

Earth Ethics: Religion, Nature and Globalization
REL 3492/IDS 4920
BA/BS
Tuesday/Thursday: 2-3:15
Fall 2011¹

Room: GC 283A

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Course Description

This course draws from religious, philosophical, and scientific sources in order to examine planetary environmental problems. Environmental Philosophy and Ethics, as well as the emerging field of Religion and Ecology have developed over the past 50-60 years in an attempt to address problematic human-earth relations. However, underlying many of these approaches is a very western understanding of “nature” as pristine, pure and without human presence. The Modern, Western Scientific Worldview, for instance, has attempted to define globally what “nature” is. Historically, some religious worldviews have understood nature as either a pristine creation for which humans ought to be good stewards, or as evil material that must be controlled and eventually escaped. Finally, many Romantic thinkers have argued that culture and technology are the culprits of ecological and social ills, and human beings ought to return to a paradisiacal relationship with nature.

Might these very static notions of nature, as either pristine source of salvation or chaotic source of evil, exacerbate planetary ills? This is precisely what some political, post-modern, and post-colonial scholars have suggested. Nature, from this perspective should be thought of in the plural and not as something separate from “culture.” The very attempt to define nature and globalize that understanding of nature leads to social oppressions (think about what is coded as “natural” or “unnatural”) and ecological ills (through removing humans from their ecological and often urban contexts). This course will explore the effects of globalizing understandings of “nature” and “religion.” The hypothesis of the course is that both religion (culture) and science (nature) have served as apolitical foundations for forcing truth claims upon “others.” In response to this, this course will explore what a “planetary” understanding and ethic (Spivak) of the world as opposed to that of the global might look like. In other words, what might planetary environmental ethics look like?

¹Syllabus is subject to change. Required purchased texts, course requirements, and course time will not change, but some of the reading materials may depending on the context of the Fall 2010 semester.

AIM OF THE COURSE

To explore the philosophical and religious sources and forms for the processes known as “globalization” as they pertain to the human and non-human community, and to discern an appropriate, non-colonizing environmental ethic in a world that has multiple meanings of “nature” and what is “natural.”

LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course will: a) familiarize students with “environmental ethics”, b) familiarize students with the literature in “religion and ecology,” and thus c) provide students with the resources to address and examine global, environmental problems and how those problems affect different peoples around the world.

REQUIREMENTS

Recognizing that there are many different learning styles, these requirements are designed to provide you with a variety of ways in which you can demonstrate your engagement with the materials in the course.

1. Class Participation—30%

The first step to doing well in this class is to show up! You can’t be a part of the learning community if you are not present. If you have to be absent from the course, please notify me ahead of time. Any more than two absences (unless there are extenuating circumstances) will result in a lowering of your participation grade. One absence is a free-bee. The second you may use the “get out of class” free card that I am providing on the first day of class. **(Just attending all sessions gets you 15%.)**

The second step to doing well in the class is to speak up during course discussions. This means you must read materials and attend lectures! I realize that we all exist on a spectrum between introversion and extroversion, but remember that the classroom is as good as all of the voices therein. We all lose if we don’t hear your voice at some point(s) throughout the semester. **(This will count for 15%)**

The classroom is a community of learners. That is, we are all in the process of critically engaging the lectures and course materials together. Learning should be a collaborative process and it will take all of us to learn this semester. Having said that there are some ground rules that should be followed in course discussions and assignments.

1. Confidentiality: Sometimes we are exploring serious issues in the course that may be hard to speak about or give voice too. I expect that students will respect one another’s privacy in this course and allow room for this type of exploration.
2. Trust and Respect: The classroom is a learning community and it is only as good as the relationships of the people that make up the classroom. Give your classmates the benefit of the doubt before jumping to conclusions about what is said. Also, be sure to state your opinions, questions, ideas and beliefs in a way that is not intentionally disrespectful to others in the class.
3. Academic Honesty. In all written materials, students will be expected to cite sources. Plagiarizing and “Copying” from other students may result in a failing grade. Grading for written assignments will follow the Rubric that is handed out on the first day.

4. Students should be aware of everyone in the classroom and enable each person to contribute to the conversation. Likewise, each participant should refrain from dominating class discussion.
5. In order to facilitate dialogue, on discussion days we may break out into small groups.

3. Ecological Footprint Journal: 30%

Each student is expected to keep an “ecological footprint” journal. This journal will have three components.

1. Go online and complete the Ecological Footprint.

(http://www.footprintnetwork.org/en/index.php/GFN/page/personal_footprint). Write a reflection about your results in your journal including addressing the complex question, “what is sustainability?” Offer your own reflections about whether or not humans are responsible for living within the ecosystems of planet earth. Finally, offer your reflections on what you think “nature” is, and how humans are and/or are not a part of the rest of the natural world. **Due Tuesday, September 13 in class.**

2. Monitor your food consumption for a day. Write down everything you eat, including their ingredients, and try to find out: a) where the food came from and how much it had to travel to get to you, b) how the people in farms/factories were treated in the making of the food product (this one may not be possible in all cases, but do your best), and c) how the crops and animals that made your food were grown /raised (organically? With pesticides? In factory farms? Small farms? Etc.) After completing these three steps, reflect on some ways that you might “green” your own diet. **Due Tuesday, October 18, in class.**

3. Choose a topic that we have covered or will cover in the course and reflect on three questions: a) why is it important in the context of the course, b) Why you agree or disagree with the ways in which the lectures/readings dealt with that given topic, and c) what might be some constructive ways to think about that topic in the future. **Due Tuesday, November 8 in class.**

Each journal entry should be 3-5 pages, typed, and double spaced. For each section, you should cite information that you use. Any type of plagiarism will not be tolerated. Each section will count for 10% of the grade.

4. Quizzes, Mid-term, Final Exams—40%

Weekly quizzes: Weekly quizzes will be given on the readings and lectures for the given week on Thursdays, in class. There will be 12 quiz sessions (one for each Thursday) but only 10 required quizzes (meaning you can miss two). They will each consist of 5 questions and make up **20% of the grade**. Thus, there will be total of 50 quiz questions for a perfect score. If you take all 12, you can make up to 60 points and anything over 50 will be factored in as extra credit.

Each student must take the midterm and final exams. They will be take-home essays, given out at the end of a Thursday class. The mid-term given out at the end of class on **October 13** and due in class on Tuesday, **October 18**, and the final will be given out at the end of the last class on **December 1** and due at the end of the day on Tuesday **December 6**. **They will make up 20% of the grade.**

PLAGIARISM POLICY

This course adheres strictly to FIU's plagiarism policy:

This Policy views plagiarism as one form of academic misconduct, and adopts the definition of the university's Code of Academic Integrity, according to which plagiarism is:

the deliberate use and appropriation of another's works without any indication of the source and the representation of such work as the student's own. Any student who fails to give credit for the ideas, expressions or materials taken from another source, including internet sources, is guilty of plagiarism.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

1. Term papers acquired online or from other sources;
2. Copying of original material without attribution;
3. Use of other students' work;
4. Copying and pasting, verbatim, information from Internet sources, without quotation marks and correct citation.

Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course and a referral to the College of Arts and Sciences Dean of Students for academic misconduct.

Grading Scale

A	96-100	C	72-77
A-	91-95	C-	71, 70
B+	89, 88	D+	69, 68
B	82-87	D	62-67
B-	80, 81	D-	60, 61
C+	79, 78	F	59 and below

Required TEXTS

Whitney Bauman, Rick Bohannon, and Kevin O'Brien, eds., *Grounding Religion: A Fieldguide to the Study of Religion and Ecology* (Routledge 2010).

David R. Keller, *Environmental Ethics: The Big Questions* (Blackwell 2010).

I-Clicker!

Other selected PDF Readings on Blackboard

Important Web Resources

Forum on Religion and Ecology: www.environment.harvard.edu/religion/religion.

Environmental Ethics: <http://online.sfsu.edu/~rone/Environ/Enviroethics.htm>.

Center for Environmental Philosophy: <http://www.cep.unt.edu/>.

Ecofeminism: <http://eve.enviroweb.org/>.

Environmental Justice: <http://www.ejnet.org/ej/>.
Evangelical Environmental Network: <http://prayerforcreationcare.creationcare.org/index.php>
Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life: <http://www.coejl.org/index.php>
Indigenous Environmental Network: <http://www.ienearth.org/>
Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences: <http://www.ifees.org.uk/>
United Nations Environmental Program: www.unep.org

***NB: Please help me add to this list. I hope and actually expect to learn a lot from you this semester!**

Important Dates

September (1962): Publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*
September 13: **Journal #1 Due**
September 26: St. Francis Birthday
October 11: **Journal #2 Due**
October 13: **Mid-term Essay handed out in class**
October 18: **Mid-term Essay due**
October 31: **Last day to drop with a DR grade**
November 8: **Journal #3 Due!**
December 1: **Final Essay Exam handed out in Class**
December 6: **Final Essay Exam Due**
December 19: Anniversary of the Brundtland Report
December 24: Anniversary of Apollo Earth Rise Image
February 16 (2005): Kyoto Protocol Comes into Effect
March 24, (1989): Exxon Valdez Oil Spill
March 26 (1974): First Large Action of the Chipko Movement
April 1 (1940): Birthday of Wangari Maathai
April 20-24, 2009: Indigenous People's Global Summit on Climate Change
April 22 (1970): First Earth Day
April 26 (1986): Chernobyl Disaster
June 4 (1892): Sierra Club formed with John Muir as President
July 4 (1845): Thoreau moves to Walden Pond
August 2 (1978): Lois Gibbs begins movement at Love Canal

Schedule

Conceptual Introductions

Week 1 August 23/25: Introduction to Course: Sources for Environmental Ethics. Overview of Syllabus and Requirements

READING:

Blackboard: Lynn White, The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis (PDF online)

Week 2, August 30/September 1: What is Religion? What is Nature?

READINGS: Keller, "Introduction" pp 1-24.
Grounding Religion, 1-46.

Week 3, September 6/8: What is Nature? What is Religion?

READINGS: Keller, 193-220; 230-251.
Grounding Religion, 47-78.
Moodle: Val Plumwood, "Decolonizing Nature," 51-75

Historical Overviews: Religion, Nature, and Cosmologies

Week 4, September 13/15: "Religion and Nature: The Ancient Near East, Greece and Proto-Forms of Modern Science"

READINGS: Keller, 57-88; 252-256.
Moodle: Selections from the *Enuma Elish*; Genesis 1 Creation Story; Ferngren, Chapter 5, "Aristotle", 33-46.

Journal 1 Due, September 13.

Week 5, September 20/22: Religion and Nature: Islamic Thought and the Scientific "Revolution": Shifting Paradigms.

READINGS: Keller, 352-367
Moodle: Ferngren, "Islam" pp 73-92. Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, chapters 5 and 7.

Week 6, September 27/29: Colonization of land, animals and "others"

READINGS: Keller, 257-280.
Grounding Religion, 147-162.
Moodle: Bauman, Chapter 3, "Ex Nihilo, Erasure and Discovery," 57-78.

Week 7 October 4/6: The Romantic "Return"

READINGS: Keller, 89-146. 311-327.

Moodle: Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, 42-70.

Topics in Religion and Ecology / Nature

Week 8, October 11/13: Globalization and its Discontents

READINGS: Keller, 409-413; 551-558.
Grounding Religion, 181-202
Moodle: Ruether, 1-44.

Journal 2 due on October 11
Midterm take home essay on October 13

Week 9, October 18/20: Religion, Gender and Nature

READINGS: Keller, 281-310.
Grounding Religion, 130-146.
Moodle: Merchant, *Reinventing Eden*, XXX-XXX.

Midterm due on October 18.

Week 10, October 25/27: Technology, Religion and Nature

READINGS: Keller, 368-376
Moodle: Haraway, "Cyborg Manifesto."

Week 11, November 1/3: Agriculture and Food

READINGS: Keller, 161-174; 443-468, 476-490.
Grounding Religion, 113-129, 203-221.

Week 12, November 8/10: Environmental Justice

READINGS: Keller, 509-550.
Grounding Religion, 163-180
Moodle: *Inherited Land*, 148-170.

Journal 3 Due on November 8!

Week 13, November 15/17: Global Climate Change.

READINGS: Keller, 561-574.
Moodle: IPCC Report.

November 22/24 No Class! Happy Thanksgiving!

Week 14, November 29/December 1: The Planetary Future

READINGS: *Grounding*, 81-95, 222-227.

Moodle: Bauman, "From Global to Planetary Identities."

December 1, Hand out final exam in Class

December 6, Final Exam Due