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Lecture: Tu 4:30-5:45 108 Plant Sciences  
Sections: Th: 3-4:15, 38 Ag Hall  
Th: 4:30-5:45, 10 Ag Hall  
F: 1-2:15 10 Ag Hall  
F: 2:30-3:45 38 Ag Hall

Community and Environmental Sociology 541  
ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AND SOCIAL JUSTICE  
Religious Studies 401  
TOPICS IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
FALL, 2015

**SPECIAL TOPIC: NATURE, FAITH, AND COMMUNITY**

How shall we live? What is just? What is sacred? Where can we find truth? How can we best steward the world and care for all its inhabitants, human and non-human alike?

In this special topic course, we take a sociological look at the history and interrelationship of three of the most culturally powerful realms of reasoning on these deep and abiding questions – nature, faith, and community – and their implications for how we understand environmental and social justice. From Buddha to Darwin, from Lao-Tzu to Thoreau, from Mohamed to Einstein, from Gilgamesh to the Bible, we will consider the past, present, and future of these great ideas in their social, and therefore political, context.

Check your absolutes at the door, however. You can pick them up again on your way out, but during the class we will strive as best mere humans can to be open-minded about the thoughts of others and ourselves. As well, the ultimate physical or metaphysical correctness of these ideas are questions we leave for outside the classroom. Our concern is for their social origin and for the social use to which we put them.

We will read widely, skipping like stones across the shimmering pool of millennia of mulling these matters. We will bounce our minds off samples of the writings of the ancients – including the ancient Sumerians, Greeks, Romans, Hebrews, Christians, Buddhists, Muslims, Chinese, Mayans, and more – as well as those of Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment thinkers. And we will be guided along the way by the insights of historians and sociologists of religion, nature, and science.

Each week of the course will begin with a lecture on Tuesday, introducing the week's focus and sketching its social and historical milieu. For the second class session, each student will attend a discussion section to develop their own responses, in dialogue with others, based on their weekly intellectual journal. The course will also include a midterm exam and a final exam, each with an in-class and a take-home component.

## COURSE ORGANIZATION

### Student Evaluation

Your grade for this course will be based on the following: the weekly intellectual journal (30%), the midterm (25%), the final (25%), and class participation (20%), with deductions for unexcused absences. (See special requirements for graduate students, described below.)

### Weekly Intellectual Journal

The point of the weekly intellectual journal is to give you a chance to develop your own views on the readings and lectures, to communicate those views to the class, to demonstrate your command of what we've read thus far, and to keep you up-to-date with the material in the course. The format is simple: Write a critical appraisal of around 250-350 words (longer is just fine; shorter is not) of some particular theme in the week's readings and lecture, and email the result to your *muddle* (see below) by **Wednesday midnight**, with a cc to Kerem Morgul, the course TA. It is important to develop one theme or argument, rather than a scatter of observations. Also, it is important to *document* your theme or argument and to explain your *reasoning*, rather than offering opinion.

Here's a nice thing: We will drop your two lowest grades out of the 12 total weekly entries. (There's no journal entry due for week 1, week 8, or week 15.) Another way to put it: You can choose to take two weeks off from writing one entirely!

Note that for Thanksgiving week, the journal assignment will follow a different format, which is described on the course web site.

### Muddles

Each muddle will be a group of 3 or 4 students, who are expected to read each other's intellectual journal entries before section and to "muddle through" them together, both in section and through brief comments made *before section* on the learn@uw page for the course. Each section will begin with a meeting of the muddles, who will afterwards bring issues for discussion forward to the entire section. We will periodically re-organize into new muddle groups over the course of the semester.

### Readings

In most weeks, there will be both primary and secondary sources to read, of varying difficulty. You should expect to put in 4-5 hours each week doing the course readings. Plan for it.

### Midterm and Final Exams

The midterm and final will each consist of in-class *identifications* and take-home *essays*, based on the readings and lectures. For the take-home component, we encourage you to meet and discuss the questions with others; the only constraint is that you must put your answers *in your own words*. Note that the final exam will be *cumulative*, although it will emphasize the second half of the course.

### Class Participation

Your grade for class participation will not be a measure of how loud you were, or of how often you spoke. Rather, it will reflect the extent to which you were "there." We will evaluate your "thereness" based on our subjective assessment of your engagement, including the quality of your listening, in muddles and class discussions. If things don't seem to us to be going well for you in this area, we will let you know.

## Attendance

Attendance will be taken daily in lecture and section. You may miss two lectures and two section meetings. Think of it as four chits, two of each type. No excuse or explanation needed; just don't show up, and we'll deduct the chit. However, additional absences will not be excused, except in exceptional circumstances. Each absence beyond two chits each *will lower your final grade by 2 points*. If you are late to lecture or section by more than 10 minutes, you will be considered absent for the day. But – special bonus – you'll get one point *added to your final grade* for each of chits you don't spend. Perfect attendance for the semester, in both section and lecture? Nice. Get 4 points added to your average.

## Electronic Devices

You'll want to bring a paper notebook for keeping notes in during class. Ordinarily, we prohibit electronic devices, such as laptops, phones, or tablets during lecture and discussion section. If a student has particular needs that require her or him to use an electronic device, she or he must discuss it with the TA prior to class. If a student uses an electronic device during class without permission, that student will receive a zero for participation and attendance for that class meeting.

We recognize it may seem terribly autocratic to make this rule, but laptops and cells can easily get out of hand in a lecture course, distracting you and others.

## Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct

While some of the readings will be difficult or unfamiliar, your weekly intellectual journals and the material for the take-home portion of your exams must be uniquely yours, in your own words, and cited fully and properly. Any form of cheating or plagiarism is absolutely unacceptable and intolerable in this class and in the entire UW System. We expect you to familiarize yourself with your rights and duties as a UW student, and about the consequences of cheating at: [www.wisc.edu/students/saja/misconduct/UWS14.html](http://www.wisc.edu/students/saja/misconduct/UWS14.html).

We will not accept lack of knowledge regarding these guidelines as an excuse.

Note that the Department of Community and Environmental Sociology is licensed to use anti-plagiarism software. This software is extremely accurate, comparing student work to a database of previously submitted work, on-line sources, and published academic materials. Be aware that we may choose to run your intellectual journal entries and test answers through the software.

Every year, instructors in our department catch students committing plagiarism. It is an immensely uncomfortable experience for all concerned, and can affect a student's career for years afterwards, even permanently. It's not worth it. Really.

## An Additional Requirement for Graduate Students

We require graduate students in the course to write a final paper in the range of 3500 to 5000 words (14 to 20 double spaced pages) analyzing how social constructions of nature, faith, and community shape their field of graduate work, or their graduate research. We welcome a wide range of specific approaches to this broad topic. This paper will be worth 20% of the final grade of graduate students. The midterm and final will be worth 15% each, instead of the 25% each for undergraduates. Grades for class participation (20%) and weekly journals (30%) will count the same as for undergraduate students. A **topic statement** (1-3 sentences) is due at section in week 7; an **abstract with a preliminary references list** is due at section in week 10; the **final paper** is due along with the essay section of the final exam.

## Course Books

### Required:

- Armstrong, Karen. 2009. *The Case for God*. New York: Anchor Books.
- *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching*. Ursula Le Guin, trans. [Place]: Shambhala; Har/Com.
- Mitchell, Stephen. 2006. *Gilgamesh: A New English Version*. New York: Free Press.
- Aslan, Reza. 2013. *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*. Random House.
- Weber, Max. 2009 (1904). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Norton Critical Edition.

Recommended: I'll be providing PDFs of the required portions of these books, in an effort to hold down costs, but you may want to purchase them for your own library.

- Armstrong, Karen. 2006. *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Berger, Peter and Anton Zijderveld. 2009. *In Praise of Doubt: How to Have Convictions Without Becoming a Fanatic*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Kurtz, Lester R. 2007. *Gods in the Global Village: The World's Religions in Sociological Perspective*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Pagels, Elaine. 2012. *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy, and Politics in the Book of Revelation*. New York: Viking.
- Wright, Robert. 2009. *The Evolution of God*. New York and Boston: Little and Brown.

## Getting Ahold of the Books and Readings

All of the books for the course are available at the Rainbow Cooperative, 426 West Gilman Street. The other readings will all be available on the password-protected "materials" tab at the course site: <http://www.michaelmbell.net/CES-541/home.html>

## COURSE SCHEDULE AND LIST OF READINGS

(All readings subject to change. Check the course website for the latest news!  
As well, the course site contains links to supplemental materials.)

### Week 1 (9/3-4): Introduction

Meet in sections to learn about the course. No readings

## NATURE

### Week 2 (9/8, 9/10-11): The Conundrum of the Absolute

#### *Secondary source*

White, Lynn. 1967. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crises." *Science* 155:1203–1207. On-line.

#### *Primary sources*

St. Augustine. 2006 (circa 400 CE). "The Garden," pp. 175-182 in *Confessions*. Garry Wills, trans. London: Penguin. On-line.

Thoreau, Henry David. 1862. "Walking." Pp. 185-222 in *Excursions*. Read pp. 185-202; skim 203-222. On-line.

### **Week 3 (9/15, 9/17-18): Nature Before Nature**

#### *Secondary sources*

Taussig, Michael. 1980. "The Worship of Nature," pp. 155-168 in *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

#### *Primary source*

Mitchell, Stephen. 2006. *Gilgamesh: A New English Version*. New York: Free Press.

### **Week 4 (9/22, 9/24-25): First Nature**

#### *Secondary sources*

Bell, Michael M. 2012. "The Ideology of Environmental Concern," pp. 169-200 in *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*, 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge. On-line.

#### *Primary sources*

*Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching*. Ursula Le Guin, trans. [Place]: Shambhala; Har/Com. **Whole book!**

Horace. [c. 20 BCE] 1983. "Epistle I," pp. 215-216 in *The Essential Horace*. Trans. Burton Raffel. San Francisco, CA: North Point Press. On-line.

Theocritus. [c. 3th C. BCE]. "Seventh Idyll." A couple of pages. On-line.

### **Week 5 (9/30, 10/1-2): The Danger of Nature**

#### *Secondary sources*

Guha, Ramachandra. 1989. "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique." *Environmental Ethics* 11:71-83. On-line.

Williams, Raymond. 1980 (1972). "Ideas of Nature," in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*. London: Verso. Pp. 67-85. On-line.

#### *Primary sources*

Grant, Madison. 1936 (1916). *The Passing of the Great Race, or, the Racial Basis of European History*. New York: Charles Scribner's. Skim chapters 1 (Race and Democracy) and 2 (The Physical Basis of Race). On-line.

Hitler, Adolf. On-line video.

Smuts, Jan. 1917. "The White Man's Task." 6 pages. On-line.

## FAITH

### Week 6 (10/6, 10/8-9): Pagan Monotheism and the Two Evils

#### *Secondary sources*

Armstrong, Karen. 2009. "God," pp. 27-48 in *The Case for God*. New York: Anchor Books.

Friedman, Richard Elliott. 2003. Pp. 1-6, and skim pp. 32-40 from *The Bible with Sources Revealed: A New View of the Five Books of Moses*. San Francisco: Harper. On-line.

#### *Primary source*

Coogan, Michael D., ed. 2001. Old Testament selections from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*. 3rd edition. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. On-line.

### Week 7 (10/13, 10/15-16): Why Jesus Never Talked about Farming

#### *Secondary sources*

Aslan, Reza. 2013. *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*. Random House. Whole book.

Meyer, Marvin. 2009. "Gnosticism, Gnostics, and The Gnostic Bible," pp. 1-6 in *The Gnostic Bible*. Revised edition. Boston and London: Shambhala. On-line.

#### *Primary sources*

Coogan, Michael D., ed. 2001. New Testament selections from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*. 3rd edition. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. On-line.

"Thunder, Perfect Mind," a selection from the Gnostic tradition. On-line.

One page from the *Talmud*. On-line.

### Week 8 (10/20, 10/22-23): Great Departures: Buddha, Zoroaster, Plato, and the Axial Age

#### *Secondary sources*

Armstrong, Karen. 2006. "Introduction," pp. xv-xxiii from *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions*. New York: Anchor Books. On-line.

Jasper, Karl. 1949 (1976). *The Origin and Goal of History*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. Pp. 1-21. On-line.

Kurtz, Lester R. 2007. A brief overview of Buddhism, pp. 64-70 from *Gods in the Global Village: The World's Religions in Sociological Perspective*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press. On-line.

#### *Primary sources*

Selections from Carus, Paul. 1894. Selections from *The Gospel of Buddha*. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company. On-line.

Plato's *Timaeus* 27c-34a. On-line.

## **Week 9 (10/27, 10/29-30): Midterm exam**

No reading. In-class portion of exam and essay prompts handed out on 10/27. Sections devoted to workshops on take-home essays. Essays due by midnight 10/30.

## **Week 10 (11/3, 11/4-6): Great Syntheses: Vyasa, Muhammad, Quetzalcoatl, and Divergence from the Axis**

### *Secondary sources*

Kurtz, Lester R. 2007. Selections from *Gods in the Global Village: The World's Religions in Sociological Perspective*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press. On-line.

Coe, Michael and Rex Koontz. 2013. 3 page extract (pp. 160, 169, & 170) from *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs*. New York: Thames and Hudson. On-line.

### *Primary sources*

Selections from the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith*. On-line.

Selections from the *Bhagavad Gita*. On-line.

Selections from the *Rig Veda*. On-line.

A selection from *The Upanishads*. On-line.

A selection from the *Popol Vuh*. On-line.

## **Week 11 (11/10, 11/11-12): Paganism, Magic, and Folk Belief in the Modern World**

### *Secondary sources*

Abram, David. 1996. "The Ecology of Magic," pp. 3-29 in *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. New York: Vintage Books. On-line.

Bell, Michael M. 1997. "The Ghosts of Place," *Theory and Society*. 26:813-836. On-line.

Gmelch, George. 1971. "Baseball Magic." *Transaction* 8(8):39-41,54. On-line.

Olmos, Margarite Fernández and Lizbeth Paravisini-Gebert. 2011. Overview of Santería, pp. 39-to-top-of-47 in *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo*. New York: New York University Press. On-line.

### *Primary sources*

Read two fairy tales! On-line.

## **COMMUNITY**

## **Week 12 (11/17, 11/19-20): Religion, Capitalism, and the Domination of Nature**

### *Secondary source*

Weber, Max. 2009 (1904). Selections from *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Norton Critical Edition.

### *Primary source*

Calvin, John. 2008 (1536). Institutes of the Christian Religion. Henry Beveridge, trans. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers. Pp. 578-582 and 738-746. On-line.

### **Week 13 (11/24, no sections): The Greening of Religion**

#### *Secondary sources*

A few web sites, plus your own research, on current trends in the greening of religion, associated with a special assignment for this week, described on the course website.

#### *Primary source*

Pope Francis. 2015. *Laudato Si*. (The Pope's encyclical on the environment.)

### **Thanksgiving Break Nov. 26-29**

### **Week 14 (12/1, 3-4): Denying Science: Religion and Identity**

#### *Secondary source*

Armstrong, Karen. 2009. "Science and Religion," "Scientific Religion," "Unknowing," and "The Death of God?" pp. 161-208 and pp. 262-317 in *The Case for God*. New York: Anchor Books.

#### *Primary source*

Pope, Alexander. 1733-34. Selections from *An Essay on Man*. On-line.

A few websites on contemporary deism, theism, and creationism. On-line.

### **Week 15 (12/8, 12/10-11): Awesome Coolness and the Politics of Nature**

#### *Secondary sources*

Dawkins, Richard. 2008 (2006). Pp. 23-50 from *The God Delusion*. [Place]: Mariner Books. On-line.

Reitan, Eric. 2008. Pp. 1-13 and 208-225 from *Is God a Delusion?* On-line.

Dworkin, Ronald. 2013. "Religious Atheism?" LOC 61-139 and LOC 304-410 in *Religion without God*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.

#### *Primary sources*

Lakota Shaman, speaking on the subject of Wakan Tanka (the "Great Mystery"). On-line.

*Sections devoted to exam preparation.*

### **Week 16 (12/15, no sections): The Multilogics of Truth**

*No reading. Essay portion of the final handed out 12/15.*

### **Week 17: Final Exam**

In-class component: *December 22, 7:25-9:25pm*. Essay portion due at the start of the in-class component.