

CAS RN 242/ HI 203

Magic, Science, and Religion Syllabus

Tuesday/Thursday 11-12:30 CAS 314



Illustration accompanying Maimonides' letter on astrology in the 15th-century Italian Hebrew manuscript known as the [Rothschild Miscellany](#)

This course explores the ways in which boundaries defining and separating magic, science, and religion emerged in western thought and culture from late antiquity through the European Enlightenment, when the definitions generally recognized in western culture today were delineated. We will consider the nature of "magic," "science" and "religion" in historical context, the relationship between learned and popular thought and practice, and the interplay of disciplines we would define oppositionally (e.g., astrology and astral magic with astronomy, medicine and healing), while exploring underlying assumptions about God, Nature and natural forces.



REQUIRED TEXTS

Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis and The Great Instauration*, revised ed., Jerry Weinberger, ed.
978-0882951263

Richard C. Dales, *The Scientific Achievement of the Middle Ages* 978-0812210576Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* 978-0521785761Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* 978-0226750217Voltaire, *Candide, Zadig and Other Stories* (Signet ed.) 978-0451528094

Also: a set of readings available in pdf format on our Blackboard Learn site and a number of documents linked to the syllabus [here](#)

Please bring reading materials to class on the day(s) they are assigned, including printouts of web documents or a laptop for viewing them.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to attend and participate in every class. All reading is to be completed before the class for which it is assigned. Students are required to post responses to the readings (one to two pages) on Blackboard five times over the course of the semester. The class participation grade will be based on attendance, the level of your preparedness and involvement in discussion, and the posted responses.

Other graded work for the class will consist of a research project, a midterm exam, and a final exam. The grading for the course will be as follows: 20% for class participation, 20% for the research project, 30% for the midterm exam and 30% for the final.

If you know that you will miss class because you are sick or are away from school for an emergency, please try to let me know ahead of time, if possible, via phone or e-mail. More than three unapproved absences during the semester may result in a lowered overall grade in addition to an unsatisfactory class participation grade.



SCHEDULE

Sept 2: Introduction: Magic, Science, and Religion as Cultural Constructs

Sept 4: Science and Religion in Greek and Roman Antiquity

Reading: Excerpts from Plato's Republic and Timaeus, Ptolemy's Almagest, Galen's Therapeutic Method, and Pliny's Natural History [Course Documents]

Sept 9: Magic and Miracle in Late Antiquity

Reading: G. Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, 109-121, and 135-147 [Course Documents]

Sept 11: Magic and Miracle in Late Antiquity

Reading: [Biblical Texts on Sorcery, Magic, and Miracle](#); [The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles Peter and Paul](#)

Sept 16: Paganism, Christianization, and Magic in the Early Middle Ages

Reading: Valerie Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, 240-253 and 301-328 [Course Documents]; [Gregory of Tours, Eight Books of Miracles](#)

Sept 18: Paganism, Christianization, and Magic in the Early Middle Ages

Reading: R. Kieckhefer, *Magic*, Ch. 3; Anglo Saxon Charms: [Field Remedy Ritual](#); [Lacnunga Elf Charms](#); [Leechbook, Book 3 Elf Charms](#)

Sept 23: Learning, "Science," and the Church in the Early Middle Ages

Reading: R. C. Dales, *The Scientific Achievement of the Middle Ages*, Introduction and Chapter 1; [Richer of Rheims' Journey to the School at Chartres](#) (10th century)

Sept 25: Rosh Hashanah—No Class

Sept 30: Twelfth-Century Learning and Arabic Science: The Islamic World

Reading: A. Ede and L. Cormack, eds., *A History of Science in Society*, 57-73; Excerpts from Al-Ghazali, "Incoherence of the Philosophers" and Maimonides, "Guide of the Perplexed" [Course Documents]; [Baghdad in the eleventh-century](#)

Oct 2: Twelfth-Century Learning and Arabic Science

Reading: Kieckhefer, 116-119; R. C. Dales, *Scientific Achievement*, Chapter 2 [Excerpt from Peter Abelard, *Sic et Non*](#)

Oct 7: The Rise of Universities and Control of Knowledge

Reading: E. Grant, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages*, 33-53 [Course Documents]; [Stephen of Tournai, An Invective Against the New Learning](#); [Jacques de Vitry's description of students](#)

Oct 9: Observing the Natural World: Experimental Science

Reading: R. C. Dales, *Scientific Achievement*, Chapter 3; [Roger Bacon, *On Experimental Science*](#)

Oct 14: Monday Schedule—No Class

Oct 16: The Medieval Cosmos

Reading: E. Grant, "Cosmology" [Course Documents]; [Genesis 1:1](#); review excerpts from Plato's *Timaeus* [Course Documents] and Aristotle's [On the Heavens](#)

Oct 21: Astronomy, Astrology, and Astral Magic

Reading: Kieckhefer, 120-133; Dales, *Scientific Achievement*, Chapter 7 and also Chapter 8, pp. 139-146; 151 (last two lines on page)-157; [Marsilio Ficino: Three Books of Life](#)

Oct 23: MIDTERM EXAM



Oct 28: Medieval Medicine and Healing

Reading: Excerpt from N. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine*; The case of a woman doctor in Paris [Course Documents]; [Abu Ali al-Hussain Ibn Abdallah Ibn Sina on Medicine](#)

Oct 30: Alchemy and Alchemists

Reading: Kieckhefer, 133-139; R. P. Multhauf, "The Science of Matter"; Roger Bacon, excerpts from *Radix mundi (Root of the world)*, in Stanton J. Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 111-122 [Course Documents]

Nov 4: Common Magic: Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries

Reading: Kieckhefer, Ch. 4; [Stephen of Bourbon's account of the cult of the Holy Greyhound \(St. Guinefort\)](#)

Nov 6: Learned Magic: Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries

Reading: Kieckhefer, 140-144 and Ch. 7; [Honorius of Thebes, The Sworn Book](#)

Nov 11: Legal Processes Against Magic

Reading: Kieckhefer, Ch. 8; Documents from the trial of Tempel Anneke [Course Documents]

Nov 13: From Magus to Scientist: The Yates Thesis

Reading: Kieckhefer, 144-150; F. Yates, "The Hermetic Tradition in Renaissance Science," *Art, Science and History in the Renaissance*, C. S. Singleton, ed., 255-274; Excerpt from the Hermetic corpus [Course Documents]

Nov 18: Scientific Revolution

Reading: Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution*, pp. 1-8 and Chapter 1, "What Was Known."

Nov 20: Copernicus, Galileo, and the New Cosmos

Reading: Copernicus, [Dedication of the Revolution of the Heavenly Bodies to Pope Paul III](#); Excerpts from Galileo's [Letter to Duchess Christina of Tuscany](#)

Nov 25: Constructing a New Science

Reading: Shapin, Chapter 2, "How It Was Known."

Nov 27: THANKSGIVING! NO CLASS!

Have a great holiday!

Dec 2: The Great Instauration: The Promise of New Learning

Reading: Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis and The Great Instauration*, 35-83; Bacon, [Aphorisms](#)

Dec 4: Isaac Newton and the Meaning of Science

Reading: John Henry, "Newton, Matter and Magic" [Course Documents]; Isaac Newton, [Excerpts from Principia](#) (1687) and [General Scholium](#), published as an appendix to the second edition of the *Principia* (1713)

Dec 9: The Enlightened Rationalist in a Superstitious World

Reading: Voltaire, *Zadig*

Tuesday, Dec 16, 12-2 PM

FINAL EXAM