Science and Religion

IDSEM 1514
Spring 2013

Tue-Thurs 11-12:15
1 Washington Place, Room 527

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In this course, we will examine the complex interactions between science and religion through a series of case studies. While most popular presentations of science and religion often descend into simplistic models of conflict (the secular nature of modern science and its repeated conflicts with religion) or cooperation/co-existence (science and religion each have clearly defined domains), we hope to explore a wider variety of relationships. Moving beyond claims of superiority or mutual isolation, we will consider the complicated negotiation of boundaries and proper authority between science and religion.

This can be a contentious subject. The goal, however, is to construct an impartial, historical understanding. We will consider at some length exactly what this means, but, briefly, it means that we must look at a set of ideas from a historical figure’s own viewpoint. That will provide the basis for broad generalizations about the past and, eventually, a deeper understanding of the present.

Goals

- Draw on historical resources to contextualize claims about science and religion.
- Develop analytical reading skills and apply them critically to a wide variety of primary and secondary sources.
- Discuss and critique various approaches to studying science and religion as exemplified by the readings
- Improve and develop writing skills

The class is structured around five major units. Each unit will end with an in-class debate. Everyone will be assigned a side in the debates, and will also write an individual short assessment (4 pages) of the evidence for and argument of each party in the debate.

Everyone will be required to post a brief response to each day’s reading on the web discussion forum. The response should be about a paragraph, and can consist of your thoughts on the material, questions you have, or issues you would like to discuss.
These posts must be made by 10:30 am on each day class meets and will be used to help frame our class discussions.

A final project will be due at the end of the course, on a topic of your choice relating to the themes of the class. The default form of the final project is a research paper (12-15 pages), but I am open to other ideas. In the past students have written short stories, performed songs, investigated field sites anthropologically, and authored plays. Any project that involves outside research, has an argument, and displays intellectual rigor is acceptable.

The course grade will be determined as follows:

- Debate papers: 10% (each)
- Blackboard responses: 10% (combined)
- Final project: 15%
- Project proposal: 5%
- Class participation (including debates): 20%

It is expected that you know how to write clearly. Everything you write for this class should have an argument, a thesis statement, and sources cited with quotations marks and footnotes. If you are not confident in your ability to do these things, contact me right away.

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction in accordance with the Student Discipline Rules of the Gallatin School of Individualized Study. Familiarize yourself with Gallatin's academic integrity and plagiarism policies at http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html

Late policy: Late assignments will lose a full letter grade for every 24 hours they are late. Assignments five days late will not be accepted.

If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with me soon.

We will be using these books, all available at the bookstore:
- Maurice Finocchiaro, *The Galileo Affair: A Documentary History*
- Gary Ferngren, ed., *Science and Religion: A Historical Introduction*
- Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate over Science and Religion*
- Bible (any version)

The majority of the readings are in the course reader. On the syllabus, reading assignments in the reader are marked (R).
Class Schedule:

| Jan   | 29   | Introduction to the Class |

**Unit 1: Galileo and Thinking Historically**

| 31    | Feb  | Background to Galileo (Ferngren, Chs. 3, 4, Augustine (R), Ptolemy (R)) |
| 5     | 7    | Galileo I (Ferngren, Ch. 7, pp. 105-113; Joshua 10:12; Ecclesiastes 1:4-6; Psalm 19; Galileo’s Letter to the Grand Duchess, Finocchiaro, 87-118) |
| 12    | 14   | Galileo II (Galileo on the Tides, in Finnochiaro 119-133) |
| 12    |      | Debate: Galileo’s Trial  
**Debate Assessment Due.** |

**Unit 2: God and Nature**

| 19    | 21   | William Paley (Ferngren Chs. 13 and 15; Paley (R)) |
| 21    | 26   | Hume (Ferngren 168-9; Hume, *Dialogues on Natural Religion* (R)) |
| 26    | 28   | Turn to the East (Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (R)) |
| 28    |      | Newton vs. Liebniz (Leibinz-Clarke correspondence (R); Ferngren Ch. 12 and pp. 163-168 and 234-238) |
| 5     | 7    | Materialism (Tyndall’s Belfast Address, (R)) |
| 7     |      | Debate: God and Nature.  
**Debate Assessment Due.** |

**Unit 3: Evolution and religion**

| 12    | 14   | An Old Earth (Ferngren Ch. 14; Genesis 1-3; Chambers, *Vestiges* (R); Review of Cuvier (R)) |
| 14    |      | Darwin (Ferngren Ch. 16, 17; Darwin, selection from *Origin of Species* (R), Darwin, “Religious Belief” (R), Wilberforce and Sedgwick (R)) |
| 26    | 28   | Evolution and Man (Wallace, “Limits” (R); Darwin, *Descent of Man* (R)) |
| 28    |      | Christian Darwinism (Mivart, “On the Genesis of Species” (R); Asa Gray, “Compatibility of evolution and religion,” (R); Powell, "Validation of religion." (R); McCosh, “Religious Aspects” (R)) |
| 2     |      | Evolution of religion (“This is your brain on God” (R); *The God Gene* (R)) |

March 19-21 Spring Break
4 Debate: Evolution and religion
Debate Assessment Due.

Unit 4: The roles of science and religion
9 The Battlefield of Science and Religion (Huxley, “Orthodoxy scotched if not slain,” (R); Leslie Stephen, "Spreading agnosticism," (R); Huxley, "Science and church policy" (R); A.D. White, “History of the warfare of science with theology” (R))
11 Fundamentalism (James Orr, “Holy Scripture and Modern Negations” (R); and Larson (chs.2, 3, 4)
16 The Scopes Monkey Trial (Larson (chs. 5, 7, 9; skim 6 and 8)
Project proposal due.
18 Creation science and Intelligent Design (Morris, “Scientific creationism” (R); Behe “Molecular machines” (R))
23 Liberal religion and science (Fosdick, "Shall the fundamentalists win?" (R); Einstein (R); Raymo (R))
25 Debate: Roles of Science and Religion.
Debate Assessment Due.

Unit 5: The Nature of Life
30 Descartes (Descartes’ Discourse and Treatise on Man (R); Ferngren Ch. 11)
May 2 Disease, healing, and prayer (Robertson, “Thanksgiving Day” (R); Stannard, The God Experiment (R); “Can Prayer Heal?” New York Times (R))
7 The anthropic principle and life in the universe (Will, “The Gospel from Science” (R); Davies, The Accidental Universe (R); Consolmagno, "Would you baptize an extraterrestrial?" (R))
9 Ecotheology

Final exam date: Debate: Nature of life
Debate assessment due.