

German 3451H (GE) Spring 2013  
(Taught in English)

# Religion in Modern German Literature and Philosophy



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Time: TuTh 12:45 pm - 2:05 pm  
Location: Lazenby Hall 0001  
Class number: 15954 (3 units)  
Office Hours: TBA

**This Honors course fulfills two GE Categories:**

- **Cultures and Ideas**
- **Diversity: Global Studies**

## **Course Description:**

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain, and a century after Nietzsche's famous proclamation that "God is dead," we have allegedly been witnessing a global resurgence of religion and the beginning of a "post-secular age." New, vigorous debates have emerged on the pros and cons of religion and secularization with respect to national and international peace, social justice, scientific development, and quality of life. For instance, in September 2012, the notorious "Mohammed video" has sparked demonstrations and violence all over the Islamic world and has renewed debates about where freedom of speech ends and hate speech begins. From the perspectives of the influential German traditions of philosophy, literature, psychology, and theology, this course explores the roles that religions can play in our modern societies.

We will begin with an exploration of Kant's notion of an enlightened and simultaneously divine community and of Schleiermacher's idea of society as a spiritual family. We will also explore Lessing's notion of religious tolerance. Our investigation of these attempts to reconcile the Enlightenment with religion will be followed by a critical analysis of Marx' and Freud's claims that religious belief is the "opium of the people," luring them into submission. A third focus of the course will lie on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. We will learn about Herzl's Zionism and about endeavors to rethink both the Jewish and the Christian religion in light of the Holocaust. To conclude, we will explore contemporary thinkers' ideas about how to conceive of the function of religion contemporary societies, concentrating on the dialogue between German philosopher Habermas and Pope Benedict XVI about ethics and on contemporary philosophical debates about atheism vs. belief. Students will also learn about and discuss the current significance of the historical ideas covered in this class. We will for instance, explore current debates about the relationship between religion and rationality, Zionism in contemporary Israel, and new economic, biological, and psychological explanations of religion.

## **Assessment and Grading:**

- short weekly writing assignments (1 ½ to 2 pages or 350-500 words): 20%
- participation in class discussions and activities: 20%
- take-home midterm exam (3 to 4 pages): 20%
- one oral presentation, incl. handout (15 min.): 10%
- individual research paper (8-9 pages): 30%