

Christianity and Environmental Ethics – REL 906 / F&ES 797
Yale Divinity School and Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies – Spring 2016
Matthew T. Riley – Instructor – matthew.riley@yale.edu
Class: Weekly meeting time: Monday, 1:30-3:20pm. Location: BUSH-S200
Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description: The purpose of this course is to provide an introduction to core questions and moral frameworks in environmental ethics as they relate to Christianity. This course will explore how scholars, activists, and religious leaders have created and refined Christian responses to environmental problems. In order to develop a deeper understanding of not only the promise of environmental ethics, but also its efficacy and theoretical underpinnings, this course invites students to critically assess the effectiveness of these strategies and to be analytical in the examination of proposed solutions.

Moreover, students in this course will explore how various ethics and worldviews arose historically in conversation with environmental philosophy and in response to contemporary ecological and theological concerns. Special attention will be given to understanding, critically assessing, and applying the fundamental methodology that undergirds environmental ethics as read through the lens of Christian theology and religious moral reasoning. This course will simultaneously allow students to take stock of contemporary issues including but not limited to: global climate change; the moral status of ecosystems; biodiversity loss; the relationship between race, gender, poverty, and the environment; and intersections with other issues such as animal welfare, economics, and agriculture.

No prior experience in theology, environmental ethics, or religious ethics is required – participants will be encouraged to be exploratory, inquisitive, and interactive in their learning.

Objectives: Students who complete this course will:

- 1) Understand the historical emergence and development of environmental ethics.
- 2) Describe the ethical relationship between the Christian tradition and environmental problems.
- 3) Become conversant in, and learn to utilize, the fundamental methodology of environmental ethics as read through the lens of Christian theology and religious moral reasoning.
- 4) Be able to assess the effectiveness of applied, pragmatic approaches to environmental ethics and to think critically about the successes, or failures, of on-the-ground attempts to apply ethics to action.
- 5) Think, speak, and write critically about contemporary environmental ethics, particularly those framed in a Christian perspective.

Course Format: This course is offered to undergraduate and graduate students including, but not limited to, students in the Yale Divinity School and the Yale School of Forestry and

Environmental Studies. Undergraduate students are also welcome to attend. Class meetings will typically consist of a short lecture by the instructor and a student presentation followed by class discussion and reflection. It meets once per week and is worth three credits.

Course Requirements and Grading: Students are expected to complete the following:

- 15-20 page Research Paper. (55% of final grade).
- In-class presentation / short paper. (15% of final grade).
- Reading of books and articles as demonstrated through weekly submission of Reading Responses. (15% of final grade).
- Active participation in class discussions. (15% of final grade).

Grading Rubric

H	95-100%	Work receiving a grade of “Honors” is exemplary scholarship which features clear writing, expression of nuanced arguments and insights, and has the originality and structure expected in publication quality work. This is work that uses an effective rhetorical structure nearing professional level writing and it is coherent and enjoyable to read from beginning to end. Honors work will have negligible issues with grammar and formatting.
H-	90-94%	Work receiving a grade of “Honors Minus” indicates outstanding work in the form of quality writing, well-considered arguments and insights, and which also shows a depth of thought and originality that nears that of publication quality work. Honors Minus work will often have minimal issues with grammar and formatting.
HP+	87-89%	Work receiving a grade of “Honors Pass Plus” indicates acceptable work which may include the following attributes: Clear but somewhat disorganized writing, arguments and insights that are cogent but which need further refinement, and a level of thought that is more descriptive than critical. Honors Pass Plus work will often have some issues with grammar and formatting.
HP	84-86%	Work receiving a grade of “Honors Pass” indicates acceptable work which should include many, but not all, of the following attributes: Clear but somewhat disorganized writing, arguments and insights that are cogent but which need further refinement, and a level of thought that is more descriptive than critical. Honors Pass work will often have some issues with grammar and formatting.
HP-	80-83%	Work receiving a grade of “Honors Pass Minus” indicates work which shows clear effort and intent to complete the assignment, but which may feature several of the following: Disorganized writing, an argument which

		conflicts itself or which is purely descriptive in nature, a misunderstanding of source materials, or it will have significant issues with grammar and formatting.
P	70-79%	Work receiving a grade of “Pass” indicates work that was turned in, but which minimally adheres to the standards of academic writing and critical thought.
F	0	Passing credit cannot be given for this work.
W	Withdrawal	Student withdrew from course.

Reading Responses and Presentation: Students are expected to post a weekly reading response to Canvas. Each response should be a critical engagement with the concepts and ethical theories explored in that particular week’s readings (approximately 400 words). Your task is not to summarize the readings, but rather to explore the ethical frameworks that they present. In addition, you should not be addressing an environmental *issue* that interests you, but rather a particular way of *thinking* about religious environmental ethics. Then, read the posts of your classmates and comment on the posts of 2 other students in a thought-provoking or insightful way (this can be as short as a sentence or two or as long as you’d like). The reading responses are due three days before class meets at 9pm (Friday, 9pm) and comments on the posts of your peers are due the day before class by 9pm (Sunday, 9pm). Students should come to class prepared to discuss their responses.

Each week, 1-2 students will be assigned to do a short in-class presentation. Rather than completing a short reading response for the week in which they are presenting, students should instead write a short paper of approximately 1,000 words which can then be read or summarized as a class presentation on the week’s topic (~10 minutes). In these reading responses, you should do three things: 1) Begin by selecting an environmental issue as a case study. This can be an important environmental issue or a recent event highlighted in the news such as an environmental disaster, a key policy decision, and so forth. 2) Then, using the readings, discuss how the authors, or thinkers using the ethical frame of thought, might respond to the case study that you have chosen. This should be both a discussion of the ethical decision making that is needed for such perspectives as well as an account of what kinds of action might be taken under such ethical considerations. And, lastly, 3) wrap up your paper/presentation by offering your own perspective on the ethical frameworks and their ability to address the environmental issue in your case study. Do the authors offer an ethical that seems to work? What are the problems with this kind of thinking? What are the strengths?

These short 1,000 word “papers” should be emailed to the instructor by 9pm on the day before class. Typically student presentations will be given sometime during the first half of the class session on Monday.

Research Paper: Each student is required to write a research paper on the topic of their choosing (with instructor approval) which is due at the end of the semester. Like the reading responses, your task is to engage with a particular way of *thinking* about environmental ethics as it relates to Christianity. You may organize your paper around a particular environmental issue

or aspect of the Christian tradition, but the main task of your paper is report on a particular way of thinking about environmental ethics, to critically examine it, and to draw it into conversation with the broader ethical theories presented in this course. Papers should be in the form of a Word document, use 12pt. font, have 1-inch margins, and should also have a works cited list in addition to the paper. Additional instructions will be provided in class. **The paper is due May 10th.**

Classroom Culture, Participation, and Academic Integrity: This course is intended to be an intellectually challenging opportunity for personal growth and development. Since this is a shared learning environment, participants in this course are expected to be respectful of others. This includes actively listening to one another, being respectful of the time and ideas of your classmates, and entering into the classroom with a desire to engage and learn in a collaborative fashion.

Students participating in this course must adhere to the standards of academic integrity. If you have any questions regarding plagiarism, please consult the YDS Bulletin for guidelines regarding plagiarism and citing sources. When in doubt, consult the instructor of this course.

Absences and Late Work: Students are expected to attend classes and to turn work in on time. In the case of emergencies and extenuating circumstances, extensions may only be given with prior consent from the instructor. Late papers will have a portion of the final grade for that assignment deducted for each day that it is late (for example, an “H” paper that is one day late will receive a mark of “H-” and an “H” paper that is two days late will receive a mark of “HP+”).

Special Accommodations: Students with documented learning challenges, health conditions, or who are non-native speakers of English should meet with the instructor at the beginning of the semester. Students should also contact, and work with, the appropriate resources available to them on campus to aid in their learning. Your learning is important and I will make every reasonable effort to facilitate your success in this course. For more information, please consult the Student Handbook and the YDS website.

Required Texts: The following books can be purchased at the YDS Student Book Supply or via an online bookseller. Additional readings, such as articles, will be provided on Canvas.

- Dieter T Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether. Editors. 2000. *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking Well-Being of Earth and Humans*. Cambridge, MA: Center for the Study of World Religions and Harvard University Press.
- Jenkins, Willis. 2008. *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Keller, David R. Editor. 2010. *Environmental Ethics: The Big Questions*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Rasmussen, Larry. *Earth-honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*. 2012. New York: Oxford University Press.

Course Schedule:

Jan. 25 - *Introduction to Environmental Ethics – Key Terms and Conversations in Christianity.*

Discussion Questions: What is “environmental ethics” and what role has Christianity played in addressing environmental issues? What are the central concerns and questions of environmental ethics and how do these concerns and questions differ from other theological or ethical problems? What makes an environmental ethic uniquely “Christian?” What is the standard of success for environmental ethics?

Required Readings:

- Jenkins, “Christian Ethics and Unprecedented Problems,” online, pp. 67-106.
- Palmer, “An Overview of Environmental Ethics,” online, pp. 15-25.
- Keller, “Introduction, What is Environmental Ethics,” in *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 1-23.
- Tucker and Grim, “Series Forward,” in *Christianity and Ecology*, pp. xv-xxxix.

Recommended Readings:

- Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics*.
- Curry, *Ecological Ethics*.

Feb. 1 - *Environmental Ethics – Historical Development and Christian Responses.*

Discussion Questions:

What are some of the commonly recognized historical and intellectual origin points of ecotheology and Christian environmental ethics? Are there aspects of Christian environmental ethics that precede the advent of the environmental movement? How have scholars and activists changed their ethical responses to climate change over time?

Required Readings:

- White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.” *Science* 155: 3767 (1967), pp.1203-1207.
- Grim and Tucker, “Problems and Promise of Religions,” in *Ecology and Religion*, online, pp. 13-27.
- “The Assisi Declarations,” Christianity section, (<http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/THE%20ASSISI%20DECLARATIONS.pdf>).
- Sylvan (Routley), “Is There a Need For a New, an Environmental, Ethic?,” in *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 98-102.
- Website: International Society for Environmental Ethics (ISEE) (<http://enviroethics.org/>), browse website to obtain a general understanding of the organization.

Recommended Readings:

- Nash, *The Rights of Nature*.

Feb. 8 – *Anthropocentrism and Non-Anthropocentrism – Part 1 of 2: Dominion and Stewardship.*

Discussion Questions: What is meant by the term “anthropocentrism” and how does it differ from non-anthropocentrism? What is the difference between utilitarian thought and deontological thought? Why does this difference matter and how does this play into the dominion-stewardship debate? Who, or what, has moral standing within an anthropocentric environmental ethic? How might a Christian anthropocentric ethic approach an ethical problem such as clear-cut logging or whale hunting? Are these responses adequate? What are the strengths of anthropocentric thinking in ecotheology and Christian environmental ethics?

Required Readings:

- Jenkins, Ch. 4, “The Strategy of Christian Stewardship,” pp. 77-92.
- Rasmussen, Ch. 4, “The Ethic We Need: Change and Imagination,” and Ch. 5, “The Ethic We Need: Good Theory,” pp. 111-159.
- Northcott, “The Environment and Christian Ethics,” online, pp. 164-198.
- Keller, “What is Anthropocentrism? Introduction,” in *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 59-62.
- Kant, “Rational Beings Alone Have Moral Worth,” online, pp. 45-46.
- Aquinas, “Humans as Moral Ends,” in *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 63-64.
- Locke, “Nature as Economic Resource,” in *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 77-81.

Recommended Readings:

- Jenkins, Ch. 8, “Stewardship After the End of Nature: Karl Barth’s Environment of Jesus Christ,” pp. 153-170.

Feb. 15 – Anthropocentrism and Non-Anthropocentrism – Part 2 of 2: Stewardship and Beyond.

Discussion Questions: How have churches responded to the call for stewardship and how does a stewardship ethic look in practice? What critiques can be raised against taking an anthropocentric approach to environmental ethics? What are some of the existing critiques of Christian Stewardship and what alternative ethics are suggested? Do these critiques seem valid to you? Why or why not?

Required Readings:

- White, “Continuing the Conversation,” online, pp. 55-64.
- Hitzhusen and Tucker, “Religion and Earth Stewardship,” online, pp. 368-375.
- Palmer, “Stewardship: A Case Study,” online, pp. 63-75.
- Jenkins, Ch. 5, “The Strategy of Ecological Spirituality,” pp. 93-111.

Recommended Readings:

- The Green Seminary Initiative website (www.greenseminaries.org).

Feb. 22 – Biocentric Ethics.

Discussion Questions: What is non-anthropocentrism (or biocentrism) and how does it differ from anthropocentrism? Can “nature” have intrinsic value? How do Christian biocentric ethics both expand upon existing anthropocentric ethics and create a unique way of valuing and thinking about the natural world? How would each of the authors read this week answer the question: Should rocks have ethical standing? What objections would someone who places a high value on human uniqueness raise when considering a biocentric ethic?

Required Readings:

- Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” in *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 193-200.

- Rolston, “Value in Nature and the Nature of Value,” in *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 130-136.
- Thomas Berry, “The New Story” and “The Meadow Across the Creek,” online
 - (http://thomasberry.org/assets/attachments/Thomas_Berry-The_New_Story.pdf).
 - (<http://thomasberry.org/publications-and-media/the-meadow-across-the-creek>).
- Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep Ecology Movement,” in *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 230-234.
- Taylor, “The Ethics of Respect for Nature,” in *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 175-181.
- *Deep Ecology and World Religions*, online, pp. 169-191 and 213-228.

Recommended Readings:

- Zimmerman, *Environmental Philosophy*.
- Keller, “What is Nonanthropocentrism?” pp. 89-106.

Feb. 29 – Earth Community.

Discussion Questions: Have changing notions of Christian community impacted how we think about the environment? Who, or what, has moral standing within a Christian biocentric ethic? What is the difference between objective and subjective value theories and how might this influence how we think about communities and values? Using a particular Christian tradition or Biblical text, how might one define the boundaries of an ecological community?

Required Readings:

- Niebuhr, selections from *The Kingdom of God in America*, “Introduction” and “Institutionalization and Secularization of the Kingdom,” pp. 1-16 and 164-198, online.
- Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, “Christianity and the Modern Social Problem,” pp. 1010-1014, online.
- Rasmussen, Ch. 3, “The Faith We Seek;” Ch. 6, “The Ethic We Need: Community Matrix;” and “Interlude,” pp. 80-110, 160-190, and 226-238.
- Elliot, “Meta-Ethics and Environmental Ethics,” in *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 342-351.

Recommended Readings:

- Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*.

Mar. 7 – Nonhuman-Animals, Ecosystems, and Biodiversity Loss.

Discussion Questions: What criteria are used for valuing individual animals or species in Christian environmental ethics? How might one value an individual animal over an ecosystem and vice versa? How would you defend such a claim using a deontological approach? A utilitarian approach? What major differences exist across varying Christian traditions? How might a decline in biodiversity affect the health, quality of life, and/or other moral goods for an individual human or nonhuman animal? How does focusing on animal rights, the value of ecosystems, or on biodiversity challenge human-centered environmental ethics?

Required Readings:

- Riley, “A Spiritual Democracy of All God’s Creatures,” online, pp. 241-260.
- Regan, “Animals as Subjects of a Life,” in *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 161-168.
- Singer, “All Animals are Equal,” in *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 169-174.
- Palmer, “Animals in Christian Ethics: Developing a Relational Approach.” *Ecotheology* 7:2 (2003), pp. 163-185.
- Jenkins, Ch. 6, “Sanctifying Biodiversity: Ecojustice in Thomas Aquinas,” pp. 116-132.

Recommended Readings:

- Cahen, “Against the Moral Considerability of Ecosystems,” online, pp. 114-123.

Mar. 14 and Mar. 21: *Spring Recess, no classes.*

Mar. 28 – *Humans, Diversity, and Nature: Justice, Equality, and Race.*

Discussion Questions: Are people of color disproportionately burdened with environmental harm? How are attitudes towards nature, ecologically destructive practices, and environmental policy connected to race and class? How do the insights of environmental justice reveal racism to be institutionalized, systematic, and deeply rooted in theology and religious institutions? Might the other forms of ecotheology and religious environmental ethics that we have studied have potentially racist or classist outcomes if applied to policy and practice? Why or why not?

Required Readings:

- “The Principles of Environmental Justice,” (www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.pdf).
- Rasmussen, “Global Eco-Justice: The Church’s Mission in Urban Society,” in *Christianity and Ecology*, pp. 515-530.
- Jenkins, Ch. 3 “The Strategy of Ecojustice,” pp. 61-76.
- The United Church of Christ, “Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty: 1987-2007,” (www.ucc.org/justice/pdfs/toxic20.pdf), skim.
- Laudato Si’ (http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclica-laudato-si.html), skim.

Recommended Readings:

- Bullard, *Unequal Protection*.
- Rasmussen, Larry. “Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice: Moral Theory in the Making?” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 24, no. 1 (2004): 3-28.

Apr. 4 – *Humans, Diversity, and Nature (cont.): Gender, Women, and the Distribution of Justice.*

Discussion Questions: Are women disproportionately burdened with environmental harm? How are attitudes towards nature, ecologically destructive practices, and environmental policy connected to sex and gender? What, if any, connection exists between ecological harmful attitudes and masculine notions of God? Might the other forms of ecotheology and religious environmental ethics that we have studied have potentially sexist outcomes if applied to policy and practice? For instance, how do

stewardship ethics conceive of sex and gender and how might this impact the moral decision making of a religious community?

Required Readings:

- Warren, “The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism,” in *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 281-290.
- Taylor, Sarah McFarland. “Reinhabiting Religion: Green Sisters, Ecological Renewal, and the Biogeography of Religious Landscape.” *Worldviews: Journal of Environment, Culture, and Religion* 6:4 (2002): pp. 227-252.
- Ruether, “Ecofeminism: The Challenge to Theology,” in *Christianity and Ecology*, pp. 97-112.
- Rasmussen, Ch. 11, “Prophetic-Liberative Practices and Oppression,” pp. 305-331.
- Page, “Has Ecofeminism Cornered the Market? Gender Analysis in the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture.” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture* 1:3 (2007), pp. 293-319.

Recommended Readings:

- Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*.
- McFague, *The Body of God*.
- Eaton, Heather. "At the Intersection of Ecofeminism and Religion: Directions for Consideration." *Ecotheology* 6 (Jul 01/Jan 02): 75-91.
- Merchant, “Feminism and the Philosophy of Nature,” in *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 291-299.

Apr. 11 – Agriculture, Food, and Flourishing.

Discussion Questions: What makes food and agriculture an ecological issue? How has the “green revolution” simultaneously decreased biodiversity and increased human-health risks? Does the Bible have a land ethic? When a decision is made between feeding people or protecting nature, must a choice be made between the two? What are some alternative ethical ways of thinking about the problem? How is the rapidly human population tied into Christian environmental ethics?

Required Readings:

- Bean, “Toward an Anabaptist/Mennonite Environmental Ethic,” online, pp. 183-205.
- Rasmussen, Ch. 7, “The Ethic We Need: Tilling and Keeping,” pp. 191-225.
- Cobb, “Christianity, Economics, and Ecology,” in *Christianity and Ecology*, pp. 497-514.
- Hardin, “The Ecological Necessity of Confronting the Problem of Human Overpopulation,” in *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 434-442.
- Website: Genesis Farm (www.genesisfarm.org).

Recommended Readings:

- Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*.
- Shiva, *Stolen Harvest*.
- Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*.

Apr. 18 – Pragmatism and Pluralism – Rethinking Ecological Problems.

Discussion Questions: Rather than thinking of ethics from the standpoint of cosmology and ideas, how does thinking about ethics in terms of practical strategies for action change how we think about environmental issues? What are some instances where Christian communities have successfully worked to address moral ecological conundrums? What, if any, is the role of the ethicists in the day-to-day lives of Christians facing climate change? How might we think about environmental ethics in terms of moral monism and pluralism in a globalized world? Must Christian environmental ethics be pluralistic in order to be efficacious?

Required Readings:

- Weston, “Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics, in *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 311-317.
- Light, “Methodological Pragmatism, Pluralism, and Environmental Ethics,” in *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 318-326.
- Jenkins, Ch. 2, “Three Practical Strategies in Environmental Ethics,” pp. 31-60.
- Nash, “Seeking Moral Norms in Nature,” in *Christianity and Ecology*, pp. 227-250.

Recommended Readings:

- Website: GreenFaith (www.greenfaith.org).

Apr. 25 – *Christians and Ethics in an Era of Climate Change: The Religious Environment of the Twenty-First Century.*

Discussion Questions: What areas of Christian ecological ethics are newly emerging in the twenty-first century? How does climate change redefine Christian ethics? Is climate change a “game-changer” for the broader tradition of Christian ethics? Why or why not?

Required Readings:

- Grim and Tucker, “Building an Interreligious Dialogue: Toward a Global Ethics,” in *Ecology and Religion*, online, pp. 154-163.
- Berry, “Christianity’s Role in the Earth Project,” in *Christianity and Ecology*, pp. 127-134.
- Rolston, “The Future of Environmental Ethics,” in *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 561-574.
- Rasmussen, Ch. 13, “Closing” and “Postlude,” pp. 357-368.
- Jenkins, Ch. 12, “Conclusion,” pp. 227-243.

May 2 – *YDS Reading Period, no class.*

May 9 – *Conclusion to the course and sharing of final papers.*

- Your assignment for this week is to post a draft of your paper to Canvas for your peers to read and then to read and respond to two of the papers of your peers. Further instructions are on Canvas in the discussion thread for this week.
- In class, we will be informally sharing papers. Students will each be asked to describe their paper’s argument, to describe the challenges or successes of their research process, and to ask for feedback from the class. This is informal and is meant to be a chance for students to learn from one another and to share their research. And, just as important, this is a chance for you to improve your paper by hearing feedback from

others and gathering ideas. Please do not prepare a formal presentation or spend lots of time preparing what you will say.