

SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND THE HUMANITIES SINCE DARWIN

V57.0443.003

Thursdays, 9:30-12:15
25 West 4th Street, C16

Professor Guy Ortolano
ortolano@nyu.edu
Office: KJCC 420
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 4-6 pm

OVERVIEW

The literary critic Lionel Trilling called the place where literature meets politics “the bloody crossroads.” The same might be said of the intersections between science, religion, and the humanities since the mid-nineteenth century. This course examines the relationship between these three cultural domains, considering how the boundaries between them have been erected and contested. The focus is on debates in Britain, with consideration of episodes in the United States as well. The seminar is divided into three parts, each of which features its own central text:

1. The first part examines the origins, content, and reception of Darwin’s theory of natural selection; the key text for this part is **Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (1859)**.
2. The second part examines the wider reverberations of Darwin’s ideas; the key text for this part is **Edward Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (1997)**.
3. The third part examines several challenges to scientific authority during the twentieth century; the key text for this part is **C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures* (1959)**.

By the end of the term, through these readings, films, discussions, and essays, you will have developed a rich understanding of some of the educational questions, moral problems, and political controversies that have attended the development of science during the modern period.

EVALUATION

Participation (10%): Participation includes attendance at, and thoughtful participation in, our meetings. See below for the attendance policies. In addition, before class each week you will write an informal response to a prompt about the reading. These prompts are designed to help guide your reading, and your responses will often function as the starting point of our discussions.

Essays (3 x 30%): At the end of each part of the course – on Mar. 3, Apr. 14, and May 12 – you will submit an essay of about 6 pages. These essays vary in form and purpose, and we will discuss them in detail as they draw near.

COURSE POLICIES

1. Academic integrity: Intellectual integrity is the university's most fundamental commitment. Plagiarism will be penalized to the fullest extent, without warning or exception. A helpful rule of thumb is simply to be polite: when you draw upon somebody's work or ideas, thank them in a note. For further details on NYU policy, see:

➤ <http://cas.nyu.edu/page/ug.academicintegrity>

2. Attendance: You are permitted one absence without discussion; a second absence requires advance notice or a valid excuse; a third absence will be reflected in your participation. No student with four or more absences, including meetings with the professor or writing tutor, will pass the course. *These policies take effect from the first day of class, regardless of when you personally enroll.*

3. Written work: Unless otherwise stated, all written assignments must be double-spaced, with one-inch margins and numbered pages, and submitted in hard copy. Late papers will be penalized at the rate of one grade per day: a B+ paper, submitted the morning after it was due, will receive a B. A paper that is more than 72 hours late will receive an F. You are expected to follow – *down to every last comma and indentation* – the standard reference style in the discipline of history. This style is explained in Rampolla, and also here:

➤ http://chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

4. Computers: Hard copies of readings, whether printed or purchased, facilitate active reading at home and easy reference in class; you are, therefore, encouraged to work from hard copies of readings whenever possible. While you are permitted to bring laptops to class, you are expected to disable the internet connection before class begins. **Any student who engages in electronic communication of any kind during class (email, Facebook, Wikipedia, texting, etc.) will be regarded as absent.**

5. Religious holidays: NYU accommodates observances of religious holidays. In order to receive this accommodation, notify the instructor of any planned absences during the first two weeks of the semester. Details on NYU's policies may be found at:

➤ <http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/university-calendar-policy-on-religious-holidays.html>

TEXTS

The following required texts are available for purchase in the bookstore. It is essential, in the case of Appleman especially, that you purchase the correct edition; the ISBN numbers are provided for that reason.

Phillip Appleman, ed., Darwin (3rd edition). ISBN 0-393-958-49-3

Edward Larson, Summer for the Gods. ISBN 0-674-85429-2

C. P. Snow, The Two Cultures. ISBN 0-521-45730-0

Readings labelled “Bobst” are available online. Additional readings, designated with an *, will be made available through Blackboard or in hard copy.

I. ORIGINS, 1820-1870

Feb 3 Introduction

Science, Religion, and the Humanities since Darwin

Feb 10 Science and Religion before Darwin

Gavin de Beer, “Biology before the Beagle,” in Appleman, pp. 33-39 (1964).

William Paley, “Natural Theology,” in Appleman, pp. 41-43 (1802).

*Mott. T. Greene, “Genesis and Geology Revisited” (2003).

Feb 17 Charles Darwin and The Origin of Species

Adam Gopnik, “Rewriting Nature,” New Yorker, 23 October 2006 (Bobst).

Charles Darwin, The Origin of Species (1859), in Appleman, pp. 95-151, 158-174.

Feb 24 Victorians Debating Darwin

David Hull, & Adam Sedgwick, Richard Owen, Fleming Jenkin *et al.*, in Appleman, pp. 257-288.

Mar 3 Americans Debating Darwin

Screening and discussion of a documentary about the 2005 Dover, PA trial.

⇒ **Paper #1 due**

II. EXTENDING THE BOUNDARIES, 1870-1960

Mar 10 Scientific Racism

*Stephen Jay Gould, “Darwin’s Dilemma: The Odyssey of Evolution” (1977).

Charles Darwin, The Descent of Man (1871), in Appleman, pp. 175-177, 243-254.

*Stephen Jay Gould, “Measuring Heads: Paul Broca and the Heyday of Craniology,” in *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: Norton, 1996), pp. 105-141.

SPRING BREAK

NOTE: On April 7, we will be discussing nearly 200 pages of reading from Edward Larson, *Summer for the Gods*. This book will be the subject of your second major essay. The sooner you can begin this reading, the better off you'll be.

Mar 24 *Liberal Education: Scientific or Literary?*

*Thomas Huxley, "Science and Culture" (1880).

*Matthew Arnold, "Literature and Science" (1882).

Mar 31 *Medical Science versus Animal Rights*

George H. Daniels, "The Process of Professionalization in American Science: The Emergent Period, 1820-1860," *Isis* 58 (Summer 1967), pp. 150-166 (Bobst).

*Frances Power Cobbe, "Science in Excelsis" (1889).

*H. C. Wood, "The Value of Vivisection" (1880).

*Albert Leffingwell, "Selected Letters" (1901).

*Henry C. Mercer, "Men of Science and Anti-Vivisection" (1899).

Apr 7 *The Scopes Trial*

Edward Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, Ch. 1-7 (1997).

Apr 14 *Staging "Science versus Religion"*

Screening and discussion of *Inherit the Wind*, dir. Stanley Kramer (1960).

⇒ Paper #2 due

III. TESTING THE BOUNDARIES, 1960-PRESENT

Apr 21 *The "Two Cultures" Thesis*

C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (1959).

*F. R. Leavis, *Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow* (1962).

Apr 28 *Feminism, Gender, and Sociobiology*

Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (1871), in Appleman, pp. 230-243.

E. O. Wilson, Stephen Jay Gould, in Appleman, pp. 409-419.

*Ruth Hubbard, "Have Only Men Evolved?" (1979).

May 5

Postmodernism and the “Science Wars”

*Alan Sokal, “Transgressing the Boundaries,” and “An Afterward” (1996).

Stanley Fish, “Professor Sokal’s Bad Joke,” New York Times, 21 May 1996 (Bobst).

John Guillory, “The Sokal Affair and the History of Criticism,” Critical Inquiry 28 (Winter 2002), pp. 470-508 (Bobst).

Essay #3 due, in hard copy and in person, during this class’s final exam period:

10 AM, THURSDAY, MAY 12