

Science and Religion in American Culture

An Undergraduate Course

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[contact information]

Course Description

This course engages the myriad ways science and religion interact in American culture, though it will be of particular interest to undergraduate students of Religious Studies, American Studies, and/or history of science. In addition to reading secondary sources and academic commentary, we will examine cultural resources such as films, journalistic pieces, and digital media in our exploration of the topic. The time period we cover dates roughly from the nation's founding to the present day, but we approach the topic more from a cultural studies angle than a strictly historical one. While giving due time to the "conflict thesis" of the "warfare" between science and religion, this course aims to complicate this paradigm by focusing on the many ways science and religion interact productively and collaboratively, sharing language, borrowing tropes, and/or awarding each other distinct space. We cover topics such as evolution and creationism, religion in the atomic age, "scientific" religions, and religious dimensions of science. Class meetings will be largely discussion-based with occasional lectures to clarify or expand upon readings. Students will develop a research project in which they explore in depth a cultural moment or artifact through the themes of the class.

Course Objectives

In this course, students will gain a thorough and nuanced understanding of the historical interactions between science and religion in American and an understanding of the theoretical relation between these categories. Although a number of the writers featured in the course present their own theories as to the relationship between science and religion, it is mostly through exploring historical moments of conflict, interaction, and exchange that students will theorize the relationship between the two overlapping domains. We will ask questions such as: Is there an inherent conflict between science and religion as two different ways of orienting to the world and organizing experience? When, historically, has this conflict played out, and when has it been challenged? How strictly determined are the boundaries between the categories of religion and science? At what points do boundaries between science and religion seem particularly firm, and when do they seem flexible? How does the public understand the relationship between religion and science, and to what effect? How do science and religion mix with commerce in American culture? And how might these categories be implicated in the so-called "culture wars"?

Course Standards, Policies, & Requirements

Attendance and Preparedness

25%

Attendance is required. Students are requested to notify me as soon as possible should they foresee needing to miss a class for extenuating circumstances. Absences are dealt with according to the situation, but unexcused or explained absences will directly affect the participation grade (5% for every missed class). Lateness is frowned upon; expect to experience a stink-eye the likes of which

will make your skin crawl. Excessive and/or repeated lateness will result in uncomfortable conversations and will start to affect your grade like absences. Finally, students are expected to have completed assigned readings for every class, and should come to class with relevant questions or comments in mind so as to be able to engage and should we have in discussion time.

Short Response Papers

30%

There are ten weeks in the quarter, and students are asked to submit six thoughtful 1-2 page responses throughout the quarter. One should be submitted on or before [date] (the end of Part One). This can be a valuable opportunity to explore any materials or concepts that students might want to develop later; it also lets me know that students are reading critically and thoughtfully. Each response is worth 5% of this portion of the grade.

Midterm Proposal

10%

The midterm is a 2-3 page (double-spaced, 12-pt font) proposal of your final paper, due [date].

Final Paper

35%

The final will be 10-12 pages, due by [date]. Students are welcome (and encouraged) to meet with me to explore and discuss topics.

Due dates and times are firm; papers will only be accepted late if students have discussed circumstances prior with me.

Academic Integrity

Students must comply with the University's regulations regarding academic honesty; if you are unsure as to what these standards are, please consult the student handbook/website or speak with the instructor prior to completion of assignments. The minimum penalty for academic dishonesty will be loss of credit on the assignment.

Overview of Grading

Class Participation and Preparedness	25%
Short Response Papers (6)	30%
Midterm Proposal (2-3 pgs)	10%
Final Paper (10-12 pgs)	35%

Course Materials

Catherine Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (Yale University Press, 2007).

James Gilbert, *Redeeming Culture: American Religion in an Age of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

Canvas: Readings will be posted on Canvas. This site will also include links to the films and other media included for the class

Course Schedule

PART ONE: CONFLICT AND CRITIQUE

“The history of Science [sic] is not a mere record of isolated discoveries; it is a narrative of the conflict of two contending powers, the expansive force of the human intellect on

one side, and the compression arising from traditional faith and human interests on the other.”

John William Draper, *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science* (1874)

Week 1

Class 1: Introduction to Science and Religion

- “An Overview of the Issues,” in Paul Kurtz, ed., *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?* (New York: Prometheus, 2003), 11-24.

Class 2: The Conflict Thesis

- Andrew Dickson White, *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, Introduction & Chapter 1 <<http://www.aren.org/prison/documents/religion/Misc/History%20of%20the%20Warfare%20of%20Science%20with%20Theology%20in%20Christendom--Andrew%20Dickson%20White.pdf>>
- John William Draper, *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science* (1874), Preface & Chapter 1 <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1185/1185-h/1185-h.htm>>

Week 2:

Class 1: Evolution and Creationism

- Ronald Numbers, “Creationism in 20th-Century America,” *Science* 218: 4572 (1982), 538-544.
- Peter Williams, “Creation Museum,” *Material Religion* 4:3 (2008), 373-375.
- View: Bill Nye and Ken Ham Debate (until 1:30) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6kgvhG3AkI>>

Class 2: Evolution and Creationism

- Film: *Inherit the Wind* (1960)

Week 3:

Class 1: Religion and Nuclear Science

- James Gilbert, *Redeeming Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) Introduction and Chapter 3.

Class 2: Religion and Warfare

- *God and the H-Bomb* (New York: Bellmeadows Press, 1961).
 - “The Nature of the Present Crisis,” 22-24
 - “The Power of Self-Destruction.” Paul Tillich, 35-36
 - “Concern for Peace,” Pope Pius XII, 125
 - “Is Nuclear War Justifiable?” Fulton J Sheen, 144-147
- Lauren Markoe, “Drones make war too easy, too remote, faith leaders say,” *Religion News Service*, 11 Feb 2015, <<http://www.religionnews.com/2015/02/11/drones-make-war-easy-remote-faith-leaders-say/>>

PART TWO: DIALOG & APPROPRIATION

Week 4

Class 1: Mesmerism, Magnetism: Early Scientific Religions

- Catherine Albanese, “Communion of Spirits,” in *A Republic of Mind and Spirit* (Yale University Press, 2007), 190-233.
- Jeremy Stolow, “The Spiritual Nervous System: Reflection on a Magnetic Cord Designed for Spirit Communication,” in *Deus in Machina*, ed. Jeremy Stolow (Fordham University Press, 2012), 83-116.

Class 2: Spiritualism, Christian Science, Theosophy: Scientific Religions “Arrive”

- Albanese, “Spirits Reformed and Reconstituted,” 257-300.

Week 5

Class 1: Sermons from Science: Scientific and Religious Training

- Gilbert, *Redeeming Culture*, Chapters 5 and 6.

Class 2: Performing Science and Religion

- Fred Nadis, “The Missionaries,” in *Wonder Shows: Performing Science, Magic, and Religion in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 179-210.
- Gilbert, *Redeeming Culture*, Chapters 7 and 8.

Week 6

Class 1: Science of Mind/Mind-Cure (Phrenology)

- Lisle Dalton, “Phrenology and Religion in Antebellum American and Whitmans’ *Leaves of Grass*,” *Mickle Street Review* 15 (2002) <
<http://micklestreet.rutgers.edu/archives/Issue%2015/essays/Dalton.htm>>

Class 2: Science of Mind/Mind-Cure (Scientology)

- Watch “Dianetics: An Introduction,” on Scientology.org <
http://www.scientology.org/what-is-dianetics/basic-principles-of-scientology/dianetics-understanding-the-mind.html?video-play=dn_intro>
- William S. Bainbridge, “Science and Religion: The Case of Scientology” in *The Future of New Religious Movements*

Week 7

Class 1: “Proving” religion through science

- William James, “Lecture 1: Religion and Neurology,” in *Varieties of Religious Experience*.
- Tracey Cho, “The Psychologizing of Religion in William James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience*,” *The Harvard Brain* 14 (1996).

Class 2: “Proving” religion through science

- “Long-Awaited Medical study Questions the Power of Prayer,” *The New York Times*, 31 March 2006.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/31/health/31pray.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0>
- “Can Prayer Heal?” WebMd Feature
<http://www.webmd.com/balance/features/can-prayer-heal>
- “Scientists Photograph Energy Field Leaving Body at Death, According to New Study” (2014) <<http://www.spiritscienceandmetaphysics.com/scientists-photograph-energy-field-leaving-body-at-death-according-new-study/>>

- Wendy Cadge, “Possibilities and Limits of Medical Science: Debates Over Double-Blind Clinical Trials of Intercessory Prayer,” *Zygon* 47:1 (2012), 43-64.

PART III: RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF SCIENCE

“Science is not only compatible with spirituality; it is a profound source of spirituality. When we recognize our place in an immensity of light-years and in the passage of ages, when we grasp the intricacy, beauty, and subtlety of life, then that soaring feeling, that sense of elation and humility combined, is surely spiritual.”

Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*

Week 8

Class 1: Religious Naturalism

- Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) Introduction and Chs. 1-4.

Class 2: Religious Naturalism

- Goodenough, *Sacred Depths of Nature*, Ch 5-12.

Week 9

Class 1: Artificial Intelligence

- Robert Geraci, “Apocalyptic AI: Religion and the Promise of Artificial Intelligence,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76:1 (2008), 138-166.

Class 2: Artificial Intelligence

- Watch: *AI* (2001)

ADDENDUM: THE SCIENTIST IN AMERICAN CULTURE

Week 10

Class 1

- Elaine Howard Ecklund and Christopher P. Scheitle, “Religion among Academic Scientists: Distinctions, Disciplines, and Demographics,” *Social Problems* 54:2 (2007), 289-307.

Class 2

- Watch: *Bones*, “The Man in the Morgue,” Season 1 Episode 19.
- (optional) *Bones*, “A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood,” Season 5, Episode 4
- (optional) *Bones*, “The Shot in the Dark,” Season 8, Episode 15
- (optional) *House*: “Unfaithful,” Season 5, Episode 15

Final Paper Due [date]

Thanks for taking “Science and Religion in American Culture”! Enjoy your break and stay in touch.