, ch. 2
- Voltaire, selections

Recommended: Margaret C. Jacob, "The Enlightenment Critique of Christianity"; Helena Rosenblatt, "The Christian Enlightenment"

Feb 27 Religion of the Heart

- Ted Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart*, ch. 1
- Johanna Eleonora Petersen, *Life* (on Canvas only)

Recommended: David Hempton, *The Church in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ch. 5

Mar 4 Reforming Judaism **Response 2 due 3/3**

- Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion*, ch. 1 (on Canvas only)
- Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*

Recommended: David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment*, ch. 4

Mar 6 Religion and Revolution

- Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*, 806-816
- Documents on Dechristianization

Recommended: Timothy Tackett, "The French Revolution and Religion to 1794"; Suzanne Desan, "The French Revolution and Religion, 1795-1815"

Mar 11 Romantic Religion

- Michael Ferber, *Romanticism*, ch. 4
- Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion*

Recommended: Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1, ch. 3

- Mar 13 The God that Failed
- Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*
 - Karl Marx, "The Social Principles of Christianity" and "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*"
- Recommended: Dominic Erdozain, *The Soul of Doubt*, ch. 6; Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, ch. 3
- Mar 18 Against Christendom **Paper 2 draft due 3/17**
- Patrick Gardiner, *Kierkegaard*, ch. 1
 - Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*
- Recommended: William Barrett, *Irrational Man*, ch. 7
- Mar 20 New Directions in Judaism **Response 3 due 3/19**
- Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion*, ch. 2 (on Canvas only)
 - Abraham Geiger, Letter to J. Derenbourg
 - Samson Raphael Hirsch, Sermon on the Science of Judaism
- Recommended: Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion*, chs. 3 & 4
- SPRING BREAK —
- Apr 1 The Warfare of Science and Religion? **Paper conferences this week**
- David N. Livingstone, "Re-placing Darwinism and Christianity"
- Recommended: John Hedley Brooke, "Science and Secularization"; Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, ch. 7
- Apr 3 The Death of God
- Peter Fritzsche, *Nietzsche and the Death of God*, 68-76, 79-90 98-106, 121-124, 129-134, 138-141, 144-153
- Recommended: Peter Fritzsche, *Nietzsche and the Death of God*, Introduction; John Gray, *Seven Types of Atheism*, ch. 2
- Apr 8 Catholic Reaction and Renewal **Revised paper 2 due 4/7**
- Leo XIII, *De Rerum Novarum*
 - Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*
- Recommended: Frances Knight, *The Church in the Nineteenth Century*, ch. 3
- Apr 10 Good-Bye to All That
- Philip Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War*, chs. 7 & 8
 - Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*

Recommended: Michael Snape, "The Great War"; James C. Livingston et al.,
Modern Christian Thought, vol. 2, ch. 3

Apr 15

Nazism and Resistance

Response 4 due 4/14

- Alec Ryrie, *Protestants*, ch. 11
- The Platform of the German Christians
- Theological Declaration of Barmen
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*

Recommended: Watch *Bonhoeffer* (dir. Martin Doblmeier); James C. Livingston et al., *Modern Christian Thought*, vol. 2, ch. 4

Apr 17

Judaism after the Holocaust

- Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion*, ch. 5 (on Canvas only)
- Selections from Richard Rubenstein, Irving Greenberg, Ignaz Maybaum Dan Cohn-Sherbok, Emil Fackenheim, and Steven Jacobs

Recommended: Berel Lang, "Evil, Suffering, and the Holocaust"

Apr 22

Existentialism on the Edge of Death

- Watch *The Seventh Seal* (dir. Ingmar Bergman)

Recommended: Thomas Flynn, *Existentialism*, ch. 1

Apr 24

Pluralism and Interfaith Dialogue

- *Nostra Aetate*

Recommended: Thomas Albert Howard, *The Faiths of Others*, ch. 4; Jonathan Magonet, "The Growth of Interfaith Dialogue"

Apr 29

Theologies of Liberation

- Leonardo Boff & Clodovis Boff, *Liberation Theology*
- Dorothee Soelle, *Against the Wind*

Recommended: Roberto Goizueta, "Theologies of Liberation"; Lillian Calles Barger, *The World Come of Age*, chs. 1 & 2

May 1

A Secular Age?

Response 5 due 4/30

- Tom Holland, *Dominion*, ch. 21

Recommended: Grace Davie, "Revisiting Secularization in Light of Growing Diversity: The European Case"; Hugh McLeod, "The Crisis of Christianity in the West: Entering a Post-Christian Era?"

May 5

FINAL PAPER DUE AT 7:00 P.M.