

## SII 330-10: Science and Religion

### Contact Information

Room: Education 310

Time 2:40 – 4:25 pm, Thursday

Instructor: Stephen Pitts, SJ

Office Hours: SII Office Wednesdays 2-5pm and by appointment.

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### Science and Religion: Enemies, Strangers, or Partners?

The advance of technology has not reduced the role of religion in the present day; in contrast, it seems like we hear about it more than as fundamentalists and atheists wage war with each other. One group distrusts vaccines, evolution, and a great deal of modern science while the other sees religion as the source of all the evil and violence in the world. Trapped somewhere in the middle, we struggle to understand the conversation much less figure out where we stand.

In this course, we will begin with Ian Barbour's description of several approaches to the relationship between science and religion. Next we will read Francis Collins' account of how he integrates his Christian faith and his genetic research. Finally, we will place him in conversation with Richard Dawkins, a biologist and member of the New Atheist movement. Along the way, we analyze and critique their arguments in order to develop our own perspective on the meaning of science and religion in our lives.

### Required Texts (Available in physical or electronic format)

Ian G. Barbour. *When Science Meets Religion*. New York: Harper Collins, 2000.

Francis S. Collins. *The Language of God*. New York: Free Press, 2006.

Richard Dawkins. *The God Delusion*. Boston: Mariner Books, 2008.

## Course Requirements

1. Attendance
2. Homework (10%)
3. Personal Inventory (20%)
4. Midterm Reflection (20%)
5. Class Presentation (20%)
6. Final Project (30%)

### Attendance

Students are expected to attend class regularly and to be punctual in arrival. Any absence will result in one-third of a letter grade being deducted from the student's final grade. To avoid the grade penalty, a student must turn in a three-page summary of the readings by the next class. If a personal situation affects a student's ability to participate in class, the student should consult with the professor to make alternate arrangements.

**Homework (10%)**

Before the starred classes, students will answer a question about the readings on an online forum. These responses should be about one paragraph and will help the students to begin thinking about the material before the seminar discussion itself. These assignments cannot be made up.

**Personal Inventory (20%)**

As a first assignment, students will write a three-page essay that describes their scientific and religious background in light of Barbour's categories. They will describe past and present influences on their perspective and outline any outstanding questions as the course moves forward. The assignment will be due by **noon on September 17**.

**Class Presentation (20%)**

Every student will take a turn leading class discussion on one of the Dawkins chapters. The student will provide either a handout or an electronic presentation with the pertinent themes from the chapter and speak for about ten minutes. Then, the student will guide the seminar discussion for another thirty minutes. These presentations will be graded on how effectively the student presents the themes and elicits class discussion. After the presentation, the student will meet with the professor in his office hours to debrief.

**Midterm Reflection (20%)**

As a midterm assignment, students will write three pages, describing two themes from the course have affected their own thinking on these issues and highlighting one theme that they would like to continue to investigate as the course progresses. The assignment will be due by **noon on October 22**.

**Group Project (30%)**

Students will work in groups of two or three students to investigate one of the issues covered by Collins and Dawkins. On the last day of class, they will present on the issue using a variety of sources: a conversation with someone else, a piece of religious research, a personal experience, a piece of scientific research. Ultimately, they will choose which of Barbour's four models best summarizes their perspective and justify it. This assignment will be due by **noon on December 3**.

**In-Class Behavior**

The seminar format of this class requires that we be present—to the text, to each other, and ultimately to ourselves—as we engage in the ancient discipline of the communal search for truth. Cell phone use is prohibited during class. In extraordinary circumstances, students may leave class to take phone calls or return text messages. Tablets and laptops may be used for academic purposes only. Disruptive students may be asked to leave the classroom.

**Student Writing**

All assignments for the course should be written in standard academic English as described in Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers*. Mistakes in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization will affect grading. All students concerned about their writing ability should contact the Writing Center in Cowell Hall, Room 215 (422-6713). Additional inquiries and training regarding study habits may be directed to the Learning Center (422-6715).

## **Class Schedule (Starred sessions require forum postings)**

### **Part I: When Science Meets Religion**

- Aug 27 \*Course Introduction; Four Models of Relationship. Barbour xi-38.
- Sep 3 \*Astronomy and Creation; Quantum Physics. Barbour 40-89.
- Sep 10 \*Evolution and Continuing Creation; Genetics, Neuroscience, Human Nature. Barbour 90-149.
- Sep 17 God and Nature. Barbour 150-180. Personal Inventory due.

### **Part II: The Language of God**

- Sep 24 \*The Chasm Between Science and Faith. Collins 1-56.
- Oct 1 \*The Great Questions of Human Existence. Collins 57-144.
- Oct 8 \*Faith in Science, Faith in God. Collins 145-212.
- Oct 15 No class. Work on midterm essay.
- Oct 22 Truth Seekers. Collins 217-232. Midterm Essay Due.

### **Part III: The God Delusion**

- Oct 29 \*God Hypothesis. Dawkins 31-99.
- Nov 5 \*Arguments for God's Existence and Why There Almost Certainly Is No God. Dawkins 100-189.
- Nov 12 \*Roots of Religion, Morality, the Bible. Dawkins 190-309.
- Nov 19 \*What's Wrong With Religion. Dawkins 317-387.
- Dec 3 A Much Needed Gap. Dawkins 388-420. Final Project Due.