

Science and religion in Britain, from 1600 to the present

Science and religion are two of the most powerful forces that shape contemporary life. A popular perception persists that these disciplines or areas are necessarily in conflict with one another. The actual story of the historical relations between science and religion, however, is far more complex and interesting than that.

In this course we will examine key moments in the history of the relations between science and Christianity across the British Isles, with a view towards outlining an alternative historical narrative to the prevailing conflict-centred one. We will do so by analysing the thinking and legacy of selected key figures since the seventeenth century who wrote about matters at the intersection of Christian thought and scientific practice. We will also look at crucial developments that led to shifts in cultural attitudes and perceptions of the relations between the two. And as we do so, we will pay attention to the social status of those involved. By the end of the course, we will see that rather than always having been in conflict, Christianity in Britain has had a major part to play in propelling science to the forefront of modern life. We will also see that modern science has sought to maintain its central role by downplaying or denying this early dependence on religion.

Student learning outcomes

Students who have taken this seminar will:

- have deepened their understanding of the relations between science and Christianity throughout history, and of the changes in those relations that have occurred in the past
- have gained an appreciation for a range of past and recent British thinkers who have advocated for diverse ways of thinking about the relations between Christianity and science
- have gained experience in reading and analysing historical and contemporary writings on Christianity and science, and in setting those in their historical context

Helpful reading before arrival

- A. McGrath, *Science and Religion: A New Introduction* (2020)
 T. Dixon and A. Shapiro, *Science and Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (2022)

Recommended reading list when in Oxford

- S.C. Barton and D. Wilkinson, eds. *Reading Genesis after Darwin* (2009)
 J.H. Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (1993)
 D. Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action* (2010)
 T. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament* (2005)
 S. J. Gould, *Rock of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (1999)
 P. Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (2015)
 E. Johnson, *Ask the beasts: Darwin and the God of love* (2014)
 E. Larson, *Summer for the Gods* (2008)
 T. McLeish, *Faith and Wisdom in Science* (2014)
 J. Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence* (2005)
 S.P. Rosenberg, ed. *Finding Ourselves after Darwin* (2018)
 R.J. Russell, N. Murphy, and W.R. Stoeger, eds. *Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (2008)
 C. Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (2008)