



The Question of Religion: Exploring Some Existential Concerns

A lecture by Prabhsharanbir Singh (Punjab)

Wednesday,
August 8 at 6 p.m.

Senior Common
Room (305),
Founders College,
York University

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Within this talk, Prabhsharanbir Singh interrogates the presumed universalism of a post-secular period found in the writings of continental philosophers. He demonstrates his own unavoidable love–hate relation with thinkers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida. Love because they all challenge the presumed universalism of the western subject, and hate because even with their focus on the other, the Eastern Other is systematically ignored. [More on Prabhsharanbir's talk >>](#)

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Using the work of John Caputo, Singh provides a brief overview of how religion has changed from St Anselm's times to the secular present. However, Singh notes a certain provincialism in Caputo's argument that ignores non-Western religions and cultures, and locates the source of this provincialism (via Heidegger) in Philosophy's mode of questioning, specifically every philosopher's penchant for asking the "what is" question. Singh asks, "what problematic is generated when those societies enter the post-secular era which were never fully secularized?"

Does 'the actual state of affairs' and 'the truth about contemporary continental philosophy' narrated by Caputo remain actual and true when applied to eastern varieties of religion?" In so doing Singh, illuminates a huge ironic, narcissistic if not hypocritical dark and blind spot in past and current Western philosophical thinking that constantly seeks the Other and its alterity yet never truly engages with it.

In contradistinction, through a third way of reading religion (beyond the Western religion and the Hindu dharma) to those traditions that emphasize religion as path (*panth*). Here Singh's focus falls upon the Sikh tradition as the example of this third way of reading religion. However Singh notes how colonialism, modernity and secularization all coerced indigenous elites to remake their religious traditions in the name of Western conceptions. Singh thus not only calls for a more honest engagement by Western thinkers with the non-Western Other, he also highlights how this alienation has been internalized by Indians themselves. Yet this complex problematic can be transformed.

According to Singh the Sikh tradition has many examples of non-violent ways of relating to the Other that demonstrate what is most needed today, in a world that is undergoing the globalization of a Euro-American conceptual and capitalist universe.