

RELIGION 225

Magic, Science, & Religion

Winter 2009

Prof. Timothy Lubin, 208 Baker Hall

Phone: 458-8146; lubint@wlu.edu

<http://home.wlu.edu/~lubint/rel225.pdf>

<http://home.wlu.edu/~lubint/touchstone>

THE CENTRAL QUESTIONS

How do religious and scientific explanations and methods of inquiry differ? How is “real” magic supposed to work? What is the role of reason in each of these cases? What is the role of authority? Where do systems such as alchemy or astrology fit in the spectrum of such ideas and practices? This course draws together a wide range of materials from antiquity to the present, from the West and from Asia, that will illustrate a variety of types of systems of knowledge that have been proposed, and the bases upon which they have been constructed. The approach will be to present classical and modern philosophical, religious, and scientific views of what counts as “knowledge,” how it is acquired and taught, the authority of tradition, and the role of experience (perception, experiment) and reason in establishing or confirming knowledge. Theoretical and methodological readings will be balanced with a selection of “case studies” in which these questions arise. These will be drawn from a diverse range of contexts: religious ritual, the spiritual claims of mystics, scripture-based doctrine, alchemy, astrology, sorcery, “traditional medicines,” and modern religious movements. Students will research a system of their choice and analyze its claims and methods in comparison with those of other traditions covered in the course, using the analytic framework described at the end of the syllabus.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. A midterm examination (25% of the final grade).
2. A final examination (25% of the final grade).
3. A ca. 3000-word research paper (40% of the final grade) that will be integrated into “[TOUCHSTONE](#),” the course’s web-based information center, which is designed to provide basic data on a wide range of traditions, along with analysis of the criteria used within the tradition to make claims to truth or efficacy, and the ways in which it positions itself in relation to other spheres of knowledge and action. Papers will follow a common format to facilitate comparisons between topics. A wide list of suggested topics is presented, along with a seed-bibliography. (No experience in web-design or computer programming is required.)
4. Critical reflections (ca. 300 words each) on a preliminary draft of two other students’ papers (together worth 10% of the final grade).

BOOKS FOR PURCHASE

- Lindberg, David C., *The Beginnings of Western Science: The European Scientific Tradition in Philosophical, Religious, and Institutional Context, 600 B.C. to A.D. 1450* (U. Chicago, 1992).
Lang, Mabel, *Cure and Cult in Ancient Corinth: A Guide to the Asklepieion* (ASCS at Athens, 1977).
* Other readings on Blackboard

CLASS SCHEDULE

MAPPING THE CATEGORIES

Week I — Rationality and Systems of Knowledge

How are we to distinguish religion from science, magic from science, or religion from magic? In other words, what is distinctive about the sources of knowledge, the value of personal experience, the forms of argumentation and proof, and the role of authority in each of these contexts? This unit looks at some landmark statements on these categories, on the logic and persuasiveness of ritual action (religious or “magical”), and on the nature of science.

- 1/6 Opening Lecture: The Invention of Knowledge
This lecture introduces the notion of a “system of knowledge” and the various historical roles of such systems. For any given system or tradition, we must ask: How is knowledge discovered or acquired? What constitutes a proof or confirmation of this knowledge? How is it preserved and transmitted? Is it subject to change or supplementation over time? To whom is it accessible? What sort of institutions are associated with it?
- 1/8 * Bronislaw Malinowski, “Magic, Science and Religion.”

FOUNDATIONS OF EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE IN ANTIQUITY IN THE WEST

Week II — Classical Modes of Knowing and their Purposes

Having laid out some methodological considerations in the first week, we turn to the early development of such concepts as ‘science’, ‘philosophy’, ‘religion’, and ‘magic’ in the classical Greco-Roman tradition. We consider both the systematic approach to the discussion of the soul, of God, and of nature by the philosophers, as well as religious beliefs and ritual practices, with a special focus on the cult of Asclepius as a faith-based approach to sickness and healing.

- 1/13 Lindberg, chs. 1–3 (Science’s Origins; Greeks and the Cosmos; Aristotle’s Philosophy of Nature).
1/15 Lindberg, chs. 4 and 6 (Hellenistic Natural Philosophy; Greek and Roman Medicine).
Lang, *Cult and Cure*.

Week III — Science and Religion in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages

This segment follows the elaboration of science in the Medieval period, noting the close relationship between scientific endeavors and religious doctrine (Christian and Islamic). Both Muslims and Christians assumed that knowledge of the natural world would accord in principle with sacred and spiritual knowledge, but had to account for the fact that much authoritative wisdom derived from the pagan Greek. Meanwhile some scientific work was condemned for challenging (or appearing to challenge) dogma.

- 1/20 Lindberg, chs. 7–8 (Roman and Early Medieval Science; Science in Islam)
1/22 Lindberg, ch. 9–10 (The Revival of Learning; Recovery of Greek and Islamic Science)

REDRAWING THE CATEGORIES IN LATE MEDIEVAL AND ENLIGHTENMENT EUROPE

Week IV — Astrology and Alchemy

Astrology, long regarded as indistinguishable from astronomy, is used to illustrate the interface between naturalistic and theological explanations of the order and meaning of the universe. Belief in astrology was not always seen as incompatible either with faith or reason, but was criticized more frequently for being impious than for being irrational. Alchemy, based largely on neo-Platonic thought, is shown to be the birthplace of modern chemistry and chemotherapy, especially through the efforts of Paracelsus (half mystic, half revolutionary empiricist). At the same time, a process of personal moral perfection and self-transformation was also sometimes taken to be integral to the alchemical practice.

1/27 Lindberg, ch. 11 (The Medieval Cosmos).

1/29 Lindberg, pp. 181--190 (only) of ch. 12 (The Physics of the Sublunar Region);

* Paracelsus, "The Coelum Philosophorum, or Book of Vexations";

* Marsilio Ficino, "Book of the Chemical Art," sections 1--1 and 19 required.

TOPICS AND PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHIES DUE ON FRIDAY

Week V — Distinguishing Religion from Magic

In the second quarter of the course, we turn to the dramatic changes of the late Reformation and the Enlightenment — especially the self-conscious conceptual reformulation of religion, magic, and science as distinct phenomena, using the case of England in the 16th and 17th centuries. We find that relative definitions of religion and magic turn on theological assumptions and the putative motives of practitioners; labels are applied often in a polemical way.

2/3 * Thomas, chs. 2--3 (The Magic of the Medieval Church; The Impact of the Reformation).

2/5 * Thomas, ch. 9 (Magic and Religion);

Liber Iuratus Honorii, or The Sworne Booke of Honorius (sections I, III, V):

<http://www.esotericarchives.com/juratus/juratus.htm>

Week VI — Varieties of Witchcraft

Witchcraft and mantic arts are usually classified simply as magic (or fraud), but they are practices with close connections to religious ideas and institutions. Belief in unseen powers and beings in devotional contexts carries easily over into situations in which those powers are tapped for practical purposes. We conclude our review of the emergence of Western categories and attitudes by examining belief in, practice of, and attitudes toward witchcraft in Europe and America, followed by a consideration of anthropological interpretation of this phenomenon in other cultures.

2/10 Douglas Linder, "An Account of Events in Salem" and "Chronology of Events...";

http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/ASAL_CH.htm

http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/SAL_ACCT.htm

"Witchcraft Documents [15th c.]": <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/witches1.html>

Cotton Mather, *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions* (1689):

http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/asa_math.htm

"The Case of Bridget Bishop" and "The Case of Mary Barker," from the Salem Witch Trials

Documentary Archive and Transcription Project":

<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/salem/home.html>

2/12 **Midterm Examination**

WASHINGTON HOLIDAY: No classes 2/17–19

THERAPEUTIC PARADIGMS ON THE BOUNDARIES OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Week VII — Ontology, Eschatology, Epistemology, and Psychology as Interrelated Systems in India

The second half of the course adopts a cross-cultural approach, comparing Asian traditions and knowledge-systems with analogous institutions and practices in the West. This week we consider concise, clear summaries of five systems of thought from India. All of them attempt to describe the nature of the cosmos, God, the soul, and the embodied person's experience of the world, in order to identify the source and mechanisms of ignorance and unhappiness, and to remedy the problem.

2/24 Paul Deussen, *Outline of the Vedanta System of Shankara*;
* Farquhar, 8 pp. on the Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, and Vaisheshika systems from his *Outline of the Religious Systems of India*.

2/26 *The Yogasutra*
Stephen Phillips, Chart of Yoga: <http://asnic.utexas.edu/asnic/phillips/pages/yoga/astanga.html>
* Sarasi Lal Sarkar, "Yoga and Mesmerism" (1902), appendix to *The Hindu System of Self-Culture in the Patanjala Yoga Sutra*, by Kishori Lal Sarkar (Calcutta, 1902), pp. 121–160.

Week VIII — Medical and Therapeutic Traditions of Medieval Europe and Classical Asia

Traditional medical systems combine premodern understandings of physiology, a pharmacology and therapeutics based on a combination of speculative theory (of humors or of the qualities of physical substances) and empirical evidence, and often a mental-spiritual component. We may ask ourselves to what extent these systems rest on religious or philosophical bases, how much of their method could be called scientific (or empirical) in some sense, and to what degree their techniques resemble those of a faith-healer (or work by the placebo effect).

3/3 Lindberg, ch. 13 (Medieval Medicine and Natural History);
N. Sivin, "Science and Medicine in Chinese History": <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~nsivin/ropp.pdf>;
Wang Tao, "Qi Theory": <http://www.damo-qigong.net/qi-theory.htm>

3/5 * Dominik Wujastyk, *The Roots of Ayurveda*, pp. 1-10, 52-66, 75-103, 200-206.

Week IX — Faith Healing, Vitalism, and Competing Claims to 'Science' in the West

In modern times, innumerable new systems, drawing eclectically on Asian mystical and religious-philosophical, 19th-century spiritualist, psychological, and scientific ideas, have been developed, often by charismatic teachers who have assumed the role of religious visionary. This unit examines a few examples: Hahnemann's homeopathy, spiritualism, mesmerism, and Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science. An attempt is made to apply the course's criteria to identify the religious dimensions of these systems, and to assess their claims to being scientific. Several other movements are also discussed.

3/10 * Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with a Key to the Scriptures* (Preface, Ch. 4 [pp. 70-76 only], Chs. 5-6; skim some of Ch. 18 ["Fruitage," i.e., testimonia] and the Church website) (reading available on-line: http://www.scienceandhealth.org/dt/toc_SH.jhtml).

3/12 * Samuel Hahnemann, *Organon of Medicine*, pp. 30-33, 92-111, 198-221.
Creighton University School of Medicine, "Homeopathy" (2007):
<http://altmed.creighton.edu/Homeopathy/Default.htm>

FULL DRAFTS OF PROJECTS MUST BE MADE AVAILABLE FOR PEER REVIEW

Week X — Modern Systems Claiming to Integrate ‘Science’ and ‘Religion’ for Health

America, Europe, and Asia have seen the adaptation of traditional forms of spiritual self-cultivation to the modern world, partly influenced by its colonial-era and post-colonial encounters with European and American thought and notions of spirituality. Two new systems, taught by charismatic teachers, are Li Hongzhi’s “Falun Dafa” (or “Falun Gong”) system, and L. Ron Hubbard’s “Church of Scientology” (formerly, “Dianetics”).

- 3/17 Barend ter Haar, “Falun Gong: Evaluation and Further References” (2005), on-line:
<http://website.leidenuniv.nl/~haarbjter/falun.htm>
Li Hongzhi, “Falun Gong” [The Energy of the Wheel of the Law], “Lunyü” and “Chapter One”:
<http://www.falundafa.org/book/eng/flg.htm>
Skim his lecture on supernormal powers: <http://www.falundafa.org/book/eng/lecture2.html>
- 3/19 L. Ron Hubbard, “What Is Dianetics?” and “What Is Scientology” on the Scientology website:
<http://www.scientology.org/religion/presentation/index.html>
<http://www.scientology.org/religion/presentation/pg006.html>
* William Sims Bainbridge and Rodney Stark, “Scientology: To Be Perfectly Clear,” Sociological Analysis, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Summer, 1980), pp. 128-136.

SCIENCE AND RELIGION IN MODERNITY: DIVERGENCES AND SYNTHESSES

Week XI — The ‘Rivalry’ between Religion and Reason

The final segment of the course returns to the question: is scientific reason incompatible with religious knowledge or faith? Beginning with a philosopher of religion’s modeling of the rational basis of religious belief, we will then examine an influential contemporary statement made by Pope John Paul II, who sees human reason as an invaluable aid for understanding the “knowledge of the spirit” (revelation) but inadequate in itself. He faults contemporary philosophy for abandoning the search for absolute truth.

- 3/24 * Stenmark, chs. 9 and 10 (The Nature and Function of Religious Belief; Religious Rationality).
- 3/26 Guest Lecture: Prof. Christian Jennings, “Traditional African Thought and Scientific Reasoning”
Readings T.B.A.

FINAL PROJECTS DUE

Week XII — Faith, Reason, and Science in Today

Despite the ascendancy of science to a position of virtually unchallenged authority in most areas of pragmatic concern (medicine, engineering, technology), religious ideas continue to be widely regarded as persuasive in explaining the source and meaning of human existence, positing the existence of laws and realities outside the material realm. There is a tendency, however, for some traditionalists to reassert the validity of religious explanations of the natural world, and even to legitimate them in scientific or at least scientific terms.

- 4/5 * Stephen Toulmin, “Cosmology as Science and as Religion.”
- 4/5 * Source packet on Biblical literalism, “Creation Science,” and “Intelligent Design”

FINAL EXAMINATION

STANDARD PAPER FORMAT for Rel. 195 Projects

Title of System

The title should be short and precisely descriptive, in most cases no more than the name of the system or tradition (e.g., Homeopathy, the Theosophical Society), although sometimes it may be desirable to delimit the subject further (e.g., Sainthood in Roman Catholicism, witchcraft practices among the Azande people of Africa).

Keywords

Provide a list of five to ten words that could be used with a search engine to locate your paper together with others of related interest. Thus, the words should identify the cultural milieu and distinctive features of the system (e.g., healing, possession, soul, China, science).

Body of the Paper

I. Abstract

The abstract is a ca. 150-word summary of the basic features of the system, to enable those browsing the website quickly to determine what each paper is about. It is best to compose the abstract last.

II. Scope and Purpose of the System

First main section should spell out in detail the basic characteristics of the system, in order to answer such questions as: How does the system identify itself? Where is it found? What are its main claims? What are the purposes of the system (e.g., spiritual salvation, peace, or perfection, bodily health, social harmony, prediction of future events, fulfillment of wishes, communication with the dead)? To what sectors of society does it pertain or is it available? This may be dealt with in one or two paragraphs.

III. Authority Structure

The next section is crucial for making the paper topics effectively comparable. It is here that we can identify fundamental differences in the way knowledge is created, confirmed, and used. It is these differences that can determine how proponents of one system view and engage in discussion with those of another. This section (ca. 2-3 pages) should provide answers to such questions as:

a. Sources and Criteria of Valid Knowledge

According to the system, what are the possible sources of knowledge: e.g., sacred scripture (that is, revealed or inspired by God? The records of uniquely wise elders of the tradition?), the insight or mystical experience of certain sages or prophets, systematic analysis of empirical evidence, the accumulated records and conclusions of such evidence, introspection or intuition, pure reason, “common sense.”

b. Methods of Inquiry

On the basis of these recognized criteria, how does one go about acquiring knowledge? What spiritual, rational, and empirical means are available: e.g., textual study and interpretation, debate, prayer, meditation, physical or ascetic exercises, ritual, experiment. What constitutes a “proof” of the validity of knowledge in the system? How do such methods differ from those of similar systems or traditions. In particular, do those that claim to be scientific meet the standards of modern science?

c. Institutions and Professional Structure

How is practice and the preservation and teaching of knowledge organized? Is there a central authority (Church, standard-setting body, professional organization), an official hierarchy of accredited practitioners or professional teachers? If so, how are they trained and vetted? By what means are they recognized? To what standards are they held? How much control do they have over the broader community of participants?

IV. History

A couple pages should be devoted to outlining the origins (if known) and history of the system or tradition, taking care to describe important features of the cultural or social context, significant crises or transition points in its development. Here you should also situate your main primary sources: where do they fit in the history of the tradition? And what is the social or official position of the authors, if this is known? Does it continue today, or is it obsolete?

V. Representative Examples of Argumentation

A separate section should be given over to illustrating one or more typical ways in which the truth or value of the system of knowledge is explained or defended. This provides an opportunity to examine some of the primary sources on which the paper is based, using them to illustrate the principles outlined in section III. This is also a good place to highlight the ways in which the system comes into conflict or responds to other systems (although such a response may not be overtly made).

VI. Suggested Position in Comparative Scales

In the interests of facilitating comparison, your concluding section should attempt to define the position of the system in terms of a set of standard scales:

- a. Relative emphasis on traditional authority ----- or the testimony of experience.
- b. Relative centralization of authority ----- or decentralization (individual inquiry, lay teaching).
- c. Relative emphasis on invisible (spiritual or heavenly) realities ----- or material, earthly ones.
- d. Mainly spiritual or moral objectives ----- or pragmatic aims (prediction, healing, etc.)
- e. Most power or agency reserved for a divine being ----- or realizable in individuals.

As the term progresses, class discussion may lead to modifications or refining of these scales, and other, more useful ones may be suggested. Feel free to do so in the paper. The assessment should be represented graphically, or using a scale of 1–10, but there should also be a brief clarification (in a short paragraph) of the tabulations.

Annotated Bibliography

The paper should end with an annotated bibliography — i.e., with brief comments on the nature and utility of each of the sources you found useful, whether or not you used them all extensively. This is included to provide direction to others who may be interested in the subject. The works should be divided into primary sources (under the heading I) and secondary sources (II). Annotation of the primary sources is especially important.