

Instructor: Michael M. Bell
michaelbell@wisc.edu
Teaching Assistant: Valerie Stull
valerie.ces541@gmail.com

Lecture: Tu 4:30-5:45 184 Russell Labs
Sections: Th 3-4:15 1116 Biochem
Th 4:30-5:45, 10 Ag Hall
F: 1-2:15; 2:30-3:45 38 Ag Hall

Community and Environmental Sociology 541
ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AND SOCIAL JUSTICE
Environmental Studies 402
SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES IN ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES
FALL, 2013

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*. 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

Nota bene—Check the separate “section syllabus” for additional details on course organization and procedures.

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.

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 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 Valerie Stull, the course TA. And **bring a print-out for Valerie to section**. 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!

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. 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. No excuse or explanation needed; just don't show up. However, additional absences will not be excused, except in exceptional circumstances. Each absence beyond two each from lecture and section will lower your 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.

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, 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.

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.

Course Books

Required:

- Armstrong, Karen. 2009. *The Case for God*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Lao Tzu. (c. 4th C. BCE)—Choose either one of these two translations:
 - *Tao Te Ching*. D.C. Lau, trans. Penguin Great Ideas series. [Place]: Penguin. A more academic and accurate translation, but with gendered language.
 - *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching*. Ursula Le Guin, trans. [Place]: Shambhala; Har/Com. A more artistic and personal rendition by one of America's most famous authors.
- 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.)

NATURE

Week 1 (9/3, 9/5-6): The Conundrum of the Absolute

Secondary source

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

Primary source

Thoreau, Henry David. 1862. "Walking." In *Excursions*. On-line.

Week 2 (9/10, 9/12-13): Nature Before Nature

Secondary sources

TBA

Primary source

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

Week 3 (9/17, 9/19-20): 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

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.

Lao Tzu. [c. 4th century BCE] *Tao Te Ching*.

Theocritus. [c. 3rd C. BCE]. "Seventh Idyll." On-line.

Week 4 (9/24, 9/26-27): The Danger of Nature

Secondary sources

Bell, Michael M. 2012. "The Human Nature of Nature," pp. 201-226 in *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*, 4th edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press. On-line.

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."

FAITH

Week 5 (10/1, 10/3-4): YHWY's Transformation

Secondary sources

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

Wright, Robert. 2009. "Polytheism: The Religion of Ancient Isreal," pp. 98-130 in *The Evolution of God*. New York and Boston: Little, Brown and Company. On-line.

Friedman, Richard Elliott. 2003. Selection 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 6 (10/8, 10/10-11): Why Jesus Never Talked to Farmers

Secondary sources

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

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.

A selection from the *Talmud*. On-line.

Selections from the Gnostic tradition. On-line.

Week 7 (10/15, 10/17-18): The Axial Age and the Nature/Supernature Split

Secondary sources

Armstrong, Karen. 2006. Selections from *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions*. New York: Anchor Books. On-line.

Armstrong, Karen. 2009. "Reason," pp. 49-76 in *The Case for God*. New York: Anchor Books.

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

Primary sources

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

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 8 (10/22, 10/24-25): Midterm exam

No reading.

Week 9 (10/29, 10/31-11/1): Off the Axis? Hinduism, Islam, and Aztec and Mayan Religion

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.

A reading on Aztec and Mayan religion TBA. On-line.

Primary sources

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

Selections from the *Hadith*. On-line.

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

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

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

Week 10 (11/5, 11/7-8): 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

TBA. On-line.

COMMUNITY

Week 11 (11/12, 11/14-15): 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 12 (11/19, 11/21-22): Denying Climate Change: Religion, Science, 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.

Week 13 (11/26, no sections): The Greening of Religion

Secondary sources

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. 1996. "The Rediscovery of Nature: Religion and the Environmental Crisis," pp. 191-234 in *Religion and the Order of Nature*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. On-line.

Taylor, Bron. 2010. Selection from *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. On-line.

Primary source

DeWitt, Calvin B. 2011. "A Biblical Perspective on Creation Care," pp. 71-82 in *Earthwise: A Guide to Hopeful Creation Care*. 3rd edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive. On-line.

Thanksgiving Break Nov. 28-Dec. 1

Week 14 (12/3, 12/5-6): Awesome Coolness and the Politics of Nature

Secondary sources

Aiken, Scott F. and Robert B. Talise. 2011. Pp. 9-13 and 95-125 from *Reasonable Atheism: A Moral Case for Respectful Disbelief*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books. On-line.

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.

Berger, Peter and Anton Zijderveld. 2009. *In Praise of Doubt: How to Have Convictions Without Becoming a Fanatic*. Short selection TBA. On-line.

Primary source

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

Lucretius, circa 99-55 BCE. Selection from *On the Nature of Things (De Rerum Natura)*. On-line.

Week 15 (12/10, 12/12-13): The Multilogics of Truth

No reading. Essay portion of the final handed out 12/10. Sections devoted to exam preparation.

Week 16: Final Exam

In-class component: *December 17th, 5:05-7:05pm*. Essay portion due at the start of the in-class component.