



*The Glasscock Center for Humanities Research Graduate Colloquium
at Texas A&M University
presents*

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**“Conceptions of the Highest Good: From Rational Theology to Radical
Theology”**

Derrida observes a problematic division between the religious and the ethical in Kierkegaard and Levinas (given their commitment to the necessity of respect for the absolute singularity within both religion and ethics). We see an earlier framing of this murky intersection between the theological and the ethico-political in Kant's conception of the highest good, which correlates happiness with virtue in a state of affairs made possible through a rational theology. Central to this rational theology is Kant's postulate on God's existence, which should be noted in its similarity to Pascal's wager. Given Badiou's Pauline claim that the universal is contrary to notions of right and duty, the tension between the wagering of Kant's rational theology and the universality of his practical philosophy of the unconditional comes into full relief with the distinguishing between gift and wager. Within the purview of this Kantian problematic, how can one revise Kant's political theology of the highest good for the sake of universalism? I argue that Kierkegaard offers such a revised political theology, which provides a non-calculative basis for a radical political theology of the universal. Kierkegaard rejects the rationalist theology of the wager with a minimalist conception of the highest good, “there is nothing to be said of an eternal happiness except that it is attained by venturing everything absolutely.” This conception does not postulate God's existence, but rather ventures “everything absolutely,” which frames the highest good in terms of a radical theology of the gift and a political theology of the universal.

Thursday, 1 October 2009
2:30 p.m.
311 Glasscock Center Library