

Philosophy 351: Selected Topics: Science and Religion

Texts

Bertrand Russell, *Religion and Science* (1935)

Ian G. Barbour, *Religion and Science* (1990)(1997)

J.P. Moreland, ed. *The Creation Hypothesis* (1994)

John Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science* (1998)

Robert T. Pennock, *Tower of Babel* (1999)

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Course Description: Since the time of Galileo, many philosophers have felt that there was a deep conflict between science and religion. While most working scientists have probably believed in God, and many have understood their scientific work as deeply religious, some scientists and philosophers, believing that science offers knowledge where religion offers only dogma, have thought that the conflict between science and religion must ultimately prove fatal to religion. In an effort to save religion from modern science, many philosophers and theologians have argued that the conflict between religion and science is only apparent, that rightly understood religion and science deal with different and non-conflicting subject matters, and that the idea that science has anything to say about religion or religion anything to say about science is fundamentally misguided. Over the last two hundred years, since the work of the philosopher, Immanuel Kant, this view that science and religion deal with mutually exclusive spheres has been probably the dominant view among philosophers. In recent years, a number of Christian scientists and philosophers have challenged this long-standing orthodoxy, arguing that good science provides evidence for the existence of a theistic God. The aim of this course is to examine this recent work by Christian scientists and philosophers along with some criticisms of this work by philosophers who defend the orthodoxy of the last two centuries.

The course will include a number of topics. In the first part of the course we will look at the historical background to the current debates. With this historical background in place, we will examine some philosophical arguments about whether or not it is at all possible for there to be scientific evidence for God, and we will look at claims to find in current physics, astronomy, and biology, evidence for the existence of a theistic God. We will also consider difficulties in understanding the very possibility of divine intervention in the world, possible evidence for such divine intervention, and the scientific status of such evidence.

Class Meetings: The course will be run as a seminar. Accordingly, class attendance and participation is required. You should have done the assigned reading for each class session and come prepared to discuss the material in the readings. Come with questions about the material, with any objections you may have to what the author has to say, and with any outside information you may know of that is relevant to the issues at hand. Some of the readings are difficult, so please do not be concerned if there are parts (or all) of the assigned reading you do not understand. The primary purpose of class meetings will be for us to help one another come to a better understanding of the reading and to discuss issues that appear to us to be of central importance. You should expect to find that there are major differences in perspective present in the class. Agreement on anything will be rare.

We probably will not have time to read all of each of the books selected for the course. While I have been working with the texts for the course and have prepared a list of topics I would like to see covered and corresponding proposed readings from each book, to a large degree I am open about just what topics we will pursue, how much of each author we will read, and in what order material will be taken up. I am inclined to recommend that we follow authors rather than topics since I think the authors here have interestingly interconnected views on the various topics, but this too will be decided by the class as we go along.

Course Requirements: Students will write 5 short (approximately two page) review essays, one on each of the books used in the course. In addition students will write a final (approximately ten page) paper on a topic of choice. The topic must be connected to one or more of the issues considered in the class, must include at least some discussion of at least some of the books read for the class, and must make a contribution to the discussion of the issue or issues at hand.