

## **Contemporary Cosmology and Christian Ethics**

Yale Divinity School Fall 2013

REL 647a

Fred Simmons

SDQ Taylor S 218

Office Hours by appointment

frederick.simmons@yale.edu

### **Objectives and Overview**

This seminar examines changing conceptions of the place and purpose of human beings in the cosmos, and explores what these changes may mean for Christian ethics.

Beginning with 19<sup>th</sup> century German appraisals of the theological significance of the Copernican revolution, we turn to 20<sup>th</sup> century American Reformed thinkers' retrievals, rejections, and revisions of Christian ethics in light of the new cosmology and biology. We then survey a recent venture in Christian evolutionary theology and environmental ethics, and conclude by canvassing competing Christian eco-feminist treatments of these themes. This course thus aims to investigate an aspect of the nature and limits of the systematic character of Christian thought, and to introduce a particularly productive and contested arena of contemporary Christian ethics.

### **Format**

Besides an initial session introducing the class and reviewing significant stages of Western cosmology, a student paper on the week's reading and another student's response to it (or two of each if enrollment requires) will prompt each seminar's discussion. In two page, single-spaced, papers, presenters succinctly distill what they believe the most salient ethical assertion, question, or problem raised by the week's reading, explain what they take to be its import, and offer their analysis. As such, these papers advance an interpretive claim and assess its substance. After conferring with the presenter prior to class, a respondent prepares a one page, single-spaced reply to the presenter's paper that both engages and extends it—whether constructively or critically. Presenters and respondents distribute their papers to members of the class, read them aloud, and facilitate discussion of them for the first half of the session. Thereafter, the instructor leads discussion by either continuing the prior conversation or addressing material in the week's reading that has yet to be considered.

### **Contents**

#### **PART I. Protestant Retrievals, Rejections, and Revisions Given the New Cosmology**

August 29<sup>th</sup>: Course Overview and Description

Pivotal developments in Western cosmology and their Christian consequences.

September 5<sup>th</sup>: Troeltsch. *The Christian Faith*.

§1, §2, §4, §5, §15 - §18. Course Reader.

September 12<sup>th</sup>: H. Richard Niebuhr. *The Responsible Self*.

Richard R. Niebuhr Preface, Gustafson Introduction, Entire volume, Appendices A & B.

September 19<sup>th</sup>: Gustafson. *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*.  
Volume I. Chapters 1, 2, 4 – 7.  
Volume II. Chapter 1. Course Reader.

September 26<sup>th</sup>: Gustafson. *A Sense of the Divine*.  
Entire volume.

October 3<sup>rd</sup>: Farley. *Good & Evil*.  
Preface, Part I, Chapters 1-5, Part II, Chapters 6 & 7.

October 10<sup>th</sup>: Farley. *Good & Evil*.  
Chapters 8-16.

October 17<sup>th</sup>: Southgate. *The Groaning of Creation*.  
Entire volume.

## PART II. Varieties of Christian Eco-feminism and their Christian Eco-Ethical Critics

October 31<sup>st</sup>: McFague. *Life Abundant*.  
Preface, Part I, Part II (pages 51 – 65 may be skimmed).

November 7<sup>th</sup>: McFague. *Life Abundant*.  
Part III, Epilogue, Appendix.

November 14<sup>th</sup>: Ruether. *Gaia and God*.  
Introduction, Chapters 1-3, 5, 8 – 10.

November 21<sup>st</sup>: Sideris. *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology & Natural Selection*.  
Entire volume.

December 17<sup>th</sup>: Seminar paper due.

### **Reading Materials**

A course reader may be purchased at TYCO (262 Elm Street); it contains the reading assignment for September 5<sup>th</sup>, and part of the reading assignment for September 19<sup>th</sup>.

All other assigned readings are found in books that may be purchased at Student Book Supply (Yale Divinity School).

All readings are on reserve at the Divinity School Library Reserve Desk.

### **Evaluation**

Discussion Paper	15%
Response Paper	5%
Class Participation	10%
Seminar Paper	70%