

COURSE SYLLABUS

30783—RELIGION AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Spring 2009

Thursdays: 6:00-8:40 P.M.

TBH Room 109

Dr. Jack A. Hill
Phone: 817-257-6453
Email: j.hill@tcu.edu

Office Hours: T-R: 2:00-4:00 P.M.
Weds 12:00-1:00 P.M.
Office Location: TBH 110

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores a wide range of ethical and religious views about environmental issues, especially regarding apparent threats to the eco-system. It examines how different religious understandings shape moral choices on issues such as the relation of evolutionary theory to ecology, the nature of “nature,” the rights of animals, and moral responsibility in relation to the eco-system, with special attention to perspectives from world religions.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

As a result of this course, students will be able to

- Describe major aspects of the global ecological crisis
- Identify schools of thought, figures and themes associated with normative ethical reflection on the environment, with special attention on religious presuppositions
- Critically reflect on—for example, compare and contrast—different normative positions on the environment, with particular attention to those associated with different world religions
- Examine how our own lifestyles and worldviews enhance or endanger a healthy ecosystem
- Develop a constructive normative proposal regarding a specific environmental issue in civic life

REQUIRED TEXTS

Barnhill, David Landis, and Roger S. Gottlieb, eds. *Deep Ecology and World Religions: New Essays on Sacred Ground*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001 (hereafter cited as “DE”).

Sideris, Lisa H. *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology and Natural Selection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003 (hereafter cited as “EE”).

Smith, Pamela. *What Are They Saying About Environmental Ethics?* New York: Paulist Press, 1997 (hereafter cited as “WA”)—**this book must be purchased from Frog Prints [located in the TCU Student Union]**

ADDITIONAL REQUIRED READINGS

In addition to reading assignments from the required texts above, students will also be responsible for reading the following brief articles and excerpts of articles, which will be distributed in class. In the Course Schedule below, these readings will be cited in terms of the author’s name, in order to distinguish them from readings in the required textbooks (which were cited above according to letter abbreviations).

Callicott, J. Baird. “Traditional American Indian and Western European Attitudes Toward Nature.” In Oelschlaeger, Max, ed. *Postmodern Environmental Ethics*, 193-219. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

Gottlieb, Roger. “Religion in an Age of Environmental Crisis.” In Gottlieb, Roger, ed. *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, 3-11. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Gudorf, Christine E. “A Conflict of Interest.” In Wolfe, Regina and Christine Gudorf, eds. *Ethics and World Religions: Cross-Cultural Case Studies*, 239-59. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000.

Hill, Jack A. “Was Jesus Green? Reflections on the Sayings of Jesus from a Cross-Cultural Perspective,” *The Fourth R* (September/October, 2002): 3-8.

Kyung, Chung Kyung. “Ecology and Feminism and African and Asian Spirituality.” In David G. Hallman, ed. *Ecotheology: Voices from North and South*, 175-78. Orbis: Mary knoll, 1994.

Stivers, Robert L. “Oil and the Caribou People.” In Stivers, Robert L., Christine Gudorf, Alice Evans and Robert Evans, eds. *Christian Ethics: A Case Method Approach*, second edition, 144-62. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997.

Tinker, George E. “An American Indian Theological Response to Ecojustice.” In Weaver, Jace, ed., *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice*, 153-76. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997.

SECONDARY READINGS

There will be occasional information sheets, case study descriptions and outlines distributed in class, in addition to the many sources available on-line and in the library.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND GRADING

Since this course will be conducted as a seminar, students will not only be responsible for reading all assignments, but they will also be expected to make relevant contributions to class discussions, including some initiation of discussions based on reaction papers. All reading assignments are listed next to the topic on the “COURSE SCHEDULE” and should be read before the class in question.

Student evaluation will be based on three brief reaction papers (15% of the grade), a major critical essay (40 % of the grade), class participation (10% of the grade) and an in-class examination at the end of the semester (35% of the grade.)

The **three reaction papers** (each 2 pages, typed, double-spaced) will provide a summary of; critical, comparative reflection on; and four/five discussion questions about the practical implications of—the main points of a reading assignment. All students will submit the first reaction paper the second week of the course (see “COURSE SCHEDULE” below). Then, each student will be required to submit one paper during weeks 4-7, and another paper during weeks 8-12, according to a schedule established by the instructor.

The **critical essay project** is intended to be both a critical discussion of a dispute surrounding an issue in environmental ethics, and a constructive proposal regarding possible ways to alleviate the dispute by drawing on ethical resources from at least two major religious traditions, one of which must be a non-western tradition. It will be written in two stages (see schedule for essay writing in the “COURSE SCHEDULE” below). First, a brief *précis* (no more than one typed, double-spaced page) should be developed, describing the issue, the dispute surrounding the issue, and a possible way forward. Second, a 10-12 page, typed, double-spaced (12 font) essay will be due at the end of the course (see “COURSE SCHEDULE” for due dates).

The **class participation** grade will be based on your leadership of two class discussions, your comments and involvement in the other class discussions, and evidence of your commitment to building a strong learning community as demonstrated by your

- Promptness in being on time for all class sessions
- Attendance throughout the semester
- Enthusiastic, constructive engagement as shown by active listening, sensitivity to differences, openness to new ideas and perspectives, and capacity to ask relevant, searching questions

The **exam**, administered during the last class session, will test familiarity with figures and ideas in environmental ethics; challenge you to compare and contrast different normative perspectives, and flesh out those perspectives by showing how they might well lead to different practical solutions with respect to a specific case study in environmental ethics.

The grading scale for this course is A=90-100; B=80-89; C=70-79; D=60-69; and F=0-59. In general, if you demonstrate a grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of key figures, themes, concepts, and methods of environmental ethics, you will receive a grade in the C range. If you show that you can critically reflect upon different schools of environmental ethics in relation to one another, you will receive a grade in the B range. Finally, if you do an outstanding job of critically reflecting on different perspectives and demonstrate a capacity to develop your own constructive perspective, you will receive a grade in the A range.

ATTENDANCE

Given the seminar character of the class, regular and prompt attendance is essential to success in the course. If for any reason it is not possible to attend a class, it is common courtesy to inform the instructor beforehand, or in case of unavoidable emergency, at the earliest opportunity. Since this class meets for three-hour blocks of time once a week, one absence is the equivalent of three “50 minute” classes. Therefore, if you have more than one unexcused absence, your grade will be adversely affected. Any explanation regarding an absence must come to me in writing, on paper or electronically.

CLASS ETIQUETTE

Studying Ethics: Exchanging ideas about ethical issues involves encountering viewpoints that are often controversial and that may challenge beliefs that you hold dear. This can sometimes feel threatening. Nevertheless, it is mandatory that you treat differing perspectives with respect. Please note that the primary aim of the class is not to marshal arguments for ideas and beliefs you already hold, but to understand how someone could hold very different beliefs and ideas than your own, and to critically evaluate your own in light of those other views.

As TCU students you are expected to abide by the student conduct guidelines contained in the TCU Student Handbook, “Code of Student Conduct,” sec. 3.4. For additional details, see www.studentaffairs.tcu.edu/handbook/academic.htm.

Also, given teaching and learning issues associated with multi-tasking in the larger culture, I would like all of us to abide by the following ground rules:

- Turn off and put away all cell phones, I-pods and communication devices before we begin class.
- Since the class is largely discussion oriented, refrain from using computers during class. They often inhibit face-to-face communication and prove distracting to other students as well as to the professor. If you have special needs which require use of a computer for note taking, please see me about arrangements. Similarly, if you need to tape record lectures/discussions, do not proceed without discussing it with me first.
- Take care of all non-related class business before the class period commences. That means, ordinarily, you would not leave and come back during class, including times of small group discussion and video watching. If you have a

special condition that requires leaving, please let me know. We will always have a ten-minute break after 75 minutes of class.

- Obviously, forms of potentially disruptive behavior such as reading newspapers, passing notes, knitting or exclusive conversing unrelated to course material, should be avoided.

In short, it is in everyone's interest that all of us are fully present in the classroom.

Other...

If you are having difficulties of any sort (academic or otherwise) that are interfering with your performance in class, please let me know before the situation gets out of hand. It is much easier to work out difficulties early on than it is to deal with these several weeks into the course.

TAKING YOUR OWN ACADEMIC PULSE

I also expect that you will be evaluating your own performance throughout the course. Use the following questions as guidelines for assessing your own work in the course:

1. Was I a responsible and actively engaged learner? Was I well-prepared for each class? Have I critically reflected on my own values and assumptions?
2. Have I enthusiastically entered into this experience? With the instructor as well as peers? Have I really tried to learn how classmates who differ from me think about important issues in ethics?
3. Is my performance, in general, excellent in terms of my expectations for myself? How so? If so, do I deserve an A, a C, or what?

DISABILITY STATEMENT

Texas Christian University complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 regarding students with disabilities. If you require accommodations for a disability, please contact the **Coordinator for Students with Disabilities in the Center for Academic Services, located in Sadler Hall (SH) 11**. Further information can be obtained from the Center for Academic Services, TCU Box 297710, Fort Worth, TX 76129, or at 817-257-7486.

Adequate time must be allowed to arrange accommodations and accommodations are not retroactive; therefore, students should contact the Coordinator as soon as possible in the academic term for which they are seeking accommodations. *Each eligible student is responsible for presenting relevant, verifiable, professional documentation and/or assessment reports to the Coordinator.* Guidelines for documentation may be found at <http://www.acs.tcu.edu/DISABILITY.HTM>.

Students with emergency medical information or needing special arrangements in case a building must be evacuated should discuss this information with their instructor/professor as soon as possible.

COURSE SCHEDULE

PART ONE

THE NATURE AND STUDY OF THE PROBLEM: DIMENSIONS OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Date	Topic	Assignment
R-1/15	Introduction to the Course: What is Environmental Ethics? What is Religion?	Review syllabus/ DE: 1-15; WA: 1-4
R-1/22	Evolutionary Theory, Religion and Environmental Ethics: How are they related?	EE:11-44;DE:17-32 Gottlieb: 3-11; 1st Reaction Paper Due (on DE: 17-32)
R-1/29	<i>NO CLASS: PROFESSOR AWAY AT CONFERENCE</i>	
R-2/5	Two Case Studies of Conflict: Western & Native American Ecological Perspectives	DE: 35-57; Stivers: 144-62; Gudorf: 239-259

PART TWO

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEM: CHRISTIAN & HUMANIST PERSPECTIVES IN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

R-2/12	Protestant Eco-Justice: Overcoming Anthropocentrism & Promoting Sustainability	EE: 91-129; 201-15; DE: 213-28
R-2/19	Catholicism, Eco-ethics & Ecocentric Land Ethics	DE:169-92; WA: 78-87; EE, 167-201; <i>Précis Due</i>
R-2/26	Deep Ecology, Ecofeminist & Liberation Ecotheology	WA: 5-33; DE: 229-41; EE: 45-90, 217-61
R-3/5	Animal Rights Advocates & Naturalists	WA: 34-56; EE, 131-66

PART THREE
THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEM:
NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES IN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

R-3/12	Eco-Ethics of World Religions I: Native American Perspectives	WA: 67-77; Callicott, 193-219; Tinker, 153-76; DE, 35-57
R-3/19	<i>NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK WEEK</i>	
R-3/26	Eco-Ethics of World Religions II: Judaism & Islam	DE: 153-67, 193-211
R-4/2	Film: TBA	Finish draft of Critical Project Essay
R-4/9	Eco-Ethics of World Religions III: Hinduism & Buddhism	DE: 59-106; Kyung, 175-78
R-4/16	Eco-Ethics of World Religions IV: Daoism & Confucianism	DE: 107-52; Hill, 3-8; Critical Project Essay Due

PART FOUR
CONCLUSION: APPLYING DIFFERENT
NORMATIVE PERSPECTIVES TO A CASE STUDY OF AN ECOLOGICAL ISSUE

R-4/23	In-Class examination	WA: 88-92; review notes and readings
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