This course explores the idea of "political theology" by considering how modern thinkers (and actors) conceive the political implications of biblical texts. Strictly speaking, if "theology" is the effort to produce (rational) knowledge of god, then "political theology" suggests the idea that political power or the state should be anchored in (our knowledge of) divine law, as if god is a ruler whose will and law should legitimize and regulate the regimes that human beings make. More broadly, however, "political theology" suggests: (a) that every regime is anchored in faith—whether faith in god or a-theism, or in rule by reason, or in equality and universal human rights—and (b) that every "faith" has a worldly bearing on the collective life we make. In this broad sense, political theology is the study of how faith shapes politics. In this regard (c) it is readily apparent that even if we declare a faith, its meaning is not self-evident, but requires interpretation, and as a result, people who profess faith in the same god (or scripture, or principle) will practice it differently. This is as true of those who call themselves Jews, or Christians, or Muslims, as of people who call themselves democratic. Political theology thus must include study of how we conceive but also practice our faiths, and thereby create what might be called "forms of life." Our goal, then, is to explore the relationship between faith and life, by way of focusing especially on the bonds relating faith to politics.

In this semester we focus especially on the Hebrew Bible and Christian gospels, to see how "The Bible" contains texts that elicit radically opposed interpretations, and that entail radically different implications. That is how "The Bible" has enabled violent conflict and opposing forms of culture and politics. It is important to emphasize that "The Bible" does not speak in one voice, and, that we will not privilege—but of course respect—a religious orientation as one among many perspectives to bring to bear on the text.

In the last 5 weeks we consider how key modern commentators address the meaning of this whole history of interpretation and worldly practice as they argue about modernity, nihilism, and democracy.

Required texts:
** The Oxford Study Bible or King James Bible
** Stephen Mitchell, The Book of Job
** Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling (penguin)
** Carl Schmitt, Political Theology (Chicago)
** Carl Schmitt, The Concept of the Political (Chicago)
** Friedrich Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals (Vintage/Penguin)
** Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Grand Inquisitor (Hackett)
** Franz Kafka, The Metamorphosis and Other Stories
** Sigmund Freud, Moses and Monotheism
** Norman O. Brown, Love's Body

course requirements:
* attendance is mandatory (and punctuality is expected)
* one-page typed response paper each week
* two 5-page essays

ggrading:
response papers 25%; participation 25%; essays 25% x 2; & improvement counts

plagiarism policy: the use of the words or the work of others, without attribution, is plagiarism, and is punishable by an F for the course. If you have ANY question about what counts as plagiarism (i.e. what resources, work, or passages you should cite) please ask me for clarification!
1/26

Introduction

2/2
#2

read:
* Richard Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible*? (x)
* *The Book of Genesis*, chaps 1-6 (Alter & Fox translations) (x)
* William Blake, "There is No Natural Religion," (x)
* William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" (x)
* Adam Phillips, "Difficult Children" (x)
* Ernesto Laclau, "On The Name of God" (x)

write on one prompt:
* How does translation matter?
* How does Blake model a way to read/interpret the bible?
* Give a Blakean ("poetic") reading of the Eden or the Cain story.
* Compare Blake and Laclau on the idea of god.

2/9
#3

read:
* *The Book of Genesis* (up to and including 41)
* Eric Auerbach, from *Mimesis*, "Odysseus' Scar" (x)
* Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, Intro & Appendix (x)
* Williams Adams, "Political Poetics" (x)

write:
* Use Auerbach to interpret one passage or story.
* In Fish's terms, is Genesis a "dialectical" or "rhetorical" text
* In Adams' terms, what kind of political imagination is entailed by the "narrative" of Genesis?
* Use Abraham to explore the relation of faith and freedom

1st paper due Monday 2/15 by noon: write no more than 5 pages (typed & double-spaced) about one passage or story in *The Book of Genesis*. Using Blake, Laclau, Auerbach, Fish, or Adams, make an interpretation or commentary.

2/16
#4

read:
* *The Book of Exodus* 1-24/32-35
* *The Book of Numbers* 11-16
* Ila Pardes, from *The Biography of Ancient Israel* (x)
* Machiavelli, from *The Prince* (x)
* Jean-Jacques Rousseau, from *The Social Contract* (x)
* John Winthrop, Speech on Authority (x)
* Jonathan Boyarin, "Reading Exodus into History" (x)

write:
* How is God (un)like Pharaoh? (Why reject other gods and demand that people live by a covenant?)
* What is the dilemma in founding (according to Rousseau) and how does the bible engage &/or evade it?
* What does the exodus story teach about freedom?
* How is the story "nation-building" or "imagined community"
Exodus II: Founding, Memory and Freedom

#5
read:  
* The Book of Deuteronomy 1-12, 28-34  
* Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, 2nd essay (1-4, 8-10, 16-18)  
* Hannah Arendt, "Collective Responsibility" (x)  
* Abraham Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address" (x)

optional reading:  
* Harry Berger, "The Lie of the Land" (x)

write:  
* What must Hebrews do (who must they become) to "obey" god? (What does it mean to "love" the law?)  
* Are Hebrews taught submission &/or how to make/keep promises?  
* What is the meaning of "responsibility"? How is it created?  
* What is freedom for those who inherit this order?  
* What is idolatry and why is it a problem?  
* How does the text construct identity and difference?

Prophecy, Poetry and Politics

#6
read:  
* Samuel I chaps 1-8  
* The Books of Amos, Micah, Hosea, and Isaiah 1-16  
* George Shulman, from American Prophecy (x)  
* Frederick Douglass, "The Meaning of July 4th to the Negro" (x)  
* Martin Luther King, "Where do we go from here?" (x)  
* Allan Ginsberg, "Wichita Vortex Sutra" (x)

optional reading:  
* Herbert Schneidau, "In Praise of Alienation" (x)

write:  
* What is prophecy? What is the "office" of a prophet? What do "prophets" do? (Use Douglass, King or Ginsberg...)  
* Discuss: prophecy is/not antithetical to democratic values.  
* Compare how MLK and Ginsberg speak "prophecy" to oppose war.

From Theodicy to Tragedy

#7
read:  
* Stephen Mitchell, The Book of Job, read full text THEN read Mitchell's introduction

write:  
* Relate what the Job text teaches to how it teaches.

3/15 spring break
From (Hebrew) Tragedy to (Christian) Redemption

read:
* The Gospel of Matthew
* Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels (x)
* Orlando Patterson, "Jesus & the Jesus Movement" (x)

write:
* Jesus is a Hebrew: what is his relation to the tradition he inherits? How does he revise/affirm/reject/replenish it?
* Assess the STYLE of "the gospel of" as a narrative form

read:
* Paul, Romans, Corinthians, Galatians
* Orlando Patterson, "Paul and His World" (x)
* James Baldwin, "Racism and World Community" (x)

write:
* What is the difference between Matthew's Jesus and Paul?
* How does Paul relate the old & new, the Jew & the Christian?
* How does Paul address issues of exclusion/inclusion?
  (How does he define who can be redeemed?)
* How are slavery and freedom related in Paul's theology?
* How does Baldwin assess Paul's legacy?

Second paper (optional) due Monday March 28 by noon: write 5 pages (typed and double-spaced) on the ways that Moses, Job, Jesus, or Paul address a central issue in the tradition they inherit. That issue may be: views of god and what god requires, of god's justice, of covenant, idolatry, membership & identity, chosen people, worship & daily practice, and even more broadly, may be the very question of what it means to inherit a tradition.
Faith and Freedom

3/29
read:
* Kierkergaard, Fear and Trembling, read to Problem III

write:
* Assess how K links faith to "the absurd."
* Assess K's reading of the Abraham-Isaac story.
* explain K's claim that faith "suspends the ethical."

4/5
Nihilism & Modernity I
#10
read:
* Karl Marx, excerpts (x)
* Nietzsche, excerpts from The Gay Science (x)
* Nietzsche, excerpts from Thus Spoke Zarathustra (x)
* Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, preface & 1st Essay

write:
* Does Marx remain a "religious" thinker? Secularize its promise?
* What does Nietzsche mean by the "death of god"?
* How does Zarathustra echo or repeat (or overcome) Jesus?
* Assess N's distinction between "noble" and "slave" morality.

4/12
Nihilism & Modernity II
#11
read:
* Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, 2nd & 3rd essays
* William Connolly, from "Political Theory & Modernity" (x)

write:
* analyze ONE passage in GM
* what is "the ascetic ideal"? Why is science no alternative?
* For N, how is "theism" secularized as "science"?
* How does Connolly explain N's purpose or project?

4/20
Political Theology and Radical Politics I
#12
read:
* Carl Schmitt, Political Theology, chaps 1/3/4 (p5-15/36-66)
* Carl Schmitt, Concept of the Political, p.19-79
* Anne Norton, "the voice of the people" (x)
* Bonnie Honig, "The Miracle of Metaphor" (x)

write:
* Does sovereignty secularize the divine or sacred?
* why does "the exception" matter in religion & politics?
* in what sense is "the people" the "voice of god"?
* How does Schmitt define "the political"?
* Why does Honig reject S's views of sovereignty and exception?

4/27
Political Theology & Radical Politics II
#13
read:
* Gustavo Gutierrez, "The Task & Content of Liberation Theology"
* James Cone, from A Black Theology of Liberation (x)

write:

Political Theology and Radical Politics II

5/3
#14
read:
* Norman O. Brown, Love's Body
* Romand Coles & Stanley Hauerwas,......

paper due
Monday May 9 by noon
Chronology

3000BC
writing emerges in Sumer
2800BC
Stonehenge
2600BC
pyramid-building
2500BC
Gilgamesh
1800BC
Hammurabi's law

1700BC
Abraham?
(Semitic/Canaanite peasants begin to withdraw from imperial systems and Mesopotamian cities)

1280BC
probable date of exodus

1300-1000BC
formation of the "Hebrews" as confederated tribes in Canaan, period of "Judges"

1020-1000BC
Samuel the prophet, and Saul the first king

1000-960BC
David captures Jerusalem/unifies country/rules

960-922BC
Solomon: temple-building/state centralizing/empire

950-900BC
The Book of J is written

922BC
Solomon dies/kingdom divides:
Israel/Samaria (north) and Judah (south)

875-850BC
Ahab & Jezebel vs prophet Elijah in Israel (north)

850-800BC
E revises J (E is a Levite priest in Israel?)

760BC
Amos and Hosea prophesy in northern kingdom

720BC
Israel conquered by Assyria/10 tribes deported & disappear

715-687
Reform era of Hezekiah in Judah-1st Isaiah

687-640BC
worsening corruption of monarchy in Judah

640-609BC
Josiah rules; attempted reforms fail

622
Jeremiah writes Deuteronomy
Jeremiah's circle writes Samuel I/II and Kings I/II

587BC
Babylon destroys Jerusalem/temple/Hebrews exiled

539BC
Cyrus of Persia conquers Babylon

538BC
Jews allowed to return from exile (though many stay)

550-500BC
the P text written, with Leviticus

520-515BC
Rebuilding of the Temple

450BC
Nehemiah rules as governor under Cyrus' empire
Ezra brings J/E and D

400BC
The redactor combines J,E,P,D (redactor is Ezra?)

490-440: Greeks battle Persians at Marathon & Salamis; Rise of Athens
470-399: life of Socrates
425-----Oedipus Tyrannos by Sophocles
340-404: Athens vs Sparta in Peloponnesian War
336-323 -Alexander the Great

63 BC -Pompey conquers Jerusalem for Rome
44 BC - Caesar assassinated
35 BC - Herod rules the province of Palestine
Nietzsche on biblical interpretation:

"The Philology of Christianity - how little Christianityeducates the sense of honesty and justice can be gauged fairly well from the character of its scholars’ writings: they represent their conjectures as boldly as if they were dogmas and are rarely in any honest perplexity of the interpretation of a passage in the Bible. Again and again they say: "I am right for it is written" - and then follows an interpretation of such impudent arbitrariness that a philologist who hears it is caught between rage and laughter and asks himself: is this possible? Is this honorable? Is it even decent?....How the Bible is pummeled and punched and the art of reading badly is in all due form imparted to the people....But after all, what can one expect from the effects of a religion which in the centuries since its foundation perpetrated that unheard-of philological farce concerning the Old Testament: I mean the attempt to pull the Old Testament from under the feet of the Jews with the assertion that it contained nothing but Christian teachings and belonged to the Christians as the true people of Israel, the Jews being only usurpers. And then there followed a fury of interpretation and construction that cannot possibly be associated with a good conscience: however much Jewish scholars protested, the Old Testament was suppose to speak of Christ and only Christ, and especially his cross. Wherever a piece of wood, a rod, a ladder, a twig, a tree a willow a staff is mentioned, it is supposed to be a prophetic allusion to the wood of the cross...even the spits on which the Passover lamb was roasted - allusions to the Cross and preludes to it. [But] they were conducting a war and paid more heed to their opponents than to the need to stay honest."

Alisdair MacIntyre on (the idea of) tradition:

"The connection between narrative and tradition has hitherto gone unnoticed, perhaps because tradition usually has been taken seriously only by conservative social theorists. Yet those features of tradition which emerge as important when the connection between tradition and narrative is understood are ones which conservative theorists are unlikely to attend to. For what constitutes a tradition is a conflict of interpretations of that tradition, a conflict which itself has a history susceptible to rival interpretations. If I am a Jew, I have to recognize that the tradition of Judaism is partly constituted by a continuous argument over what it means to be a Jew. Suppose I am an American: the tradition is partly constituted by continuous argument over what it means to be an American and partly by continuous argument over what it means to have rejected tradition ... [These] traditions have epistemological debate as a necessary feature of their conflicts. For it is not merely that different participants in a tradition disagree; they also disagree as to how to characterize their disagreement and as to how to resolve them. They disagree as to what constitutes appropriate reasoning, decisive evidence, conclusive proof. A tradition then not only embodies the narrative of an argument, but is only to be recovered by an argumentative retelling of that narrative which will itself be in conflict with other argumentative retellings. Every tradition therefore is always in danger of lapsing into incoherence, and when a tradition does so lapse, it sometimes can only be recovered by a revolutionary reconstitution..." from "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," The Monist 60 (1977)
FIRST PAPER: Write no more than 5-pages typed and double-spaced on one question. Make a title page to state your question!

1. Do a close reading of one story in Genesis. [Explore its meanings and ambiguities to evoke what is at stake in it.]

2. Analyze the meaning and purpose of the Eden story as a creation myth. [What aspects of the human condition does it address? By what narrative and literary devices? What are the consequences of its representation of human origins? Do we need origin stories? Why? Which are better?]

3. Reflect on The Bible's statement that God made humans as a self-image. [What is "man" like in Genesis, and what does this tell us about god, man's creator? "Modern" thinkers typically say: "Man makes god his self-image," so what is god like in Genesis and what does this tell you about man, his creator? Consider: why would god or man need to create the "other"?]


5. Assess the political lesson in stories of familial conflict or rivalry.

6. What human aspirations do the stories of Eden and/or Babel represent and how are we positioned by the stories toward those aspirations? [What do Eve or the builders want? Why deny their aspirations? Could god justify his action in terms we might accept?]

7. Why depict founders as flawed, morally problematic people, rather than idealize them? What difference does the representation of founders make to the character or life of their "children"?

8. Analyze God's character in Genesis. [What does its representation of god say about its authors? About reality or life?]

9. Greeks and Hebrews situate human agency in relation to larger forces they call gods; Machiavelli relates action to a force he personifies as "Fortuna." Assess the idea of a double perspective on human action. Why create it? What difference results from calling it fate, God or Fortuna?

10. Analyze what the binding of Isaac teaches about god, Abraham, and faith, and by what literary means does it do so?

11. How does the text advance a "gendered" representation of women & life? [How does it establish patriarchy? Does it also subvert the authority of men or recast the patriarchal construction of properly masculine & feminine?]

12. What does Genesis teach about "morality"?

* * *

"In most books, the I, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew so well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience. Moreover, I, on my side, require of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life, and not merely what he has heard of others' lives; some such account as he would send to his kindred from a distant land; for if he has lived sincerely, it must have been in a distant land to me." ---Henry David Thoreau, from the opening to *Walden*
SECOND PAPER OPTION (A)

1. Analyze The Bible’s narrative arc. [Why begin with Genesis and humanity rather than the Hebrews in Egypt or Sinai? Why begin again in Egypt rather than Sinai? How does the world of Genesis differ from the world after Sinai? Is this progress?]

2. Assess how & why God changes after Genesis. (Does God become ethical or concerned with justice in a new way? Does God become more violent? More "loving"?) What is the text doing?

3. A “free” people is not born, but made: explore the dilemmas in this achievement, or question this claim.

4. Analyze the story of Exodus as a model of revolutionary politics. Does it teach essential lessons? Does it send radicals in the wrong direction? (How would Moses respond to you?)

5. Explore different interpretations of the psychological/familial relation between god and the Hebrews. (Will the Hebrews “grow up” only when they learn to “fear god,” or, will they never “grow up” as long as they “fear god”? But also, if “god” is a metaphor what does “fear” mean?)

6. How does the text advance a “gendered” representation of women & life? (Is this a problem? Does it also subvert the authority of men or recast the patriarchal construction of property masculine & feminine?)

7. Analyze idolatry. Why must there be an abstract/invisible ONE god? What does it mean to call other gods “idols?” Why worship Yahweh rather than a golden calf? The Greeks were polytheist: what differences follow?

8. Explore the insistence on cultural difference in the exodus cycle. Why refuse mixing, intermarriage, and cosmopolitanism? Why attack the actual hybridity of cultures and enforce cultural purity?

9. “All the achievements of civilization are bathed in blood – that is the critical and horrific –the tragic– lesson of the Bible.” Discuss

10. “The promise of redemption justifies violence, and entails the dangerous fantasy of a promised land as a recovered Eden. Political wisdom and democratic freedoms require us to reject such promises!” Discuss

11. Rousseau said: “Moses founded the body of a nation, using for his materials a swarm of wretched fugitives who possessed no skills, no arms, no talents, no virtues, no courage, and who, without an inch of territory to call their own, were truly a troupe of outcasts on the face of the earth. Moses made bold to transform this herd of servile emigrants into a political society, a free people.” Critically assess the idea of “making” a free people.

12. What does The Bible (Genesis to Deuteronomy) teach about “morality”? (If violence is needed to found the law prohibiting violence, does the text teach ethical idealism or its impossibility?)
Anonymous: "To orient ourselves by the right kind of authority is the only way to foster our freedom."
Anonymous: "But what kind of authority is that?"
Use Exodus to assess the relationship of authority & freedom: do some kinds of authority (God) produce subjection and other kinds of authority (Pharaoh) enable freedom? Or does the text connect subjection/submission and a "subject" responsible for its acts?

14. "God is a tyrant! For a people denied freedom of choice, there is no difference between slavery in Egypt and 'serving' God."—Anonymous

"God seeks freedom by teaching Hebrews to make and keep covenants. But freedom also depends on what they promise: they are free only if they choose to do certain things and reject others."—Anonymous

Relate the Hebrew god, covenant, and freedom

15. "Freedom lies in making and keeping promises because promises embody both self-determination and self-limitation. Acts of commitment—choosing to live by a law, with a lover, for a principle—demonstrate our freedom. 'Freedom from' is slave-talk." Analyze this claim.

16. "For Abraham or Moses, freedom means breaking tradition: we become free, and innovate the unprecedented, by rejecting the tradition or authorities we had internalized."—Anonymous

"No, they teach piety and memory: freedom means renewing (making a-new) an inherited frame of first principles. A 'free' people reaffirm (by re-making) inherited commitments as their own, now."—Anonymous

Analyze the relationship between tradition and freedom

17. Moses seeks remembrance—of what? Why are memory and forgetting so crucial in politics?

18. Discuss (the implications of) the ways the Hebrews imagine history, both the past (Eden or Egypt) and the future (the Promised Land.)

19. Assess the meaning of the blessings/curses that Moses links to dis/obedience: Is he scaring people? Showing that conduct has consequences? Making the universe ethically rational?

21. Assess the idea of collective liability: are you responsible for what is done in your name? Are we responsible for the acts of others in our community? Is it justice to say that no one will exempted from collective responsibility?
Second paper (OPTION B): prophets/Job/Jesus

1. Greeks and Hebrews situate human agency in relation to larger forces they call gods; Machiavelli relates action to a force he personifies as Fortuna. **Assess this idea of a double perspective on human action.** Why create it? What difference results from calling it god, fate or Fortuna?

2. **How and why does god change?** What is the text “doing” by its representation of god?

3. "The Bible shows that monotheism is necessarily dogmatic and anti-democratic because it stipulates ONE transcendent authority and moral law, to mandate ONE right way to live. Biblical conceptions of law and authority devalue plurality, and foster violence rather than freedom.” -Anonymous

   "Not so - The Bible offers crucial resources to small-d democrats: the idea of covenant, the model of prophetic witness, the praise for memory and historical attachment, the insight into human finitude and fallibility, and the chastening of moral pretension.” -Anonymous

   **what kind of political disposition or ethos does the Bible (has it, can it, might it?) foster?**

4. “Taken as a whole, The Bible teaches irony, a self-critical attitude toward even the forms of authority and piety it endorses.” **Discuss:** does the Hebrew Bible generate (does its god requires) alienation not myth, iconoclasm not orthodoxy, discontent not subjection?

5. "The prophets, claiming to speak god's word, are self-righteous and intolerant, guilt-tripping and moralistic. What gives them authority to judge anyone?” -Anonymous

   "Prophets hold people accountable to their own professed standards, to a 'god' whose authority enables them to make judgments about justice by requiring them to think about what “our” god requires.” -Anonymous

   **Assess authority & judgment in prophets, including Jesus or F.Douglass**

6. Prophets hold each Hebrew responsible for a collective fate from which none are exempted, while Jesus teaches individual responsibility for salvation. (Machiavelli thus condemns Christianity on political grounds.) **Assess the idea of collective liability.**

7. **How does Jesus reject (or revise) the tradition he inherits?** (Which elements does he use to reject what other elements? Does he initiate unprecedented changes?)

8. "Jesus individualizes a freedom he construes as internal. But for Moses, earlier prophets, or the Greeks, only slaves think this way.” **Discuss**

9. **Evaluate the idea of internalizing the law (or circumcising the heart.)**

10. Does Jesus flee from or engage political reality?
11. Analyze the idea of redemption in Matthew. (What does it mean to seek “the kingdom of god?” Is this a worldly practice? An escape to the interior? A fantasized “true world” by which to devalue the actual one? How does it compare with Exodus redemption, or prophetic repentance?)

12. “The whole point of the Bible is to establish and justify a moral law (and constitutional framework) for the Hebrews.” -Anonymous

"On the contrary, The Bible teaches profound ambivalence about ‘the law’ and what people call ‘morality’" - Anonymous

Is there a lesson about "morality" in the Bible?

13. What does The Book of Job teach about god’s justice in relation to humanly-made (“moral”) categories of justice or good and evil? How does the story position humans toward their own categories, and with what effect?

14. “The Book of Job shatters the idea that the law known to human beings reflects the law rooted in the divine or ultimate nature of being, and also it shatters the idea that the divine or ultimate nature of being is law-like.” Assess this claim and its implications for the conduct of human life.

15. If Job is innocent, why does he suffer and what is its meaning? (How does the text teach us to understand suffering? How does it address claims that the universe -and suffering- is ethically rational or intelligible?)

16. Relate the style or form of The Book of Job to its content: does the poetry gesture beyond the discursive and argumentative? How? Why?

17. "Job is a tragic text." In what sense of “tragedy” and “the tragic” is this a true or useful statement --or is this a wildly incorrect statement?

18. Compare the Gospel of Matthew to the Book of Job.