

University of North Texas
Religion and Science: Stories that Make Worlds
PHIL 3650
Spring 2026

“When we consider what religion is for [humankind], and what science is, it is no exaggeration to say that the future course of history depends upon the decision of this generation as to the relations between them.” – Alfred North Whitehead, *Science in the Modern World*

“It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.” — Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*

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I. Rationale and course outline:

How do we tell the story of science? How do we tell the story of religion, of what it is and what it does? It matters what metaphors we use, what “stories we tell to tell other stories” (Haraway). In the context of current US culture, it matters for how we address key issues like environmental and reproductive justice; it unfolds through economic, political, and educational policies. How we tell the story of religion and science matters. It materializes in landscapes, relationships, cultural movements, and government policies.

This course begins by posing questions about definitions of religion and science. In particular it begins by encouraging a rethinking of basic assumptions that typically accompany a culturally familiar question: Are religion and science compatible? In the first unit we will examine the development of the study of the relationship between religion and science: starting with the most common assumption, that they are in conflict or combat; moving to the more recent complication of a simple binary between religion and science: the complexity thesis. The second unit builds skills for analyzing the complex and contextualized relations between religion and science by examining historical and cultural shifts in ancient, medieval and modern contexts from multiple cultural perspectives. The final unit will follow a recent key shift in religion and science studies to put a primary focus on areas of current cultural debate with significant ethical weight.

In the end, this is a course about stories. What stories get told about reality: how the world works, where it came from, where it is going, who humans are and their proper roll in the

cosmos? What stories get forgotten or delegitimized? What impact do these stories have on the ways humans value, live on, live with, and use up the natural world?

II. Course Outcomes:

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Identify, analyze, and contribute their own additions to existing descriptive models of the relationship between religion and science.
- Articulate a broad understanding of the complex historical relationships between religions and sciences in the ancient, medieval and modern world.
- Articulate the contributions and contestations of multiple religious and philosophical world views in relation to modern science.
- Compare and contrast religious and scientific models of reality and analyze how these models impact current political debates and policy decisions.

III. Format and Procedures:

This class will emphasize discussion and will thus require consistent participation and engagement during class time. Class participation is key since skills for coming up with your own unique ideas and communicating them clearly and persuasively will develop in class discussion as we test ideas and have them challenged or built upon by other classmates from different world or disciplinary perspectives. This means the student should expect to do more than just show up for class. Be prepared to be an active participant in class (having completed readings, reflected on them with critical thinking skills and finished any assignments), contribute to class discussion, take notes during class, and bring appropriate materials (*especially the assigned readings and notes on the reading*) to class.

V. Course Requirements:

1. Class attendance and participation policy:

Given the importance of class participation, *on time attendance each week is mandatory* and any *unexcused absences will reduce your participation grade (attendance grade can be viewed on Canvas. See statement below in case of illness). Excessive tardiness will similarly affect your grade.

More than physically being present, class participation entails:

1. coming to class having read the assigned readings and any other assignments completed.
2. critical reflection on the text.
3. bringing the assigned reading and notes to class every day.
4. taking notes in class on lectures and class discussion.
5. contributing to class discussion with your observations and opinions on the topic being discussed.

*An unexcused absence is 1) when you don't show up in class without first communicating with the instructor and/or 2) don't have an acceptable reason for missing class (even if you first communicate with the instructor).

- * If a student misses a class (whether it is an excused or unexcused absence) that student is responsible for class content, assignments missed, and upcoming due dates. Any time a class is missed the student is responsible for arranging with a classmate to take notes and notifying them of upcoming due dates and announcements.
- * Exceptions will only be made for emergency situations. In all cases, timely communication with your professor is key.
- * In case of illness: If you are ill please stay home! Contact the professor before class and arrange for a classmate to take notes to share.

Course Materials for Remote Instruction: Remote instruction may be necessary due to community health or weather-related events. You will need access to a webcam and microphone to participate in fully remote portions of the class. Information on how to be successful in a remote learning environment can be found at <https://online.unt.edu/learn>

2. Course readings:

- Required readings will be accessible via Canvas or UNT library digital reserves

3. Assignments

Final grades will consist of the following:

Class participation	20%
(including attendance, active participation in class discussion, and in class writing responses. See grading rubric at end of this document for class participation grading)	
Discussion response	20%
(graded credit/no credit)	
Quizzes	20%
(multiple choice, T/F, short answer, short essay)	
Midterm	20%
(in class, short answer and essay)	
Final project	20%

V. Grading Policies and Procedures

Grading rubrics will be used to evaluate class participation, assignments, and exam essays.

GRADING SYSTEM: GRADING SYSTEM: A: 90-100%, B: 80-90%, C: 70-79%, D: 60-69%, F: 0-59

LATE ASSIGNMENTS:

All work is expected to be submitted by the designated due date. Late assignments will be docked 5% for each day late (2 days late: 10% deduction, 3 days late: 15% deduction, etc.). Late assignments should be emailed to the instructor as soon as they are completed in order to avoid further grade penalty. If a student is absent from a class when an assignment is due, the student must email the assignment to the instructor the same day it is due in order to avoid penalty. No late material will be accepted after the last day of class.

* As with attendance, exceptions will only be made for emergency situations. In all cases, timely communication with your instructor is key.

AI policy

In this course, I want you to engage deeply with the materials and develop your own critical thinking and writing skills. For this reason, the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools like Claude, ChatGPT, and Gemini is not permitted. While these tools can be helpful in some contexts, they do not align with our goal of fostering the development of your independent thinking. Using GenAI to complete any part of an assignment, exam, or coursework will be considered a violation of academic integrity, as it prevents the development of your own skills, and will be addressed according to the [Student Academic Integrity policy](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003) (<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>).

All essays, including drafts and revisions, should be written in a program like Google Docs which saves the evolving history of the document. If the final essay is suspected of being AI generated the student may be asked to submit their notes, outlines, and doc history as evidence that their work is their own.

VI. Academic Integrity

“UNT promotes the integrity of learning processed and embraces the core values of trust and honesty. Academic integrity is based on educational principles and procedures that protect the rights of all participants in the educational process and validate the legitimacy of degrees awarded by the university. In the investigation and resolution of allegations of student academic dishonesty, the university’s actions are intended to be corrective, educationally sound, fundamentally fair, and based on reliable evidence.” (UNT Academic Integrity Policy description, <https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>)

Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive a "0" for that particular assignment or exam. Additionally, incidents will be reported to the UNT office of Academic Integrity which may impose further penalty. Further incidents may result in failing the course.

According to the UNT catalog, the term "cheating" includes, but is not limited to:

- a. use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations;
- b. dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments;
- c. the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty or staff member of the university;
- d. dual submission of a paper or project, or resubmission of a paper or project to a different class without express permission from the instructor(s); or
- e. any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage.

The term "plagiarism" includes, but is not limited to:

- a. the knowing or negligent use by paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment; and
- b. the knowing or negligent unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.

VII. Acceptable Student Behavior

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor’s ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at <http://deanofstudents.unt.edu>.

Cell phone policy: Cell phones must be on silent or vibrate mode during class. Calls, texting, or

headphone/earbud use are not appropriate during class. If an emergency situation arises, communicate this with your instructor and step outside the classroom.

Computer policy: Computer and internet use should *aid participation* in class. If their use becomes a distraction from class for you or your classmates this will affect your participation grade and you may be asked to leave these devices outside the classroom.

AI policy: see above, section V

Recording policy: all visual and audio recording is prohibited in the classroom without instructor and classmate consent.

VIII. Accommodations for students with disabilities (ADA statement)

"The University of North Texas is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation; reference Public Law 92-112 - The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. With the passage of new federal legislation entitled Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens."

Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided by the fourth week of class. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://disability.unt.edu>. You may also contact them by phone at (940) 565-4323.

IX. Drop Information

Schedule available here: <http://essc.unt.edu/registrar/schedule/scheduleclass.html>

X. Inclusivity, chosen names, and pronouns

UNT students represent a variety of backgrounds and perspectives. The professor is committed to providing an atmosphere for learning that respects diversity. Therefore, a portion of the student's participation grade will reflect their ability to:

- share their unique experiences, values and beliefs
- be open to the views of others
- honor the uniqueness of their colleagues
- value each other's opinions and communicate in a respectful manner
- keep confidential discussions that the community has of a personal nature

Chosen Names

A chosen name is a name that a person goes by that may or may not match their legal name. If you have a chosen name that is different from your legal name and would like that to be used in class, please let the instructor know.

Pronouns

Pronouns (she/her, they/them, he/him, etc.) are a public way for people to address you, much like your name, and can be shared with a name when making an introduction, both virtually and in-person. Just as we ask and don't assume someone's name, we should also ask and not assume someone's pronouns. You can add your pronouns to your Canvas account so that they follow your name when posting to discussion boards, submitting assignments, etc.

[Texas Senate Bill 17](#), the recent law that outlaws diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at public colleges and universities in Texas, does not in any way affect content, instruction or discussion in a course at public colleges and universities in Texas. Expectations and academic freedom for teaching and class discussion have not been altered post-SB 17, and students should not feel the need to censor their speech pertaining to topics including race and racism, structural inequality, LGBTQ+ issues, or diversity, equity, and inclusion.

XI. Retention of Student Records

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Blackboard online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. You have a right to view your individual record; however, information about your records will not be divulged to other individuals without the proper written consent. You are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the university's policy in accordance with those mandates at the following link: <http://essc.unt.edu/registrar/ferpa.html>

XII. Succeed at UNT

UNT endeavors to offer you a high-quality education and to provide a supportive environment to help you learn and grown. And, as a faculty member, I am committed to helping you be successful as a student. Here's how to succeed at UNT: Show up. Find Support. Get advised. Be prepared. Get involved. Stay focused. To learn more about campus resources and information on how you can achieve success, go to <http://success.unt.edu/>.

XIII. Student Evaluation of Teaching (SETE)

Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The Student Evaluation of Teaching (SETE) is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. This short survey will be made available at the end of the semester to provide you with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught.

XIV. Course Schedule

(May change to accommodate public health or other unanticipated events & student needs)

Week / Date	Theme	Readings to be discussed	Assignment due
Unit 1	Whose Religion? Whose Science?		
class 1 T(8/18)	Introductions	Introductions to one another and the theme of the course including an overview of the syllabus	• Read syllabus, come with clarification questions
class 2 R(8/20)	Conflict thesis	• <i>Routledge Companion to Religion and Science (RCRS</i> hereafter), "Science and Religion: From a Historians Perspective" (24-33) • <i>God and Nature</i>, "Introduction" (1-10)	Week 1 discussion response (DR)

class 3 T(8/25)	Complicating the conflict thesis: Storm's empirical data categories	Josephson Storm, "Enchanted (Post) Modernity"	
class 4 R(8/27)	Complicating the conflict thesis: Barbour's categories	Barbour, Ch. 4, "Ways of Relating Science and Religion"	Week 2 DR
class 5 T(9/1)	From conflict to complexity: Which Religion? Which Science?	<i>Science and Religion Around the World (SRAW hereafter)</i> , "Which Science? Whose Religion?," (278-296)	
class 6 R(9/3)	Which Religion? Which Science?: Application	• <i>RCRS</i>, "Religion and science in Christian theology," (3-12) • <i>RCRS</i>, "Empiricism, Conceptual Cleavers, and the Discourse on Religion and Science," (13-23) • Recommended: <i>SRAW</i>, "Buddhism" (210-227)	• <i>Unit 1 Quiz due</i>
Unit 2 Complexity: Skills for Analyzing Science and Religion			
Class 7 T(9/8)	Ancient: Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greeks	Lindberg, <i>The Beginnings of Western Science</i> : • "What is Science?," (1-3) • "The Beginnings of Science in Egypt and Mesopotamia," (12-16) • "The Greeks and the Cosmos" (25-43)	
Class 8 R(9/10)	Ancient: Aristotle	<i>The Beginnings of Western Science</i> , "Aristotle's Philosophy of Nature" (45-65)	
Class 9 T(9/15)	Ancient: Judaism and Christianity	• <i>SRAW</i>, "Early Judaism" (20-27) • <i>SRAW</i>, "Early Christianity" (67-71) • Recommended: <i>RCRS</i> (79-90)	Week 5 discussion response

Class 10 R(9/17)	Ancient: Chinese and Indic Religions	• <i>SRAW</i>, “Early Chinese Religions” (175-188) • <i>SRAW</i>, “Early Indic Religions” (195-199)	• <i>Quiz on ancient religion and science</i>
Class 11 T(9/22)	Medieval: Myths about the Middle Ages	• <i>Galileo Goes to Jail</i> (GGJ hereafter) “Myth 2: That the Medieval Christian Church Suppressed the Growth of Science” (19-27) • <i>GGJ</i>, “Myth 4: That Medieval Islamic Culture Was Inhospitable to Science” (35-42)	
Class 12 R(9/24)	Medieval: Islam	• Ferngren, <i>Science and Religion</i>, “Islam” (73-92) • Recommended: <i>SRAW</i>, “Early Islam” (120-145)	Week 6 discussion response
Class 13 T(9/29)	Medieval: Christianity and Judaism	• <i>GGJ</i>, “Myth 9: That Christianity Gave Birth to Modern Science,” (79-89) • <i>SRAW</i>, “Early Judaism” (27-41) • Recommended: <i>SRAW</i>, “Early Christianity” (71-87)	
Class 14 R(10/1)	Modern: 16th-17th century, Copernicus and Galileo	• <i>God and Nature</i>, “Copernicans and the Churches” (76-103) • <i>GGJ</i>, “Myth 8: That Galileo was Imprisoned and Tortured for Advocating Copernicanism” (68-78)	Week 7 Discussion response
Class 15 T(10/6)	Modern: 17th century Newton	<i>GGJ</i> , “Myth 13: That Isaac Newton’s Mechanistic Cosmology Eliminated the Need for God” (115-22)	
Class 16 R(10/8)	Modern: 18th century Deism and Atheism	<i>SRAW</i> , “Unbelief” (252-273)	

Class 17 T(10/13)	Modern: 19th century Darwin	<i>GGJ</i> , “Myth 16: That Evolution Destroyed Darwin’s Faith in Christianity—Until He Reconverted on His Deathbed,” (142-151)	Week 9 Discussion response
Class 18 R(10/15)	Midterm (in class)	Midterm exam	• <i>Midterm on material from weeks 1-9</i>
Module 3 Contemporary Issues in Religion and Science			
Class 19 T(10/20)	Evolution and Creationism	• <i>SRAW</i>, “Indic Religions” on evolution (203-204) • <i>RCRS</i>, “Christian responses to evolution” (414-424)	
Class 20 R(10/22)	Intelligent Design and Emergence	• <i>RCRS</i>, “Emergence and Christian Theology” (213-222) • <i>RCRS</i>, “Buddhism, Emergence, and Anti-Substantialism” (223-29) • <i>GGJ</i>, “Myth 23: That ‘Intelligent Design’ Represents a Scientific Challenge to Evolution” (206-214)	
Class 21 T(10/27)	Religion and climate change	Perez Sheldon and Oreskes, “Religious Politics of Scientific Doubt” (348-363)	Week 11 discussion response
Class 22 R(10/29)	Religion and energy	Rowe, “Energy” in <i>Grounding Religion</i>	
Class 23 T(11/3)	Critical approaches to Religion and Science	Perez Sheldon, Asad, and Keel, Introduction	
Class 24 R(11/5)	Religion, Science, and Reproduction	Perez Sheldon, (61-86)	Week 12 discussion
Class 25 T(11/10)	Religion, Science, Race and Nature	Graves, (255-73)	
Class 26 R(11/12)	Indigenous and colonial technologies	Nelson, (281-303)	

Class 27 T(11/17)	Religion, Science, and energy	Storm, (127-54)	
Class 28 R(11/19)	Workshop/make-up/ flex day		
Thanksgiving Break (11/23-27)			
Class 29 T(12/1)	Workshop in small groups	Workshop in small groups	
Class 30 R(12/3)	Small group Presentations	Presentations	
Finals week 12/5-11	Finals week	Presentations	Final reflection paper due 12/11

Class Participation Evaluation Rubric

	10 —9 points	8 —7 points	6 —5 points	4 —3 points	2 —1 point
The student participates in the discussion in timely and substantive ways	The student participates in class discussion every day with comments that are on task and contribute in a substantive way to the conversation	The student participates in class discussion most days with comments that are on task and contribute in a substantive way to the conversation.	The student participates in class discussion less than half the time with comments that are on task and contribute in a substantive way to the conversation	The student participates in class discussion rarely with a comment that is on task and contributes in a substantive way to the conversation	The student does not participate or is not on task
In class discussions and writing responses the student demonstrates a substantial knowledge base from the assigned readings, presentations, and course content	The student's contributions to discussions are clearly built on familiarity with and comprehension of assigned materials displaying higher levels of learning (analysis, synthesis)	The student's comments are clearly built on familiarity with assigned materials but comprehension is slightly limited	The student's comments are clearly built on some familiarity with assigned materials but comprehension is limited	The student's comments are built on varying degrees of familiarity with assigned material and comprehension is quite limited	The student's comments demonstrate a lack of familiarity with assigned materials and comprehension is severely limited

In class discussions the student demonstrates respect for different opinions and an engaged attitude	The student always demonstrates respect toward instructor/classmates/invited guests and consistently maintains an engaged attitude	Most of the time the student demonstrates respect toward instructor/classmates/invited guests and is engaged the majority of the time	About half of the time the student demonstrates respect toward instructor/classmates/invited guests and is engaged some of the time, but may be distracted by phone or internet use	Less than half the time the student demonstrates respect toward instructor/classmates/invited guests, is generally not engaged, and may be distracted by phone or internet use	The student has failed to demonstrate respect toward instructor/classmates/invited guests, is generally not engaged, and/or is consistently distracted by phone or computer use
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Adapted from Mark A. Maddix, "Generating and Facilitating Effective Online Discussion," in *Best Practices of Online Education* (ed. Mark A. Maddix, James R. Estep, and Mary E. Lowe; Charlotte, N.C.: Information Age Publishing, 2012), p. 119