COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is religion’s role in the wealth and poverty of nations? In the past two centuries or so, historians and social scientists have developed a rich variety of methods of answering this question, a question that is acquiring new attention in the age of globalization.

The present course has three purposes. The first is to survey early treatments of the relationship between religion and prosperity. During the Enlightenment, when political economy first emerged, authors such as Adam Smith and Tocqueville pioneered the attempt to study the economic effects of religious belief and practice. Our aim will be to rediscover their efforts, some of which are informing research agendas today.

Second, we will focus on the Weber thesis and its critics. In responding to Karl Marx’s materialist theory of economic development, Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) offered a cultural theory of development rooted in religion; it became a popular cliche as well as a classic in the sociology of religion. What are the strengths and weaknesses of his theory? And how is it regarded today by historians and social scientists trying to understand economic development and its religious dimension, past and present?

Third, we will direct our general question to the contemporary world at large. Is religion giving way to secularization, and if not, why not? Is there a Confucian ethic in East Asia that is comparable to Weber’s “Protestant ethic” in its economic impact? Is there a religious dimension to the economic prospects of the Islamic world? What effects has the explosive rise of movements like Pentecostalism had on the economic experience of Africans and Latin Americans? These are among the topics we will address in the third part of the course.

COURSE GOAL: By combining selective study of some classics of modern social theory---Adam Smith, Tocqueville, Marx and especially Max Weber---with a review of current sociological literature, this course will introduce students to some of the biggest but most overlooked questions of our time: What is the relationship between religion and economic development? Are some religious cultures more conducive to economic development than others? If so, what are the options for governments that are seeking the economic modernization of their peoples?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: By the end of this course, students will be better able to analyze the historical roots of the correlation between religion and political economy, examine a range of evidence for and against the most important theory (the Weber thesis) concerning that correlation, and extend its findings beyond its original European focus to include the world at large today.

GRADING:

- Midterm Examination: 20%
- Final Paper: 25%
- Final Examination: 30%
- Class Participation: 25%
The midterm examination will consist of essay questions drawn from a pool that will be made available in advance. The final examination will be cumulative and will also be based on a pool of essays posted ahead of time on Canvas.

The final paper will be a research paper of 15 to 18 pages. By no later than Friday, April 8, students must come to my office to discuss their interests and settle on a topic to explore. Then, no later than a week before their paper is due, they must bring or email me a copy of the annotated bibliography of a minimum of twelve sources that they intend to use in composing their paper.

Finally, students must present for class discussion a brief outline of their research that includes close attention to the following elements: framing the research question, articulating a methodology, describing the types of sources used for the study, and offering reasons for the conclusions based on those sources. This presentation will take place during week 8. The oral presentation will be considered part of the final paper assignment (not the class participation assignment), and will count for 3 of the 25 points allotted to that assignment.

The class participation part of the grade will consist of the following elements: coming to class regularly (6.25%), showing evidence of having attentively read the assigned material regularly (6.25%), listening carefully and responding thoughtfully to what is said by the instructor and the other students (6.25%), and offering serious and reflective comments on a regular basis (6.25%).

ATTENDANCE POLICY: Students should be present and accounted for at each class meeting. I will take attendance each day, and for each absence beyond the fourth (4th), I reserve the right to reduce the student’s grade under the aforementioned “class participation” rubric.

TECHNOLOGY POLICY: All laptops, cellphones, tablets, and other technology aids must be off and stowed away at all times during class. Violations of this policy will count against the “Class Participation” portion of the final grade.

COURSE SYLLABUS

Week 1: Mar. 28---Introduction and Orientation: What is political economy? What might religion’s role be in it?
Apr. 1--- Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1, ch. 9, sects. 4-6, pp. 467-88 (Nolla ed.) (Canvas)

Apr. 6--- Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. 1, ch. 1, sect. 4, toward the end (https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm#219) (Canvas) and Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Author’s Introduction and ch. 1
Apr. 8 --- Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, ch. 2

Apr. 12 --- X-Hour (12-12:50), Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, ch. 4
Apr. 15---NO CLASS

Week 4: Apr. 18 --- Critics of the Weber Thesis (Norton critical ed.)
Apr. 20 --- MIDTERM EXAMINATION
April 27--- Islam and Africa: Stark, *Faith*, chs. 4-5, pp. 85-126
April 29 --- India and China: Stark, *Faith*, chs. 7-9, pp. 143-84

May 4 --- Pneumacentrism in an Open Religious Market: Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits*, ch. 1
May 6 --- Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits*, chs. 2-3

Week 7: May 9--- Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits*, chs. 4-5
May 11--- Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits*, chs. 6-7
May 13 --- From Theory to Action?: Harrison, *Jews, Confucians, and Protestants*, introduction-ch. 1

Week 8: May 16 --- Harrison, *Jews, Confucians, and Protestants*, chs. 2-3
May 18 --- Harrison, *Jews, Confucians, and Protestants*, chs. 4, 5, 11

Week 9: May 23 --- CLASS PRESENTATIONS
May 25--- CLASS PRESENTATIONS
May 27 --- CLASS PRESENTATIONS

Week 10: May 30 --- NO CLASSES (MEMORIAL DAY) (PAPERS DUE)
May 31---X-hour (T 12-12:50), Final Exam Review

FINAL EXAMINATION: Friday, June 3, 8:00 am

REQUIRED BOOKS:


