

RELG 472 Religion and Science, Human Questions

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Required text:

Benjamin Zeller, *Protons and Prophets: New Religious Movements and Science in Late 20th Century America*

Required Readings, on Blackboard:

- Neil DeGrasse Tyson, excerpt from *Death by Black Hole and Other Cosmic Quandaries*
- Irving Hexam, “Learning to Live with Robots” (1980)
- Sherwin, “Golems in the Biotech Century” (2007)
- Excerpts, *Neuroscience and Religion*
- Excerpt, *Biopolitics*

Course overview:

Religion and science have been divorced since the Enlightenment placed reason as the primary motivator for constructing society, intellectual life, nations, and so on. While religions got relegated to the intellectual back room, the reality is that we humans are whole beings, who operate (sometimes) in irrational ways. The most famous American fight between religion and science took place at the Scopes Monkey Trial, when teaching evolution in a public school was challenged in court. If religious people decades ago could just ignore something like the theory of evolution, the 21st century does not have that option. The questions that religion and science raise today can no longer be dismissed. When does human life begin? When is the end of life? Should we do anything to alter the flow of human existence? Who caused global climate change? If there are scientific practices potentially detrimental to human life (from nuclear plants to fracking to use of cell phones) how do we decide what to stop? And who should pay to clean up the brown fields left behind? Is being gay a personal choice or is there scientific data to prove otherwise? What do religions have to say about these very real situations?

This course may raise more questions than answers but the need to explore the relationships between religion and science for our times is critical. The need to make it personal and think about the questions in terms of our humanness is especially important as science and technology become the new gods of the 21st century. Or do they?

The course is divided into three sections. First we will look at general understandings of science and religion and how the human questions are viewed; we will use science fiction review and interview methods to get some answers. We will then consider scholars from the science side, and from the side of religion. Finally, we will explore next questions and possible solutions.

Objectives: upon completion of the course, the student should:

- Clearly state the scope of science/religion divisions and questions and how these impact human life and meaning
- Recognize arguments on either side of the divide and identify strengths and weaknesses
- Recognize some growing edges of the discipline

Grading scale:

A	100-91
B	90-81
C+	80-75
C	74-65
D	64-55
F	54 and below

Class requirements:

These influence your final grade:

The readings selected for this class are demanding. Students must maintain the reading schedule.

NOTE: FOR EACH READING IN THIS SEMESTER, BE PREPARED TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS: HOW DOES THIS AUTHOR UNDERSTAND THE HUMAN? THE COMMUNITY/SOCIETY? SCIENCE? GOD?

Participation in class discussions

Attendance: we follow the university's attendance policy, which limits the number of absences. Your grade will be lowered significantly if you are absent more than 4 times.

University of South Carolina policy: "Absence from more than 10 percent of the scheduled class sessions, whether excused or unexcused, is excessive and the instructor may choose to exact a grade penalty for such absences. It is of particular importance that a student who anticipates absences in excess of 10 percent of the scheduled class sessions receives prior approval from the instructor before the last day to change schedule as published in the academic and refund calendars on the registrar's Web site (<http://registrar.sc.edu/>).

It must be emphasized that the "10 percent rule" stated above applies to both excused and unexcused absences. Faculty members should notify classes, specifically in the course syllabi, the attendance policy which they intend to follow in each class. It is also recommended that the faculty include a policy statement in their syllabi requesting students to meet with the instructor early in the semester to discuss the consequences of potential excessive absences due to participation in University-sponsored events."

Writing and Research requirements:

College level writing is critically important for this class. Your grade for the class will be at risk if you hand in late assignments, un-typed papers (except for in class assignments), plagiarized, undeveloped, etc. If you have any concerns about your own writing, make an appointment at the writing center.

For this course, the following are **NEVER** considered valid resources for research papers:

- Dictionaries
- Wikipedia
- Most encyclopedias

****When using on line sources, going through the USC library in order to locate scholarly articles is strongly suggested.**

Papers must be typed, double-spaced. Handwritten papers will not be accepted. Citations of sources are required. When needed, you must use a notation format -- MLA, Chicago, APA -- consistently throughout any paper. In addition, poor grammar and spelling can be grounds for lowering a grade. The aim in these restrictions is to develop college level, critically sharp papers that (really!) say what you mean them to say.

Because of the relationship between reading, class work, and group discussions, late papers are *seldom* accepted.

Assignments:

- Science fiction movie/book assignment: pick your top one (or two) science fiction movies or books.
2-page paper on Hexam, Sherman, and science fiction assignment. Analyze the works in terms of how the human is seen in the works? Is there value content? What is the value content? How is it constructed? (see writing and research requirements above) **20% of grade**
- Interview someone who is much older than you. What differences have science and/or technology made in their lives? What differences can they see from their parents' lives? Does this person think of these "good" or "bad" changes? See the following website for guidelines in conducting your interview and writing your paper:
http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html
2-page paper (see writing and research requirements above) **20% of grade**
- Look up "alternative" physics websites. There are several physicists who have begun to rethink science starting from quantum physics, and therefore, are finding new ways to think about religion. Spend some time finding some of these sources for in-class discussion. Turn in a page with the website/s addresses; remember to add your name to the sheet. **10% of grade**
- Short paper: 6-8 page research paper on food of the future (might include: religious food restrictions v. food shortages; population growth; genetically engineered food/seeds, human life, and religious thought). Consider this question: To what degree will human life and value change in the future with greater changes in food growing, processing, etc? You may decide to take a different focus, but clarify your argument/position. **(30% of grade)**
- Final exam will be an in-class writing assignment. You will need to be prepared to make your points clearly and defend your arguments with direct reference to course readings and discussions. **(20% of grade)**

Due dates and assignments:

Day	Date	Topic
1	TH, 8/23	Introduction
2	T, 8/28	Lecture: Defining religion
3	TH, 8/30	Lecture/ discussion: importance of VALUE in constructing humanness
	M, 9/3	Labor Day holiday – no classes
4	T, 9/4	Science fiction movie/book assignment – class discussion
5	TH, 9/6	Raising questions: “Learning to live with Robots”
6	T, 9/11	Raising questions: “Golems in the Biotech Century”
7	TH, 9/13	Interview results discussion – (<i>first writing assignment due</i>)
8	T, 9/18	Interview results discussion
9	TH, 9/20	Class discussion: Neil DeGrasse Tyson
10	T, 9/25	Class discussion: Neil DeGrasse Tyson
11	TH, 9/27	Discussion – (<i>Interview paper assignment due</i>)
12	T, 10/2	Discussion: <i>Biopolitics</i> excerpt
13	TH, 10/4	Discussion: alternative physics websites– (<i>list of alternative websites due beginning of class</i>)
14	T, 10/9	Discussion: alternative physics websites
15	TH, 10/11	Discussion: <i>Neuroscience and Religion</i>
16	T, 10/16	Discussion: <i>Neuroscience and Religion</i>
	TH, 10/18	Fall Break – no classes
17	T, 10/23	Zeller: Introduction
18	TH, 10/25	Zeller: Introduction
19	T, 10/30	Science, Technology impact on our humanness – discussion
20	TH, 11/1	Science, Technology impact on our humanness – discussion (<i>food paper due</i>)
	T, 11/6	General Election Day – no classes
21	TH, 11/8	Zeller, ch 1
22	T, 11/13	Zeller, ch 2
23	TH, 11/15	Zeller, ch 3
24	T, 11/20	Zeller, ch 4
	TH, 11/22	Thanksgiving Recess – no classes
25	T, 11/27	Zeller, ch 5
26	TH, 11/29	Zeller, ch 6
27	T, 12/4	Final class discussion: drawing conclusions, framing questions, comparing ideas
28	TH, 12/6	Final exam review

Relationship of Religion and Science with respect to critical questions of human life on our planet in the world as we know it today and anticipated possible changes and issues going into the future.