

Georgetown University
Graduate Liberal Studies Program
SYLLABUS

Roots of the New Atheism: Philosophy, Science, and the Cultural Impact of World War I

LSHV 478 (Summer 2017); Maguire 104

Wednesdays 6:30-9:30 PM (May 31, 2017--Aug 2, 2017)

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I. Course Description

Today's "new atheists" claim science is the only reliable source of genuine truth, reality is only valueless matter obeying physical and natural laws without meaning or purpose, and the idea of God or any transcendent power is intellectually indefensible delusion. We trace the philosophical and scientific development of this theory of knowledge and materialist worldview from the Enlightenment through World War I, a cultural turning point. We then consider the role of postwar theology, philosophy, literature, art, and music in the rise of this modern secular cosmology. Throughout, we critically assess evolutionary materialism, using the process thought of philosopher Alfred North Whitehead and theologian John F. Haught, and selected writings of some prominent materialists (Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Jacques Monod, and Stephen Hawking).

II. General Learning Goals and Outcomes

Consistent with the GLS Program goals of analyzing and assessing human values (who we are, what we can know, and what we should do), this course undertakes a broad interdisciplinary study of humanity's problematic relationship with nature and the cosmos from the Enlightenment to the present. The course aims to provide (a) the critical tools for evaluating the current debate between science and religion on the nature of reality and the truth-claims for evolutionary materialism, and (b) a broad interdisciplinary perspective on the cultural impact of World War I as it bears on the science-religion debate and humanity's relationship to the universe.

III. Course Texts

Required Books:

Haught, John F. *Is Nature Enough? Meaning and Truth in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), ISBN: 13-978-0-521-60993-7

O'Connor III, Charles A. *The Great War and the Death of God: Cultural Breakdown, Retreat from Reason, and Rise of Neo-Darwinian Materialism in the Aftermath of World War I* (New Academia Publishing, 2014), ISBN 978-0-989-9169-9-8

Whitehead, Alfred North. *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Free Press, 1953), ISBN: 0-684-83639-4

Required Supplemental Readings: Electronic Reserve – see Weekly Schedule below

Optional Books (each student is responsible for reading and reporting on ONE of the following books):

Graves, Robert. *Good-Bye to All That* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998), ISBN: 0-385-09330-6.
Hemingway, Ernest. *A Farewell to Arms* (New York: Scribner, 2012), ISBN: 978-4516-5816-3.
_____. *The Sun Also Rise* (New York: Scribner, 2006), ISBN: 13-978-0-7432-9733-2.
Remarque, Erich Maria. *All Quiet on the Western Front* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982), ISBN: 0-449-21394-3.
Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway* (San Diego: Harvest/HBJ Book, 1981), ISBN: 0-15-662870-8.

IV. Weekly Schedule:

1. Introduction: God, Science & Evolutionary Materialism (May 31). Course overview and the materialist challenge to monotheism.
Readings: Whitehead, Chapter 12; Haught, Chapters 1-2; O'Connor, Chapter 1.
Electronic Reserve: Hawking and Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (selections); Monod, Preface (pp. xi-xiv) & Chapter 1 "Of Strange Objects" (pp. 3-4, 8-22); Dawkins, Preface (pp. ix-xxi) from *The Blind Watchmaker*; Brooke, "Peace"; Yeats, "The Second Coming."
Viewing; Listening: Rodin & Hausmann; Elgar & Ravel
2. Enlightenment Science: Scientific Method & Critical Intelligence (June 7). Hume on the philosophic underpinnings of modern science; Whitehead on reason and materialism.
Readings: Whitehead, Chapters 1 & 3; Haught, Chapter 3; O'Connor, Chapters 2 (pp. 15-25) & 8 (pp. 210-17).
Electronic Reserve: Hume, *Skeptical Doubts and Particular Providence*.
Viewing; Listening: Zimmermann; Bach
3. Rationalism & Romanticism: Reality as Spirit and Organism (June 14). Kant's response to Hume; the Romantic sensibility; and Whitehead's view of reality.
Readings: Whitehead, Chapters 4-5; Haught, Chapters 4-5; O'Connor, Chapter 2 (pp. 30-36).
Electronic Reserve: Schleiermacher, *The Nature of Religion*; Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey* and "The Tables Turned."
Viewing; Listening: Blake; Haydn, Mozart & Beethoven
4. The Chaotic 19th Century: Honest Doubt, Darwin & Fin De Siècle Culture (June 21). Paley's divine watchmaker, Darwin's natural selection, and the crisis of faith.
Readings: Whitehead, Chapter 6 & 9; Haught, Chapter 6; and O'Connor, Chapter 2 (pp. 25-30; 37-44) & Chapter 3 (pp. 45-51).
Electronic Reserve: Bergson, *Creative Evolution*; Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* and *On the Descent of Man* – (Selections); Arnold, *Dover Beach*; Hopkins, "The Windhover" & "I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark, Not Day"; Hardy, "Hap," "The Darkling Thrush," & "Channel Firing."
Viewing; Listening: Kirchner, Picasso & Boccioni; Mahler & Stravinsky

5. World War I: Cultural Breakdown & Cosmic Alienation (June 28). The surprise, horror, and toll of war; the postwar distrust of reason, doubt of the transcendent, and rise of science.
Readings: O'Connor, Chapter 3 & 7 (pp. 161-81).
Electronic Reserve: Barbusse, *Under Fire* (selections); Brooke, "The Soldier"; Owen, "Anthem for Doomed Youth," "Futility," "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young" & "Dulce et Decorum Est"; Eliot, "The Burial of the Dead" from *The Waste Land*.
Viewing; Listening: Nevinson, Léger, Kirchner & Dix; Berg.
MIDTERM PAPER IS DUE
6. Postwar Theology & Modern Science (July 5). Karl Barth's neo-orthodoxy, Paul Tillich's existentialism, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's process thought, US Fundamentalism & Jewish thought.
Readings: O'Connor, Chapters 4 & 8 (pp. 222-27); O'Connor, "Judaism and the Rise of Scientific Materialism after the Great War."
Electronic Reserve: Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*; Tillich, *The Courage to Be*; Teilhard, *Science and Christ* – (selections); Livingston, "Process Theology"; *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District* (M.D. Pa. 2005) (pp. 11-17, 29-39 & 56-57).
Listening: Stravinsky & Copeland
7. Postwar Philosophy: Science, Metaphysics & Existentialism (July 12). Wittgenstein & Logical Positivism; Husserl & scientism; and Heidegger, Sartre, Camus & existentialism.
Readings: O'Connor, Chapter 5.
Electronic Reserve: Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*; Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences*; Heidegger, *What Is Metaphysics?*– (selections); Sartre, *Nausea* (selections) & *Existentialism is a Humanism*; Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus"; and Stace, "Man against the Darkness."
Listening: Shostakovich
8. Postwar Literature & Art: The Creative Imagination & Existential Alienation (July 19). Literature, Dada and Surrealism addressing the postwar world.
Readings: O'Connor, Chapters 6 & 7.
STUDENT REPORTS: Graves, *Goodbye to All That*; Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* & *The Sun Also Rises*; Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*; and Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*.
Viewing; Listening: Dix, Duchamp, Schwitters, Grosz & Ernst; Britten
9. The Case for Scientific Materialism: Monod, Dawkins, and Dennett (July 26). A critical review of the materialist worldview.
Reading: O'Connor, Chapters 8-9.
Electronic Reserve: Monod, "Vitalisms and Animisms" & "The Kingdom of Darkness" (pp. 23-44 & 160-80) from *Chance and Necessity*; Dawkins, "Explaining the Very Improbable," and "Doomed Rivals" (pp. 3-30 & 407-53) from *The Blind Watchmaker*; Dennett, "Tell Me Why" (pp. 17-34) from *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*; Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos* (pp. 97-128) & "The Core of Mind and Cosmos."
Listening: Holst

10. The Case for God after Darwin: John F. Haught (August 2). A critical review of the theological response to materialism.

Reading: Haught, *Is Nature Enough?* Chapters 7-12; Whitehead, Chapter 13;

Electronic Reserve: Haught, “Mind and Cosmos: Another Look.”

V. Expectations and Requirements

Students are expected to attend class regularly, participate actively in class discussions, prepare a written answer (250-300 words) on Discussion Board the day before each class to 1 of 3 questions on the week’s assigned readings (approximately 1 hour each week), and report in class # 8 on their chosen optional book. In addition, students are expected to submit a short (5-6 page) midterm paper (due in class on June 28) and a long (10-12 page) final paper (due COB at the Liberal Studies Office, ICC 225, by COB August 9). The short paper will address a topic provided in class on June 21, and the long paper a topic chosen by the student concerning the general subject matter of the course, submitted electronically for prior approval by July 12 (1-2 pages). The midterm and final papers should follow the citation format in Turabian’s *A Manual for Writers*, should be carefully proofread, and should be submitted on time.

The course grade will be computed as follows: class participation, Discussion Board answers, and book report in class – 25%; midterm paper – 25 %; and final paper – 50%.

VI. Academic Standards and Disability Notice

MALS and DLS students are responsible for upholding the Georgetown University Honor System and adhering to the academic standards included in the following Honor Code Pledge stated below:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor; and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

If you believe you have a disability, you should contact Ashley Bray, Disability/Learning Skills Adviser, ARC alb342@georgetown.edu for further information. She is located at the Academic Resource Center on main campus, Leavey Center, Suite 335 as well as her SCS Office at 640 Mass. Ave. On behalf of the Academic Resource Center, she is responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.