

HPS/H 169

The Occult Origins of Modern Science: Alchemy, Astrology, and Magic

9 units (3-0-6)

No prerequisites

Modern science is often described as a rational, empirical, and objective search for truth about nature. But how, when, and why did science come to acquire these qualities? Many scholars look to the exciting developments and discoveries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe—the so-called “Scientific Revolution”—as the defining period for the emergence of modern science. If “modern” science is defined in these terms, then “premodern” science must have looked more like pseudo-science, superstition, or myth. However, that is far from the truth. In this course, we’ll work to uncover the role that the occult sciences, including alchemy, astrology, and magic, played in the formation of modern science. Our studies of the occult sciences will force us to think more deeply about what distinguishes modern science from the occult sciences, and to question why their role in the development of modern science has also been obscured.

Instructor: Gaida