

Department of Religion  
Gustavus Adolphus College

**REL 253**  
**Science & Religion**

Fall 2018  
Prof. Samuel J. Kessler  
kessler@gustavus.edu

T/R  
10:30-11:50AM  
Old Main 004

Office Hours:  
Old Main 304D  
T/H 3-5PM  
(and by appointment)

Final Exam:  
Final Paper Due TBD

*Course Description*

**253 Science and Religion** (1 course) *The 400-year-old debate between science and religion seems poised for a fundamental change. Until recently it has presupposed a dualism between fact-based science and faith-based religion. This course will examine contemporary efforts to replace that dualism with dialogue. Sciences covered will include evolutionary biology, genetics, neuroscience, evolutionary psychology, quantum mechanics, and astrophysics. Religious questions covered will include God, creation, sin, human nature, consciousness, and eschatology, in both Christianity and [Judaism]. **HIPHI**, offered occasionally.*

*Course Introduction*

The interaction between religion and science is one of the most interesting and fraught issues in contemporary society. Some scholars trace the beginning of this divide as far back as the days of classical antiquity, seeing in the writings of pre-Socratic philosophers the foundations of a materialist worldview. Others place its origins with Galileo and Copernicus, in the Scientific Revolution and the beginning of European modernity. Still others see the great separation as only two or three centuries old, arising with the European Enlightenment, or even later, nearer to the end of the nineteenth century when Darwin's theories gained widespread acceptance. This course will survey this great debate, challenging some of its core assumptions, as well as continuing to ask the most fundamental and interesting questions about the very nature of "religion" and "science" themselves.

At one level, this course is an overview of existing theories and claims about religion and science. We will look at some of the classic case studies in religion-science history, as well as discuss the writings of the "New Atheists" and their opponents. In both the popular media and the world of scholarship, this front line is still very real. However, in this course we will also spend time with writings that step back from the fray, with people and ideas that attempt to find new languages or sets of principles that not only negate a "great clash" but also offer a more compelling vision of humanity's perennial quest for truth, knowledge, and meaning.

This course is divided into five units: (1) Positioning, (2) The New Atheists & An Alternative, (3) Two Classic Case Studies, (4) Attempting Solutions, and (5) Escaping the Attempt at Solutions. These units are meant to suggest pathways of thought, avenues of approach, along which we can develop our study of the interaction of religion and science. However, the readings in this course are not the end of the study of the relationship between religion and science. This class prepares students to engage with the intersection of religion and science through one's own lens, finding new texts and modes of thinking to explain, examine, and question a debate that has come to fundamentally define our intellectual era.

This course has no prerequisites. The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, including assignment due dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

**You may not use a laptop or smart phone in class.**  
**You may use an iPad or other tablet device for note-taking purposes only.**

### Guidelines & Policies

#### *Course Readings & Communications*

All readings for this course will be available either as a PDF document on Moodle or in the assigned course textbooks. You are required to buy all books listed as "Required Texts." Readings should be completed before the Tuesday lecture for the week that they are listed. *You must bring the required books to class on the days they will be discussed.*

You are responsible for checking your Gustavus email regularly for communications about the course.

#### *Accommodations Resource Policy*

Those who qualify under Gustavus policies and guidelines for reasonable accommodation should alert the professor privately at the start of the semester. Information concerning programs through College's Center for Academic Resources and Enhancement (CARE) can be found at [https://gustavus.edu/general\\_catalog/current/](https://gustavus.edu/general_catalog/current/).

#### *Assignment Policies*

All assignments are to be printed and submitted in class on the day they are due. You will be penalized 10% for each day a paper is late. Papers submitted over one week after the deadline will not be accepted. If you are ill or have a family emergency please contact the professor as soon as possible.

All assignments must be written in 12-point font, Times New Roman or Garamond, with 1-inch margins.

The Gustavus Writing Center provides helpful overviews and links for improving your writing. They also have appointment services available to help edit papers or discuss the writing process with a tutor. You can find more information on these services at <https://gustavus.edu/writingcenter/>.

*Note:* You should not expect a response from the professor about papers or exams beginning 24-hours prior to their due date.

### *University Honor Code*

The Undergraduate Honor Code states: “*On my honor, I pledge that I have not given, received, or tolerated others’ use of unauthorized aid in completing this work.*” For additional information about the Honor Code, visit [https://gustavus.edu/general\\_catalog/current/](https://gustavus.edu/general_catalog/current/).

### Required Texts

- Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Mariner 2008) [\$16.95]
- Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (Twelve 2009) [\$16.00]
- Marilynne Robinson, *Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self* (Yale 2011) [\$16.50]
- Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership: God, Science, and the Search for Meaning* (Schocken 2014) [\$16.95]
- “God’s Not Dead” (Lionsgate 2014) [\$3.99 on Amazon]
- “The Unbelievers” (Gravitas Ventures 2013) [\$2.99 on Amazon]
- “Questioning Darwin” (HBO 2014) [\$3.99 on Amazon]

### Course Assignments & Expectations

#### *Class Attendance & Participation*

Attendance will be taken during each class period. If you arrive late and attendance has already been taken you are responsible for alerting the professor to your presence. Arrivals more than ten minutes after class begins, or continuous tardiness, will be counted as absence. More than two unexcused absences will impact your final grade by 2% per absence. If you have more than six unexcused absences you cannot receive a course grade higher than a C. Please notify the professor as soon as possible for absences related to illness or family emergencies. For more information, the Gustavus Class Attendance Policy can be found at [https://gustavus.edu/general\\_catalog/current/](https://gustavus.edu/general_catalog/current/).

Class participation points are based on the following criteria: arriving in class on time; being awake and attentive during lecture; being responsive and active during discussions and small group activities; respectfully listening when others are speaking; and being engaged in the course without checking your mobile devices. Failure to meet these criteria will result in the loss of participation points throughout the semester.

#### *Contemporary Media Paper* (3 pages, double-spaced)

This first paper addresses the current politics of the religion-science debate. You must find two articles from the media *written in the past year*. These articles can come from a news or culture website, a religious or secular newspaper, a magazine, or any other media genre of your choice. Your task is to discuss how the story of religion and science is portrayed in each article; scrutinize the author’s stance and language; and put the article into the larger context of its intended audience: Whom does it wish to persuade? Who might be its defenders and detractors? Be sure to include the *full citation information* for each article at the end of your paper.

**(Due Thursday, September 20)**

*Film Response Papers* (2 pages, double-spaced)

During the semester you will write two response papers about films. For each paper you must answer the question: What does “religion and science” mean in this film? Your answer must use the evidence you see on screen (including lines of dialogue, specific imagery or locations, particular vocabulary) to prove your answer. You must write one paper on “God’s Not Dead;” you may choose either “The Unbelievers” or “Questioning Darwin” for the second paper.

**(Due Thursday, September 27 and Thursday, November 1)**

*Debate Analysis* (3 pages, double-spaced)

For this assignment, you will be given a list of internet links to contemporary science and religion debates. Your responsibility is to listen and/or watch carefully to the debate, and then write an analytical paper that discusses each side, the key points made, the language used, the types of evidence given, and the overall tone of the debate.

**(Due Tuesday, November 20)**

*Final Project: Religion & Science Interview Podcast* (5-10 minutes) *and Analysis Paper* (3-4 pages double-spaced)

This assignment is divided into two parts: an interview/conversation and a response paper.

For the interview, you must find someone (e.g. a friend, roommate, parent, teacher, neighbor) who is willing to discuss with you his/her ideas on the relation between religion and science. You should compose a list of preliminary questions to ask this person, but you may certainly allow the conversation to flow freely if that occurs. (We will discuss a list of good introductory questions in class.) You must record this interview (which should be between 5 and 10 minutes in length) and save it as an mp3 file to upload into Moodle. You should be able to record your interview on any smart phone, computer, or tablet. Should you need assistance in creating an mp3 file, please contact the office of Technology Services, which can be found at [https://gustavus.edu/gts/Technology\\_Services](https://gustavus.edu/gts/Technology_Services).

After you have conducted the interview, you must write a 3-4 page (double-spaced) response paper, analyzing the way your interviewee describes his/her beliefs or ideas about religion and science. Focus on such things as word choice, descriptive examples, and on whether this person seems to be having personal experiences (e.g. alone) or ones rooted in a place (e.g. church, laboratory) or a time (e.g. holidays, family gatherings, classroom). You should quote from the interviewee in your paper and note the setting of the interview and how comfortable/uncomfortable your interviewee seemed to be when discussing these topics. You must upload this document along with the mp3 to Moodle.

**(Due Thursday, December 13)**

Grading

Class Attendance & Participation	15
Contemporary Media Paper	15
Film Response Papers	20
Debate Analysis	20
Final Project	<u>30</u>
	100

ScheduleWeek 1: September 4-6

Introduction: Religion and Science in Contemporary Society

*Reading*

- Thomas Dixon, *Science and Religion*, pp. 1-17 (Moodle)

*One: Positioning*Week 2: September 11-13

Historicizing the Religion-Science Divide

*Reading*

- Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion*, pp. 1-19 (Moodle)

**\*No class: Tuesday, September 11 (Rosh Hashana)**Week 3: September 18-20

The Option of Natural Theology

*Reading*

- John H. Brooke. "Natural Theology," pp. 140-153 (Moodle)

*Suggested Reading*

- John H. Brooke and Geoffrey Cantor, *Reconstructing Nature*, pp. 176-206 (Moodle)

**\*Contemporary Media Paper Due: Thursday, September 20**Week 4: September 25-27

What Religion Could Mean in a Scientific Context

*Reading*

- Bruno Latour, *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*, pp. 99-123 (Moodle)
- Watch: "God's Not Dead" (Lionsgate 2014) (Amazon)

*Suggested Reading*

- Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture*, pp. 221-248 (Moodle)

**\*No class: Tuesday, September 25 (Sukkot)****\*First Film Response Paper Due: Thursday, September 27***Two: The New Atheists & An Alternative*Week 5: October 2-4

Religion as Destruction (&amp; Child Abuse I)

*Reading*

- Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great*, pp. 1-36, 63-71, 217-228, 277-283

Week 6: October 9-11

Religion as Illusion (&amp; Child Abuse II)

*Reading*

- Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, pp. 137-189, 317-387
- Watch: “The Unbelievers” (Gravitas Ventures 2013) (Amazon)

Week 7: October 16-18

Religion as Transcendence

*Reading*

- Abraham J. Heschel, *Man is Not Alone*, pp. 35-66 (Moodle)

*Three: Two Classic Case Studies*Week 8: October 25

Galileo, Authority, and the Right to Truth

*Reading*

- Thomas Dixon, *Religion and Science*, pp. 18-36 (Moodle)

*Suggested Readings*

- William R. Shea, “Galileo and the Church” (Moodle)
- David C. Lindberg, “Galileo, the Church, and the Cosmos” (Moodle)

**\*Fall Break: October 20-23**Week 9: October 30-November 1

Of Men and Monkeys

*Reading*

- Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, pp. 3-10, 11-30, 225-266 (Moodle)
- Watch: “Questioning Darwin” (HBO 2014) (Amazon)

*Suggested Reading*

- William Jennings Bryan, “The Last Speech” (Moodle)

**\*Second Film Response Paper Due: Thursday, November 1***Four: Attempting Solutions*Week 10: November 6-8

A Jewish Theologian and the Problem of Religion and Science

*Reading*

- Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership: God, Science, and the Search for Meaning*, pp. 101-205

Week 11: November 13-15

Scientists and the Problem of Religion and Science

*Readings*

- Stephen Jay Gould, “Nonoverlapping Magisteria” (Moodle)
- Edward O. Wilson, *The Meaning of Human Existence*, 147-158, 173-187 (Moodle)

Week 12: November 20

## Enchantment and Disenchantment

*Reading*

- Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 1-22 (Moodle)

*Suggested Reading*

- Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 146-158, 539-593 (Moodle)

**\*Debate Analysis Due: Tuesday, November 20**

**\*Thanksgiving Break: November 21-25**

*Five: Escaping the Attempt at Solution*Week 13: November 27-29

## Humanity and Being

*Readings*

- Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Who is Man?*, pp. 50-80 (Moodle)
- Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love*, pp. 122-153 (Moodle)

Week 14: December 4-6

## Existence and Being

*Reading*

- Marilynne Robinson, *Absence of Mind*, pp. ix-xviii, 1-29, 109-135

Week 15: December 11-13

## Toward a Humanist Future

*Reading*

- Leon Wieseltier, "Among the Disrupted" (Moodle)

**Final Project**  
**Due Thursday, December 13**

"Yet again it is demonstrated that monotheistic religion is a plagiarism of a plagiarism of a heresy of a heresy, of an illusion of an illusion, extending all the way back to a fabrication of a few nonevents."

Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great*

"It is the theoretician, who, rather than standing face to face with the mystery, holds his mental mirrors against it, making myths of mysteries, computing dogmas of enigmas and worshipping the image in the mirrors."

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man is Not Alone*

Further Reading

## Some Noteworthy Books on Religion and Science

- Jerry A. Coyne, *Faith Verses Fact: Why Science and Religion are Incompatible* (Penguin, 2015).
- Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meaning of Life* (Simon & Schuster, 1995).
- Daniel C. Dennett and Alvin Plantinga, *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?*, Point/Counterpoint Series (Oxford, 2011).
- Paul Feyerabend, *Conquest of Abundance: A Tale of Abstraction versus the Richness of Being* (Chicago, 2001).
- Adam Frank, *The Constant Fire: Beyond the Science vs. Religion Debate* (California, 2009).
- Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (Oxford, 2000).
- Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (Norton, 2012).
- Sam Harris, *The End of Faith* (Norton, 2005).
- Peter Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science* (Cambridge, 2008).
- John F. Haught, *Is Nature Enough: Meaning and Truth in the Age of Science* (Cambridge, 2006).
- Armand Marie Leroi, *The Lagoon: How Aristotle Invented Science* (Viking, 2014).
- Lawrence Lipking, *What Galileo Saw: Imagining the Scientific Revolution* (Cornell, 2014).
- Kenneth R. Miller, *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* (Harper, 2007).
- Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford, 2012).
- Alvin Plantinga, *Where The Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (Oxford, 2011).
- John Polkinghorne, *Science and Religion in Quest of Truth* (Yale, 2012).
- Loyal Rue, *Nature is Enough: Religious Naturalism and the Meaning of Life* (SUNY, 2011).
- Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (Vintage, 1998).