

Catholic Theological Union
C4401/5401 Neuroscience, Evolution, and Theology
May Term 2020 (Synchronous Online via Zoom)
Mondays and Wednesdays, 19:00-22:00 hrs CDT

Scott C. Alexander, Ph.D.
Professor of Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations
Founding Director, Catholic-Muslim Studies
Chair, Department of Intercultural Studies and Ministry
Co-Editor, Journal of Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society
scalexan@ctu.edu
t. +1 773.580.7239

Course Description

The basic aim of the course is to introduce students to the story of what has always been and what will continue to be the critically important relationship between science and theology. It will proceed by constructing a narrative arc comprised of the following six elements: 1) an examination of the history of holistic approaches to “truth” (beginning specifically with the shared *kalam* tradition of medieval Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) through a focus on the power dynamics of epistemological paradigms and the complex relationship between concepts of “reason” and “revelation” in these paradigms from the medieval period to the post-modern era; 2) an exploration of the challenges posed by leading edge scientific (especially neurological) research into human behavior to traditional religious metaphysics of human personhood and the theological underpinnings of key legal concepts such as mitigated free will; 3) a review of what recent neuroscientific research reveals about the nature of punishment, the biological effects of poverty and the implications of this research for theologies of criminal and social justice; 4) a review of what neuroscience teaches us about *us/them-ing* as a basic human behavior and what the implications of this knowledge might be for theologies of “otherness” and “othering”; 5) a brief inquiry into the theological implications of psychiatric research into individual identity formation teaches us about group identity formation and especially the difference between adaptive and maladaptive models of leadership in group identity formation and maintenance; and finally 6) what an accounting for the neuroscience of human behavior tells us about the *telos* of theological education in the early 21st century CE.

Wk. 1 Rationalism, Scripturalism, and Power Politics of Epistemology: from Ghazali’s *Tahafut* to the Scopes Trial and Beyond

McCord Adams, M. (2004). Anselm on faith and reason. In B. Davies & B. Leftow (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (Cambridge Companions to Philosophy, pp. 32-60). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Al-Ghazali, *The Deliverer from Error (al-Munqidh min al-dalal)*; Ibn Rushd (Averroes), *The Decisive Criterion (Fasl al-maqal)*; Maimonides (Rambam), *Guide for the Perplexed*—selections

Sorkin, David. *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008—selections

Larson, Edward. *Summer for the Gods: The Scope's Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997)

Wk. 2 Neuroscience, Human Behavior and the Metaphysics of Mitigated Free Will

Augustine of Hippo, *On Free Choice of the Will (De libero arbitrio)*, Thomas Williams, tr. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993

Al-Ash'ari, *The Book of Illumination (Kitab al-luma`)* in Richard J. McCarthy, S.J., tr. *The Theology of al-Ash'ari*. Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1953.

Gazzaniga, Michael S. *Who's in Charge: Free Will and the Science of the Brain*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2011. Chs. 3, 4, & 6.

Sapolsky, Robert. *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*. New York: Penguin Press, 2017. Introduction and chs. 13, 15, & 16.

“Did My Brain Make Me Do It?” DoSER Annual Holiday Lecture 2014 <http://media.aaas-science.org/services/player/bcpid53734095001?bckey=AQ~~,AAAADFlexpk~,logkjB2yVJwsTlvEim3fHGse-pcdnTwe&bctid=3972123022001>

“Where There is a Will.” *This American Life* (NPR series, WBEZ Chicago), no. 662. Podcast or Transcript (<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/662/transcript>).

Wk. 3 Revisiting Theologies of Punishment and Poverty: Neuroscience, Social/ Restorative Justice, and the Deadly Effects of ‘Feeling’ Poor

Hoffman, Morris B. *The Punisher's Brain: The Evolution of Judge and Jury*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Chs.

_____. “Evolutionary Jurisprudence: The End of the Naturalistic Fallacy and the Beginning of Real Reform?” in Michael Freeman, ed. *Law and Neuroscience* (Current Legal Issues Series, vol. 13). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 483-504.

Sapolsky, Robert. “Poverty's Remains” (ch. 8) in *The Trouble with Testosterone: And Other Essays on the Biology of the Human Predicament*. New York: Scribner, 1997, pp. 114-124.

Zehr, Howard. *Changing Lenses: Restorative Justice for Our Times* (25th Anniversary Edition). Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2015.

Wk. 4 What Would Levinas Think about Green Beards? Neuroscience and the Theological Implications of Alterity

Berreby, David. *Us and Them: The Science of Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Chs.

Sapolsky, *Behave*. Chs. 10, 11, & 12.

Shepherd, Andrew. "The Transcendence of the Other and Infinite Responsibility: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas" in Shepherd, Andrew. *The Gift of the Other: Levinas, Derrida, and a Theology of Hospitality*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014.

Wk. 5 "Us" versus "Them": Religion, Group Identity, and the Problem of Maladaptive Leadership

Sapolsky, *Behave*. Ch. 17

Volkan, Vamik. *Blind Trust: Large Groups and Their Leaders in Times of Crisis and Terror*. Charlottesville, VA: Pitchstone Publishing, 2004. Chs. 1-3, & 8.

Wk. 6 Radical Kinship: Rethinking Theological Education in Light of Neuroscience

Boyle, Gregory, S.J. *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017.

Alexander, Scott C., "Exercising a *Khilafa*/Ministry of Radical Kinship: Theological Educator and Student as Interreligious Ally" in Najeeba Syeed and Heidi Hadsell, eds. *Critical Perspectives on Interreligious Education: Experiments in Empathy*. Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2020, 220-242.