DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
PSYC 250. Science and Faith
A 2014 Spring Breakaway Course

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Course Overview

This course will explore the relationship between science and faith, particularly as understood from a psychological point of view. This Study Abroad course will use the life story and ideas of Nicolaus Copernicus, Johannes Kepler, Giordano Bruno, and Leonardo da Vinci as touchstones to explore and discuss the intersection of religious faith and scientific ideas. At the center of our discussions will be Giordano Bruno, a Dominican friar and philosopher whose ideas concerning an infinite universe comprised of matter, as well as the commonalities across religions, led him to be deemed a heretic by both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches and eventually burned for heresy. The relationship between Bruno’s ideas and those of Copernicus, Kepler, and DaVinci, will provide opportunities to consider these important figures and their different ways of integrating science and faith.

As a complement to our historical focus, we will examine how psychology can speak to the tension between science and faith and between reason and belief in our everyday lives. We will consider experimental psychology’s implications for understanding how people know what they know, and how they make decisions. We will examine moral decision-making in particular, and students will explore the values that guide and inform their own decisions, from the everyday to the religious, ethical, and political.

The course will entail travel to Rome, Italy for 5 days and Geneva, Switzerland for 3 days. In Rome we will visit, among many of the traditional sites that show the intertwining of faith and ancient Roman civilization, (1) the site of Bruno’s burning, (2) the Vatican, particularly excavations under St. Peter’s Basilica that have employed scientific methods to support tenets concerning the founding of the church, and
(3) the Basilica of San Clemente, which shows the layering of religious sites and practices over centuries. In Geneva students will visit (4) St. Peter's Cathedral, where Calvin's protestant reformation began and under which excavations show a layering of earlier religious sites and practices, as well as (5) CERN, where recent discovery of the so-called "God particle" reverberates with Bruno's ideas from the 16th century, and provides further opportunity to discuss the integration of science and faith.

**Learning Objectives**

Upon the completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Identify themes addressed by religious faith and science, and thoughtfully consider those shared themes.
2. Explain and reflect on some historical developments in the relationship of Christianity and science.
3. Describe the complex relationship between science and faith.

**Course Requirements and Grading**

Students will be expected to complete assigned readings or tasks and contribute to class discussion. They will also be required to submit reflection papers following each week of reading, and to complete an essay exam at the conclusion of the course. Final grade will be comprised of participation (20%), reflection papers (10% each; 60% total) and final exam (20%) grades.

**Class schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assigned Reading</th>
<th>Assignment Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/8</td>
<td>Introduction, overview</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1/15</td>
<td>Parris, ch. 1; Rowland, pp. 2-13</td>
<td>Bring Sobel book to</td>
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<tr>
<td>class</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/22</td>
<td>Sobel, pp. 160 – 201</td>
<td>&quot;About Copernicus&quot;</td>
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<td>1/29</td>
<td>Sobel, pp. 202-236</td>
<td>&quot;Kepler and Galileo&quot;</td>
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<td>2/5</td>
<td>Capra, pp. 137-140;</td>
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159-166; 249-265
2/12 Watts and Dutton, ch. 1
2/19 Moral Foundations Questionnaire;
Schwartz Values Scale
2/26 Political Compass Quiz;
Belief-O-Matic Quiz

"About DaVinci"
"Science and Religion"
"Moral Foundations"
"Religion and Politics"

3/1 Departure for Rome
3/9 Return from Geneva

3/19 Course review; final exam distributed (exam due 3/26)

Bibliography


As outlined in the University Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct, academic dishonesty (plagiarism, etc.) will not be tolerated and will be subject to disciplinary actions. Students with documented disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodations if needed. If you need accommodations, please contact the Office of Freshman Development and Special Student Services in 309 Duquesne Union (412-396-6657) as soon as possible. Accommodations will not be granted retrospectively.