

Prof. Mike A.: Hey, what do you study?

Speaker 2: I study the ethnography of religion.

Speaker 3: Religion in the Caribbean and the American South.

Speaker 4: I study [inaudible 00:00:07] and self-health formation.

Speaker 5: I study contemporary religious identity in India.

Speaker 6: [inaudible 00:00:12], Hebrew Bible testament, and holocaust and genocide.

Speaker 7: History of the field and the politics of classification.

Speaker 8: New philosophy of religion and the intersection of development studies and religious studies.

Speaker 9: Religion in popular culture and religious texts.

Prof. Mike A.: What do you study? Welcome to Study Religion, the podcast of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Alabama. I'm your host, Professor Mike Altman, and on this episode we're gonna talk about guests. Yes, visitors. Those that come in from the outside. I think every department can benefit from having people visit and bring new ideas and new experiences into a department. We have two regularized occasions for guests to come visit, two lecture series, the Zachary Day lecture and the Aronov lecture, that happen every year. Usually one in the spring and one in the fall, but this year we were having them both happen this past spring. I wanna bring you clips of those lectures, and a conversation with a guest about the state of the field and our department, and the future of religious studies, and technology, and all sorts of stuff.

Prof. Mike A.: Our first guest that we had this spring was actually an old friend of mine, Dr. Elijah Siegler, who is a professor at the College of Charleston, and was one of my professors when I was in college. I graduated from the College of Charleston, and actually that's where I discovered religious studies. Now, here I am, with a podcast about it. Dr. Siegler came as a day lecturer and gave a very interesting lecture about religion and film, particularly with the works of the Coen brothers, who have produced films such as True Grit, The Big Lebowski, Burn After Reading, Raising Arizona, so many great films. What I wanna do is play you a compressed segment of Dr. Siegler's lecture because it was a really fascinating look at the way we think about religion and film, or religion in film, and the consequences of how we choose to define those things. And then, how he used some examples from his readings of these films by the Coen brothers as examples for this. Take a listen.

Dr. Elijah S.: I'm gonna talk about the films of the Coen brothers. This talk generally fits into this growing academic subfield called religion in film. I'll talk briefly about what

we mean by that, religion in film, including some methodological issues. Religion in film is a growing subfield in the academic study of religion. There are new books published all the time, there are more classes and more universities offer it each year on the theme of religion of film, and there are many ways to approach the subject of religion in film. Which approach one takes depends on how you define these terms. I'm gonna talk a little bit about the term religion and the term film. Let's start with film. How do you define the word film? Pretty easy. I mean, maybe not so easy anymore, with there are so many different platforms for viewing. But, I'm kind of an old-fashioned guy and I take an old-fashioned approach to movies. I think of movies as a feature film, so let's say 90 minutes or longer. But, in terms of the viewing experience, I think that it's a benefit to students to sit together in a dark room and watch on as big a screen as possible a full length movie, and then later discuss it.

Dr. Elijah S.: With popular culture, maybe you're watching it on your phone or whatever, and that's fine, but there's something to be said for that cinematic experience. Now, let's define religion. Well, that's easy. We all know what religion is. But seriously, as the famous scholar said, religion is our term to define. So, when I use the word religion in a class, like religion in film, I'm not taking an essentialist definition of religion. Religion isn't any particular essence, but a common sense definition in the way that things might be considered religious by filmmakers or also by film watchers, one might they see. So, just as an arbitrary workable definition, you might see these different things in film and they might all be considered religious to you. That's all I mean by that. So, when you're studying something like religion in film or religion in popular culture, you need to take a broad definitely of religion. But, you don't wanna be too broad. Because if everything is religion, then nothing is.

Dr. Elijah S.: If religion is simply meaning, like this is something serious or worth taking notice of or thoughtfulness, then you've lost something specific about what religion is. Because I think there are a lot of great filmmakers out there who make very meaningful films of very high quality, who don't seem to be particularly interested in myth at all, widely conceived, or morality at all. They don't seem to have a religious interest, which is fine. That's not to criticize them. I'm thinking of people like Wes Anderson, one of my favorite filmmakers but not necessarily one I would consider to have a religious sensibility. Some filmmakers, I would say, are anti-religious, and I actually wrote about that a couple years ago in an article about the great Canadian [inaudible 00:06:14] David Cronenberg, who is very explicitly anti-religious.

Dr. Elijah S.: Certainly there's a relationship being posited when you're talking about religion and film. There's a kind of relationship. I'm gonna, again, just arbitrarily argue that there are maybe three common relationships that the word and can do in religion and film. How is religion represented in film? There are many, many films where there's Jesus figures in film, which you can say there's an example of religion in film. How are, for example, Muslims represented in American film? Spoiler alert, not that well. Usually not very accurately. Those are the kinds of questions that you can ask when you're studying religion in film.

Dr. Elijah S.: Maybe the and means is. Maybe that and is talking about religion is film. Here, you're really getting deeper because you're talking about the metaphysics or the theology of film style. Another way that religion is film works is by looking at that definition of mythology. Mythology is film. If you see mythology as revealing the culture values, the power structures of a given society, it creates meaningful worlds for us to inhabit. It teaches and questions morality. If you look at that's what mythology does, then it's quite easy to see film as the most powerful form of modern mythology.

Dr. Elijah S.: I would say the third definition that the word and can do here in religion and film is to switch it around and look at film as religion. Here, I would ask you to look at the cinematic experience itself. The experience of going into a darkened room with deep red curtains, sitting in silence, having a stirring experience. Could be going to a cathedral or you could be going to see a film. Or, think about people who are so fanatical about certain films, people who are Star Wars fans or Harry Potter fans, that it becomes a religion for them. In this case, film functions as a religion. And this lends itself very well to a kind of Durkheimian analysis, a sociological analysis, of how religion functions to create community and so forth.

Dr. Elijah S.: Those are the three definitions. We're gonna look at all three definitions. I'll focus more on one than the other two, as you'll see. For those of you who aren't familiar, who are the Coen brothers? There's those guys. They are two skinny, bearded guys from Minnesota. Joel was born in 1954 and Ethan was born three years later, and they write and direct and produce, and even edit their own films. They edit under the pseudonym Roderick Jaynes. In a 32 year period, from their first feature film Blood Simple in 1984 to their most recent feature film, Hail Caesar! in 2006, they have given us 17 film and I would argue that all but one or two of them are eminently watchable and endlessly rewatchable. Many of these films are among the best American films of all time, I would say.

Dr. Elijah S.: There's a lot of critical analysis of their films. They're darlings of film critics, even though their films don't always do that well at the box office, but their films are not usually seen as religious, particularly. There's not a lot of work on the religious aspect in the films of the Coen brothers. For years really, there was debate whether the Coen brothers had any kind of serious background or interest in religion at all. Certainly it was there in their movies, but was religion just one more element in their ironic post-modern mix of genres, American folklore, and popular culture? But, with their 14th and 15th films, which were released one year apart, I believe the Coens tipped their hand. The Coens offered us this film, True Grit, a remake of the famous John Wayne western, and critics generally found it light and accessible. Some critics even called it un-Coen-like, in the fact that the film was their biggest box office hit to date. It starred Jeff Bridges, Matt Damon. It seemed to confirm that this was a lighter film.

Dr. Elijah S.: But some critics, maybe more attuned to religious matters, noticed how central the Calvinist idea of God's grace featured in the movie's dialogue, soundtrack,

and visual grammar. It became possible, even necessary, to read back to the beginning of the Coens' filmography and to see their films as seriously religious all along. Did we really miss the fact that their very first film, *Blood Simple*, a low budget film noir, features Christian imagery, including light and fish and stigmata? And, it features an apocalyptic sermon on a Christian radio station in one of the scenes. Did we miss that the key to solving the puzzle film of Barton Fink may in fact be in the Bible? Or did we miss the fact that *The Hudsucker Proxy* wears its dharmic influences on its sleeve?

Dr. Elijah S.: So again, if you're simply looking for the representation of religion, again limiting oneself to the first definition we talked about, you'll find many obvious religious scenes in most of the Coen brothers' films. A lot of their films contain references to the Bible, whether direct quotations or indirect allusions. At least three of their movies feature soundtracks filled with religious music. That's *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, *The Ladykillers*, and *True Grit*. Even movies with little explicit religion might include subtle visual clues. For example, in the movie *Inside Llewyn Davis*, the Upper West Side apartment of a married Jewish couple is decorated with a variety of Menorahs. Or perhaps character background.

Dr. Elijah S.: Let's skip ahead briefly to the third definition of religion, film as religion, the idea that actually watching films and appreciating films can become a kind of modern form of religion. Here, the obviously example is *The Big Lebowski*, where the Coen brothers are accidentally responsible for the biggest cult movie of the past quarter century. In fact, in a few days we'll be at the 20th anniversary of *The Big Lebowski*. So, do yourself a favor, watch the movie. Have some refreshments. *The Big Lebowski* has really inherited the mantle of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* as the preeminent film in which screenings involved ritualized audience participation. Ritualized audience participation.

Dr. Elijah S.: But, let me go back to the second definition of religion, religion is film. Could the Coens' increasingly impressive body of work actually be saying something consistent throughout their 17 films, about what they consider or what audiences may consider to be the sacred about morality, about mythology, about how we should live our lives? Some basic religious questions. Unlike other American filmmakers to whom they might be compared, like Wes Anderson or Woody Allen, the Coens have never shot a film outside the US, with two notable exceptions, a five minute short for the anthology film *Paris je t'aime*, which is shot in the Paris metro although it featured an American, and then a few scenes of *No Country For Old Men* take place right over the border in Mexico. Other than that, the Coens' movies are set in America, and in very particular places. Santa Rosa, Hollywood, Texas, Minnesota, Mississippi. What are they doing here? I think they're tapping into the collective national imagination, which is another way of saying American mythology.

Dr. Elijah S.: What kind of mythology? They're set in particular eras before things really get happening. Before the '80s start or the '60s start or the '40s start. That to me suggests that the Coens' eschew triumphalist myth set in the eras of past that are considered glorious. The Coen brothers have never made, and probably will

never make, a movie about brave American soldiers during World War II or plucky businessmen in the Great Depression unless it's very ironic. The heroes in Coen brothers are not masters of their time, but they're subject to larger forces beyond their control. The iconic line from No Country For Old Men, Sheriff Bell says, something's coming, referring to the brutal drug wars in the 1980s, but also the free floating American apocalypse. Coen protagonists are, at certain places in mythic times, betwixt and between on the verge of something new that they cannot understand, control, or even escape, whether that be the incipient UFO craze in small-town California in A Man Who Wasn't There, the sexual revolution that has not quite hit suburban Minnesota, the New Deal's modernization of the deep south, Pearl Harbor, or the arrival of Bob Dylan on the New York folk scene.

Dr. Elijah S.: These unstoppable forces that the Coen brothers' mostly male protagonists face speak to a larger issue, I think. A larger, mythological theme. That is that Coen brothers' movies consistently question the mythology of masculinity. Let me give you some examples from several of their films. In a voiceover, Barton Fink reads a line from a script he is writing. If you are a man, a real man ... Ulysses Everett McGill, an old brother, wants to be a bonafide paterfamilias. Even as his estranged wife argues that he is not. The first line of True Grit, is that the man? And, of course, in The Big Lebowski, the dude gets asked, what makes a man? One of the answers, maybe, to being a man and to acting morally is understanding. Understanding what's going on, understanding your place in the world. So, let me end by asking the question, is all my analysis here actually in the movie? Probably some of you are thinking, am I just reading too much into it, because that's what I do? Is this really what the Coens meant themselves?

Dr. Elijah S.: There's a couple of possible answers to that. On the one hand, it doesn't really matter, because you want to avoid the creeping intentional fallacy, which is a faulty argument that a text can only mean what the authors intend. So, it doesn't really matter what the Coens had in mind, it's what we, as audience, can get out of their movies. On the other hand, we can actually look at what the Coen brothers have said about their movies during their interviews and press tours. Some, I would argue, to argue the other side, to play the devil's advocate, in our desire to find the message in their movies, beyond their immediate pleasures, maybe we're ignoring the best advice of the Coens themselves. They once told a journalist, quote, none of our movies have messages. Do you see a moral in them?

Dr. Elijah S.: To be honest, their kinda famously dickish in interviews. They disavow meaning. They pretend to be just old-fashioned filmmakers, despite the fact that Joel has a degree in philosophy from Princeton and so forth. Ethan, rather. Sorry. Joel has a film degree from NYU ... So, they're very disingenuous, in other words. We might ask whether the very way that religious study scholars look for the religious in the Coen brothers' movies, or more broadly the way that film critics look for meaning in general in them, is the same way that the Coen brothers' protagonists often are looking, sometimes futilely, for transcendence or for

meaning. Is this actually what makes the Coen brothers' films religious in the first place? Thank you.

Prof. Mike A.: Thanks again to Dr. Elijah Siegler from the College of Charleston, for what was an excellent day lecture. Another great lecture on religion in popular culture. But, Dr. Siegler was not the only guest we had this semester. We also had Linell Cady from Arizona State University, who was our Aronov lecturer. Professor Cady came and actually spent a lot of time in the department. One of the things we did, we did this roundtable discussion with some faculty members who were available about the state of the field changes in universities and higher educational generally, in graduate education, in religious studies. Professor Cady at Arizona State was part of a transition that happened there, where the department of religious studies was combined, merged, with history and philosophy into a larger school. We talked about that, we talked about Arizona State's work with technology and online education. We talked about changes in the field more broadly, in higher ed. It was just a really good conversation. Now, it was recorded with one microphone on the table, so the quality of the recording isn't up to what we usually have, but the content level, I think, makes it really worthwhile. I wanna turn this over to a discussion. You'll hear me opening it up, and then a couple of our faculty members, Nathan Loewen, Ted Trost, Steven Ramey, and Matt Bagger were there as well. Let's take a listen.

Prof. Mike A.: To start with, I was curious ... this is something Russel and I were talking about. At Arizona State now, you are housed in this school of, I [inaudible 00:20:28] looked at this this morning, history ... What is, now? History something.

Prof. Linell C.: History, philosophy, and religious studies.

Prof. Mike A.: Okay. I was trying to get the order right.

Prof. Linell C.: Yeah. Alphabetical.

Prof. Mike A.: Yeah. I looked at the home page and it frames itself as a transhumanity. Is that the word? Just curious, how did that unit come to be? How is it working in that kind of unit versus a stand-alone department?

Prof. Linell C.: Well, it goes back. We were created as a school in, I think it was 2009. It was driven by two things. One is the president of ASU, who came in 2002. His vision of higher education is that it was too much broken up into departmental silos, and he really felt that higher education, it's really an old legacy of the 19th Century, and that it really needed to transform and areas of study needed to be far more integrated. So, in other units, there had been some movement towards, like the School of Life Sciences or the School of Geological Studies. There were some shifts that went on around the university. But, in the humanities, we were still pretty much the same old regular departments, until the financial crisis hit in 2008 or '09. That's when they decided to move forward with our school. At the time, I think there was great hope amongst the

administration that the faculty would be able to come up with a nifty name that would somehow reflect a more transdisciplinary humanities orientation, but everything that we proposed over that, to each other, didn't seem to work. Just calling it humanities, the other humanities departments weren't gonna let that pass because they were humanities too. So, it was not really clear what name would work.

Prof. Linell C.: On top of that, the faculty was very eager to maintain their own distinctive identity because you all well know a philosopher does not see him or herself as an historian, let alone a scholar of religion. So, these are not necessarily easy borders to ignore. The way it ended up was we kept our own name in the title. Also on the grounds that students needed to be able to find where this kind of study was being done, because I know Alabama's gotten really big too, but there are, I don't know, 50 or 60 undergraduates on ground there. Students wanting to find out where you study a certain thing, if you didn't have that name, you'd really be disadvantaged. It is so cumbersome it's ridiculous, but on the other hand, it faithfully honors the fact that there are three disciplines, or at least fields, if you wanna debate what we are. But, that has been a good thing, I think, for maintaining our own identities.

Prof. Mike A.: You also founded this center, let me get it right, Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict?

Prof. Linell C.: Religion and Conflict.

Prof. Mike A.: Yes. Where did that come from? What's the story behind its founding and genesis?

Prof. Linell C.: When President Michael Crow came to ASU in 2002, he wanted to do something, if there was interest, to enhance what was going on in religious studies because he recognized that religion really had a lot of public salience. I think prior to that, although we flourished as a department, there had not been a lot done to provide any kind of leverage or platform for more than what we did within a departmental unit. This was right after 9/11, and he felt that religion and conflict was the issue that was most significant and important to bring resources to bear on. So, he invested, each year, money in developing a center for religion and conflict. I was appointed the director, and it was, for me, a wonderful opportunity to develop a center that brought together the study of religion with all these other fields. So, it was very much driven by the directive to be a multidisciplinary center and get faculty from across, not just liberal arts and sciences, but other colleges as well to join together in all sorts of different kinds of collaborations. Of course, there was this expectation that it would generate external funding, because we were formed with the expectation of being a research center.

Prof. Linell C.: But, what we found was that it really was a lot of interest in funders for all sorts of projects having to do with the study of religion with other areas. We are more familiar, I think, with programs such as the Ford Foundation or Luce

Templeton, which had been long-standing funders in the humanities. The areas that we also were able to form faculty collaborations, one initial grant was for a Minerva Grant from the Department of Defense, which was a \$5 million grant. That was then parlayed into additional \$1 million plus grants. And these were faculty working with people from, well it's international teams, but the core team at ASU was a couple of scholars of Islam working with a computer scientist who does more data mining, as well as someone from global studies. So, it was really trying to bring together these people for much larger kinds of things. This particular project they were doing was on exploring ... multiple forms of Islam across three different continents, both those prone to more Jihadist orientations as well as those who were explicitly counter to those movements. So, trying to look at this dynamic within these different countries.

Speaker 12: If I can ask? We've talked about the moving of religious studies into a school with other units, and you've retained some, as it were, disciplinary or departmental identity despite the merging into a school.

Prof. Linell C.: Yeah.

Speaker 12: But, now you're talking about grant work.

Prof. Linell C.: Yeah.

Speaker 12: In the former part, it sounds like you really don't have to play well with others. You can retain your departmental identity and not really seek collaborations across, inside ASU. Now, when you're talking about grant stuff, and I think we had this conversation at breakfast, that playing with other people or working with other people outside your disciplinary boundaries is really important if you're going to get those big dollar grants. If you're gonna get anything, right?

Prof. Linell C.: Yes.

Speaker 12: Even a \$5,000 NEH Grant now requires you to be playing with other people.

Prof. Linell C.: Yes.

Speaker 12: How do you retain your departmental disciplinary identity and maintain your interests, but also have productive collaborations with people with whom might have other interests than yours? Right?

Prof. Linell C.: Yes.

Speaker 12: You may be pulling two different sleds, but how do you get pulling the same sled in order to get a grant? What's the trick there?

Prof. Linell C.: It's a really good question. All through ASU, the ethos over the last 15 years has shifted to, excuse me, encouraging people to be collaborative. The president

really, I think, has generated not just interest, but enthusiasm and buy-in on the part of much of the faculty that all areas really are enhanced if they recognize that working together with other colleagues will be generative of their own intellectual work and the significance that it yields. So, this wasn't just a directive for the center that I developed, but there are other units on campus where faculty really do feel this sense of commitment to working with others on different kinds of projects. So we developed, over the years, an Institute for Humanities Research, for example, that also tries to encourage faculty to work together on different kinds of projects.

Prof. Linell C.: But, I think the lagging shift at ASU was that for years the 10 year and promotion criteria did not change relative to the ethos of collaboration. And this is now a conversation that has become more visible, and that things that people are doing, that may not be the standard monograph but that may be more, let's say, public humanities or public collaborative work, has to be recognized somehow. I would say that units are among the most conservative to change on this score. Although someone like the president can come and exhort everybody to move in this direction, it gets very difficult. Because faculty feel that their own reputations, and rightly so, are tied much more to the traditional kinds of works. So, it's difficult to negotiate these expectations on the part of the different parties.

Speaker 12: Right. Get a graph or something that's not gonna move you through the TNP process.

Prof. Linell C.: That's why I think it's much, much harder at the pre-tenure stage. I think once you get tenure, you're in a much better position to get involved in these kinds of things.

Speaker 12: But by that time, the culture that's creating in your brain-

Prof. Linell C.: You're right.

Speaker 12: ... over the six to seven years of getting tenure or whatever-

Prof. Linell C.: You're right.

Speaker 12: ... leads you to not knowing how to play with other people.

Prof. Linell C.: No, you're right.

Speaker 12: I spent six years focusing on me and my work, just to then later say, well now I gotta do work with other people. I don't know how to do it anymore.

Prof. Linell C.: You know, I it has to be that whatever kinds of collaborative meetings or seminars are put together has to be genuinely engaging intellectually for the participants. They really have to feel that somehow they're getting something

by going and talking to these people. I found, over the years, that sometimes it really does lead to very specific projects, like an article or some kind of a collaborative grant that they then publish their own material from, but sometimes it's just the intellectual conversations that gets people excited about then applying it in their own work to their own individual products. So, I don't think it always has to be a very visible collaborative joint result, but it can be that spark that gets you going. Because sometimes when you're working in isolation and then teaching your course, at least I think a lot of people find, that you miss that real excitement of a seminar, of just a quick-moving conversation.

Speaker 13: I think is really important, there are very simple institutional ways to do it. Some universities require for a PhD defense committee, that you have somebody outside of the department. Right?

Prof. Linell C.: Yes.

Speaker 13: You have to have an external member of the committee. That just builds it in those conversations from the get-go. All it takes is just a rule, as opposed to any money.

Prof. Linell C.: Yes, yes.

Speaker 13: If you have a core curriculum, you draw the faculty from across departments and have them meet every so often. They're talking, and yes you have to provide the donuts, but it's not a big [crosstalk 00:34:10]

Prof. Linell C.: Not a big cost.

Speaker 13: Right. And, those are where a lot really interesting exchanges happen. On the other hand, when we think about the model of collaborative scholarship, how many of us have found published works that are explicitly collaborative and in that way really valuable? There are some, but not that many. So, in my view, the focus, again really probably ought to be on fostering those conversations in the institutionally arranged ways rather than saying, look, we need people to publish together.

Speaker 12: Yeah, I think you'll find that in places like College of Education, School of Business. That's where multi-author, actual collaborative, methodologies get applied, executed, and delivered. But, in humanities and social sciences? I guess psychology, sociology will have that, anthropology a bit, but once you move over to history, religious studies, philosophy, that's not big into the culture or the structure of most institutions and disciplines.

Prof. Mike A.: It's funny because I know when I was in grad school, interdisciplinary was the thing. Like, the reason to come to Emory is that it's interdisciplinary. I think a lot of graduate programs tout that. But once you graduate, we stop. Like, I would be in seminars with comp lit, history, American studies folks. I was in a seminar

on theories of myth, and half the class were comp lit people who were bringing all this stuff that I had never heard of. It was awesome. But then, you leave and you go off, and you hopefully get a job, and then you don't talk to any people in comp lit ever again. So, it's just interesting how we value that at some parts of our world but not others.

Prof. Mike A.: It's interesting because it sounds like your school and university has been on the front edge of a lot of the larger higher ed changes that have been coming through. But, you also have a graduate program. How has these [inaudible 00:36:16] big, structural changes that you've observed in the university and overall changed the way you think about graduate education and preparing PhD students to walk into the world that you're now the cutting edge of?

Prof. Linell C.: Well, the graduate students, before the faculty for the most part, got into the online instruction. That was because that was where it was available. There were opportunities, and many of them are fearless when it comes to saying, yes I can teach this. I can do that. I admire their ability to say yes. And, they'll develop a course in something. So, they became adept, and maybe they just have greater facility with technological tools and things like that, or less hesitation to learn these kinds of things, but they oftentimes will teach their own online course. Religious studies, when we were a department, we had graduate students assisting faculty in courses. We really kept the model of graduate assistance. When we moved into the school, within the space of two to three years that changed because there was a sense by the director that it had to be parity, and history, for years, had its entering doctoral students teach sections of whatever that intro to western civ is. So, it was thought that, well, is it fair that doctoral students in the same school, some are assisting in a course and another is teaching his or her own course? Over time, that's meant that we've lost our assistantships and they've now become, for the most part, maybe not in the first year, but they do their own course.

Prof. Mike A.: Does it change anything about training your curriculum or any sort of structural changes in your graduate program, beyond just a change in teaching?

Prof. Linell C.: Well, when we developed the doctorate program, we instituted a teaching [inaudible 00:38:38] course, that was designed that everybody who got a degree would be able to enter a department and teach that course at a 100 level. I think the instructor for that, it's varied, but tries to also orient students to this kind of changing type of instruction when they're teaching this pedagogy course, trying to get students to be adept at [inaudible 00:39:12]. They generally do have experience in different kinds of instruction. And, I think it's great, the public humanities orientation, that your master's program is incorporating.

Prof. Mike A.: Inventing.

Prof. Linell C.: Well, inventing. No, I-

Prof. Mike A.: As we go breaking out.

Prof. Linell C.: ... I think, in fact this is something I mused over at one point with the doctoral program, whether it would be good to have that kind of a course where students really focus on public issues and contemporary life. That's sort of the topic, and then they cultivate the ability to address some of these issues in a more public fashion. I will be interested to see if it's successful.

Prof. Mike A.: Me too.

Prof. Linell C.: Yeah. But, this is the way it's going. Even faculty now, I just have this sense that faculty have to have, have to maybe is not the right way to put it, but will have their own kind of platform that they become almost a brand in themselves, or a kind of a presence online and then they have a more public dimension. But, I don't think faculty members who are towards the end of their careers ... It's such a cultural shift. A shift in the ethos and sensibilities of what you do. But, I think among some it's really gonna become much more [crosstalk 00:40:59]

Prof. Mike A.: Are we better or worse off for it?

Prof. Linell C.: I actually think it's better. I really do. I think there have been far too strong and insular character to academics for a long time, and I think this is a really good way to have a broader impact, publicly. So, I think it's a positive thing.

Prof. Mike A.: We are very thankful for Linell Cady for spending that time with our faculty and for that excellent conversation. Now, for our last segment of the episode, we have a section of Dr. Cady's lecture, her Aronov lecture. It was titled Spirituality, Religion, and Science in a Post-Secular Age. What I chose to pull out for our listening audience was a section where Dr. Cady talks about a writer and speaker named Gary Zukav, who you may have heard, as she says early in this section, on Oprah. One of Oprah's Soul Sunday speakers. She talks about how Zukav uses the language of physics and the language of spirituality, and it's just a really interesting look at modern American religion and where it's headed.

Prof. Linell C.: There are two early popular and influential figures in this cultural space. Oprah Winfrey credits Zukav with her introducing spirituality and its talk of energy frequencies and intentions into the mainstream of American culture. She says that his book, *The Seed of the Soul*, changed the way I see myself and it changed the way I practice my relationships, personal and business. She claims, next to the Bible, it is the most important book in her life. The poet and memoirist Maya Angelou confesses not only to reading Zukav's book 10 times, but to keeping a copy of it covered in plastic on her kitchen table. Zukav and his multiple workshops, his bestselling books, and his over several dozen appearances on the Oprah show have secured his reputation within popular culture over the past quarter century. If his 1989 book launched his career as a spiritual guru, it was an earlier book, published in 1979, that really captures how

much the spiritual but not religious movement tapped into the new physics in its development.

Prof. Linell C.: He published a book called *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, which is an overview of the new physics, and it eventually sold over a million copies and was translated into multiple languages and editions. That came on the heels of Capra's even more successful and critically acclaimed *The Tao of Physics*, which was published a few years earlier and has really become, in some respects, an iconic book that is still in print with over 40 editions worldwide. The self-taught Zukav really wasn't self-taught. He went to Harvard. But, he did not have a graduate degree in physics. Capra, who was a trained physicist with a doctorate from the University of Vienna, they were both members of a social network of largely unemployed or underemployed university trained physicists in northern California in the '60s and '70s.

Prof. Linell C.: This network belonged to the countercultural movement that was plumbing the stranger features and implications of quantum physics that was spearheaded by some of the early 20th Century giants in this area, such as Einstein, Heisenberg, and Schrodinger. Their interests were very eclectic, exotic. They ranged from paranormal experiences to quantum physics, Eastern religion, alternative consciousness from the mystical to the psychedelic. As David Kaiser tells the story, this loosely affiliated network existed on the margins of the university-based discipline of physics, which had since the second world war, focused mostly on gadgetry, essentially on a special flavor of research and development that was conducted side by side with engineers and military planners, as he explains. But, missing from this orientation in physics was engagement with the broader philosophical questions that had troubled the earliest 20th Century figures in this area, given the profound challenges to our common sense view of reality. Capra and Zukav traveled in the same circle as these marginalized physicists and did a great deal to push the discussion about these big metaphysical questions and helping to refocus mainstream physics on some of these questions but as much advancing these hybrid cultural formations that have been clicking along on the margins of elite culture.

Prof. Linell C.: Now, even in their book titles, they were really eager to illuminate the parallels between quantum physics and Eastern mystical traditions. They argue that the alignment between science and spirituality is made possible by quantum physics' revolutionary overthrow of the Cartesian-Newtonian model that has dominated science and modernistic thinking in the modern period. Now, this claim permeates this body of literature. Sometimes in a more sophisticated fashion, such as Capra, and sometimes not quite so sophisticated, as with Zukav. But, it goes something like this, the modernist paradigm in both its dualist and physical modest versions construes material reality as existing outside the self, operating according to laws of nature that are, in principle, regular and predictable. Truth is a function of the human rationally comprehending the law-like operations of processes in the physical world, the thoroughly disenchanting real world, the objective world, out there, outside the self, giving rise to the metaphor of the great machine.

Prof. Linell C.: Quantum physics upends this mechanistic deterministic model with the startling discovery that it doesn't apply to the subatomic level. In a series of experience in the last century reveal a fundamental indeterminacy at the smallest level, and it's better understood in terms of possibilities or tendencies than independent objects whose interactions can, in principle, be determined. Actualization can only be approached in terms of statistical probability, and most consequently is somehow related to the act of observation. In the striking words of one of these physicists, gone is the observer of classical theory, the person who stands safely behind the thick glass wall and watches what goes on without taking part. Unquote. Within the new paradigm, the observer is a participant, with consciousness somehow co-constructing reality itself. Quantum physics seems to point to a deeper dimension that reveals a relational whole rather than an aggregate of parts that are externally and only locally related. Experiments increasingly show that the parts are intimately related and very counterintuitively that instantaneous communication and non-local causality actually exist.

Prof. Linell C.: The implication is that our three dimensional time-space world does not exhaust reality, but is in some sense embedded in and refracting another dimension or domain understood as mind or consciousness. Now, the striking similarities between this idea and perennial claims to mystical experience across multiple traditions give rise the conviction of parallels and harmony between quantum physics and spirituality. Now, the new physics ... I have to see how I'm doing here. The new physics, as they underscore, exposes the limits of science. And, I think this is an important point. It repeatedly leads to results that contradict our everyday understanding of reality. There was a recognition among the earliest scientists that physics was not really dealing with reality as such, but with symbolic mathematical representations of it. It does not, and cannot, capture reality in its immediacy, fullness, or wholeness. In this respect, the new physics dethrones science as the final or complete arbiter of what is true and real. In so doing, it creates room for a mystical experience, understood as an alternate source of insight into reality. It leaves open the possibility that reality is more than science can measure, as mystics have long claimed.

Prof. Linell C.: Renowned physicist Eddington acknowledged in his quip that religion first became possible for a reasonable man about the year 1927. Science has always dealt with the shadowy world of symbols, but he confesses, we thought we were dealing with the world itself. In this respect, quantum physics limits the territorial expansive moves, epistemological and ontological, of modernist thinking and science alike. Now, one point I think is very important to understand is that, although the language of mysticism suggests a common core experience, the way these figures render that experience, interpret it, differs significantly.

Prof. Linell C.: For Zukav, quantum physics upends a dispiriting and disenchanting materialism, making way for recognition of human agency and participation in the construction of reality. Talk of the possibility that we shape our own reality morphs into the affirmation that not only do we influence our reality, but in

some degree we actually create it. Then, more dramatically still, he claims the cogs in the machine have become the creators of the universe. This gives you just some sense of the enthusiastic affirmation of what human agency and creativity and human potential means in this interpretation. But, it clearly exalts the power of expanded human consciousness and its potential to usher in a new human species with new capacities and capabilities, and it's through conscious choice of attention and action that individuals expand in direct consciousness to construct reality. This capability is a function, he argues, of recognizing that we are not alone. That our higher selves can access a consciousness that is deeper and wider than everyday ego-driven consciousness. It is the fount of endless possibilities.

Prof. Linell C.:

Really, he's spiritualizing the idea of evolution, and it echoes ideas that have been circulating for at least a century. But, it's found new vigor with quantum physics, and the genre of spirituality, in a sense, popularizes this more broadly within the culture as a whole. Now, I would say, just parenthetically, so fixated is Zukav in underscoring the individual's power and responsibility to create reality that he gives no attention, for the most part, to the biological, social, and political factors that condition and constrain human lives. These are essentially erased. The prime directive is always to focus on how you construct reality, and if there's anything negative entering into your horizon, you are to ignore that or interpret it as, somehow, a learning experience that will enable you to construct your reality in a more positive, flourishing vein. For many, despite the theoretical and moral limitations of that position, this is overshadowed by what is felt to be a very empowering message that individuals do have agency and do have the ability to, in a sense, transform their own reality.

Prof. Mike A.:

Thanks again to Professor Linell Cady from Arizona State University for an excellent Aronov lecture. Thank you to Elijah Siegler for an excellent day lecture. It was a great spring semester. And, it was just wonderful to have guests on campus and guests in the department. We learned so much from both of them. Study Religion is a production of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Alabama. For more information on our department, go to www.religion.ua.edu or you can find us on Facebook. [Facebook.com/rel@ua](https://www.facebook.com/rel@ua). If you've got a comment or a question or ideas for this podcast, we would love to hear from you. You can email us at religiousstudies@ua.edu or you can send us a tweet. We are @studyreligion. We're also on Instagram with awesome pictures of our beautiful historic Manly Hall and the wonderful squirrels and all sorts of things going on in the department @studyreligion on Instagram. If you've enjoyed this show, if you wanna support our department, if you want more people to listen to this awesome podcast, do us a huge favor. Go to iTunes. Leave us a comment, leave us a rating. That really helps other people find the show. Study Religion is produced by me, Mike Altman, with help from our wonderful production assistant, Sierra Lawson. This credit music is from Disparition. More information about them at disparition.info. We'll talk to you soon. Roll tide.

Speaker 14:

[inaudible 00:57:43]

Speaker 15: I thought you were very stoic the other day. I had no idea you were injured.

Speaker 14: [inaudible 00:57:46]

Prof. Mike A.: We eventually will have an honor's day with one faculty member not freshly injured. We've had two in a row now.