Nothing that is worth doing is completed in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope.
Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore, we must be saved by faith.
Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we are saved by love. No virtuous act is
quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.

-- Reinhold Niebuhr,
The Irony of American History

Sciences respond to a felt need to understand the world, and religions respond to a felt need for the world to have meaning. From these different starting points, one issue emerges at the junction of any science and any religion: are these felt needs commensurate? That is, is the universe a moral place, so that the natural order is relevant to human lives and human values; do faith and family, love and charity mirror any larger meaning than the meanings we give to them? Today, to a first approximation, the answer to these questions from any religion is Yes, and the answer from any science is No.

In a recent book on eschatology, the eminent Anglican theologian-scientist John Polkinghorne defines the soul as "the information-bearing pattern carried by the matter of the body." This formulation invites a simple extrapolation: that the soul of a person is the information in that person’s DNA. Can this be?

After 150 years, the essential core of Darwinian natural selection as the mechanism of evolution remains problematic for many people of faith. This Continuing Education course will
examine the question: what do the facts of natural selection and evolution say about the soul?

We would like to be sure the students in this seminar learn with great clarity what these facts are. Then, we would like to examine religious texts to see with some precision where the theological expectations are actually at loggerheads with these facts, and where instead, confusion has allowed unnecessary anxiety to emerge.

Of these anxieties, perhaps the most destructive, pervasive, and resistant to the facts of science has been the use of evolutionary ideas and data to support the deeply offensive notion of racism, that is, that in some way one's biological origins determine any aspect of one's fundamental humanity and, thereby, one's soul.

Introduction (session 1)

Assigned readings


Recommended


How did the universe begin? (sessions 2 and 3)

Assigned readings


Robert Pollack, *Signs of Life* Chapter 6: "Between Physics and History: The New Paradigm of Biology"
Astronomy illustrations from NASA, ESA, S. Beckwith (STScI) and the HUDF Team, *Hubble Ultra Deep Field*


*Genesis 1-4*: Jewish Publication Society (JPS) version, King James version, Revised Standard version

**Recommended**


The continuity and origins of life (sessions 4 and 5)

**Assigned readings**


Chapter 2: "Origins of Life"

John F. Haught, *Darwin and Contemporary Theology*
Worldviews 11 (2007) 44-57

**Recommended**


What do we consciously comprehend? (sessions 6 and 7)

**Assigned readings**


Lorenzo Albacete, *God at the Ritz: Attraction to Infinity,* Chapter 7: "The Reduction of Desire"

Abraham Heschel, *Man is Not Alone.* Chapters 2 and 4 "Radical Amazement" and "To Be is to Stand For"

**Recommended**


Robert Pollack *The Missing Moment* Chapter 6: "The Fear of Death"

B. Alan Wallace, *The Taboo of Subjectivity: Toward a New
Eschatology as a context for science (session 8)

**Assigned readings**


William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Lecture 20: "Conclusion"


Robert Pollack, "DNA and Neshamah: Locating the Soul in an Age of Molecular Medicine" *Cross Currents* 53, no. 2 (Summer 2003).

**Ecclesiastes**: JPS, King James, Revised Standard

Psalm 115: JPS, King James, Revised Standard

Psalm 118: JPS, King James, Revised Standard

Psalm 27: JPS, King James, Revised Standard

**Recommended**


of Death"

Riley, *Sickness, Recovery and Death* Chapter 1: "The Boundary of Survival"