The UVU Religious Studies Program and Westminster College present the Thirteenth Annual Religion and the Humanities Conference

Secularism Examined

Tuesday, February 3, 2009
Lakeview Room, UVU Library (fourth floor)

The publication of Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* and the popularity of the “new atheism” are indicative of the resurgence of secularism as an ideological and ethical orientation. This conference will provide an opportunity to examine the foundations of secularism and its place in civil society.

Conference Themes

The New Atheism
Proponents of the new atheism such as Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, Michel Onfrey, and Richard Dawkins make the argument that religious belief is intellectually irresponsible and politically damaging to society. A common theme in this literature is the close connection between religious belief and social conflict. Do these arguments characterize religious belief fairly? What are the social and political consequences of taking an anti-religious stance in civil discourse? What should be the place of religion and atheism in the “public square”?

The Concept of Secularism
What are the intellectual and historical foundations of secularism? What is the relationship between secularism, naturalism, atheism, and agnosticism? Is the term meaningful in capturing a particular worldview?

Secular Meaning and Spirituality
Is a meaningful life possible without belief in an ultimate reality or an afterlife? What does it mean to be spiritual? Are there spiritual practices in religions that could be accepted within a naturalistic perspective?

Co-Sponsors

Utah Valley University
Religious Studies Program
College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Utah Democracy Project, Center for the Study of Ethics

Westminster College
The Tanner-McMurrin Lecture Series on the History and Philosophy of Religion

This conference is made possible through the generous support of the Utah Humanities Council

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Schedule of Events

10:00 – 11:15 a.m.
“**Atheism and Meaning**”
**Owen Flanagan, Duke University**

11:30 – 12:45 a.m.
“**The World and the Prophets: A Religious Response to Secularism**”
**James Faulconer, Brigham Young University**
James Faulconer is the Richard L. Evans Professor of Religious Understanding at Brigham Young University and editor of *Transcendence in Religion and Philosophy* (Indiana University Press, 2003) and *Appropriating Heidegger* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

1:00 – 2:15 p.m.
“**I Don’t Believe in Atheists**”
**Chris Hedges, Princeton University**
Chris Hedges is the Anschluz Distinguished Fellow at Princeton University and Senior Fellow at the Nation Institute in New York City. He is also the best-selling author of *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (Anchor Books, 2003) and *I Don’t Believe in Atheists* (Free Press, 2008).

2:30 – 3:45 p.m.
Panel Discussion
“**The Politics of Secularism**”
**Chris Hedges, Owen Flanagan, James Faulconer, Michael Minch (UVU), Dennis Potter (UVU)**
Participants will explore the following questions: What are the political dimensions of the new secularism? What should the role of religious belief be in a secular society? What is the relationship between political conflicts and religious faith or lack thereof? Is it possible to critique religious faith from within a postmodern perspective?

7:30 p.m.
**Westminster College (Gore Auditorium)**
“**Secularism Examined**”
**Chris Hedges, Owen Flanagan, James Faulconer, Michael Minch (UVU), Dennis Potter (UVU), Michael Popich (Westminster)**
This session will allow conference participants to engage with students, fellow scholars, and the community on the questions that emerged in the conference and to explore the future of pluralistic democracies and the impact of secularist arguments on civil discourse.

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