



RELS 217 / 317

# Religion, Science, and Magic

2020



Prof. Greg Dawes

COURSE OUTLINE  
(SYLLABUS)

# Course Outline

## Course Description

In our day, science enjoys enormous prestige and is clearly distinguished from both religion and magic. But it was not always so. The great founder of modern science, Isaac Newton, dabbled in alchemy and wrote commentaries on the Bible that resemble those of today's 'fundamentalists'. So how did science emerge from a world of mysticism and magic? The paper tries to answer this question by returning to early modern Europe and examining two influential thinkers: Giordano Bruno, who was put to death by the Roman Inquisition, and Galileo Galilei, who escaped the same fate by renouncing his scientific views.

Classes (See ['Lecture Schedule'](#) below.)

Mon 10.00–10.50 (Lecture)  
Thu 10.00–10.50 (Tutorial)  
Fri 10.00–10.50 (Lecture)

## Workload

The course is worth 18 points, which is equivalent to 12 hours of work each week. Three hours a week will be taken up with lectures, so nine hours a week should be devoted to study and assignment preparation.

Humanities students should spend as much time reading, ideally in the library, as science students spend in labs.

## Lecturer

Prof. Greg Dawes  
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Student consultations are by appointment: to contact the lecturer, please send an email.

## Assessment

Internal assessment for the course has three components.

- (a) The first consists of in-class short assignments, worth 15% of the final mark.
- (b) The second consists of an essay outline (of no more than one page), worth 5% of the final mark, in preparation for the third assignment task, which is
- (c) an essay of no more than (a) 2000 words for Rels 217 or (b) 3000 words for Rels 317, worth 25% of the final mark.

In addition to the internal assessment, there will be a three-hour written exam, worth 55% of the final mark.

### (a) In-class Short Assignments

On Friday each week, students will be given 10 minutes to write a one-paragraph summary of the reading assigned for that week's material. (The readings are listed in the Coursebook and copies are on eReserve, to be accessed via Blackboard.)

An excellent summary will gain 1.5 marks. A reasonably accurate summary will gain 1 mark. A summary that shows a little knowledge of the reading will gain 0.5 marks. An entirely irrelevant piece will gain no marks.

To gain the full 15%, a student must complete ten of these.

Where there is more than one reading for that week, the class will be told on the Monday which reading to prepare.

### **A Sample Summary** (so you know what is expected):

Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 641–68.

In this extract from his book *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Thomas reflects on what factors may have brought about a decline in belief in magic after the seventeenth century. He notes, first of all, that magical beliefs tend to be immune to evidence that would tell against them. The magician can generally 'explain away' the failure of a ritual. So it is hard to see what led (at least many educated) people to abandon such beliefs. Thomas examines several possibilities. The first is the intellectual change represented by the 'scientific revolution'. This undermined the Aristotelian and neo-Platonic ideas to which magicians could appeal, as well as demanding experimentally demonstrable evidence for claims about the world. A second

factor was the development of new technologies, which increased our control over the environment. This alleviated at least some of the anxieties which had led people to rely on magic. But often magic was abandoned before these new solutions had been developed. So a third factor seems to have been a new faith in the *possibility* of such technological solutions, even before they were found. These changes did not lead to the disappearance of magical beliefs, but they did lead to a gap between an educated urban élite, who no longer believed in magic, and a less educated (often rural) population, among whom such beliefs persisted.

### (b) Essay Outline

Each student is to produce a one-page outline of the major assignment for the course (see *Assignment Two* below). The work will be graded on a scale of 0 to 5 points.

The outline should include:

- (a) headings and subheadings, to show what topics you will cover;
- (b) a brief indication of the anticipated conclusion; and
- (c) a list of at least three of the works you intend to consult.

The purpose of this outline is to assist you in the process of writing a good essay. Your final essay need not resemble what you present on your outline, if I suggest (or you decide) you approach the topic differently. A sample essay outline, on a topic for a different course, is given in the Appendix to this course outline.

Due Date: Fri 7 Aug.

### (c) Essays

The essay topics at each level are given below.

An essay that exceeds the specified maximum length by more than 20% (which is, for instance, more than 2400 words in the case of a 2000-word essay) will also be penalized, unless it is of exceptional quality.

Due Date: Mon 7 Sept.

### Essay Topics for REELS 217

1. Summarize and evaluate the arguments against the 'ritual healers' offered by author of the Hippocratic treatise, *On the Sacred Disease*.
2. How would Plato distinguish between 'magic' (which he dislikes) and 'religion' (of which he approves)? Is his position a consistent one?

3. Is Giordano Bruno better regarded as a Renaissance *magus* (magician) or as a pioneer of early modern science? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Galileo is today most commonly remembered for his telescopic observations. But were they his most important contribution to what historians have called “the scientific revolution”?
5. Compare and contrast the principles of biblical interpretation espoused by (a) Galileo and (b) Cardinal Bellarmine (the head of the Roman Inquisition).

### Essay Topics for REELS 317

1. In what ways does the Hippocratic treatise *On the Sacred Disease* anticipate modern medical attitudes? In what ways does it differ from what we would today regard as science?
2. Plato may disapprove of magic, but does he believe that magical rituals can be effective? Refer to particular passages in Plato’s works in your answer.
3. What impact would you expect the Copernican revolution to have on the practice of astral magic and astrology? What impact did it actually have?
4. Giordano Bruno wrote about magic; Galileo Galilei would never have dreamt about doing so. Why?
5. Is the trial of Galileo accurately described as a conflict between science and religion? If so, why? If not, why not?

A significant proportion of the essay mark will be awarded on the basis of how well you have answered the particular question you choose. So do not, for instance, if you are answering question (5), simply write an essay on the life of Galileo. Answer the question that is asked.

**Marks will be deducted for essays that cite websites.** (A Google search is not research.) Cite peer-reviewed books and articles instead. The only exception will be for web-based material that is peer-reviewed, such as the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

### Submitting Essays

- (a) All assignments should be typewritten in a 12-point serif typeface (e.g. Times Roman) on one side of A4 paper, with a line spacing of at least 1.3 (130%) and a 3cm left-hand margin for comments.

- (b) Make back-up copies of your essay as you write, and keep a backup copy even after submission.
- (c) The essay should have a cover page, with the following information in the **top, right-hand corner**.

Rels 217 [317] Name: <your name> Lecturer: Dr Greg Dawes Due Date: 7 May 2018
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The cover page should also include the **essay question**, written out in full, and the following **declaration**.

I declare that this essay is entirely my own work and does not contravene the University's policy regarding plagiarism, as found on the course outline.
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- (d) The essay should be stapled in the top, left-hand corner and the pages numbered.
- (e) Essays must be submitted by 12.00 noon on the due date, as a Microsoft Word or PDF document, through the appropriate page on the Blackboard site. (Instructions will be given in class.)
- (f) Late assignments will be penalized at the rate of 5% for each working day overdue. Extensions will be given only for good reasons, such as illness, which must be documented.

### Referencing / Footnoting Conventions

In general, footnotes (or in-text author-date references) must be used to indicate

- (a) the sources of any quotations in your text, and
- (b) the sources of any ideas that are not your own.

In other words, every contestable claim – every statement that is not an undisputed and well-known matter of fact – must be backed up by evidence or by an argument, either your own or someone else's (supported by a reference).

References must follow one or other of the recognized formats for academic writing. You may use

- either the **author-date, in-text** referencing system (with a bibliography at the end) e.g. (Flew 2007: 14), or
- or **footnotes** (with a bibliography at the end if short titles have been used in footnotes),

but don't mix the two.

In either case, I recommend (but do not insist on) the conventions that I have used in writing the Coursebook, which can function as a guide.

In a **footnote**, I suggest using short titles. Full references must, however, be given in the bibliography (see below). Short titles should take this form:

Boadt, *Reading Plato*, p. 356.  
Bockmuehl, 'To Be or Not to Be', p. 275.  
Engels, 'Judaism', p. 150.

In a **bibliography**, where **footnotes with short titles** have been used, the same works would be cited as follows.

Boadt, Lawrence. *Reading Plato: An Introduction* (New York, NY: Prometheus Press, 1984)  
Bockmuehl, Markus, "To Be or Not to Be": Moral Dilemmas in Shakespeare', *Journal of Philosophy* 51 (1998), pp. 271–81.  
Engels, Frederic, 'Judaism', in *The Communist Encyclopedia*, ed. Karl and Eleanor Marx (London: Soncino, 1873), pp. 144–54.

In a **bibliography**, where the **author-date** system has been used in the text, the same works should be cited as follows (placing the date immediately after the author's name).

Boadt, Lawrence 1984. *Reading Plato: An Introduction* (New York, NY: Prometheus Press)  
Bockmuehl, Markus 1998. "To Be or Not to Be": Moral Dilemmas in Shakespeare', *Journal of Philosophy* 51, pp. 271–81.  
Engels, Frederic 1873. 'Judaism', in *The Communist Encyclopedia*, ed. Karl and Eleanor Marx. London: Soncino), pp. 144–54

**Note:** Where a book contains chapters by many authors – as in the case of the last example – cite the author of the particular chapter you are using. Do not cite merely the editor of the collection.

## Marking Standards

A **B-grade** essay shows signs of competence but offers little evidence of independent thought. You will receive a **C-grade** or lower if it is clear you don't understand what you have read, have made mistakes, or cannot present the material clearly. You will receive an **A-grade** for

depth of understanding and for presenting material that goes beyond what has been discussed in class. Wit, style, and clarity will help. We do not do any scaling nor do we have a prearranged number of passes, fails, or As. The relation between grades and percentage marks is as follows:

<b>A+</b> 90–100	<b>B+</b> 75–79	<b>C+</b> 60–64	<b>D</b> 40–49 Fail
<b>A</b> 85–89	<b>B</b> 70–74	<b>C</b> 55–59	<b>E</b> 0–39 Fail
<b>A-</b> 80–84	<b>B-</b> 65–69	<b>C-</b> 50–54	

## Plagiarism

### *University of Otago Policy*

Students should make sure that all submitted work is their own. Plagiarism is a form of dishonest practice and is defined as copying or paraphrasing another’s work, whether intentionally or otherwise, and presenting it as one’s own.

In practice this means plagiarism includes any attempt in any piece of submitted work (e.g. an assignment or test) to present as one’s own work the work of another (whether of another student or a published authority).

Assignments submitted electronically may be checked through the software “Safe Assign” for evidence of copied material. A match with other written material may be interpreted as plagiarism if it is not properly cited according to departmental bibliographical standards.

Submission of an assignment requiring your student ID and password is an admission that what you have submitted is your own work.

Any student found responsible for plagiarism in any piece of work submitted for assessment shall be subject to the University’s dishonest practice regulations which may result in various penalties, including forfeiture of marks for the piece of work submitted, a zero grade for the paper, or in extreme cases, exclusion from the University.

To avoid breaching this policy, do not copy text from a published work without acknowledgement. In reporting the words of an author, you must clearly indicate it is a quotation. For short quotations, this is done by enclosing the words in quotation marks. For longer quotations (four lines or more), indent the text on both sides and (ideally) print it in 11-point type. Remember that all quotations must be followed by a source reference.

## Library Assistance

### Library Search Video Tutorial

Otago's 'unitube' channel has a [3-minute video](#) that covers the basic techniques involved in searching for material in the library.

### Self Help Resources

The library also has a guide that offers tips and techniques in developing independent research & information skills.

<http://otago.libguides.com/selfhelp>

### Theology and Religion Subject Guides

These guides will help you find information for your assignments including articles, books, websites and more.

<http://otago.libguides.com/Theology>

<http://otago.libguides.com/religion>

### *Ask a Question*

Library staff at any Lending and i desk are available Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 6.00pm. Try these people first to answer any questions you might have about using the Library and its resources.

tel: (03) 479 8910

email: [ask.library@otago.ac.nz](mailto:ask.library@otago.ac.nz)

### Study Smart

The Study Smart tab in Blackboard offers advice and links to services and resources to help you with your studies. It includes information about the Library, Student IT and the Student Learning Centre.

## International Students

The Department encourages international students to seek support if they are having difficulties with their studies or with meeting other challenges while they are a student at Otago.

Students who require assistance can contact **International Student Support** (Archway West)

tel. (03) 479 8344, [www.otago.ac.nz/international](http://www.otago.ac.nz/international)

email: [international.support@otago.ac.nz](mailto:international.support@otago.ac.nz)

## Appendix: Sample Essay Outline

(originally for Rels 101, but the structure is what you need to note)

Outline the origin, nature, and development of Karaism. What influence, if any, did this movement have on later Judaism?

### 1. *Origins and Development*

8th-century: Founder was Anan ben David (in 'Babylon' = Baghdad)

- (a) challenges authority of Jewish leadership
- (b) moves to Palestine & establishes community.
- (c) key work: *sefer ha-mitzvōt* (book of the commandments).

9th–11th centuries: the movement spread to Persia, Egypt, Spain, Asia. Rabbis in the tradition of the Mishnah were strongly opposed to the Karaites and by the 12th century, the movement began to disintegrate, although it never disappeared.

### 2. *Nature*

Karaites = *Bnai Mikra*: 'children of the [written] text'

- (a) denied authority of Oral Torah (Mishnah & Talmud)
- (b) stressed right of individual interpretation.
- (c) effect = some freedom from 'extra' (non-biblical) commandments, but also a loss of the Talmudic adaptations (led to rigidity).

### 3. *Influence on Judaism*

Mainly by reaction: a strong re-affirmation of Oral Torah by the rabbis in the tradition of the Mishnah.

### *Sources*

Sachar, Abraham Leon. *A History of the Jews*. 5th edition. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1965.

Spielberg, Stephen. "Karaites." In *Encyclopedia Judaica*, edited by Moshe Idel, 3: 235–240. Jerusalem: Ktav Publishing, 1973.

Trepp, Leo. *A History of the Jewish Experience*. New York: Behrman House, 1962.

# Lecture Schedule

1. Mon 6 July The Crisis of Modernity
2. Fri 10 July Understanding the Crisis

## Part One: Three Cultural Practices

3. Mon 13 July The Idea of a Practice
4. Fri 17 July Religion, Science, Magic as Practices
5. Mon 20 July From Practice to Cognitive Practice
6. Fri 24 July Religion, Science, Magic as Cognitive Practices

## Part Two: The Birth of Modernity

### (a) *From Ptolemy to Copernicus*

7. Mon 27 July Ptolemy and his Medieval Followers
8. Fri 31 July The Marriage of Ptolemy and Christ
9. Mon 3 Aug. Varieties of Early Modern Magic
10. Fri 7 Aug. Sources of Magical Power (A) **Outline Due**
11. Mon 10 Aug. Sources of Magical Power (B)
12. Fri 14 Aug. **Essay Preparation Class**
13. Mon 17 Aug. The Copernican Theory
14. Fri 21 Aug. Arguments for and Against Copernicus

### **24 – 18 August Mid-Semester Break**

### (b) *Giordano Bruno (1548–1600)*

15. Mon 31 Aug. Bruno and Copernicus
16. Fri 4 Sept. An Infinite Universe
17. Mon 7 Sept. Scientist or Magician? **Essay Due**

### (c) *Galileo Galilei (1564–1642)*

18. Fri 11 Sept. Galileo's Life and Works
19. Mon 14 Sept. The Dispute about Biblical Authority
20. Fri 18 Sept. The Galileo Affair
21. Mon 21 Sept. Galileo's New Science

## Part Three: Back to the Present

22. Fri 25 Sept. Renegotiating the Practices
23. Mon 28 Sept. The Disenchantment of the World
24. Fri 2 Oct. The Disengagement of Science
25. Mon 5 Oct. Final Remarks **Exam Prep.**