

PHI 2740  
Science and Religion  
Spring 2021  
D1 hour  
Dr. Shatz  
Stern College for Women

## COURSE OUTLINE

This course focuses on differing models for understanding the relationship between religion and science, with emphasis on how the models fare in the light of contemporary thinking in science, philosophy, and religion. Sample questions include: How does science relate to religion? Do the domains mostly conflict? Do they mostly converge? Are they separate “nonoverlapping magisteria” (as biologist Stephen Jay Gould put it) directed to different questions? How do the different models handle specific challenges to religion, such as evolutionary theory and materialism?

**Course objectives:** It is anticipated that you will

- Familiarize yourself with the various sides of each topic below and the arguments for and against each position.
- Familiarize yourself with important thinkers who have addressed the topics.
- Enhance your ability to construct arguments of your own, both critical and constructive.
- Enhance your ability to communicate clearly, systematically, and critically.
- Apply your understanding of the issues discussed in the course to concrete social challenges in both America and abroad.

### Texts

The texts you should buy for the course or have readily accessible are :

1. James E. Huchingson (ed.), *Religion and the Natural Sciences: The Range of Engagement* (Harcourt-Brace, 1993) (henceforth abbreviated 'H'). This is the main text; we will be examining the selections closely.
2. John Haught, *Science and Religion: From Conflict to Conversation* (Paulist Press, 1995).
3. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, any edition)

Other assigned readings will be placed on reserve, usually on E-Res (electronic reserve). However, *do not expect every reading to be on E-RES*; sometimes the library cannot secure permission from the copyright holder and therefore cannot place the reading on E-RES. In those cases, you'll have to obtain the item (book or pamphlet) from behind the library desk.

In the second half of the course we will be making extensive use of David Shatz (ed.) *Philosophy and Faith*, which will be on reserve.

*You are expected to bring the books or articles necessary for each class to the class. If you don't, you will be penalized.* I'll specify which you must bring to a particular class, and which you do not have to bring to class.

### **Course requirements**

- Course requirements: midterm, final, two papers. The two exams will count for 60% of the grade, the two papers and short assignments for 40%. Of that 40%, the first paper (2-3pp.) will count 10% of the grade, while the second will count 30%. However, good class participation (which will certainly be facilitated by good preparation for each class) will help your grade. Poor attendance, failure to bring books and readings to class, being distracted during class (e. g. looking at your cellphone [see the end of this syllabus for exceptions]), -- such neglect or inattention will hurt your grade. I will occasionally take attendance not only of people, but of books and readings—that is, I'll check whether you have the required books and readings.
- In addition to submitting a hard copy of the papers, you will have to submit an electronic file to the anti-plagiarism program [turnitin.com](http://turnitin.com). The course number for Turnitin is 27950913 and the password is *science* (how clever!).
- The midterm date for all D hour courses is Monday, March 8<sup>th</sup>.
- The final exam date for all D hour courses is Friday May 14<sup>th</sup> (morning)
- You must have the readings each day.
- Please note that the course outline below does not indicate how many weeks will be devoted to each topic. That decision will be made after we determine the pace of the class during the first few weeks. It is possible that some topics will be skipped.

Grading system: A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72; D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; D-: 60-62; F: below 60.

### **My availability**

My office hour is club hour (Wednesdays,2:45-3:30) and by appointments, which are easy to make thanks to Zoom.

### **Accommodations for students with disabilities**

Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting disability-related accommodations should make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services, rkohn1@yu.edu, (646) 592-4132, during the first week of class. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please contact Dr. Kohn to ensure the successful implementation of those accommodations.”

### **The Writing Center**

Students seeking additional writing support are encouraged to visit the Stern Writing Center. Please consult: <https://yu.edu/writing-centers/beren/> to learn more about the Center and to request a appointment.

### **A note from the library:**

Get all the support you need with research for your courses. The **Yeshiva University Libraries**([library.yu.edu](http://library.yu.edu)) offer individualized consultations that will help you locate and cite journal articles, books, and other credible sources for solid papers, presentations, and reports. Skilled information-seekers succeed academically and in the workplace. Prepare for the future by contacting the library at [https://library.yu.edu/ask the library](https://library.yu.edu/ask_the_library).

### **Academic integrity and honesty**

Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated under any circumstances. If a student wishes to borrow the ideas, terms, statements, or knowledge of others it must be appropriately cited in accordance with APA (6<sup>th</sup> ed.) guidelines

## **Assignments**

### **I. Introduction: Background – Why the topic is important: The science-religion encounter in history and in contemporary society**

No assigned readings

### **II. Models for understanding the science-religion relationship**

**Two stories about reality:** Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership: Science, Religion, and the Search for Meaning*, 19-27.

**Four models of the relationships:** Haught, ch. 1 (pp. 9-26); see also p. 204, note 1; ch. 2 (pp. 27-46) (Recommended: Stephen Jay Gould, "Nonoverlapping Magisteria," [http://www.stephenjaygould.org/library/gould\\_noma.html](http://www.stephenjaygould.org/library/gould_noma.html))

**Heliocentrism and the Bible:** Galileo, *Letter to Castelli*, in *The Galileo Affair*, ed. M. Finocchiaro, 49-54

**More on non-literal interpretation:** Moses Maimonides, Commentary on the Mishnah, *Sanhedrin*, X, introduction, as found in Isadore Twersky (ed.), *A Maimonides Reader*, pp. 407-409

**Religious Existentialism:** Martin Buber, "I and You," in H67-70

**Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's dialectical approach:** Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (Jason Aronson, 1992). In the 1992 Doubleday edition, the pages are 1-33, 51-52, 79-90, 109-112. If you use a different edition, let me know and I'll supply the equivalent page numbers.

**The equivalent pages in the Random House edition are:** 1-32, 49-50, 75-86, 103-106. The Random House edition may be accessed on the site of the RCA (Rabbinical Council of America) at <http://traditionarchive.org/news/article.cfm?id=105067>

**Recommended: More on the conflict and independence (or contrast) models:** Ian Barbour, *Religion and Science*, pp. 77-89.

**Recommended:** Rabbi Natan Slifkin, *The Challenge of Creation*, chs. 6-8

### III. Contemporary philosophy of science and its application to religion

A. The "Demarcation" problem in the philosophy of science

**The falsifiability criterion:** Karl Popper, "Falsification," in H142-46

**The use of falsifiability in today's evolution controversy:** Michael Ruse, "Witness Testimony Sheet," in Ruse (ed.), *But Is It Science?* (Prometheus, 1996), pp. 301-306

**Against the quest for criteria of demarcation:** Larry Laudan, "The Demise of the Demarcation Problem," in Ruse (ed.), *But Is It Science?* 337-50

B. The impact of Thomas Kuhn

**Kuhn reading:** Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

#### Pages in Kuhn:

SSR: 3 (noncumulative nature of science; see also 7, lines 9-11);

p. 5 bottom (on normal science);

pp. 10-15 (normal science, paradigms, examples of paradigms and paradigm shifts);

46 lower half-47 no rules—see also his paper on Objectivity (mentioned below)

71-72 and 99 (phlogiston example);

77-78 against Popper (how anomalies are treated);

92-93, 94 last 2 paragraphs—logic alone can't settle dispute; analogy between political and scientific revolution;

98 paradigm destruction, theories not cumulative

99 phlogiston

114-15 and 122 gestalt switch;

150 last paragraph-153 and 158-59—what produces the revolution; debates over paradigms, why people do or do not accept the new paradigm. Notice 158—faith

159—last two sentences on Priestly

170-71

***Scientific objectivity according to Kuhn:*** Kuhn, "Objectivity, Value Judgment, and Theory Choice," in *The Essential Tension* (U. of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 320-339.

***Applying Kuhn to religion:*** Barbour, *Religion and Science*, pp. 106-10, 124-32 top

#### IV. Explaining events: How does God act in the world according to theists?

**Occasionalism:** Nicholas Malebranche, *The Search After Truth*, 6:2:3, in Steven Nadler (ed.) *Nicholas Malebranche: Philosophical Selections*, 92-98.

***A Jewish occasionalist:*** Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, "Nature and Miracle," *Strive for Truth*, vol. 2, 237-56

***Maimonides's pragmatism:*** Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Idolatry* 11:16; commentary to Mishnah, Pesachim 4:9; *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Deot* (Laws of Character Traits) 4:20

***Nahmanides-- nature as punishment:*** Moses Nahmanides, biblical commentary to Lev. 26:11, Deut. 18:9,

**Recommended:** R. Slifkin, chs. 1-5

#### V. Belief in miracles

***David Hume's objections to belief in miracles:*** David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, sect. X ("Of Miracles"), in Shatz, 395-401

***John Stuart Mill's objection to belief in miracles:*** John Stuart Mill, *Three Essays on Religion*, 228-32 in Shatz, 409-11

*A reply to Mill*: David Johnson, *Hume, Holism, and Miracles*, 38-45, in Shatz, 411-13

*The response of “The improbable can happen naturally”*: Richard Dawkins, “Miracles and Probability,” in H170-72

**Recommended**: C. S. Lewis, "The Naturalist and the Supernaturalist," in H127-30 (An analysis of the debate.)

**Recommended**: Paul Davies, "Do Miracles Exist?," in H173-80. (An analysis of the Debate.)

## VI. The design argument and cosmological argument in light of current scientific theories

*Hume’s classic objections to the design argument*: David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, pts. II, IV, V, and VII, as excerpted in Shatz, 206-22

*The fine-tuning/anthropic principle argument*: Stephen Davis, excerpt from *God, Reason & Theistic Proofs*, in Shatz, 222-29

*The fine-tuning/anthropic principle argument (continued)*: Nathan Aviezer, “The Anthropic Principle,” in Aviezer, *Fossils and Faith*, 21-37 (The most relevant part is his analogy to the card game on pp. 35-37. The earlier parts, however, give examples that further illustrate Davis’s argument.)

*Against the fine-tuning/ anthropic principle argument* John L. Mackie, excerpt from *The Miracle of Theism*, in Shatz, 235-37

**Overview**: Haight, pp. 100-119

**Recommended**: R. Slifkin, pp. 286-290

**Recommended**:: Robert Hambourger, "The Argument from Design," in Shatz, 229-235

## VII. Contemporary challenges

A. Evolution and naturalism

*Some options*: Abraham I. Kook, *Letters (Iggerot ha-Reayah)* , #89, #91 (trans. T. Feldman);

*Are evolution and theism compatible?: Guided evolution* Alvin Plantinga, *Where The Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* pp. 1-7 (Recommended:

Plantinga, "When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible," excerpted in Shatz, 342-54 [a longer development of Plantinga's ideas]

**Response to Plantinga:** Howard van Till, "When Faith and Reason Cooperate," excerpted in Shatz, 354-59 (This is a response to the longer version of Plantinga listed above as "recommended.")

***Are evolution and theism compatible? (continued):*** Haught, chap. 3, pp. 47-71

***Why would the Bible not give accurate science?:*** Peter Van Inwagen, "Genesis and Evolution," as excerpted in Shatz, 359-66.

***An argument against naturalism:*** Alvin Plantinga, *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?*, pp. 16-23 (book co-authored with Daniel Dennett, but Dennett is Plantinga's opponent in the book)

***Evolutionary theory and ideologies: Philip Kitcher, Abusing Science,*** 186-202 (co-authored with Patricia Kitcher)

***Sociobiology and ethics:*** Michael Ruse and Edward O. Wilson, "The Evolution of Ethics," in Huchingson 308-12

***Overview:*** Haught, *Science & Religion*, 49-63, 72-74

***Recommended:*** Slifkin, *The Challenge of Creation*, chs. 9-16, 22-23

***Recommended: A response to Ruse and Wilson:*** Arthur Peacocke, "God and the Selfish Genes," in Huchingson 329-36

***Recommended:*** Philip Kitcher, *Vaulting Ambition: Sociobiology and the Quest for Human Nature*, 395-434

B. Materialism:

***Problems and approaches:***

Haught ch. 4

Barbour 258-63.

