

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Absent Center

A Graduate Student Conference on Contemporary Issues in Political Theology

University of Texas at Austin, Government Department

19-20 February 2010

Keynote speakers:

Simon Critchley (New School for Social Research)

Eric Santner (University of Chicago)

The Secular enlightenment sought to replace religion as a foundation for political legitimacy and personal meaning. It led to a profound *disappointment*, one not specific to contemporary life. Even Spinoza, the great rationalist and philosopher of immanence, feared for a society lacking any belief in salvation whatsoever.

Precisely because the transition to secular modernity has failed, contemporary society has invested with renewed critical interest and urgency the age-old question: “What might be the best normative center for any society”? Even those who say with Nietzsche that “God is dead” would likely concede that a divine center, even though absent and yet to be replaced, retains for many a powerful force upon political imagination.

The Absent Center Conference will examine these circumstances in terms of the following questions: Is a normative center necessary for political life? Are multiple centers possible? If so, which can or ought to be affirmed, and who should decide, by what criteria? Alternatively, can political community and political action be centerless, as philosophers such as Alain Badiou and Simon Critchley argue? Can secular reason

and its contemporary political form - liberal democracy - harness the passions and channel the grievances of a thoroughly secular political life? Can alternative post-secular forms of political life be imagined? Could they ever be realized without a return to the religious?

Graduate students interested in presenting a paper should e-mail an abstract of no more than 300 words, together with a CV, to:
absentcenterconference@gmail.com

Submission Deadline Extended: 1 November 2009

Authors of accepted proposals will be notified in late November 2009