

Rels 217 / 317

Religion, Science, and Magic

General Information

(The Course at a Glance.)

Course Description

Beginning with current debates regarding creationism, alternative medicine and witchcraft (Wicca), the course examines the relation between the modern sciences and the worlds of Kabbalah, alchemy, and apocalyptic religion from which they emerged.

Lectures

Mon 10.00–10.50) See “Lecture Schedule” below.

Thu 10.00–10.50)

Fri 10.00–10.50: tutorial-style class (until mid-semester break)

Assessment

Internal assessment for the course consists of one essay outline of no more than 500 words, worth 5% of the final mark, and an essay of no more than 2000 words (for RELS 217) or 3000 words (for RELS 317), worth 25% of the final mark. (Different essay topics are assigned at each level.)

There will also be a three-hour final examination, worth 70% of the final mark. Different examinations are set for RELS 217 and RELS 317.

Workload

The course is worth 18 points, which is equivalent to 12 hours of work each week. Outside of lectures, ten hours a week should be devoted to your own study and assignment preparation.

Lecturer

Dr Greg Dawes

Room 101, Philosophy Dept, 117 Union St East

Course Outline

(The Course in Detail)

Objectives

At the end of this course, students who have attended lectures and done the assignments should have an understanding of

- (a) the premodern distinctions between religion, science and magic,
- (b) the emergence of our modern conceptions, and
- (c) the echoes of these historical changes in our contemporary popular culture.

Assessment

Internal assessment consists of both

- (a) an essay outline of no more than 500 words, worth 5% of the final mark, and
- (b) 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.

The outline should be based on one of the essay topics given below and should include:

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

In addition to the internal assessment, there will be a three-hour written exam, worth 70% of the final mark. More information will be given in class.

Essay Topics for RELS 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 RELS 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?

Lecture Schedule

1. Introductory Remarks
2. RSM: The Anthropological Debate

Part One: Ancient Anticipations

3. Hippocrates: Against Magic (A)
4. Hippocrates: Against Magic (B)
5. Plato's Religion and Magic
6. Plato's Religion and Science

Part Two: The Birth of Modernity

(a) From Ptolemy to Copernicus

7. The Ptolemaic Cosmos (A)
8. The Ptolemaic Cosmos (B)
9. Renaissance Magic (A)
10. Renaissance Magic (B)
11. The Copernican Revolution (A)
12. The Copernican Revolution (B)

(b) Giordano Bruno (1548–1600)

13. Bruno and Copernicus (A)
14. Bruno and Copernicus (B)

Mid-semester break: 25–29 August

15. Scientist or Magician? (A)
16. Scientist or Magician? (B)
17. Why was Bruno executed?

(c) Galileo Galilei (1564–1642)

18. Galileo Galilei: Life and Work
19. Galileo's Astronomy
20. Galileo's New Science
21. Galileo & the Bible
22. Why was Galileo condemned?

Part Three: What is “Magical Thinking”?

23. Lévy-Bruhl and *La mentalité primitive* (A)
24. Lévy-Bruhl and *La mentalité primitive* (B)