Précis

Is religious belief still possible in the wake of Nietzsche’s obituary of God? Is religion a viable option in today’s world, or does God poison everything, as some critics argue? After modernism – after the claims of reason alone to make certain the foundations of knowledge – comes postmodernism – the celebration of mystery and difference at the expense of authority and certitude. But what does the Athens of postmodern philosophy have to do with the Jerusalem of religion based on the Bible and other sacred texts? Some commentators argue there is little possibility for dialogue between postmodernism and theology, while others envision postmodernism as an ally of religious thought and commitment. If this is so, then, can postmodernism be understood as a resource both for criticizing the nostalgia for “raw presence” in theology, and for articulating the possibility of God without the security of a philosophical foundation?

Along with postmodernism, another potentially fruitful dialogue-partner with religion today is postcolonial theory. In religious studies, postcolonialism excavates the frozen distortions at the base of much of Western institutional life and philosophical discourse and proposes transgressive and liberatory models of the sacred in an era scarred by the subjugation of the voiceless and dispossessed. Seminar topics include religion and suffering, the death of God, the new atheism, apophatic mysticism, deconstruction, ecological spirituality, new animal studies, critical race theory, erasure of the stable self, ethics without foundations, the queer Jesus, the angel of history, naming God as woman, recovery of anti-conquest narratives, and the question of God beyond Being. Readings include works by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Bonhoeffer, Benjamin, Barth, Caputo, Keller, Buber, Althaus-Reid, Levinas, Derrida, and Kristeva. Films about Benjamin and Derrida will be viewed and discussed. This seminar is housed in the Religion Department
and also fulfills course and honors requirements for the Interpretation Theory minor.

Bibliography

8) Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. Letters and Papers from Prison, new greatly enlarged ed. Macmillan

In the schedule below, you will see listed after each week's primary readings (mostly from the required bibliography noted above) required secondary readings intended to clarify and sometimes criticize the primary readings. These are marked "Also see" in the syllabus after each week's primary readings. While all members of the seminar should have their own copies of the primary books and readings, most of the supplementary bibliography is available through the Moodle course site. As well, bring print versions of these materials as well.

All members of the seminar should read the secondary texts, and it will be especially important for those individuals who are writing for a particular week's seminar to consult with care these secondary items as they will provide much needed grist for the creative process. Go to the Moodle site for these secondary materials and all other class support items, including a file exchange area for posting seminar papers, syllabus, announcements, subject matter links, and more.

Format

This seminar emphasizes the art of collegial dialogue in support of compact and lucid writing assignments by seminar members. A final exam or paper at the end is the
culminating exercise. Seminar members lead discussion by preparing readings and papers for each seminar. Requirements include:

1. Regular and punctual attendance.
2. Preparation of all of the primary and secondary readings by the date for which they are assigned – along with peers' seminar papers – in order to facilitate a lively and informed discussion.
3. A series of single-spaced 4-5 pp. seminar papers, using primary and secondary material, with questions, notes, and bibliography to be posted on the Moodle site for this seminar by 1 p.m. on the Sunday before the session in question.
4. Final term essay or in-class exam TBA.

Schedule

1. Introduction


I - Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Precursors

2. Søren Kierkegaard: Truth, Interiority, and the Absurd

Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling (all)

Also see:

3. Friedrich Nietzsche: Death of God and Vitalist Spirituality

Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals (all)

Also see:
2. Masao Abe, "Zen and Nietzsche," in Zen and Western Thought, 135-51

4. Martin Buber: Jewish Animism

Buber, I and Thou (all)

Also see:

5. Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Ethics Without Foundations

Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, selections

Also see:
1. Susannah Heschel, The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany,

6. Karl Barth: God Beyond Being and Différance


Also see:

7. Walter Benjamin: The Angel of History

1. Frank Kermode, The Genesis of Secrecy
2. The Gospel of Mark, in The Bible

{ Spring Break }

II - The Contemporary Scene

8. Marcella Althaus-Reid: Pleasure, Indecency, and Transgression

Althaus-Reid, The Queer God (all)

Also see:
1. Patrick S. Cheng, Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology, vii-23
2. Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., Sexuality and the Christian Body, 249-75


Also see:
2. Kristeva, “From 'In the Beginning was Love,” in The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader, ed. Graham Ward, 223-32
5. Song of Solomon, in The Bible

10. Postcolonialism: Theology After Empire
Keller, et al., Postcolonial Theology, 1-117, 134-63, 221-42

Also see:
1. Edward Said, Orientalism, 1-49
2. Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, The Color of Christ, Introduction and chap. 9

11. Emmanuel Levinas: God Beyond Being and Excessive Desire for the Other


Also see:

12. Jacques Derrida I: Ethical Mysticism and Deconstruction

Derrida, Gift of Death (all)

Also see:

13. Jacques Derrida II: Spiritual Autobiography: The Constancy of God in My Life is Called by Other Names

Derrida, Gift of Death (continue)
Derrida, "'My Religion': Selections from Circumfession," in The Religious, 89-106

Also see:

Derrida, The Animal That Therefore I am (all)

1. David Abram, Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology, 1-80

Supplementary Bibliography

At first glance, it may appear that postmodernism, postcolonialism, and religious thought are not on speaking terms with one another, but a number of books in these related fields indicate otherwise. Please consider these volumes as well, some of which appear in the syllabus as secondary readings, in your preparation for the seminar:

Caputo, John D. Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction. Indiana University Press.
Caputo, John D. and Scanlon, Michael J., eds. God, the Gift, and Postmodernism. Indiana University Press.
McKenna, Andrew J. Violence and Difference: Girard, Derrida, and Deconstruction. University of Illinois Press.
Milbank, John. Theology and Social Theory. Blackwell.
Sontag, Frederick. Wittgenstein and the Mystical: Philosophy as an Ascetic Practice. Scholars Press.
---. Tears. SUNY Press.

Finally, in addition to these secondary readings, please be aware of the essential reference works for the field of modern religious thought, including:

2. Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards, 8 vols. (Macmillan) [Reference]
3. The Modern Theologians, ed. David F. Ford, 2 vols. (Basil Blackwell) [Honors]
5. Encyclopedia Judaica, ed. Cecil Roth, 16 vols. (Macmillan) [Reference]
6. Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought, ed. Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr (Free Press) [Honors]
7. Vincent Descombes, Modern French Philosophy (Cambridge) [Honors]
8. Rüdiger Bubner, Modern German Philosophy (Cambridge) [Honors]
9. Van A. Harvey, A Handbook of Theological Terms (Macmillan) [Reference]
10. Critical Terms for Religious Studies, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago) [Honors]
11. Also note: Religion Index [Tripod] and The Philosopher's Index [Tripod]
Précis

While science has been seen as the primary discipline for ecological understanding, recent scholarship in the humanities and social sciences signals the importance of religious worldviews in shaping attitudes toward the environment. This course is an introduction to the emerging discipline of religion and ecology, a new field of inquiry into the spiritual dimensions of animal and plant communities and the place of human beings therein. Religion and ecology focuses on how religious traditions have shaped human beings' fundamental outlooks on the environment in ancient and modern times. In turn, it examines how various spiritual worldviews can aid – or not – the development of an Earth-centered philosophy of life. As a response to the ecological crisis, it studies the ancient green wisdom within different world spiritualities – and corresponding social movements – concerning how human beings can live in harmony with their natural environments.

The practical aim of this course is to learn how to coordinate the inner landscape of the heart with the outer landscape of the Earth. The course thesis is that the environmental crisis, at its core, is less a scientific or technological problem and more a spiritual problem because it is human beings' deep ecocidal dispositions toward nature that are the cause of the planet’s continued degradation. Evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould writes, “We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature as well – for we will not fight to save what we do not love. We really must make room for nature in our hearts.” The crisis is a matter of the heart, not the head. Market values have overtaken community values, and the lives of most people in the developed world run opposite the crucial insight in the American Indian proverb, "The frog does not drink up the pond in which it lives."

Regarding the environmental crisis as a spiritual crisis, this course recovers the core worldviews of deep ecology and animism within different religious traditions – worldviews that are necessary for countering the utilitarian attitudes toward Earth that now dominate the global marketplace. Deep Ecology argues that all things in nature are to be valued intrinsically and equally (biocentric egalitarianism), while animism suggests that everything in nature is alive – even so-called inanimate things such as rocks and rivers – and sacred (spiritual ecology). Both perspectives are contested approaches and will be vetted and discussed in class.
With reference to these baseline perspectives, topics include ecological thought in Western philosophy and the related traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; Buddhism as an ecological worldview; American nature writings and environmental awareness, including both Amerindian and Euroamerican literatures; and public policy eco-justice debates concerning wilderness activism and the anti-fracking movement. Documentary films *If a Tree Falls*, *Butterfly*, *Grizzly Man*, and *Renewal* will be featured. In addition to two writing assignments, a midterm, and final project, the course features regular nature-based rituals and a community based learning component primarily centered in the nearby city of Chester. The course is housed in the Religion Department and also earns credit in the Environmental Studies Program and as a Community Based Learning course.

**Required Bibliography**

- Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*
- Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*
- Julia Butterfly Hill, *The Legacy of Luna: The Story of a Tree, a Woman, and the Struggle to Save the Redwoods*

This is a Moodle course. Additional required readings are marked in the schedule below with an asterisk (*). These digital readings are required assignments for the course. Films and film clips are marked with a cross (+). Other important course-related information is accessible through the Moodle course homepage: syllabus, assignments, announcements, research links, and college library system.

**Format**

This course uses a "rough seminar" format featuring opening comments by the instructor followed by general classroom and small group discussion. In addition to writing and exam assignments, the course uses alternative learning activities for cognitive development, self-discovery, and growth in civic responsibility, including:

* Earth-Based Rituals. Approximately every other week, we engage in nonsectarian ritual and contemplative practices, borrowed and modified from different religious and cultural traditions, to develop experiential understandings of class subject matter. These “spiritual lab” practices include neo-Pagan Council of All Beings ritual, lectio divina contemplative reading, modified Tu B’shevat (Tree Planting) ceremony, Zen Buddhist zazen sitting meditation, and Lakota medicine wheel practice.

* Community Based Learning. Every week, class members volunteer at after-school tutoring programs, among other activities. Swarthmore College understands its mission as developing ethical intelligence among its student body. To that end, the goal of community based learning (CBL) in this course is to integrate classroom theory and community practice so that that class members can become more reflective and competent participants in public life.
Assessment

Writing requirements with grade percentages include two short papers (25% each), midterm (25%), final term project (25%), and participation in class discussion and community based learning (gestalt overlay evaluation).

Schedule

I. Historic Roots and Heideggerian *Techné*

Philosophy, Theology, and Root Metaphors

wk.1. Jan. 21

+Film short, “A Crime Against Creation,” Renewal, dir. Ostrow and Rockefeller


wk.2. Jan. 28

Guest lecturer: Rebecca Hill, landscape architect

Heidegger, Question, i-xxxix (skim), 1-35

*Michael E. Zimmerman, Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art, 222-47


*Bill Devall and George Sessions, Deep Ecology, 63-108 (skim)

II. Christian Ecotheology

wk.3. Feb. 4

Practicum: Council of All Beings ritual

McFague, The Body of God, vii-97

Heidegger, Question, 115-82 (skim)


**wk.4. Feb. 11**

Practicum: Lectio Divina meditative reading

McFague, The Body of God, 99-157


**III. Judaism and the I-Thou Relationship**

**wk.5. Feb. 18**

1st Paper Due

+Film short, “Ancient Roots,” Renewal, dir. Ostrow and Rockefeller

Practicum: Tu B'Shevat ceremony

Martin Buber, I and Thou, 53-168


**IV. Islamic Tawhid and Taqwa and Environmental Responsibility**

**wk. 6. Feb. 25**

+Film short, “Food for Faith,” Renewal, dir. Ostrow and Rockefeller


Islamic climate change statement, go to: [http://islamicclimatedeclaration.org/islamic-declaration-on-global-climate-change/](http://islamicclimatedeclaration.org/islamic-declaration-on-global-climate-change/)

*The Qur'an, Surah Al-Hijr, chapter 15

**V. Buddhism and Dynamic Interdependence**

**wk.7. March 3**

Practicum: Zazen sitting meditation
+Film short, “Compassion in Action,” Renewal, dir. Ostrow and Rockefeller

**"The Sermon at Benares" and "Questions Not Tending to Edification," in The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha, ed. Burtt, 28-37**


**Spring Break March 5-13**

VI. Amerindian Nature Traditions

**wk. 8. March 17**

Midterm Due

Neihardt, Black Elk, 1-90


*Ed McGaa, Eagle Man, Mother Earth Spirituality, x-39*


**wk.9. March 24**

Practicum: Lakota medicine wheel ritual

Neihardt, Black Elk, 90-169


VII. Euroamerican Nature Writing 1

**wk.10. March 31**

*Bron Taylor, Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future, 42-70*
* Ralph Waldo Emerson, selections from The Norton Book of Nature Writing, 144-58

* Henry David Thoreau, selections from same, 169-207

* Gary Snyder, The Practice of the Wild, 3-47, 175-85

* Gary Snyder, No Nature: New and Selected Poems, 218-19, 236-38, 245 (from Turtle Island)

* Wendell Berry, Collected Poems, 69, 109

** Euroamerican Nature Writing 2 **

**Wk. 11. April 7**

2d Paper Due


** VIII. New Animism **

**Wk. 12. April 14**

+ Film, “Grizzly Man,” dir. Werner Herzog


* Priscilla Stuckey, “Being Known by a Birch Tree: Animist Refigurations of Western Epistemology,” in same, 182-205

* David Abram, Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology, 3-56

** IX. Wilderness Activism 1 **

**Wk. 13. April 21**

+ Film, “If a Tree Falls,” dir. Marshall Curry


Wilderness Activism 2

wk. 14. April 28

+Film, “Butterfly,” dir. Doug Wolens

Julia Butterfly Hill, The Legacy of Luna, entire


Final Project TBA
Précis

“In my beginning is my end. In my end is my beginning” -- T. S. Eliot, “Burnt Coker,” Four Quartets

“Sic transit mundus” -- A Canticle for Leibowitz

For millennia, speculation about the end of the world has fired the environmental and religious imaginations of Western cultures. Today, environmentalists argue we are in the time of the “Sixth Great Extinction,” while religious communities assert we are living into the end of the world based on ancient prophecies. Have humans so altered Earth’s climate that this is now the period of the end of nature as we know it – what scientists are calling the “anthropocene”?

This course will study the threat the extractive industries pose to planetary well-being – and the reactions to these threats by environmental justice campaigns, on the one hand, and the religious-environmental movement, on the other. It will ask how two seemingly unrelated modes of discourse – environmental science and religious studies – converge to shape productive responses to these threats; and the power, and the anxieties, of environmental spiritualities (with special reference to Christian and Native American worldviews) to challenge neo-liberal economics and give birth to hope and resilience in the face of the coming storm.

Required Texts

Cole and Foster: From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism

Kolbert: The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History

Nietzsche: Thus Spake Zarathustra

Neihardt: Black Elk Speaks

Camus: The Plague

Miller: A Canticle for Leibowitz

Silko: Ceremony
The course is divided into four sections: the end of the world, the end of Christianity, the end of Indigenous America, and rumors of rebirth. The course juxtaposes speculation about the coming apocalypse in religion, history, and culture with narratives about the numerous mini-apocalypses that have already occurred and are occurring. The word “apocalypse” means both foretelling the future and forth-telling the inconvenient truth about the past and present. The hope of the course is that students will discover that living in the last days may not be such a bad thing after all. What irony! In times of despair, people often discover that solidarity with others is the key to building communities of courage and integrity in spite of dystopian hopelessness. Or as T. S. Eliot puts it, “In my end is my beginning.”

Community Based Learning (CBL) component. CBL will facilitate growth in ethical intelligence—a primary goal of Swarthmore education.

Teaching assignment: Small Group Takeovers in which class members organize class and lead discussion of readings and topics during a particular class period.

Four Writing Assignments: two small papers, midterm, and final research essay.

As a First Year Seminar, no grades; shadow grades equally weighted in relation to five assignments. Class includes some ritual activities.

Please purchase copies of all assigned books. Other required readings marked by an asterisk (*) available under Course Documents at class Moodle site. In-class video and readings marked by a plus sign (+). Note: this is a technology free zone class. Simply bring assigned books and printed asterisked readings to class; no phones, computers, etc. Reading page numbers are noted by inclusive numbers only (e.g. 4-8) while chapters and parts assignments within books are noted by the chapter number (e.g. chap. 13) or part number (e.g. parts one-three).
Schedule

I – The End of the World

Wk. 1: Weds. Aug. 31
1. * Gospel of Mark, chap. 13
2. * “The Wanderer,” lyrics by Bono, sung by Cash
3. Kolbert Sixth Extinction 4-8

Wk. 2: Weds. Sept. 7
1. + “The Leftovers,” pilot episode, created by Damon Lindelof and Tom Perrotta
3. * Gospel of Mark, entire
4. Kolbert Sixth Extinction, chaps. 1, 5, 6, 7

Wk. 3: Weds. Sept. 14
1. Kolbert Sixth Extinction, chaps. 8, 13
2. * Scott Weidensaul, The Ghost with Trembling Wings, chap. 2
4. * The Revelation to John, chaps. 19, 20, 21, 22

II – The End of Christianity

Wk. 4: Weds. Sept. 21
--- First Paper Due
1. Camus The Plague parts one-three
2. * Jared Diamond, Guns, Germs, and Steel, chap. 11

Wk. 5: Weds. Sept. 28
1. Camus The Plague parts four-five
2. + The Seventh Seal, dir. Ingmar Bergman
Wk. 6: Weds. Oct. 3
1. + Melancholia, dir. Lars von Trier

Fall Break Oct. 10-16

Wk. 7: Weds. Oct. 19
--- *Take-home Midterm Due*
1. Miller *A Canticle for Leibowitz* chaps. 1-16
2. * List of Latin phrases in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*

Wk. 8: Weds. Oct. 26
1. Miller *A Canticle for Leibowitz* chaps. 17-30
2. Nietzsche *Thus Spake Zarathustra* part one

III – The End of Indigenous America

Wk. 9: Weds. Nov. 2
1. Neihardt *Black Elk Speaks* chaps. 1-12

Wk. 10: Weds. Nov. 9
1. Neihardt *Black Elk Speaks* chaps. 17-25

IV – Rumors of Rebirth

Wk. 11: Weds. Nov. 16
--- *Second Paper Due*
1. Cole and Foster *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the*
Environmental Justice Movement 1-102, 134-65

Wk. 12: Weds. Nov. 23
  1. Silko *Ceremony* 1-142

Wk. 13: Weds. Nov. 30
  1. Silko *Ceremony* 143-244

--- Final Term Paper Due TBA
**THE GREEN CAMPUS: SWARTHMORE AND SUSTAINABILITY**

Environmental Studies 091  
Fridays 2:00-5:00 PM  
Pearson 210  
Instructor: Mark I. Wallace  
Phone: 328-7829  
Email: mwallac1@swarthmore.edu  
Office: Pearson 206  
Office hours: Mon. Noon-1:00 PM and Fri. 11.00 AM-Noon

**PRÉCIS**

This capstone course is predicated on the assumption that urgent action is needed to reverse unprecedented environmental degradation in our time. Our planet is poised on the brink of disaster. Global warming is now upon us and causing widespread changes. As glaciers melt sea levels worldwide could rise by more than twenty feet and flood shore communities from downtown Manhattan to Bangladesh. More than 30,000 plant and animal species a year are driven to extinction – even the polar bear is now proposed as a threatened species. The great work of this generation is to develop sustainable lifestyles that kick the habit of dependence on fossil fuels, the primary source of global climate change.

In response, we will study different models for how Swarthmore College, whose educational aim is to promote ethical intelligence, can become a leader in sustainable campus development. Capstone members will research sustainability philosophy and practice at different levels of the curriculum and administration; evaluate current policies regarding, for example, energy efficiency, green building design, waste management, water conservation, sustainable transportation, and community supported agriculture; and, finally, formulate political strategies for implementing green campus ideals and practices at Swarthmore.

Readings will include academic studies of campus sustainability strategies along with works of imagination and vision that feed the soul and empower the will. This is a discussion-rich seminar that features community based learning in order to provide a living laboratory for testing the main findings of the course.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Peggy Barlett and Geoffrey Chase, Sustainability on Campus: Stories and Strategies for Change

Thomas Berry, The Great Work: Our Way into the Future
Sarah Hammond Creighton, Greening the Ivory Tower: Improving the Environmental Track Record of Universities, Colleges, and Other Institutions

Al Gore, An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming

David Orr, Earth in Mind: On Education, the Environment, and the Human Prospect

FORMAT AND ASSIGNMENTS

1. Regular, punctual attendance.
2. Preparation of the readings by the date for which they are assigned in order to facilitate a lively and informed discussion.
3. Writing and other assignments will be self-generated and focused both on theoretical reflection and action agendas.
4. Post regular reflections about the readings and discussion (questions, praise, criticism, etc.) to course website.
5. Final projects and grading TBD.

SCHEDULE

Wk 1: 1/26

Orr, Earth in Mind, part 1
Berry, The Great Work, chaps. 1-3
Barlett and Chase, Sustainability on Campus, introduction

Wk 2: 2/2

Orr, Earth in Mind, part 2
Berry, The Great Work, chap. 4
Creighton, Greening the Ivory Tower, introduction (part 1)

Wk 3: 2/9

Orr, Earth in Mind, part 3
Berry, The Great Work, chap. 5
Creighton, Greening the Ivory Tower, part 2
(Note: subsequent readings from this volume will be determined by class interests)

Wk 4: 2/16

Orr, Earth in Mind, part 4
Berry, The Great Work, chap. 6
Barlett and Chase, Sustainability on Campus, part 1
Wk 5: 2/23

Berry, The Great Work, chap. 7
Barlett and Chase, Sustainability on Campus, part 2
Gore, An Inconvenient Truth, 1-100 (skim)

Wk 6: 3/2

Berry, The Great Work, chap. 8
Barlett and Chase, Sustainability on Campus, part 3
Gore, An Inconvenient Truth, 101-200 (skim)

Wk 7: 3/9

Berry, The Great Work, chap. 9
Barlett and Chase, Sustainability on Campus, part 4
Gore, An Inconvenient Truth, 201-325 (skim)

Spring Break: 3/12-3/18

Wk 8: 3/23

Berry, The Great Work, chap. 10
Barlett and Chase, Sustainability on Campus, part 5

Wk 9: 3/30

Berry, The Great Work, chap. 11

Wk 10: 4/6

Berry, The Great Work, chap. 12

Wk 11: 4/13

Berry, The Great Work, chap. 13

Wk 12: 4/20

Berry, The Great Work, chap. 14

Wk 13: 4/27

Berry, The Great Work, chaps. 15-17

Wk 14: 5/4