POLITICAL SCIENCE 4090: ISLAMIC POLITICAL THOUGHT

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Office Hours: Thursday 1:30 – 3:00 and by appointment

COURSE OVERVIEW

Modern political and historical events point to the importance of understanding Islamic political thought. This course will study the intellectual developments that have occurred within Islam in the classical period as well as the period between the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries. Through a careful survey of Islamic thought it will be possible to detect certain shifts, developments, and transformations. The political and historical contexts will be acknowledged and considered in tandem with the intellectual developments in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the nature of politics and political theory in the Arab world.

The course will start by looking at classical Islamic philosophy, which emerged in the Middle Ages and serves as a foundation to modern Islamic thought. We will then jump ahead to the 18th century to trace the progression of Islamic ideas that developed from the foundation of traditional reform, which focused on a return to the Qur’an and the hadith, the sayings of the Prophet. Three specific transformations in Islamic reform will be considered: the 19th century development of modernist ideas; the subsequent transformation into fundamentalist ideology; and finally, the radicalization of fundamentalist thought. This survey of the intellectual developments in Islamic reform will allow a proper analysis of the ways in which each of the major trends in Islamic thought has contributed to the state of contemporary political Islam.

Grades:
Midterm Exam – 30%  
Final Exam – 40%  
Final Paper – 30%

Assignments:
Midterm and Final Exams – Both exams will be essay exams and will cover the reading material as well as the lectures. Both exams are cumulative, meaning the student will be responsible for all material covered up to the point of the exam. The midterm exam will be take-home; the final exam will be in-class.

Final Paper – Each student will write an 8-10 page analytical essay. A list of possible topics will be provided. No two students can write on the same topic. Any topics not listed must be approved. Keep in mind that creativity in developing a topic will be rewarded. Late papers will be penalized one letter grade.
Course Texts:
Many readings will be posted on Moodle for the student to access and print (student must have required reading with them in class for proper discussion of the material).

Required texts:
Alfarabi: The Political Writings, Charles Butterworth, transl.
Averroes, Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory, Charles Butterworth, transl.

Suggested text:
A History of Islamic Philosophy, Majid Fakhry

Note:
This class is structured around intense reading and lectures. Students who are not prepared for class or who do not regularly attend class will struggle with this material and it will reflect in your exam performance and your ability to write a critical essay.

Weekly Schedule and Course Outline:

Part ONE: Classical Islamic Thought
The emergence of Islamic philosophy in the Middle Ages is a significant era in Islamic history and philosophy, as well as philosophy in general, thus it deserves much attention. This course will consider some of the earliest Islamic philosophers in the context of three stages. Al-Kindi and al-Razi will be mentioned in connection to the first phase of Islamic philosophical activity, a period marked by cautious exploits into rational thinking. Al-Farabi, largely recognized as one of the greatest Islamic philosophers, represents the second stage with an emphasis on the full articulation of Neo-Platonic ideas. And, finally, Ibn Tufayl and Ibn Rushd must be mentioned in connection with the third stage of development, the Arab-Spanish interfide of the twelfth century.

Week 1: January 18, 20
I. Introduction: What is Islamic Political Thought?
   a. al-Kindi
   b. al-Razi

Week 2: January 25, 27
II. Al Farabi
   a. Selected Aphorisms of the Statesman
   b. Enumeration of the Sciences

Week 3: February 1, 3
   c. Book of Religion

III. Ibn Tufayl
   a. Hayy Ibn Yaqzan
Week 4: February 8, 10

IV. Ibn Rushd
   a. The Decisive Treatise

Part TWO: Modern Islamic Thought
   Between the 13th and 18th centuries the intellectual fervor of the Middle Ages dies out. This is not to say that in the years following the 13th century there were no intellectual advancements or contributions, however, the proliferation that marked the earlier centuries indeed vanished. The region remained quiet for many centuries, until a continuous heritage of Islamic reform began in the 18th century, particularly with the traditional reformist, Mohammed Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, whose ideas focused on a return to the Qur’an and the hadith as well as a correct understanding of the concept of tawhid, or monotheism.

Week 5: February 15, 17
   I. Introduction: The Intellectual Climate of the 18th Century
      The eighteenth century can be categorized as a period of revival, renewal and reform throughout the Islamic world. Internal strife and the general belief that Islam in its current state was a deteriorated version of what it was intended to be served to catalyze the formation and mobilization of various reform movements. In other words, many people throughout the Muslim world recognized a discord between the Islam of the 18th century and the Islam of the founding generations. Thus, a widespread, albeit faint, call for reform was initiated.

Weeks 6 - 8
   II. Modernism
      In the 19th century, Islamic reform continued in the trajectory of the traditional reformers, calling for a return to the sacred scriptures; however, as modern influences from the West began to take root, the reformers saw a need to address the issue of how these outside influences should be received by the Islamic community. The “modernist” reformers, while varying to different degrees, shared a fundamental premise: a desire for the revival of Islam in the modern world which encompassed both the original form of Islam as intended by the Prophet and an incorporation of modern ideas. The reformers intended to move Islam from the static state it had been in for centuries and toward a more fluid, dynamic, adaptable form which was true to tradition and relevant to the modern world. The most influential of these modernists were Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Mohammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida in the Middle East and Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Mohammad Iqbal in India.

February 22, 24
   a. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Lecture on Teaching and Learning and Answer to Renan

March 1, 3
   b. Mohammad Abduh, Laws Should Change in Accordance with the Conditions of Nations and The Theology of Unity

Midterm exam to be distributed March 1 and is due at the beginning of class March 15
March 15, 17
   c. Rashid Rida, *Renewal, Renewing and Renewers*
   d. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Lecture on Islam*
   e. Mohammad Iqbal, *Islam as a Moral and Political Ideal*

Weeks 9-10
III. Fundamentalism
   The move in the 20th century is characterized by a more fundamental approach.
   Fundamentalism maintains the traditional element of the focus on the sacred sources, but
   it includes a literal interpretation of these sources. The thinkers that stand out in this
   period, Mawlena Mawdudi and Hasan al-Banna, were building upon the modernist base,
   however they were also responding to the crises of their time. With European
   imperialism steadily growing in strength and scope, the creation of the state of Israel, and
   various other post-war circumstances, the Islamic thinkers began to see a need for a more
   fundamental interpretation. A major factor in the shift is that these thinkers were no
   longer addressing an intellectual elite, but rather, they were now addressing the masses as
   well. Also, they now engaged in a more active approach through political activism
   marked by strong opposition to foreign leaders and calls for reform amongst Muslim
   elites. This period marks a mid-ground between theory and practice because many of
   their ideas were not fully articulated and therefore could not practically be manifested.

March 22, 24
   a. Mawlena Mawdudi, excerpts from *Islamic Law and Constitution*

March 29, 31
   b. Hasan al-Banna, *Between Yesterday and Today*

****Topics for final papers must be approved by March 31****

Weeks 11-12
IV. Fundamentalism: Radicalized
   It is the practical manifestation of many of the ideas seen in the fundamentalist
   writings that constitute the realm of radical fundamentalism. Fundamentalist thought is
   not innately violent, or radical. However, the presence and influence of fundamentalist
   thought, combined with the increasingly tense political, social, and economic
   circumstances in Muslim countries, provided fertile ground for the emergence of radical
   Islamic interpretations. In the formation of most utopian ideologies the purpose is
   usually to provide a strong critique of the political situation, which the authors never fully
   intend to see implemented. Whether or not this is true of the Islamic fundamentalists
   who created various final solutions based on the Islamic concept is a moot point because
   those who came after them believed implementation was vital. Thus, as with many other
   utopian visions, the efforts to move the fundamental political theories from theory to
   practicum led necessarily to very drastic, exclusive, radical political realities. One of the
   important, if not the most important, figures to consider in regard to radical political
Islamic movements is Sayyid Qutb. He serves as an appropriate and sufficient source for understanding the progression from fundamentalist thought to radical fundamentalist thought.

April 5, 7 & 12, 14
a. Sayyid Qutb, excerpts from Basic Principles of the Islamic Worldview and Milestones

SPRING BREAK

Week 13: April 26, 28
V. Iran: Thought into Action

At this point it is appropriate to look at the figure of Ayatollah Khomeini, the Islamic Revolution and the effective realization of an Islamic state in Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini was a charismatic leader with a defined ideology. The ideology that Khomeini propounded through his speeches and writings is an ideology riddled with political and religious concepts that are intertwined in such a way that divorcing them is seemingly impossible. He created a radical, violent, political ideology out of his interpretation of the tenets of Shi’i Islam coupled with his complicated worldview.

a. Ayatollah Khomeini, Governance of the Jurist (Velayat-e Faqeeh)

Week 14: May 3, 5
VI. Conclusion

Final Papers due at the beginning of class May 5

Final Exam Saturday, May 14, 10:00 am – 12:00 noon