

Huntingdon College
Adult Degree Completion Program

COURSE NUMBER: REL 400
COURSE NAME: Special Topics in Christian Theology and Ethics
Christianity and Its Discontents – An Examination of Religion and Science
Spring 2009, Session 3, Center Point

INSTRUCTOR'S NAME: Dr. John Brannon

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: An examination and investigation of current conflicts and dialogues between science and religion, this course focuses attention on arguments put forth for atheism, and arguments put forth for theism. The purpose of the course is not to favor one side or the other, but to gain a familiarity of the various viewpoints and arguments put forth by theists and by atheists alike with an aim toward a better understanding of how educated persons defend their most basic, and meaningful beliefs.

PREREQUISITE: An REL course number 300 or above.

TEXT REQUIRED: Barbour, Ian G. When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partner?. (see **Huntingdon College booklist for ISBN and current edition**)

Hitchens, Christopher, ed. The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever. (see **Huntingdon College booklist for ISBN and current edition**)

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES:

1. Learn to articulate the implications of the knowledge gained through science and the scientific method for religious expression and belief.
2. Learn to articulate the basic arguments in favor of non-belief and the arguments for belief in God.
3. Learn the age-old quarrel between religion and science, and the major thinkers who contribute most saliently to the advancement and the diminution of that conflict.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING CRITERIA:

Grading Elements	Percentage:
Weekly Assignments	65%
Final Exam	20%
Participation	15%
Total Points	100%

GRADE POINT EQUIVALENTS - Describe the point range for each letter grade.

- A = 90-100
- B = 80-89
- C = 70-79
- D = 60-69
- F = 59-below

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Absences and Tardiness – All students are required to attend the first session. Those who do not attend the first session will be automatically dropped from the course. Students with more than one absence will receive an "F" for the course. Since this class meets only five times, missing a single class meeting is equivalent to missing three weeks of a regular term. If you cannot attend a class you must let the instructor know via email as soon as possible. In case of absences you are responsible for obtaining all handouts and assignments. Tardiness may result in a deduction in your class participation grade. Excessive tardiness may count as an absence.

Participation –Participation is not the same as attendance. Participation requires students to come to class prepared to actively participate, which makes the classroom experience more meaningful. However, participation is not just speaking out in class. The contributions made by the student should be related to the course content and meaningful to the class discussion.

Late Assignments – Explain whether late assignments will be accepted and what penalty might be imposed if the assignment is late. Also specify what assignments can be turned in late. This will allow the student to make informed decisions.

Accommodation of Special Needs- Huntingdon College makes every reasonable accommodation for disabilities that have been processed and approved through our Disability Services Committee in accord with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. In order to request disability-related services at Huntingdon College, students must self-identify to the Disabilities Intake Coordinator, Camilla Irvin, and provide appropriate and up-to-date documentation to verify their disability or special needs. After the accommodations have been approved by the Disability Services Committee, the 504 Coordinator, Dr. Lisa Olenik Dorman, will notify your professor(s) of the committee's decision. If you have any questions regarding reasonable accommodation or need to request disability-related services, please contact Disability Services at (334) 833-4432 or e-mail at disabilityservices@huntingdon.edu.

Academic Honesty –Plagiarism is literary theft. Failure to cite the author of any language or of any ideas *which are not your own creation* is plagiarism. This includes any text you might paraphrase, as well. Anyone is capable of searching the Internet or any printed media; your research paper is intended to broaden your knowledge, stimulate your creativity, and make you think, analyze, and learn. It is not consistent with the College Honor Code, nor with scholarly expectations to submit work which is not the product of your own thinking and research. Severe penalties will result upon the submission of any work found to be plagiarized, including potential failure of the entire course. It is easy and simple to properly cite all sources used in your paper. Take no risks – cite your sources.

First Night Assignment -

CLASS SCHEDULE:

Week 1:

Read: When Science Meets Religion, pp. vi - 38

Write: Paper # 1

Discussion Topics:

1. What is religious truth based upon? What is scientific truth based upon?

2. How do Barbour's different types of relationship between religion and science reflect how understands what truth means?

Week 2:

Read: The Portable Atheist, pp. xii-xxvi, 1-7 (Lucretius), 12-21 (Hobbes), 26-50 (Hume), 129-133 (Goldman)

Write: Paper # 2

Discussion Topics:

1. What is meant by atheism?
2. What are the main objections that atheist make against people who follow religious authority, and who believe that authority derives from God?

Week 3:

Read: When Science Meets Religion, Chapters 2 & 3

The Portable Atheist, pp.155-167 (Einstein), 218-238 (Sagan), 311-327 (Stenger)

Write: Paper # 3

Discussion Topics:

1. What has the so-called rivalry between relativity theory and quantum theory contributed to the dialogue between religion and science? Put another way, what did Einstein mean when he claimed that God does not play dice with the universe? Is it a testimony to theistic belief, or non-theistic belief?

Week 4:

Read: When Science Meets Religion, Chapters 4 & 5

The Portable Atheist, 267-269 (Shermer), 287-310 (Dawkins), 328-332 (Dennett)

Write: Paper # 4

Discussion Topics:

1. Both atheists and believers stand in wonderment at the intricate biological and genetic building blocks of life. What difference does it make that one ascribes the intricacy to the design of a personal God, and the other to the aftermath of the big bang?

Week 5:

Read: When Science Meets Religion, Chapter 6

The Portable Atheist, pp. 181-206 (Russell), 246-266 (Mackie), 366-379 (Weinberg), 454-472 (Harris),

Write: Paper # 5

Discussion Topics:

1. Does ethics, and the human being's sense of right and wrong, require belief in God?
2. What do you think are the advantages or disadvantages does belief in God, or disbelief in God bring to the question of how human being ought to live?
3. Can process thought as espoused by Alfred North Whitehead and others be reconciled to a worldview that draws largely upon the Bible, or other scriptures?

Paper Guidelines and Instructions

Each short paper (5-6 pages, **1000 words minimum**) should adopt the MLA document design.

Each paper needs to accomplish the following objectives: 1) it must answer the question assigned for each paper topic by formulating a thesis and defending the thesis. This is to say, that each paper must present a philosophical argument. 2) it must offer a critique of other arguments, i.e. point up strengths and weaknesses, question premises, uncover assumptions, etc. This objective presupposes that there is no one definitive answer to each of the questions posed.

Paper #1

Write an essay that first describes how you viewed the relationship between science and religion before you read the first chapter of Barbour's When Science Meets Religion. Complete the essay with a discussion of how Barbour's typology has influenced your thinking. Which of the approaches do you find to be the most realistic.

Paper #2

Write an essay that uncovers the reasons offered against religious belief in Lucretius, Hobbes, Hume and Goldman. What are their similarities and differences?

Paper #3

What are the implications of modern astronomy and quantum physics for traditional religious belief? After reading Barbour, Einstein, and Stenger, argue in favor of one of Barbour's typologies concerning these implications.

Paper #4

What are the implications of evolution theory and genetic theory for traditional religious belief? After reading Barbour, Shermer, Dawkins and Dennett, argue in favor of one of Barbour's typologies concerning these implications.

Paper #5

What are the implications of how science and religion think about nature? After reading Barbour, Russell, Mackie, Weinberg and Harris, argue in favor of one of Barbour's typologies concerning these implications.

Final Exam Questions

Instructions: Below is a list of 4 questions that covers the material we have covered during the semester. The final exam will consist of 3 of the following essay questions chosen at random. Answers to the questions must be written in essay form, observe the rules of grammar and punctuation.

Bring only an examination book(s), a pencil or pen to write the exam [no books or notes].

1. What is the gist of Hume's argument in favor of skepticism? Which of Barbour's categories does Hume's approach to religion fit into?
2. Given that the Bible and other ancient scriptures say nothing about quantum physics, how can the insights of quantum physics be viewed as contributing to one's religious consciousness?
3. Dawkins uses evolutionary theory to argue against the existence of God: what is his argument? Which God's existence does he deny?
4. What are Russell's and Mackie's arguments against the need for belief in God as support for ethics? How might a believer in God respond to these arguments?