Department of Theology

UNDERGRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTION

Term:       Fall 2011
Instructor:  J. Schaefer
Course #:    THEO 4430/5430
Section:     101
Course Title: Theology and the Natural Sciences

Description:

Are the natural sciences and theology adversaries, battling one another for supremacy? Or, are they allies in search of truth in its various depths? If neither adversaries nor allies, do they have very little in common--one dealing with “how” and the other with “why”? Do the disciplines share similarities in methods and issues at their boundaries that make dialogue both possible as well as desirable? Can theology and the natural sciences be integrated in ways that avoid confusing and conflating them?

Students will answer these questions in Theology 4430 by becoming informed about ways in which monotheistic religions and the natural sciences are perceived in relation to one another and by thinking deeply about how these disciplines can be constructively interfaced on issues (e.g., the universe, humanity, consciousness) when addressed from their different perspectives. Toward this end, students will critically assess the following: (1) The history of the religion-science relationship with a focus on Galileo; (2) current ways of thinking about the relationship between theology (the critically reflective approach to a religion) and the natural sciences; (3) characteristics of these disciplines that distinguish them from one another while recognizing their contributions to understanding more comprehensively some issues at their boundaries; (4) examples of current theological reflections that are informed by cosmology, evolutionary and molecular biology, and neuropsychology; and, (5) essays by the late Pope John Paul II on the role of the Church in our scientific age and on biological evolution.

Student outcomes include the ability to (1) approach issues regarding science and religion with some understanding of past interactions; (2) identify the characteristics of theology and the natural sciences as disciplines with distinct data, methods, scopes, and limitations; (3) demonstrate comprehension of theological and scientific concepts and apply them to pertinent issues; (4) identify, think critically about, and summarize views expressed in assigned readings by theologians, philosophers and scientists; (5) evaluate some basic models for thinking about the relationship between theology and the natural sciences and to choose one that is most meaningful; and, (6) reformulate theological notions about God, the human person, free will, and the soul informed by broad scientific findings.