

Freshman Topic Seminar (UNCS2245 - Fall 2014)

Science, Religion, and the Search for Certainty in an Uncertain World

Professor Alan Kafka, Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences

Office Hours - T Th 1:30-2:30, Devlin 312

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Class Meetings: Thursday 5:00-6:15, Devlin 221

This syllabus provides a basic summary of the course. Other course materials will be posted on the course web site (on the BC *Canvas* course management system).

Description of Course: We will explore how the search for certainty in an uncertain world leads people to seek answers in science and/or religion, and will reflect on how science and religion inform our understanding of our place in the world. A striking example of the different ways that people turn to science and religion to understand our place in the world is the current (and long-term) controversy over whether it is appropriate to teach biblical creation in public school science classes as an alternative to geological theories of the Earth's origin and the theory of evolution. Understanding the essence of this creation/evolution controversy provides a springboard for exploring the relationship between science and religion and how each might contribute to the development of our personal worldview. An important aspect of this exploration will be discussions aimed at understanding how scientific knowledge differs from religious belief.

Through weekly class discussions, we will together develop an approach to exploring science, religion, and the search for certainty in an uncertain world. The nature of our discussions will evolve as the semester progresses.

Course Requirements: Active participation in each class discussion, and a written reflection paper each week. Each paper must be word processed, and can be no longer than one page (double-spaced, 12 pt font).

Grades: This is a one-credit course graded Pass/Fail. Grades will be determined based on presence in class, active participation in class, and reflection papers.

Weekly Readings: A short reading will be assigned each week, and will be used to stimulate discussion on the topic of *Science, Religion, and the Search for Certainty in an Uncertain World*. Below is a list of possible examples of readings that we can use as a starting point for our discussions. Students will be active participants in revising this list as necessary to support the development of our discussions as the course progresses. We will also watch portions of some movies relevant to this topic, such as: *Inherit the Wind* and *Contact*.

- *The Challenge of Our Times: Integrating Science and Religion*, by Ken Wilber.
- *Engineers: Passengers' Survival was Miracle by Design*, by Alan Levin, USA Today, August 2010.

- *The Evolution Wars*, by Claudia Wallis and *Can You Believe in God and Evolution?*, Time Magazine, August, 2005.
- *The Evolution of a Christian Creationist*, by Rachel Held Evans, The Washington Post, August 2010.
- *Shaking the Foundation of Faith*, by Scott M. Liell, New York Times, November, 2005.
- Other recent news articles about the creation/evolution controversy.
- *Modern Science and the Book of Genesis*, by James W. Skehan, S.J..
- Readings on geological concepts from Earth Science textbooks.
- Excerpts from Professor Kafka's lecture notes on the age of the Earth, Earth history, origin of the Earth, and the theory of evolution.
- Readings from *The God Delusion*, by Richard Dawkins.
- Readings from *The Case for God*, by Karen Armstrong.
- Readings from *The Blind Watchmaker*, by Richard Dawkins.
- Readings from *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*, by Stephen J. Gould.
- Readings from *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientists Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution*, by Kenneth R. Miller.
- Readings from *Uncertain Science... Uncertain World*, by Henry N. Pollack.
- *In the Beginning*, Genesis (Chapter 1) and *The Garden of Eden*, Genesis (Chapter 2).
- "Intelligent Design" Poses Continued Threat to Science, by John W. Geissman, EOS, Transactions, AGU, January, 2006.
- Additional Readings: To be determined.

Academic Integrity:

Boston College values the academic integrity of its students and faculty. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the university's policy on academic integrity, which can be found at www.bc.edu/schools/cas/polisci/integrity.html. Violation of academic integrity will be reported to your class dean and judged by the academic integrity committee in your school. If you are found responsible for violating the policy, penalties may include a failing grade as well as possible probation, suspension, or expulsion, depending on the seriousness and circumstances of the violation.

Disability Services at BC:

If you are a student with a documented disability seeking reasonable accommodations in this course, please contact Kathy Duggan, (617) 552-8093, dugganka@bc.edu, at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities and ADHD, or Paulette Durrett, (617) 552-3470, paulette.durrett@bc.edu, in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities, including temporary disabilities. Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations.

Note: As the semester progresses, there may be corrections or addenda to what is written here. Updates to the syllabus, and other updated course information, will be posted on the Canvas course website. The most current version of the syllabus and any other course information will always be the version on Canvas.