THEO 6000: History, Theory, and the Study of Religion

Dr. Ben Dunning

"History, Theory, and the Study of Religion" will provide a thorough introduction to recent developments in critical theory and historiography as they bear upon the disciplines of Religious Studies and Theology. The course is a revision of THEO 6194, "History, Theory, and Pre-Modern Christianity," which focused specifically on late antiquity and the Middle Ages. By contrast, THEO 6000 will put less emphasis on the historiographical issues specific to a particular time period and instead engage with intellectual issues and current debates in the study of religion broadly conceived. As before, however, the course will continue to function as a kind of primer in the basic intellectual building blocks of contemporary critical theory—with an eye to laying the foundation for advanced seminars in specific areas of theory offered by various members of the department.

Goals of the course include the following: 1) to introduce a range of contemporary theoretical literatures that have developed increasingly complex and subtle ways of thinking about language, discourse, practice, and bodies (to name only a few relevant issues); 2) to explore the specific relevance of these interventions for the study of Christianity, with an eye to both historical inquiry and constructive theology; 3) to consider the intersection of this theoretical landscape with current conversations and debates in the study of religion.

Per the course requirements for doctoral students in Theology, this course fulfills the requirement for a departmental course that emphasizes method.

Philosophers and theorists to be studied may include the following:
Giorgio Agamben, J.L. Austin, Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Luce Irigaray, Jacques Lacan, Claude Levi-Strauss, Ferdinand de Saussure, Hortense Spillers, and Alexander Weheliye

Possible interlocutors in Religious Studies may include:
Talal Asad, Amy Hollywood, Willie James Jennings, Saba Mahmood, Tomoko Masuzawa, Robert Orsi, Tyler Roberts, and Jonathan Z. Smith