Instructor: Dr. Scott Marratto
Office Location: Walker Hall 343
Telephone: Office – 487-2613
E-mail: smarratt@mtu.edu
Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:30-4 p.m. (or by appointment)
Course Location: Fisher Hall 0131
Class Times: TR 12:35-1:50 pm

Course Description

It is often said that progress in science and technology along with the rise of liberal democracy in the modern period have been accompanied, particularly in societies having their roots in Western Europe, by a decline in the influence of religion in human affairs. Historical events at the beginning of the 21st century, however, might lead us to question...
this assumption. Religion has arguably reasserted itself as a significant force in contemporary politics and culture, playing a role in geo-political machinations in the Middle East, in discussions in Europe and elsewhere concerning the success or failure of state-supported “multiculturalism,” in policy debates here at home concerning gay marriage, abortion, and public education, as well as in debates about the science of evolution. Recent best-selling books like Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion* and Christopher Hitchens’ *God is Not Great* offer polemical responses to this resurgence of religion as a cultural and political force and seem to diagnose a fateful opposition between, on the one hand, the enlightenment values of reason, progress, freedom and critical inquiry, and, on the other hand, blind faith in divine revelation. But this opposition arguably involves a rather crude characterization of religious experience and overlooks a deep and very ancient discussion among leading thinkers in the traditions of the three Abrahamic religions (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism) concerning the appropriate relations between philosophy, reason, science, politics, human freedom and religious revelation. It also overlooks the religious/theological roots of the European enlightenment as well as the role of medieval Islamic philosophy in the shaping of the modern west. In this course we will examine selections from some key texts in those traditions (representing the ancient, medieval and modern periods) in order to better understand what these world-historical religious traditions have had to say about the relation of faith and reason. We will consider arguments about the interpretation of religious texts, the existence of God, the meaning of religious texts with respect to the science of nature, and the role of religion in ethics and politics. In the last part of the course we will examine, as a case study, the historical experience of Islam in relation to the West. We will see that a more nuanced understanding of the inter-relations of religion, science, philosophy and culture will also help us to critically assess claims about a so-called “clash of civilizations” between Islam and the West. This course thus aims to help us generate tools for understanding a matter of significant controversy and practical urgency in contemporary politics and culture.

**Course Resources**

**Course Website:**

Blackboard: [http://www.courses.mtu.edu](http://www.courses.mtu.edu)

**Required Course Texts (available at the bookstore):**


Grading Scheme

Grades will be based on the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 or 3 short papers (on assigned questions)</td>
<td>20% or 30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 in-class tests</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation/discussion</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class presentation (or term paper) proposal/outline</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class presentation (or term paper)</td>
<td>30% or 40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>(see note below on term paper)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Points</td>
<td>100</td>
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Assignments:

Short papers: For each paper, I will assign a question about one of the texts and you will provide an answer in 3 double-spaced pages. To answer this question effectively you will need to be engaging with and reflecting upon the central themes of the texts.

In-class tests: These short tests (consisting of mostly short-answer questions) will evaluate your familiarity with the themes, issues, and positions set out in the readings.

In-Class Presentation: This will require you to examine a particular issue arising from Tamim Ansary’s book, *Destiny Disrupted*. The book explores a number of topics having to do with the Islamic view of history, about the relation of religion and politics in Islam, about the relation of East and West (both the conflicts and the fruitful interrelations), and it makes proposals about the present. You will be asked to lead the class in a 10-15 minute reflection on one of these issues, making use of what you have learned in the class as well as some of your own research and reflection. You will be expected to submit a proposal in advance of your presentation date and to submit a 4 page report on your research on the day of your presentation.

Term Paper: As an alternative to the last short paper and the class presentation, you may arrange with me to write a 10-12 page essay in which you will apply what you have learned in the course to some issue or problem that interests you. You will be expected to submit a proposal and bibliography as well as a rough outline prior to submitting the completed paper.

Course Policies

Academic integrity is essential to a student’s education. Plagiarism, Cheating, Fabrication
and Facilitating Academic Dishonesty are offences that will not be tolerated. Plagiarism—loosely defined as the presentation of the work of another author as if it were your own—will not be tolerated. If you are unclear about how to cite your sources properly, you are urged to discuss the matter with the instructor before submitting an assignment. Academic regulations and procedures are governed by University policy. Academic dishonesty cases will be handled in accordance with the University policy. See http://www.mtu.edu/dean/conduct/policy/academic-integrity/. If you have questions about plagiarism that are not resolved after reading the policy, ask me for help.

Class Attendance is very important. Three excused or unexcused absences are permitted; it is your responsibility to notify the instructor if you cannot be in class. More than three unexcused absences can result in a lowering of the final course grade by at least a half letter grade, and additional unexcused absences may result in a grade of F being recorded for the entire course. See http://www.mtu.edu/dean/conduct/policy/attendance/ for more information.

Late Policy: All papers and assignments must be submitted at the beginning of class on the day they are due. Late papers will be reduced a fraction of a grade (e.g. from B to B-) for each week, or part thereof, of lateness, up to two full grades (e.g. from B to D).

Disabilities

If you have a disability that could affect your performance in this class or that requires an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please see me as soon as possible so that we can make appropriate arrangements. The Affirmative Action Office has asked that you be made aware of the following:

Michigan Tech complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at Michigan Tech, please call the Dean of Students Office, at 487-2212. For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head or the Affirmative Action Office, at 487-3310. Affirmative Action: http://www.admin.mtu.edu/aoa/

Disability Services: http://www.admin.mtu.edu/urel/studenthandbook/student_services.html#disability


Tentative Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Week 1:

Tuesday, Aug. 30: Introductions

Thursday, Sept. 1: Philosophy (reading on Blackboard: “Plato”)
Week 2:
Tuesday, Sept. 6: Augustine (Confessions, Books I-III)
Thursday, Sept. 8:

Week 3:
Tuesday, Sept 13: Augustine (Confessions, Books IV-VI)
Thursday, Sept. 15:

Week 4:
Tuesday, Sept 20: Augustine (Confessions, Book VII)
Thursday, Sept 22: Plotinus (Blackboard: “Plotinus”)

Week 5:
Tuesday, Sept 27: Augustine (Confessions, Book VIII)
Thursday, Sept 29: [first short paper due]

Week 6:
Tuesday, Oct. 4: The Jewish tradition on philosophy and revelation: Maimonides (Blackboard: “Maimonides”)
Thursday, Oct. 6: [Mid-term quiz]

Week 7:
Tuesday, Oct. 11: The Christian tradition on philosophy and revelation: Aquinas (Blackboard: “Aquinas”)
Thursday, Oct. 13:

Week 8:
Tuesday, Oct. 18: The Islamic tradition on philosophy and revelation: Averroes (Blackboard: “Averroes”)

Week 9:
Tuesday, Oct. 25: Modernity: Descartes on God and philosophy (*Meditations*, “Letter of Dedication” and “Preface to the Reader”) [second short paper due]

Thursday, Oct. 27: Descartes (*Meditations* 1&2)

**Week 10:**

Tuesday, Nov. 1: Descartes (*Meditations* 3&4)

Thursday, Nov. 3: Descartes (*Meditation 5*); Kant on religion within the limits of reason (blackboard: “Kant”)

**Week 11:**

Tuesday, Nov. 8: Levinas, ethical religion, and the challenge to modern reason (blackboard: “Levinas”) [paper proposal due]

Thursday, Nov. 10: Levinas, cont’d.

**Week 12:**

Tuesday, Nov. 15: Another historicity: Ansary on the Islamic experience (readings t.b.a) [third short paper due]

Thursday, Nov. 17: Ansary (readings t.b.a) [presentation proposals due]

Thanksgiving break

**Week 13:**

Tuesday, Nov. 29: Ansary (readings t.b.a) [in-class presentations]

Thursday, Dec 1: (End of term in-class quiz)

**Week 14:**

Tuesday, Dec. 6: Ansary (readings t.b.a) [in class presentations]

Thursday, Dec. 8: Final class (no readings)

This syllabus may be changed during the term to accommodate the needs of either the students or the professor.