

Religion 200: Religion, Spirituality, Nature  
Prof. M. Gail Hamner  
Hall of Languages; [mghamner@syr.edu](mailto:mghamner@syr.edu)  
Office hours: Thursdays 2:30-3:30 and by appt.

Tu/Th 12:30-1:50  
Ms. Sara Swenson  
Hall of Languages 514; [saswens@syr.edu](mailto:saswens@syr.edu)  
Tuesdays 2:00-3:30 p.m. and by appt.

### Course description:

What differentiates “nature”, “wilderness”, and “the environment”? We often hear—or feel from our own experience—that these terms refer to paradigmatic sites of spiritual experience or that they locate specific sites of religious or ethical obligation. What is it about backpacking a wilderness area, walking through your favorite park, skiing down a mountain or jumping waves at the beach, that opens some people to “spiritual” experiences unavailable through the more mundane practices of urban or collegiate life? What leads some religious institutions to lead the causes of environmental protection and eco-justice, and why do other religious institutions resist this path? Does nature or wilderness have an intrinsic value? Does non-human nature prepare or produce human religious experiences? Do we encounter nature differently from persons who lived before our media-saturated world? What values are articulated by nature-lovers, wilderness advocates, and environmental activists, and how are these values converted to specific governmental policies and personal practices? These are some of the questions we will set out to explore this semester.

### Learning Outcomes

Students of this course will be able to

- Assess how naturalists and religionists argue the connections between religion, place and identity;
- Discern the religious or spiritual values at play in discussions of “nature”, “wilderness”, and “environment”;
- Determine connections between religious or spiritual appeals to non-human life and specific government policies and personal or communal practices;
- Describe how ‘land’, ‘earth’ and ‘nature’ signify differently for different religious traditions, and for different spiritual orientations.

### Expectations and Grading

- **Participation (30%)**
  - **12% = Attendance:** I expect you (a) to come to class on time, (b) having done the reading and reading notes, and (c) ready to discuss it together. More than two absences will affect your participation grade regardless of the reason.
  - **8% = participation in group-work:** collaborative and focused work on the given assignment. Points lost for anything less than fully collaborative and focused work.
  - **10% = contribution to class discussion.** If you find it difficult to talk in class, I will accept emailed comments on class discussion or on your small group work if these are sent to me ([mghamner@syr.edu](mailto:mghamner@syr.edu)) before the next class meeting.
- **Exams (3 in-class exams @ 15% each = 45%)**
- **Reading notes/questions (10 reflections @ 2.5% each = 25%).**  
Missing responses receive a zero. Late responses receive an F (50). If you send me a response before the next class period, I will convert the F to a D (65).

### Required books (available at Schine student Center)

1. Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature, Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (U Cal Press, 2010)
2. Catherine Albanese, *Reconsidering Nature Religion* (Trinity Press, 2002)

## Syllabus

### I. Orienting Narratives about Nature, Religion, and Loss

#### Week 1

Tuesday Jan 17 Introductions, personal survey, and short writing task  
Lecture Intro on terms and questions

Thursday Jan 19 Read:  
(1) Haraway, "Staying with the Trouble" BB  
(2) Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, 1. "Introducing Religion and Dark Green Religion," 1-12

### II. EARTH

#### Week 2

Tuesday Jan. 24 Read:  
(1) Albanese Ch.1, "Nature Religion: Naming and Narrating," 1-26  
(2) Kolbert, "Obama the Conservationist" BB

Thursday Jan 26 Read:  
(1) Henry David Thoreau: Appendix of Taylor, 227-247  
(2) John Muir, selection BB

#### Week 3

Tuesday Jan 31 (1) Read: Aldo Leopold, selection BB  
(2) Watch: Pare Lorenz, *The Plow the Broke the Plains*/ (1936; ~27 min.), available on YouTube or at the reserve desk at Bird Library (DVD #7671)

Thursday Feb 2 Read: Taylor, Ch. 2. "Dark Green Religion," 13-41

#### Week 4

Tuesday Feb 7 Read:  
(1) Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* Ch. 1-3 BB  
(2) Lisa Sideris, "A Fable for Bloomington" BB

Thursday Feb 9 Read: Taylor, Ch. 3. "Dark Green Religion in North America," 42-70

#### Week 5

Tuesday Feb 14 Read: Review Thoreau, Muir, Leopold, and Carson (BB), and worksheets on Lorenz, Taylor and Albanese

Thursday Feb 16 **EXAM #1**

### III. WATER

#### Week 6

Tuesday Feb 21 Read:  
(1) Albanese, Ch. 2, "Nature Religion and the Turn to Politics and Ethics", 27-50  
(2) "Follow the VA Tech Team that Exposed Water Contamination in Flint" BB

Thursday Feb 23 Read:  
(1) Craig Childs, *Secret Life of Water*, BB  
(2) Edward Abbey, *Down the River*, BB

#### Week 7

Tuesday Feb 28 Watch: Tia Lessin and Carl Deal's *Trouble the Water* (2008, 96 min.), available free at Bird Library reserve desk (DVD #15911)  
OR Watch: Benh Zeitlin's *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012, 93 min.), available free at Bird Library reserve desk (DVD #17383)

Thursday March 2 Read:  
(1) Taylor, Ch. 4. "Radical Environmentalism", 71-102  
(2) "Between a Rock and Hard Place" (NoDAPL) BB

#### Week 8

Tuesday Mar 7 Read:  
(1) Callum Roberts, *The Ocean of Life: The Fate of Man and the Sea* BB  
(2) Courtney O'Dell-Chaib, "Toxic Bodies, Sacred Economies" BB

Thursday Mar 9 Read: Lisa Sideris, "Finitude and Responsibility" BB  
Taylor, Ch. 5. "Surfing Spirituality," 103-126

### Spring Break

#### Week 9

Tuesday Mar 21 Read: Review Childs, Abbey, Roberts and O'Dell-Chaib, and worksheets on Albanese, Taylor and the film.

Thursday Mar 23 **EXAM #2**

### IV. AIR (Note: some readings may change based on how the course develops *with you* in earlier weeks)

#### Week 10

Tuesday Mar 28 Read:  
(1) Albanese, Ch. 3. "Nature Religion and the Turn to Metaphysics," 51-72  
(2) "Religion and Views on Climate and Energy Issues" (Pew) BB

Thursday Mar 30 Read:  
Taylor, Ch. 6. "Globalization with Predators and Moving Pictures," 127-154

#### Week 11

Tuesday April 4 Watch: *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* (54 min)  
OR *Plastic Planet* (100 min.)  
Read: The Immanent Frame, "Cosmology and the Environment" BB

Thursday April 6 Read: National Geographic articles on climate change BB  
Read:  
(1) Kaza, "The Gridlock of Domination: A Buddhist Response to Environmental Suffering" BB  
(2) Twobears, "Seeing the Whole" BB

**Week 12**

Tuesday April 11 Read: Taylor, Ch. 7. "Globalization in Arts, Sciences, and Letters," 155-180

Thursday April 13 Read: Mortimer-Sandilands, "Melancholy Natures, Queer Ecologies" BB

**V. FIRE (**

**Week 13**

Tuesday April 18 Read: Return to DAPL debates; reading TBA

Thursday April 20 Read: Place NODAPL in context of Flint and other ecojustice issues

**Week 14**

Tuesday April 25 Watch: James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009: 162 min)  
OR Florio and Mudd's *Broken Rainbow* (1986: 70 min.)

Thursday April 27 Read:  
(1) Taylor, Chapter 8, "Terrapolitan Earth Religion", 181-200  
(2) Haraway, "Symposium" (selection) BB

**Week 15**

Tuesday May 2 Taylor, Conclusion, "Dark Green Religion and the Planetary Future."

**FINAL EXAM (#3) SCHEDULED DURING EXAM WEEK.**

**Official Policies**

**Academic Integrity**

The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>

**Disability Statement**

Students who may need academic accommodations due to a disability are encouraged to discuss their needs with the instructor at the beginning of the semester. In order to obtain authorized accommodations, students should be registered with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498 and have an updated accommodation letter for the instructor. Accommodations and related support services such as exam administration are

not provided retroactively and must be requested in advance.” For more information about services and policy, see Office of Disability Services: **Address:** Syracuse University, Office of Disability Services, 804 University Ave., Room 309.Syracuse, NY 13244-2330

**Phone: Voice:** (315) 443-4498; **TDD:** (315) 443-1371

**E-Mail:** [odssched@syr.edu](mailto:odssched@syr.edu)

**If you suffer from acute anxiety or depression, please let me know at the start of the semester.**