



Workshop
Exploring Postsecularism in Contemporary Historical and Political Theory

Center for Theories in the Historical research – Bielefeld University

Saturday, October 19th 2024 – Room X B2-103

Over the past two decades, the humanities have undergone significant transformations through various paradigmatic “turns.” Among these, the post-secular turn emerged visibly in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, quickly gathering attention in the works of sociologists, political theorists, philosophers, scholars of religious studies, art, and literary studies (Giorgio Agamben, Talal Asad, Alain Badiou, Rosi Braidotti, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Slavoj Žižek). This workshop seeks to interrogate the implications of the post-secular turn on historical theory, posing critical inquiries into the validity of a “return of religion.” How might such a resurgence be conceptualized within a historical framework?

We aim to explore the conditions, causes, manifestations, and consequences of this phenomenon, posing whether it is justifiable to discuss the transition from a secular regime of knowledge to a post-secular one.

During the workshop, we aim to explore the limitations inherent in the secular approach to historical knowledge, as well as potential reconfigurations within the field prompted by the post-secular turn and its manifestations. Our interests span concepts, methods, theories, and structures of historical thought. This issue should be examined not merely in terms of the “turns” and “shifts” occurring in contemporary humanities, but also through the analysis of the past of historical reflection, which, after centuries of prolonged tensions, ultimately introduced the secular “science” of history into the academic world.

Organizers: Ewa Domańska, Lisa Regazzoni

Zur Anmeldung richten Sie sich bitte an folgende E-Mail-Adresse:

theoriezentrale-geschichte@uni-bielefeld.de

Program

Saturday October 19th 2024 – Room X B2-103

10:00-10:30

Welcome and introduction by Ewa Domańska (Stanford/ Poznań) and Lisa Regazzoni (Bielefeld)

10.30 am-12.00

Willem Styfhals (KU Leuven), *Postsecular Eschatology*.

12:00-1:00

Lunch

1:00-2:30

Sabine Grenz (Vienna), *How to Widen the Scope. The Potential of Research on Women in the Religious Rights*.

2:30-2:45

Coffee break

2:45-4:15

Tomasz Wiśniewski (Poznań), *Postsecular Event. Making Politics and Constructing History Through the Smolensk Air Disaster*.

4:15-5:00

Final remarks and discussion

Abstracts

Willem Styfhals (KU Leuven)
Postsecular Eschatology.

The concept of eschatology is one of the key terms in the classic German secularization debate. Thinkers as diverse as Karl Löwith, Reinhart Koselleck and Giorgio Agamben, more recently, have traced our secular conception of history back to a theological history of salvation. This view that our contemporary historical outlook would actually be a secularized eschatology has certainly lost its attraction today, largely due to Hans Blumenberg's convincing critique of this position. As such, the notion of eschatology hardly surfaces anymore in the recent debates around postsecularism. The eschatological hopes once attributed to the modern belief in progress, moreover, are ill-fitted to our 21st-century expectations of the future in view of climate change. In the Anthropocene, the redemptive dimensions of the eschatological end of time have been substituted by a radically secular and non-redemptive fear for apocalyptic catastrophes. However, I will show how the notion of eschatology could still be of conceptual use today. For this reason, I will turn to the work of Bruno Latour who revived the old secularization debates in *Facing Gaia* in an attempt to make sense of the historicity of our new climatic regime. Going beyond Latour's work, I will propose a postsecular interpretation of eschatology. It will be my aim to make sense of our current expectations of a catastrophic future by overcoming the dichotomy between a theological concept of a redemptive, supernatural apocalypse and a secular concept of non-redemptive, natural catastrophe.

Willem Styfhals is assistant professor at the Institute of Philosophy, KU Leuven. He is the author of *No Spiritual Investment in the World: Gnosticism and Postwar German Philosophy* (Cornell UP, 2019) and *Apologie van het Schrift* (Grafische Cel, 2022).

Sabine Grenz (University of Vienna)

How to Widen the Scope: The potential of Research on Women in the Religious Right.

In feminist theory, on the one hand, there has been a call for an enhanced engagement with religion that marks the postsecular turn. On the other, feminist religious scholars have long criticized the secularization thesis as having a male bias, since historically in Europe religions have been feminized since the 19th century. In both streams of research rich bodies on conservative religious women and their negotiations within their communities exist. However, so far women in the politically active religious right have not been taken into account. In my talk I would like to address issues related to this group of women, the need to conduct research with them as well as necessary methodological adaptations.

Sabine Grenz is (ass.-) professor for interdisciplinary Gender Studies at the University of Vienna, where she also serves as head of the Gender Research Office (Referat Genderforschung). Before, she held a three-year professorship at the university of Vienna (2017-2020) and was acting professor for Diversity Research at the University of Göttingen (2015-2017). Sabine worked on masculinity and (hetero-)sexuality in sex work, femininity constructions during the Second World War, gender equality in higher education, institutionalization of Gender Studies and the intertwinement of meaning of life and gender constructions. Her current research interests are feminism and post-secularity as well as feminist epistemologies and methodologies.

Tomasz Wiśniewski (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań)

Postsecular Event. Making Politics and Constructing History Through the Smolensk Air Disaster.

This paper explores the concept of the "postsecular event," an analytical category designed to study the new visibility of religion in the public sphere and its implications for transformations of politics and historical consciousness. Drawing on a case study of the Smolensk air disaster of April 10, 2010, which had profound political and ideological ramifications in Poland, the paper examines how such events signal shifts in historical narratives and collective memory. The disaster not only intensified national conservative mobilization, leading to significant political shifts, but also (re)actualized elements of Polish romanticism linked to national messianism, influencing public discourse and ideological conflicts. This analysis contextualizes the Smolensk disaster within broader geopolitical and cultural settings, demonstrating its role as a "postsecular event" that challenges the secular narratives of modern European history. By doing so, it addresses the complex interplay between historical events, collective identity, and the metaphysical quests that underpin them, highlighting how postsecular dynamics are reshaping historical consciousness in contemporary societies.

Tomasz Wiśniewski is a scholar from Faculty of History, Adam Mickiewicz University (Poznań, Poland). In July 2023, he defended his PhD thesis, "Postsecular History: Knowledge of the Past between Science, Politics and Religion." He is interested in developing postsecular historical criticism at the intersection of the philosophy of history and political theology.