

GONZAGA-IN-FLORENCE SYLLABUS

Course: BIOL 234 / RELI 495: Evolution & Religion
3 Credits
Instructor: Robert Prusch



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This course is designed to explore an issue of fundamental tension in this country, namely the interface between science and religion broadly and specifically, evolution and religion. A fundamental question is whether or not religion and evolution can be reconciled or does it remain an “either/or” situation? Another question to be analyzed is why this tension exists, especially in this country as opposed to most of the rest of the world. We will explore some of more fundamentalist religious objections to evolution, their arguments, and the basis for their objections. This will be followed by more recent arguments against evolution including irreducible complexity and intelligent design. We will also explore scientific materialism and the role this perspective plays in the argument. You will be asked to consider your own image of God and how this impacts your own view of this tension between evolution and religion. This course is not meant to challenge religious belief but is designed to create an environment to expand your knowledge of God and creation. Hopefully, the course will give you the tools for a different way of looking at an old problem and at the same time has the potential to increase your religious and scientific insight. Readings for the course are varied and broad, ranging from Genesis to process theology and much in between.

The course will primarily be in the form of selected readings from various sources, four written assignments that are generally critiques of specific author/perspective, and a series of unannounced quizzes related to the readings. There will also be an opportunity for students to do a short presentation at the end of the course on their own perspective/interpretation of a specific topic related to the course.

Evolution and Religion
Florence: 13 Weeks

Introduction

Week 1: Setting the stage

- Session 1: What is the problem?
Religious fundamentalism: Why in this country?
Is reconciliation between evolution and religion possible?
- Session 2: Galloway, S. (2008) *The Creator's Way: The Cross, Not "Survival of the Fittest,"* Power Point presentation, www.soulcare.org.
Written assignment #1: Critique of presentation from both a religious and scientific perspective

Week 2: Genesis I & II

- Session 1: Who wrote it and when? Why? What is the story?
- Session 2: Literal interpretation/Conflict/Augustine

Week 3: What is evolution?

- Session 1: Fact and theory
“Just a theory”
Darwin's contribution
- Session 2: Mechanism: Overview of evolutionary theory
Scientific evidence:

Week 4: Materialism

- Session 1: Dennet: *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*
Ch 3: Universal Acid (pp. 61-84)
- Session 2: Philip Johnson: *Darwin on Trial*
Ch 1: The Legal Setting (pp. 3-14)
Ch 2: Natural Selection (pp 15-31)
Ch 3: Mutations Great and Small (pp. 32- 44)
Ch 5: The Fact of Evolution (pp. 63-72)
Written assignment #2: Critique of Johnson

Week 5: Science as religion

- Session 1: Morris: Evolution is Religion – Not Science
- Session 2: Darwin and religion
What was Darwin's religious perspective?

Week 6: Intelligent design and irreducible complexity

- Session 1: Paley revisited: "Natural theology"
Video: *Life's Story: The One that Hasn't been Told*, Exploration Films
(www.explorationfilms.com)
Anthropic principle
- Session 2: Irreducible complexity
Behe: *Darwin's Black Box*
Ch 1: Lilliputian Biology (pp. 3-25)
Ch 9: Intelligent Design (pp. 187-231)
Ch. 11: Science, Philosophy, Religion (pp. 232-253)

Week 7: Confrontation

- Session 1: Midterm Exam
Evolution and ID
Science and religion
- Session 2: Dover Case
Judgment Day: Intelligent Design on Trial, NOVA 2004

Week 8: Reconciliation?

- Sessions 1 & 2: Miller: *Finding Darwin's God*
Ch 3: God the Charlatan (pp. 57-80)
Ch 4: God the Magician (pp. 81-128)
Ch 5: God the Mechanic (pp. 129-164)

Week 9: What is your image of God?

- Session 1: Old Testament/New Testament
M. E. Mills *Images of God in the Old Testament* (pp 7-55)
1 Kings 19:9-13
- Session 2: Hartshorne: *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes*
Ch 1: Six Common Mistakes about God (pp. 1-49)
Christ as Warrior
Written Assignment #3: What is your image of God?

Week 10: Evolution and God

- Session 1: Teilhard de Chardin
Spirituality, mysticism and science

Alpha and Omega
Noosphere
www.teilhardforbeginners.com

Session 2: Process theology
John Haught: *God after Darwin: A Theology of Evolution*
Ch 1: Beyond Design (pp. 1-10)
Ch 2: Darwin's Dangerous Idea (pp. 11-22)
Ch 3: Theology Since Darwin (pp. 23-44)
Ch 4: Darwin's Gift to Theology (pp. 45-56)
Ch 6: A God for Evolution (pp. 81-104)

Week 11: Religion's problem with ID

Session 1: Conflation of explanation (religion and science)
Levels of understanding and explanation

Session 2: John Haught: *Is Nature Enough? Meaning and Truth in the Age of Science*
Ch 1: Is nature Enough? (pp. 4-20)
Ch 2: Religion (pp. 21-31)
Ch 3: Intelligence (pp. 32-54)
Ch 4: Life (pp 55-76)
Written Assignment #4: What does Haught mean by layered Explanations?

Week 12: Reconciliation?

Session 1: Religious views of evolution (survey, reflection of their theology)
Evolution and atheism: Necessary consequence?
Dawkins

Session 2: Catholicism and evolution
Back to Genesis: Adam & Eve, The Fall
St. Augustin and Original Sin
New views of Original Sin
Pope Pius IX to Cardinal Schonborn

Week 13: Conclusion

Session 1: Overview
Session 2: Student presentations

Final Exam