

PLENARY

GREGOR MCLENNAN

Thursday 12 April, 13:30-15:00
CITY CAMPUS EAST, ROOM 001

POSTSECULARISM?

Out of the drift towards intractable multiplicity and particularity in politics and thought, two forms of universalistic intellectual ‘revival’ have occurred in recent decades. One is a broadly Marxist critique of capitalist irrationalism and soaring material inequalities, the other involves greater appreciation of the personal and collective powers of religion as levers for radical change. While each strand responds to vital trends and events in the real world, there are obvious reasons making it hard to envisage new forms of solidarity and inclusiveness via a synthesis (or surpassing) of secular materialism and spiritual devoutness. Yet that is the project of postsecularism in contemporary social and cultural theory. Postsecularism, it has to be said, forms a rather misty and boggy terrain, and whether the effort of exploring and marking out that ground is ultimately worthwhile is debatable. That said, sociologists have always connected both their research and their ideological leanings to large matters of philosophical reflection and existential commitment, and today postsecularism and its analogues – expansive secularism, political theology – push to occupy that role. In this lecture I consider some definitions, map out some options, and develop some critical observations.

Gregor McLennan is Professor of Sociology at the University of Bristol, where he has also been Head of the School of Politics and Sociology, and Director of the [Institute for Advanced Studies](#). Following postgraduate degrees at the renowned Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, through the 1980s Gregor worked as Lecturer and Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at the Open University, going on to head up the Department of Sociology at Massey University, New Zealand from 1991-97. McLennan is the author of *Marxism and the Methodologies of History* (1981); *Marxism, Pluralism and Beyond* (1989); *Pluralism* (1995); *Sociological Cultural Studies: Reflexivity and Positivity in the Human Sciences* (2006); and *Story of Sociology* (2011). He is the co-author of *Exploring Society* (3rd edition 2010), and co-editor of several themed collections, including *The Idea of the Modern State* (1984). Over the past decade, Gregor has been engaged with the challenges to sociology posed by postcolonial and post-secular thought, and his selection and framing of Stuart Hall’s writings on *The Question of Marxism and Post-Marxism* is soon to be published by Duke UP.

