



*Department of Comparative  
Religion and Humanities*

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**CORH**  
**CONNECTION:**  
***SPECIAL ELECTION ISSUE***  
**GREETINGS FROM THE (NEW) CHAIR!**

**KATE MCCARTHY**

As fall semester winds down, we have mostly figured out how the elevators work, where we want our bookshelves, and the shortest routes to our various classes. We are settled into life in the new Arts and Humanities building. I will confess, though, that I found myself walking into Trinity Hall after class one afternoon, my muscle memory apparently still resisting the move.

As I write this, we are in something of a post-election fog. As a department we are talking and reading and thinking and trying to make sense of both how this surprising outcome occurred and what its implications are for our students, our discipline, and our country. No clarity yet, but we are committed to the work of our programs and the values of our department, which seem more precious than ever.

For me our national divide has had a prominent role in the classroom, even before the election. When a colleague in Political Science and I designed an experimental course on religion and politics for this fall called “The Religion and Civic Life Project: Finding Common Ground in Polarized Times,” we had no idea how strange those times would get. Even before the 2016 election results it was clear that we are a country divided. A 2014 Pew Research report showed that Americans were more politically polarized than at any point in the past two decades. Post-election analysis reveals just how deep and wide that split is, whether it is measured along lines of party, race and ethnicity, social class, or geography. But what of

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## McCarthy, continued...



religion? Is it a significant polarizing force? Does it offer any resources for bridging divides? Does thinking about conflicting worldviews in a democratic society offer a new way to understand American government systems? Those are the questions that got my Political Science colleague Ellie Ertle and me excited.

What emerged was a 100-student U-Course, an innovative model developed by the Chico State First Year Experience Office, in which two general education classes from different disciplines are combined into one six-unit course. These courses focus on a common theme, are project-based rather than lecture-based, and include a significant public component. The idea is that students learn best when they participate actively and can see that their work has real world impact. The combination of Introduction to Religion and Introduction to American Government may not seem like a natural for this set-up, but we're having an incredible semester.

We've examined what makes up our own identities and worldviews while exploring the religions and political demographics of the nation. We've had a panel of community members—religious leaders and civic leaders, religious and non-religious—visit our class to talk about how their values and worldviews inform their civic life. We've researched the ways that different American communities have responded—both positively and negatively—to civic challenges involving conflicting worldviews, from bathroom laws in North

Carolina to Muslim immigration in Hamtramck, Michigan to the proposed Dakota Access Pipeline across sacred Sioux lands. Our students made short films about these community conflicts that were presented to the community at the 60<sup>th</sup> Annual Dinner of the Chico Area Interfaith Council. Table conversations at that event between the students and about 100 community members helped the students identify local polarizing issues that they are now researching for their final projects. These projects—including issue and policy analysis as well as videos presenting empathetic narratives from the perspectives of opposing stakeholders—will be presented at a public event on campus to which those and other community members will be invited. If it goes well, this campus-community partnership will generate creative ideas for finding common ground on which to build new solutions, a task that next year's students will pick up and carry forward.

Along the way, of course, we're learning not only the basic intro-to-religion material—Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, Five Pillars of Islam, and the like—but also how different religious communities understand their roles in civic life, and the particular commitments and challenges they experience in the public sphere. All this is threaded through our work on the American system of government. We learned about both Sikhism and the judicial system, for instance, by researching court cases involving the right of Sikh children in California to wear the Sikh symbolic dagger or *kirpan* to school.

For me this course has been one of the most interesting of my 23-year career. I enjoyed watching these students—all first generation college students—at the community dinner where their work was presented. They were alive and engaged,

informed and articulate, in ways I have rarely seen. A few even acquired an adopted grandparent. I suspect these students will take more from this class than many others in previous years have, long after the final paper is

turned in. And when the post-election fog clears, we will all find new ways to help our students—and ourselves—find and sustain the common good. ♦

## What Does Our President-Elect Think About Science?—Greg Cootsona

This fall, *Scientific American* posed Twenty Questions to the four presidential candidates. Since my field is the relationship between religion and science, their answers sparked my interest. And now that the election is decided, they either represent opportunities missed or promises to be fulfilled.

Naturally, the answers fell into some predictable patterns: Jill Stein leaned toward enthusiasm about science, but concerns about environmental issues. Gary Johnson celebrated science and believed free markets should direct the future of science. This was mirrored in many ways by Donald Trump, although he sometimes offered much shorter answers that stuck to key emphases of his campaign. Hillary Clinton presented the most lengthy responses and sought to counterpoise government regulation and investment alongside private entrepreneurship.

Concerned that government investment into scientific research is only about 1% of the national budget, Clinton asserted that funding science would be a high priority for her administration, while Trump talked about the need for scientific innovation without mentioning investment of public funds. Johnson was inclined to remove restrictions for private enterprise, while Stein believed that global cli-

mate change is our country's biggest scientific concern. Trump could only speak of "climate change" in quotation marks and moved quickly, when asked about it, to discuss clean water. (Notably—though climate change has support from the vast majority of scientists—only U. S. Republi-

cans, out of every major party in the developed world, believe it is contested scientifically).

Finally, I found all candidates' comments on "Scientific Integrity" supportive of science and scientists. Trump made a clear declaration, "Science is science and facts are facts. My administration will ensure that there will be total transparency and accountability without political bi-

as." (I picture scientists nodding in agreement in the background with a hope those words come true in his administration.) Clinton's comments were surprisingly similar here: "I am deeply concerned by the recent increase in partisan political efforts to interfere in science."

It seems to me that, in order to move forward, we need a robust commitment to scientific advancement while respecting our deeply religious country. Naturally, I can only offer a provisional report, but I will close with the hope that a commitment to the best of religion and science will be in our country's future. ♦



## *How Do Media Technologies Affect Our Attitudes?—Daniel Veidlinger*

I have recently submitted a book for publication titled *From Indra's Net to Internet: Communication Technology and the Evolution of Buddhism*. This book, which I have been working on over the past five years, focuses on the idea that changes in communication technology have created an environment in which certain ideas central to Buddhism have been able to flourish over time. The thesis is that these key ideas, which are found in other religions as well but are particularly salient to Buddhism, succeed best in environments where communication amongst heterogeneous groups is facilitated by advances in the media. Oral communication makes it difficult for people from different regions to communicate, and also impedes accurate communication over time, whereas writing enables such communication, printing accelerates it, and the Internet makes it easiest of all. The features of Buddhism that I identify as gaining increased traction in these environments

include the idea that there is a universal moral code that is applicable to all people, that we should have compassion for everyone even those who are different from us, that we are individuals with moral responsibility for our actions, and that we should not believe blindly in old traditions that are passed down to us but rather use reasoned analysis to inform our knowledge of the world. For evidence that these ideas increase in popularity in more extensive communication networks, I look at the increasing popularity of Buddhism in India as orality was replaced by writing and in today's society as usage of the Internet expands.

Many have suggested that the key ideas of my book seem to be repudiated by the elections where we of the Internet Age voted for Donald Trump, a candidate who has apparently spurned many of these ideas with his demonization of those who have a different background or religion than himself, with his questioning of

## *Veidlinger, continued...*

advances in knowledge gained by reasoned scientific inquiry, and with his championing of American exceptionalism and espousal of a nativist turn inwards rather than a global outlook. However, if

we take a closer look at the demographics of those who voted for and against Mr. Trump, we can clearly see that the election serves to strengthen, rather

than weaken my argument. An in-depth analysis of Internet use by the Pew Research Foundation in 2014 showed that 97% of those who are between the ages of 18-29 are frequent users of the Internet, whereas only 57% of those who are over the age of 65 use the Internet on a regular basis. Likewise, only 76% of those who do not have a college degree use the Internet regularly, whereas 97% of those with a college degree do so (<http://www.pewinternet.org/data-trend/internet-use/latest-stats/>).

If we then look at the early reports of voting patterns, we find that those between 18-29 preferred Clinton by an 18% margin and those with a college degree backed her again by a 9% margin (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/behind-trumps-victory-divisions-by-race-gender-education/>). Therefore, there is a clear connection between how much one uses the Internet and how likely one is to vote against Trump. It seems that the communication opportunities afforded by the

Internet influenced those who voted for Clinton's platform, which was more compassionate towards those who are different than the majority, which was more willing to accept the reasoned use of sci-

**“...there is a clear connection between how much one uses the Internet and how likely one is to vote against Trump.”**

entific inquiry to inform opinions rather than old ideas passed down from generations past, and that was more universal-

istic in its outlook. I am not saying that Hillary Clinton is a Buddhist, of course, but it is clear that her platform bore far greater similarities to some of the key ideas espoused by the Buddha so long ago than did Donald Trump's. And it is also clear that there is a correlation between how much one uses the Internet, and how much one agrees with her platform, just as my research has shown that there is such a correlation between how much one uses the Internet, and how much one is likely to be interested in Buddhism. ♦



## *Not Dead Yet: Confucianism for Today's World—Jason Clower*

Democracy and elections have been a contentious issue in recent Confucian philosophy. For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the vast bulk of Chinese intellectuals believed that Confucianism's day was long past,

“Chinese political philosophers have shown great interest in enunciating Confucian critiques of the Western obsession with rights and personal liberties...”

that it was a relic best left to the museums. It was only a small minority of philosophers, working in out-of-the-way parts of Hong Kong and Taiwan, who tried to re-explain Confucianism as something that should live on into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and work in concert with modern democracy. They proposed that Confucianism would train generations of well-informed, civically minded citizens, and liberal democracy would be the great training and proving ground for the classic Confucian virtues of benevolence, justice, propriety, and discernment.

Mostly they remained prophets without honor in their countries, but a strange thing happened when their teachings traveled across the border into the People's Republic of China. There on the Chinese mainland, their countrymen began searching in the 1980s for alternatives to Maoism, the quasi-religious form of Communism that had animated the country

since the Second World War. Even the Communist Party became interested in promulgating a new civic religion, and after the disaster of the “Beijing Spring” of 1989 and the Tian'anmen Square massacre, that had to be something emphatically non-Western. To many people's surprise, that new civic religion has turned out to be the very Confucianism that had been preserved and updated by those lonely philosophers in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Now that Confucianism has returned home to the Chinese mainland, people are asking once again whether it really belongs together with liberal democracy. Chinese political philosophers have shown great interest in enunciating Confucian critiques of the Western obsession with rights and personal liberties (rather than reciprocal obligations, as in Confucianism), the difficulty that Western political theories have with thinking of people as collectivities (especially families) and not just individuals, and the practice of giving an equal vote to wise people and unwise people. There have even been experiments in

## *Clower, continued...*

imagining what a modern Confucian constitution for China would look like. One proposal calls for a tricameral legislature consisting of one popularly elected house, a second house composed of legislators who would represent various industries and walks of life, and a senate staffed with ... religious leaders and pro-

fessors!! I find this last idea so eminently sensible that, in 2016, I will be proposing a Constitutional reform under which our country will be ruled by departments of comparative religion. Clower for Benevolent Emperor in 2020! ◇

## *African Voices Weigh In—Joel Zimbelman*

Last summer I found myself in Moshi, Tanzania, on the side of Mount Kilimanjaro. I was there working with various Chico State faculty to set up some study abroad and collaborative research projects. My conversation with locals would often drift to the US presidential election. Questions about how it was going, where I thought the vote might end up, and who I supported were most frequent. But inevitably my hosts would share with me their favorite candidate and would give me the major reason for their choice. The responses were a surprise at first, but soon I began to see a pattern to the responses. They fell clearly into four camps.

There were those who strongly supported Hillary Clinton, and I heard two sorts of arguments in her favor. First, many individuals who had been strong supporters of Barak Obama (because of his connection to neighboring Kenya or the fact that he was the first black U.S. President) supported Clinton because of

her connection to his administration or because as the first woman in the office she would also be a trailblazer. Many women and some men in teaching, administrative, and business careers voiced this view, as did lots of students and younger people I talked to. They also felt that Tanzania might likely see some economic



**Meeting with the members of the Mwika Rotary International for their weekly gathering.**

## *Zimbelman, continued...*



**Meeting with the members of the Marangu Rotary International for their weekly meeting.**

benefits from having someone like her in office—a person who knew Africa and had been there professionally. Second, several individuals who worked in international aid and regional development, those in many careers who had travelled to the US, and those who worked as teachers or administrators in higher education and government service supported her for policy reasons. To them she was a savvy politician and policy-maker, seemed to “understand the real world,” and would “respect Tanzanians as a partner.” About 70% of the people I talked to fell into one of these two camps. A very few people voiced shock and disdain at Trump’s positions or rhetoric, and clearly saw a vote for Clinton as a protest vote.

There was a smaller but still substantial group of Tanzanians who supported Donald Trump, and they were more forceful in their support for him than the Hillary camp was for her: More animated, more certain of the importance of their choice, happy to see a break with convention. First, there were high-level administra-

tors, some local community leaders—but shopkeepers and taxi drivers as well—who saw in Trump a strong personality with clear ideas and simple but understandable goals. He was admired for his business and human resource management skills; his willingness to put his country first and to defang bureaucrats and cozy political arrangements; and for his desire to clean up corruption, end wasteful spending, and return his nation to glory. Among this group there was significant respect for past African leaders who had done the same—Jomo Kenyatta and Julius Nyerere (father of the nation). I occasionally heard in support for Trump a recognition that there were times when nations could benefit from a chiefly figure or “big man” to straighten stuff out. But, second, the largest and strongest level of support for Trump came from middle-aged and older conservative Christians. The Moshi area was evangelized over 125 years ago by German and later English and American Protestants, and later Catholic growth was substantial. The Chagga and other tribes around Moshi and Arusha (including the

“The largest and strongest level of support for Trump came from middle-aged and older conservative Christians.”

nomadic Masai) are nominally Christian (with substantial Muslim and traditional/animist traditions present as well). Their social norms and moral values tend to be more conservative and biblically literalist than even those of many American Christians. For these Tanzanians, the Democratic party’s support for such things as abortion rights, Western conceptions of women’s rights, LGBT rights and gay marriage, and

## *Zimbelman, continued...*



**A busy street scene on market day in the township of Mwika, population 20,000. Bananas are sent to Dar es Salaam and sold all across Tanzania.**



**A nice conversation with this butcher in the Halal meat market in Zanzibar (no pigs raised or pork sold on the islands), who was really fascinated with the US election and wanted me to help him figure out how the whole process worked.**

the secularization of society were viewed as a rejection of true Christian values which then undermined the moral and practical authority of the US. I was surprised how strong these sentiments were among both men and women in the Christian communities and church colleges and medical center that I visited, and the degree to which a Donald Trump presidency was seen as the decisive way to overcome most of these conventions and practices. It is clear that some Tanzanians saw the stakes as very high in our election and their voices echoed some of the positions I heard leading up to the election and in its aftermath. ◇



**Health Care and community development professionals were our constant companions and conversation partners during the three week trip.**

## *Religion, Education, and the Common Good— Bruce Grelle*

During the first week of October I was invited to participate in the 12<sup>th</sup> International Nuremberg Forum at Friedrich-Alexander University in Nuremberg, Germany. The topic of this year's forum was "Public Theology – Religion – Education: Interreligious Perspectives." While there is much attention these days to the

**"The rationale for including religious studies in US public schools is that it contributes to religious, cultural, historical, and civic literacy."**

role of religion in fomenting conflict, violence, and terrorism, the main focus of this conference was on the contributions of religions to the common good. Representatives and scholars of diverse religions discussed how their traditions provide resources for realizing liberal democratic values and for "promoting the ability to deal with plurality and to work towards an inclusive society." Most of those present were from various sites around Germany, but there were also presenters from the UK, Israel, Sweden, South Africa, Australia, Canada, and two of us from the USA. While the majority of presentations were from Catholic and Protestant Christian perspectives, there were presentations from Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, and Baha'i perspectives as well.

My own paper was titled "Religious Studies in Public Education: Promoting Critical and Appreciative Perspectives on Self, Society, and Nature," in which I discussed some contributions that the secular academic

study of religions in public schools and universities can make to the common good. Public schools in the US are legally required to take a secular, non-devotional, academic approach called "religious studies" to teaching about religion. In this context, "secular" refers to a constitutionally defined approach to religion that "neither privileges nor rejects any particular religious tradition or expression." Religious studies is thereby distinguished from a faith-based religious or theological approach to teaching and learning about religion.

The rationale for including religious studies in US public schools is that it contributes to religious, cultural, historical, and civic literacy – it informs students about the basic beliefs and practices of the world's religions; about the historical and contemporary roles of religion in shaping literature, art, music, philosophy, law, ethics, and politics; and about the rights and responsibilities of citizens in religiously diverse societies. However, on this occasion I sought to move beyond a focus on basic literacy. Rather, I explored how learning about diverse religious and secular worldviews can foster 1) critical awareness of students' own taken-for-granted assumptions about themselves, their societies, and their relationship to the natural world, and 2) an appreciation of diverse religious and secular worldviews as resources for students' own ecological and moral imaginations. More specifically, I explored how religious studies might be brought to bear on the religious dimensions and ecological implications of Americans' individualistic worldview and consumer lifestyle and on questions regarding the impact of digital culture on students' inner lives.

## *Grelle, continued...*

The field of religious studies is committed to the idea that better understanding of the world's religions and beliefs can help reduce prejudice and antagonism and promote tolerance and respect for human rights. The need for reasoned, respectful, and evidence-based discussion of religion is all the more apparent in the aftermath of this year's divisive presidential election campaign. ♦

## *What does it Mean to “do religious studies” in California—Donald Heinz*

This newsletter offers an opportunity for students and faculty to consider what we're up to together. So, have you ever wondered whether there's anything *special* about doing religious studies in California? Do you suppose we do it differently here than in Texas (where you can bring your gun to class) or Iowa or New York? How about London, New Delhi, Rome, and Hong Kong?

You may at first be inclined to assert that the academic enterprise in the humanities and social sciences is done the same throughout the world. If so, is that because our disciplines are neutral and ob-

jective and without a particular point of view other than that which holds all academics together?

During the recent American election season, conservative commentators regularly accused higher education of being biased toward liberalism. Faculty, it is alleged, notoriously lean left. Conservatives wonder if their children will find the university to be a safe space. Christian pastors send their young people off to college with trigger warnings about religious studies professors who may try to take their faith away. I've met many of these students over the years.

## *Heinz, continued...*

There is a theoretical underpinning for addressing these questions. It's called the *sociology of knowledge*, which posits that knowledge has a "social location," that supposedly objective learning may in fact be colored by where it's happening and where its roots lie. Anybody carrying a sign "Black Lives Matter" or arguing for distinctly feminist approaches to unlock patriarchal religion is pretty sure this is so.

The more you look into this issue the trickier it gets. The sociology of knowledge suspects that the discipline of religious studies is in fact shaped by its social and cultural environment; *and* in turn shapes that social location. If this mutual shaping is true in all the humanities and social sciences, some would say the stakes are higher when it comes to religion. Does a religious studies department shape religious practice in its area; do churches and synagogues and mosques and meditation centers in turn influence what goes on in Religious Studies? Or do they mostly ignore each other, seal themselves off, grudgingly offer each other "sphere sovereignty."

Which brings us back to California. Recent analyses, especially after the American election, suggest that the entire West Coast has a certain mindset that differs significantly from much of America. The "left coast" is more committed to income equality, multiculturalism, and the role of big government in contributing to the common good. But coastal areas are also less likely to see the public square as infused with historic religious symbols and traditions. (Can you say Merry Christmas?) So does it follow that we also "do religious studies" differently here too? Or

do we want to claim that all universities share the same "social location" regardless of their local environments? Does Butte County have no more influence on us than if we were in LA?

These need not be dead-end dorm debates, which are only laid to rest when everyone has drunk too much. Let's be sure that our faculty and students model the diversity of California. Let's be sure that not just one single viewpoint about our discipline prevails. Let's commit to the mantra that more knowledge, more views, more approaches, more practice, are better than fewer. And let's be sure that achieving the peace is not constituted by the evacuation of the public square and the installation of a sociology of ignorance. ♦

*Donald Heinz is Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies and was formerly dean of the College of Humanities and Fine Arts.*

## *Student's Corner: Molly Sullivan*

My religious studies education has informed and motivated my approach to journalism. Objective religious approaches in journalistic narratives are often absent or underrepresented in mass media. Faith and spirituality are contributing factors in stories that go overlooked.

My knowledge of religion has prepared me to look for its influence; it lends perspective to issues and stories. Last semester, I started the religion and diversity beat at The Orion. The beat had not been covered in the four preceding years. The stories generated from the beat were particularly needed during the election cycle and were frequently among the most visited pages on The Orion website. While managing this beat, my knowledge of religion helped me find stories and cover them more thoroughly. Religious literacy eliminated unnecessary questions and streamlined my writing. At Chico State, religion stories are consistently features about how students are living or practicing their beliefs and traditions while in college. They're not breaking or hard news stories, but they are human pieces and that makes them popular among the student body.

Religion journalism continues to be a rare facet of the news industry. Religion beats are often first on the chopping block during newspaper cutbacks. But I continue to see the need for it the national media narrative, and I think that only by introducing religiously literate journalists into the mix that the need can be adequately addressed. ♦



**Molly Sullivan is a senior journalism student who is also majoring in religious studies.**

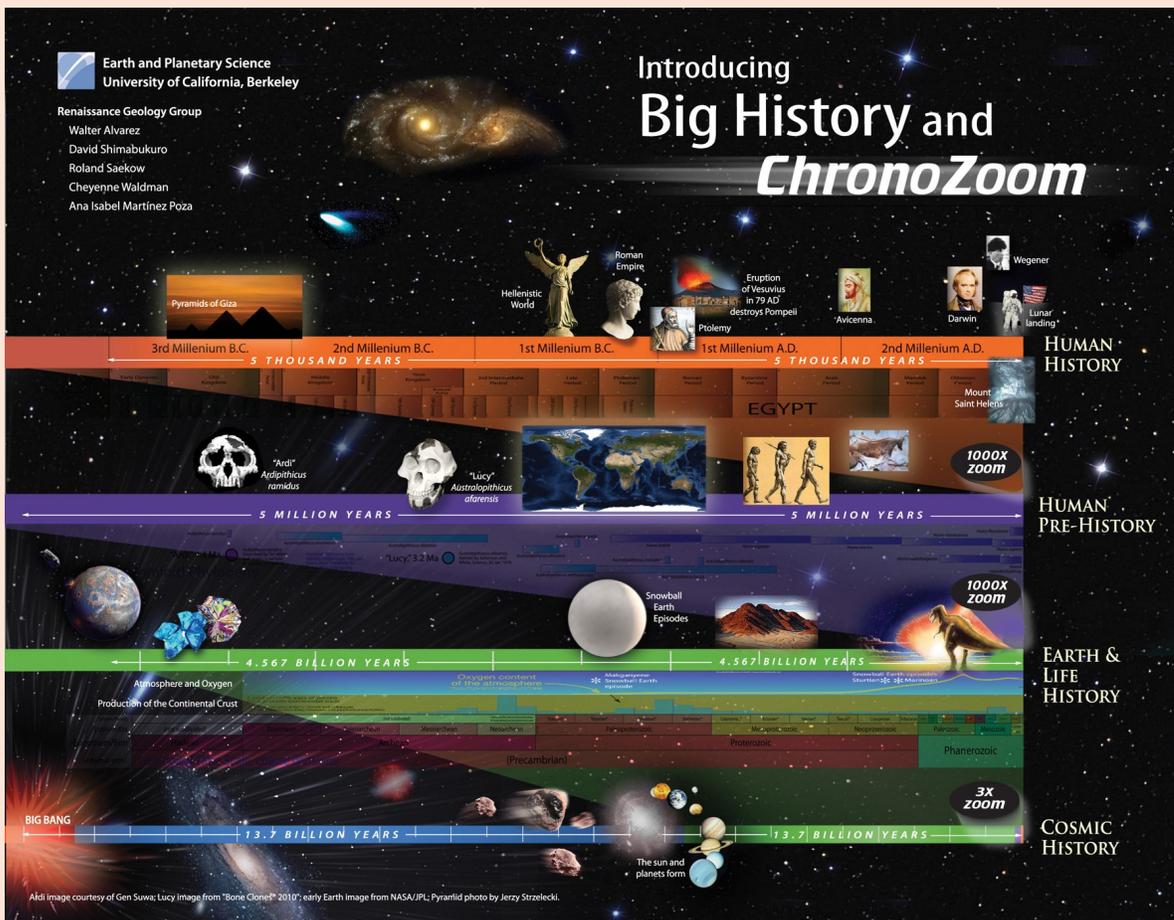
# RECENT CORH ACHIEVEMENTS

## Course Redesign Grant Awarded to Corey Sparks

Corey Sparks received a Course Redesign with Technology grant from the CSU Chancellor's Office for the introduction of a digital timeline tool into the humanities 220 curriculum. During the fall semester he has been developing the redesign for introduction in the spring of 2017. This year

and next, he will be attending a series of CSU system-wide conferences to support his work on the grant, as well as developing a digital portfolio to track, explicate, and display his progress with the course redesign. The grant seeks to use a digital tool, ChronoZoom, to address the ways in which

introductory and general education humanities courses can be challenging for non-humanities majors, who often view history, geography, and culture as a static body of facts instead of a rich tapestry of creative human endeavor.



## RECENT CORH ACHIEVEMENTS

### SPARKS Redesign, continued

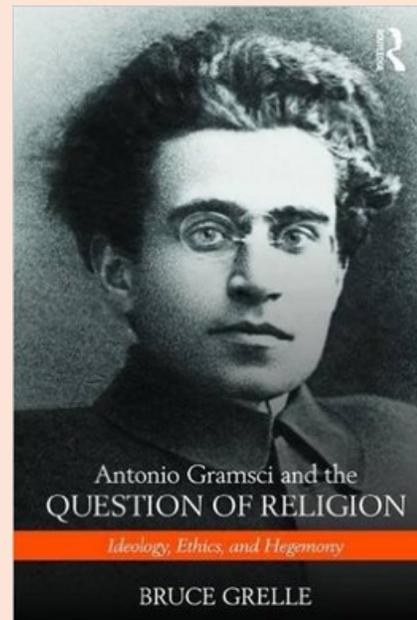
The application helps students visualize large amounts of time and access a variety of electronic sources; these features make it a compelling digital component to the HUMN 220 curriculum. Students will use ChronoZoom not just to move along a unidirectional chronology but to zoom in and out of historical moments. A primary goal is to support students in making connections and drawing distinctions between different moments of ancient and medieval history.

Corey intends to develop an enhanced set of presentations and other instructional materials from the existing course curriculum and upload it to the ChronoZoom platform, creating an interactive, visually compelling “big picture” of the cultures and eras covered by the course. The application’s spatial interface gives students the opportunity for more active learning of the course content, opening up a stronger grasp of the historical and geographical location of the various course texts and objects. ◇

### New Publication by Bruce Grelle

Bruce Grelle has published a book titled *Antonio Gramsci and the Question of Religion: Ideology, Ethics, and Hegemony* (Routledge). This book provides a new introduction to the thought of Gramsci through the prisms of religious studies and comparative ethics and shows that many of Gramsci’s key ideas were

formulated with simultaneous considerations of religion and politics. The book offers an overview of Gramsci’s approach to religion; it situates Gramsci’s thought vis à vis alternative currents within both Marxist and non-Marxist social theory; and it applies a Gramscian perspective to contemporary debates over the role of religion and morality in social order and social change. ◇



<https://www.amazon.com/Antonio-Gramsci-Question-Religion-Ideology/dp/1138190659>

## *ANNOUNNCEMENTS*



Check out our new building featured in  
*Chico Statements* Fall 2016 issue! Here's the link:

<http://www.csuchico.edu/chicostatements/2016-fall/feature-discover-arts.shtml>

Next semester, our “Religions, Science and the Future” conference will be held on Saturday, April 8, in Colusa Hall from 9 am –2 pm. Hold the Date and keep your eyes out for more details soon!



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