POLITICAL SCIENCE 4090: ISLAMIC POLITICAL THOUGHT

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 11:00 - noon 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 a 12-15 page analytical essay. No two students can write on the same topic and all topics must be approved. Keep in mind that creativity in developing a topic will be rewarded. Students can write on any topic relevant to the course. Alternatively, students can write a review essay wherein they analyze three to four books on a particular concept relevant to the course OR analyze three to four distinct thinkers not discussed in the lectures. Keep in mind—all papers must be critical, not merely historical or biographical. 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). All provided readings are indicated by ***.

Required texts:
*Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, James Howarth, transl., Bruce Lawrence, ed.

Suggested texts:
*A History of Islamic Philosophy*, Majid Fakhry
*Modern Islamic Political Thought*, Hamid Enayat

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 interlude of the twelfth century.

**Week 1: January 17, 19**

I. **Introduction: What is Islamic Political Thought?**
   a. Introductory reading: *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* by Muhsin S. Mahdi, chapters 1-3***

**Week 2: January 24, 26**

II. **Al Farabi**
   a. *Selected Aphorisms of the Statesman*
   b. *Enumeration of the Sciences*
   c. *Book of Religion*

**Week 3: January 31, February 2**

III. **Ibn Tufayl**
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 i‘tihad, or monotheism.

Week 4: February 7, 9

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.
   a. Introductory reading: “Relevance of the Past” in Modern Islamic Political Thought by Hamid Enayat*** (this text is recommended though not required; thus, if you have the book you will not need to obtain this reading from Moodle)
   b. Readings on I‘tihad
      i. “On the Origins of the Controversy about the Existence of Mujtahids and the Gate of I‘tihad” by Wael B. Hallaq***
      ii. “The I‘tihad Controversy” by Ali-Karamali and Dummer***

Weeks 5 - 7

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 14, 16
a. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani
   i. Lecture on Teaching and Learning***
   ii. Answer to Renan***

MARDI GRAS HOLIDAY FEBRUARY 21
CLASS CANCELED FEBRUARY 23

February 28, March 1
b. Mohammad Abduh
   i. Laws Should Change in Accordance with the Conditions of Nations***
   ii. The Theology of Unity***

****Midterm exam to be distributed February 28; due at the beginning of class March 6****

March 6, 8
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 8 - 9
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, Mawlana 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 13, 15
a. Mawlana Mawdudi, excerpts from Islamic Law and Constitution***
March 20, 22

b. Hasan al-Banna
   i. Letter to a Muslim Student***
   ii. Toward the Light***
   iii. Between Yesterday and Today***

*****Topics for final papers must be approved by March 22*****

Weeks 10 - 11

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.

March 27, 29; April 3, 5

a. Sayyid Qutb, excerpts from Basic Principles of the Islamic Worldview and Milestones***

SPRING BREAK APRIL 10, 12

Week 12: April 17, 19

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)***

*****Final Papers due at the beginning of class April 19*****
Week 13: April 24, 26
VI. Political Islam
   a. Osama bin Laden, Messages to the World
   b. "Justification for Violence: Religion or Policies?" by Alejandro J. Beutel

Week 14: April 1, 3
VII. Conclusion

*****Final Exam Thursday, May 10, 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm*****