

## Print Program Book

### Sessions

#### M16-109

##### Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University

Theme: *Forum on Religion and Ecology Annual Luncheon*

**Friday - 11:30 AM-1:30 PM**

Room Assignments Available Only to Members. Login [here](#) and then click the Program Book link at the top of the page to return.

#### A16-203

##### Preconference Workshops

Theme: *Sustainability Workshop - Global Perspectives on (In)equality and Ethics in Ecological Issues*

Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, Seattle University, Presiding

**Friday - 1:45 PM-5:00 PM**

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Sponsored by the Sustainability Task Force and the Transformative Scholarship and Pedagogy Group

Religion and theology increasingly are called upon to contribute their resources to the task of reversing humankind's current path toward ecological disaster. Ecological degradation is linked insidiously with various forms of social injustice based on race/ethnicity, class, gender, nationality, and caste. Those links often are ignored in the mainstream environmental discourse. A religiously grounded commitment to dismantle oppression, however, calls for holding social justice and ecological well being as inseparable in the quest for sustainable Earth-human relations. The pedagogical challenges arising from this commitment are profound. This workshop will explore the pedagogical problems and possibilities arising from a commitment — within theology and religious studies — to confront the issues of privilege, power, and difference inherent in ecological issues.

The intent is to provide a supportive and stimulating context for practical and visionary collaborative reflection on such questions as: How do we teach about climate imperialism, ecological debt, or environmental racism in ways that foster a sense of hope and moral agency rather than despair or powerlessness? What are epistemological keys to understanding the exploitation of Earth as the exploitation of people on the margins of privilege and power? What forms of teaching unlock power for confronting systemic domination? How do we prepare students to construct worlds that we have not yet imagined? One panel will uncover and explore key issues concerning the nexus of equity and ecology on local and global scales, highlighting both problems and constructive proposals. A second panel will identify key pedagogical questions and offer pedagogical tools and approaches. Guided discussion will enable participants to delve more deeply into the issues raised, share pedagogical resources, and build collegial networks of support.

The cost for the workshop is \$40, which includes the entire afternoon of sessions and a coffee break. Registration is limited to the first 75 participants.

Panelists:

Prairie Rose Seminole, Fargo, ND  
 Isabel Mukonyora, Western Kentucky University  
 Tyson-Lord Gray, Vanderbilt University  
 Kwok Pui Lan, Episcopal Divinity School  
 Kurt Kuhwald, Starr King School for the Ministry  
 Ivone Gebara, Tabatinga, Brazil

Focus on Sustainability, Professional Practices and Institutional Location

#### A17-204

##### Christian Systematic Theology Section, Theology and Religious Reflection Section, Liberal Theologies Group, and Science, Technology, and Religion Group

Theme: *In Face of Gordon D. Kaufman: A Legacy for Theology*

For questions or support, email [support@aarweb.org](mailto:support@aarweb.org).

Sheila Davaney, Ford Foundation, Presiding

**Saturday - 1:00 PM-3:30 PM**

Room Assignments Available Only to Members. Login [here](#) and then click the Program Book link at the top of the page to return.

Gordon D. Kaufman (1925–2011) was one of the preeminent American theologians of the twentieth century. In such works as *God the Problem* (Harvard University Press, 1972) and *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Harvard University Press, 1993), he challenged his peers to see theology as a work of imaginative construction and to make theology fully accountable to contemporary science and to the demands of justice. He also served the American Academy of Religion as its president in 1981–1982. In this session, we remember Kaufman's legacy and offer our own constructive proposals building on his work.

J. Patrick Woolley, Oxford University

*Advancing Kaufman's Dialogue with the Natural Sciences by Applying Lessons from Tillich on "Technical Reason"*

Kaufman's method of "constructive theology" is easily taken out of context and either misunderstood or misrepresented as a denial of God. Kaufman is often cited as claiming that God is *just* a product of the imagination. It is too often overlooked that, in his approach to religious dialogue, *everything* is an imaginary construct given no immediate ontological status. Everything—the "self" and the "world," as well as "God"—is a "product of the imagination." This reflects an influence of Kant on Kaufman's epistemology. In this paper, I demonstrate ways in which Kaufman's objectives can be clarified by emphasizing the distinction that Tillich makes between "technical reason" and "ontological reason." Focus on this distinction, I argue, will encourage us to tap into the epistemic underpinnings of Kaufman's thinking on science and religion dialogue in particular, and to better appreciate the role of "mystery" in his thought as a whole.

Karl E Peters, Rollins College

*Towards a Naturalistic Christianity: Developing the Thinking of Gordon Kaufman*

This paper will relate Gordon Kaufman's naturalistic theology to his Mennonite social justice Christianity. First, I will state some features of naturalism and Kaufman's constructivist theological method. Then I will develop his understanding of God as mysterious serendipitous creativity that underlies the universe and is manifested in Darwinian biological evolution and human creativity. The main part of the paper will develop a naturalistic Christology, beginning with Kaufman's idea that God as non-personal, non-moral creativity becomes the personal God of love in Jesus. I will suggest that Jesus was a "religious genius," using a Darwinian understanding of the origins of genius and an analysis of New Testament accounts of Jesus—following Marcus Borg and Walter Wink. This will lead to a moral exemplar theory of atonement, with Jesus continuing as the "Christ-event" that creates compassionate followers who engage in non-violent action for justice against contemporary "domination systems."

Jerome Soneson, University of Northern Iowa

*The Theological Legacy of Gordon Kaufman: Theological Method and Its Pragmatic Norm*

The most significant legacy of the theology of Gordon Kaufman rests in his theological method, particularly in his starting point, his picture of the human as a bio-historical being. I will argue that this starting point explains the diversity of cultures and religious traditions in history — not only explaining the proliferation of views of the human but also of the world. Embracing the plurality of world views, Kaufman nevertheless shows how normative reflection can emerge; for Kaufman, this becomes a pragmatic norm of truth in which the "truth" of a religious picture is judged by the extent to which it is able to do the work it is meant to do, namely, to provide unified, overall understanding and guidance in action, so that it results in meaningful and fulfilling behavior. I will argue that this starting point has the potential for Kaufman's theology to reach two sorts of persons: (1) those influenced by the secularizing effects of the social and natural sciences but who also despair over the bankruptcy of the "secular" values that remain, and (2) those who recognize the significance that religion has for persons but also its potential for increasing conflict and violence.

Myriam Renaud, University of Chicago

*Lived Religion and the "Agent-God": Making a Case for the Personalist Theological Method of Gordon Kaufman*

The work of Gordon Kaufman (1925 - 2011), sidelined for many years, is being engaged once again (e.g. Thomas James' *In Face of Reality: The Constructive Theology of Gordon D. Kaufman*, pub. 2011). In this paper, I argue that Kaufman's return to theological conversation is important for two reasons. First, though Kaufman's constructive theology evolved during his career, I argue that the personalist (middle) phase of his theological method—which permits the construction of a wide range of concepts of God including an agent-God—is of special interest to American theologians because the majority of Americans understand God as purposive and person-like. Second, I argue that the personalist phase of Kaufman's theological method is well-suited to the hybrid theologies that have become a central feature of the American religious landscape because it is open to diverse religious and theological perspectives as well as to perspectives from science and secular humanism.

Thomas James, Union Presbyterian Seminary

## Sessions

*The Immanentist Theocentrism of Gordon Kaufman—Does It Have a Future?*

Gordon Kaufman's mature theology had roots in the theocentrism of H. Richard Niebuhr and in the theological naturalism of Henry Nelson Wieman. A distinctive if not unique theological program resulted from this dual influence, rejecting the transcendent God of classical theology but embracing and even advancing its austerity about humanity and its values. In Kaufman's theology, God, or the serendipitous creativity pervasive in the universe, is not necessarily good (at least in human terms), though God is the source of goodness (and many other things). Upon his death, a question that arises is whether this program has a future, or whether it is an idiosyncratic admixture which dies with him. I argue the former. Drawing upon Niebuhr's relational value theory, dark ecology, and the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour, I suggest that Kaufman's view of God as creativity supports a theology of divine immanence for a posthuman future.

Responding:

Kwok Pui Lan, Episcopal Divinity School

**A17-229****Roman Catholic Studies Group**

Theme: *Disrupting Complementarity I: Women's Work*

Marian Ronan, New York Theological Seminary, Presiding

**Saturday - 1:00 PM-3:30 PM**

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While strong currents in Roman Catholic discourse narrow women's work to their embodiment as 'mothers', these papers offer a variety of vantage points for considering women's labor. Engaging economics, ecological care, development, work-family load, time poverty and ministry in the church, the papers sketch a range of women and work. This provides an opportunity to interrogate the trope of 'complementarity' in contemporary Roman Catholicism. The conversation of this session will be continued in 'Disrupting Complementarity II: Male Bodies'.

Lorraine Cuddeback, University of Notre Dame

*"The Rising of the Women Means the Rising of the Race": Women's Work and Economics in Catholic Social Teaching Since Vatican II*

Recognizing women as economic agents is a critical component in responding to the current economic crisis. Yet, Catholic social teaching has failed to fully address this aspect of global development, instead tending to frame "women's issues" as those of family, sexuality, and reproduction. Fixing this requires a shift in the flow of moral discourse: rather than curial documents setting universal priorities for the particular church, the ethical concerns of local regions should inform curial documents. Social encyclicals would then become means of promoting discursive solidarity among particular churches. The paper examines (1) the methods of writing papal encyclicals since Vatican II, (2) the development of subsidiarity as a principle of social doctrine, and (3) the benefits and limitations of applying subsidiarity as a method of developing Catholic social teaching and addressing feminist critiques about the inclusion of women's experience and women's work in social doctrine.

Jill Peterfeso, Guilford College

*Roman Catholic Studies through Excommunicants: Enlivening the Field with Roman Catholic Womenpriests*

This paper uses the Roman Catholic Womenpriests (RCWP) movement to consider expansions for the field of Roman Catholic Studies. The movement's resistance to easy categorization makes it all the more challenging for scholars of Roman Catholicism—and all the more important valuable. This paper contends that even from the margins of contemporary Catholicism, RCWP is a significant bellwether for Roman Catholic studies. That is, our field can and should be approached through excommunicants. RCWP goes further than troubling Roman Catholic teachings about gender; as this paper shows, RCWP invites richer consideration of three facets of Roman Catholic studies: the priesthood model, the hierarchical system, and Catholic ecumenism. RCWP has touched a nerve in today's institutional Church; rather than dismiss this activist group as outside the Church, this paper illustrates ways to place marginal groups like RCWP alongside the mainstream Church in service of the field's scholarly future.

Elizabeth Pyne, Fordham University

*Benedict XVI's "Human Ecology" in the Context of Africa, Women, and Development: Words of Caution for an Environmentally-Conscious Christian Mission*

In Benedict XVI's formulations of Christian mission, calls for an "ecological conversion" as the requisite attitude for sustainable or "integral human development" are becoming more prominent. In the context of the second African Synod and the diverse situations of globally marginalized women, contemporary discussions about the place of environmental ecology in human development become a singularly important site from which to extend critical analysis of notions of gender, development, and Christian

**Sessions**

mission. The intersectional approach of this paper employs liberation theology, ecofeminism, and postcolonial theory to affirm certain elements of Benedict's holistic environmentalism. Yet more significantly it complicates and challenges current papal articulations of ecological responsibility as they pertain to sustainable and dignified development. If ecology is to be incorporated into a liberative Christian mission globally, particularly in Africa, it must first become a site of critical reflection on an ongoing history of gendered and environmental violence.

Claire Wolfeich, Boston University

*Spirituality and the Signs of the Times: Women's Labor, Domestic Church, and Time Poverty*

This paper will illustrate a practical theological contribution to Roman Catholic studies, with a topical focus on issues of women's spirituality in the intersection of work, family, and time poverty. The paper will look at selected documents of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent texts of Catholic social teaching as examples of a kind of practical theology, a Catholic logic of reading the signs of the times in dialogue with tradition. Working with social science literature, spirituality studies, feminist leisure studies, and Catholic theology, then, the paper will extend, critique, and contextualize the contributions of these teachings in light of women's changing roles in the workforce and home and related research on time poverty. I will assert that Catholicism holds important theological insights and spiritual practices to resist distorted practices of time, work, care, and consumption. At the same time, it must take time poverty seriously as an economic/cultural reality with implications for spiritualities and theologies of labor, family, and the domestic church.

Responding:  
Chris Tirres, DePaul University

**A18-128****Religion and Disability Studies Group and Religion and Ecology Group**

Theme: *Religion, Ecology, and Disability Studies*

Heather Eaton, Saint Paul University, Presiding

**Sunday - 9:00 AM-11:30 AM**

Room Assignments Available Only to Members. Login [here](#) and then click the Program Book link at the top of the page to return.

This co-sponsored session explores the intersections of environmental crisis and disability, considering the relationship between environmental health, toxics, and disability, analyzing critical gender, race, and class implications of how bodies are affected by environmental risk, and exploring social and religious reconfigurations of disability in light of the Anthropocene (our current era of profound human ecological change). Papers will examine ethical implications of prenatal toxic exposures, social and theological implications of different conceptions of "nature" and "health," how memoirs of living with disability offer strategies for living in an ecologically at-risk world, and how disability activists' critiques of "tragic stories" of suffering offer important insights for the ethical representations of environmental disaster tales.

Sharon Betcher, Vancouver School of Theology

*Picture of Health: "Nature" at the Intersection of Disability, Religion & Ecology*

We carry our most intimate view of nature within our pictures of health. These images of health, often more amenable to ablenationalism than to a world of intra-active becoming, inform not only neoliberal policy, but ecological vision and religion. Increasingly "the politics of health" constitute something like a structure of exclusion, a "racism that is biological" (Foucault). If these intimate images of nature, these "pictures of health", motivating even popular ecological and religious imagination, may be aggravating the next great planetary divide, how might disability studies differently shape what we make of the picture of health, the "nature" that informs it, and a religious response to it? The paper examines the ways in which the ideology of health, often motivating ecological concern and religious seeking, can coincidentally collude with neoliberal responsabilization and biotechnologically supported transhumanism, generating policy enclosures of the gen-rich against the "refuse/d" or "waste/d."

Julia Watts Belser, Missouri State University

*Toxic Exposures: Disability Studies, Environmental Activism, and the Ethics of Representation*

Dramatizing the complex realities of environmental catastrophe remains an urgent task and substantial challenge. Tragic tales of suffering often intensify the vulnerability of people who are already on the margins, showcasing their pain in a way that generates pity, stripping their agency and playing into negative stereotypes of difference. This paper uses disability studies theory to examine the ethical implications of environmental disaster stories. I analyze dynamics of the "poster child" and "tragic cripple" that drive representations of disability in literature, popular culture, and telethons. I use disability studies theory to illuminate parallel perils within eco-activist storytelling, in which racialized and gendered bodies often become spectacles of suffering. I also explore alternative modes of representation within disability culture to consider possibilities for environmental storytelling that generate vibrant and vital counter-narratives of resistance.

## Sessions

Chris Klassen, Wilfrid Laurier University

*Living Imperfectly Well: Environmental Ethics from Disability and Illness*

I propose to conduct a dialogic narrative analysis of illness/disability narratives, to locate strategies for living well in ill, impaired and/or damaged bodies. Working within the discourses of material feminisms, disability studies, environmental ethics and lived religion, I hope to translate the experiences of illness and/or disability in the human body, to that of illness and/or damage of the rest of the natural world. My central questions are: what kinds of stories can we tell from positions of embodiment that recognize the realities of impairment and/or illness and/or brokenness? How can we tell such stories without falling back on a romantic ideal of 'cure' as a future goal that is held in opposition to our experience of the 'poor unfortunate' disabled body/damaged earth, which puts us in a distanced, paternalistic position? What are the spiritual implications of these material narratives with their potential for supplying strategies for environmental ethics?

Claire Bischoff, Emory University

*At Risk before Birth: Fetal Origins Research on the Intersection of Environmental Crisis and Disability*

In discussions of the intersections of environmental crisis and disability, a crucial time of life often is ignored: a human being's experience in the womb. Research into the developmental origins of health and disease, also known as "fetal origins," demonstrates that individuals are more susceptible to negative effects from environmental toxins in utero than at any other time. There is a clear class implication of fetal origins research, as pregnant women in poverty are more likely to be exposed to environmental toxins than their wealthier counterparts. As such, poor children enter the world with an invisible disability, that is, a greater body burden in terms of the chemicals they carry with them that may affect their health and development adversely. Despite the specter of inflammatory abortion politics in the United States, fetal origins research demands attention and responses from Christian faith communities wishing to advocate for "the least of these."

Responding:

Laurel Kearns, Drew University

Focus on Sustainability

## A18-273

### Religion and Ecology Group

Theme: *Ethics at Play at Rio+20*

Lucas Johnston, Wake Forest University, Presiding

**Sunday - 3:00 PM-4:30 PM**

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During the summer of 2012, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (called "Rio+20") will mark the twentieth anniversary of the first Earth Summit and the fortieth anniversary of the Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment. Activist organizations, governments, and transnational institutions are mobilizing on a massive scale and are describing the conference as an important opportunity to make significant progress toward global sustainability. In keeping with an increasing scholarly attention to practices, communities, and lived expressions of spiritually motivated environmental behaviors, this session looks to Rio+20 as an opportunity to observe religion and ecology "on the ground." The tremendous number of ideas, persons, and organizations interacting in geographic and temporal proximity provides a means to see ethics at play—to observe ethical frameworks in lived interaction. Using textual, ethnographic and comparative methods, the papers assembled here eschew normative ethical argumentation in favor of a critical, descriptive approach.

Evan Berry, American University

*Religious Non-Governmental Organizations and the Global Politics of Sustainability*

In the main, scholars of religion and ecology have been more focused on the theoretical bearing of moral traditions on contemporary ecological issues than on the social enactment of those traditions. The proposed paper addresses this imbalance and pursues a better understanding of role played by religious organizations in global environmental politics. Rio+20 provides an unparalleled opportunity to observe and interact with religious organizations engaged with global environmental issues: dozens religious organizations will join the proceedings in Rio De Janeiro during the summer of 2012. Drawing on original ethnographic research conducted at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, this paper evaluates the relationship between religious and secular actors in the political space that is global civil society.

Bron Taylor, University of Florida

*Religious NGOs and the Quixotic Quest for Sustainability at United Nations' Earth Summits*

## Sessions

My working hypothesis, which I may amend based on events at the June 2012 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, is that -- despite the exhortations from the intelligentsias of many of the world's predominant religious institutions and actors, and even though some today consecrate scientific narratives and celebrate biological diversity -- "religion" has been an ineffectual variable in influencing nation states to increase their commitment to social equity and environmental sustainability. I explore whether this is because the ideas and priorities of religious people are inexorably other than environmental, and/or because the logics and lifeways accompanying agricultures, which are generally entwined with the worlds' predominant religions, are inherently expansionist by nature. If so, then arguably "religious environmentalism" as usually understood is unlikely to significantly influence United Nations sustainability conferences and endeavors, for even at their most passionate, such actors face an intractable foe.

Sarah Fredericks, University of North Texas

*Ethical and Religious Undertones of the Official Rio+20 Conference Documents*

Religious environmentalism has increased in diversity, scope, and popularity in the last twenty years, but the degree of influence these movements have had on international discourse about environmental issues is largely unknown. This paper will begin to fill this lacuna in the literature by comparing the implicit and explicit references to ethics and religion in official international documents about sustainable development. Specifically, it will examine the documents of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and those of its follow-up conference, Rio+20, to be held this summer. Closely comparing these texts will illuminate whether and how the international community's conceptions of religion and environmental ethics have changed in last twenty years to assess the influence of religious environmentalism on official international sustainable development discourse.

Cybelle Shattuck, University of Michigan

*From Theology to Action: Rio's Effect on Religious Environmental Resources*

The Rio Summit shifted the focus of American environmentalism from local pollution reduction and wilderness preservation to concern for global climate change, which changed perceptions of the types of actions necessary to protect the environment. Rio also changed the dynamics of the public discourse on sustainability by linking developed and developing worlds into one ecological system. This paper examines how American religions responded, noting that the first decade after Rio was dominated by academic theologians who focused on environmental ethics, while more recent years have seen the emergence of a new literature from congregational clergy who prescribe actions suitable for congregation-level implementation. The paper develops a typology of these prescribed congregation-level activities and shows how the availability of structural resources, often from secular organizations, provides opportunities and procedural knowledge that affect the emergent faith-based sustainability initiatives.

Responding:

Grove Harris, Temple of Understanding

Focus on Sustainability

## A18-324

### North American Hinduism Group and Yoga in Theory and Practice Group

Theme: *Innovation and Transformation in North American Yoga*

Shreena Gandhi, Kalamazoo College, Presiding

**Sunday - 5:00 PM-6:30 PM**

Room Assignments Available Only to Members. Login [here](#) and then click the Program Book link at the top of the page to return.

The development of yoga traditions in North America has been a critical part of the formation and formulation of cosmopolitan yoga traditions that have had a worldwide impact. Through the large-scale popularization of yoga and the "pizza effect" (of North American yoga's direct influence upon its Indian counterparts), the development of yoga in the United States, in particular, has been critical in the shaping of 21st century yoga around the world. This session will highlight two papers that address innovations and transformations of practices of yoga in the North American context in the 20th and 21st centuries. The first paper will address the entrepreneurial spirit of early North American yoga enthusiasts, as illustrated in the lives and teachings of Pierre Bernard and Blanche Devries, with emphasis on their role in the formation of dominant models of "modern postural yoga." The second paper will focus upon contemporary attempts to bridge yoga philosophy with environmental philosophy, both in theory and in practice, sometimes referred to as "green yoga," highlighting contemporary "experiments" by North American yoga gurus. Attention will be paid to the ways in which prominent North American gurus have set, and continue to set, the tone and focus for yoga traditions around the world and stand at the vanguard of a dynamic global yoga spirituality.

Elizabeth McAnally, California Institute of Integral Studies

*Anthropocosmic Environmental Ethics of Yoga*

## Sessions

In contrast to anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric environmental ethics that presuppose an opposition that separates the human from the rest of the world, there is an “anthropocosmic” vision emerging within the field of Religion and Ecology that affirms the complex intertwining of the human (*anthropos*) and the world (*kosmos*), such that problems of ecological wellbeing are problems for human wellbeing, and vice versa. In this presentation, I explore the anthropocosmic environmental ethics implicit in the practice of Yoga in North America, particularly in light of my experiences during the past eleven years as a scholar-practitioner of Yoga in Texas and California. I indicate some ways in which Yogic practices (e.g., *mantra*, *asana*, *pranayama*) can facilitate a sense of anthropocosmic interconnectedness, and I show how sacred and secular practices of Yoga in North America can help build bridges between different religious communities, between humanist/scientific and religious perspectives, and between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism.

Joseph Laycock, Boston University

*Yoga for the New Woman and the New Man: The Role of Pierre Bernard and Blanche DeVries in the Creation of Modern Postural Yoga.*

Pierre Bernard and his wife Blanche DeVries were among the earliest proponents of modern postural yoga in America. The pair's success in marketing yoga coincided with a shift in gender roles. Economic and cultural changes had led to the rise of the “New Man” and the “New Woman” among urban working and middle-class whites. It is argued that Bernard's success depended largely on his ability to capitalize on the perceived “otherness” of yoga, presenting it as a resource for Americans seeking to construct new forms of gender identity. Bernard borrowed from the physical culture movement and presented yoga as a secret to producing athletic and virile men. DeVries taught yoga to aspiring vaudeville dancers who sought to learn sensual Orientalist dances. By utilizing this strategy, Bernard and DeVries helped lay important foundations for modern postural yoga and its associations with athleticism, sexuality, and physical beauty.

Responding:

Christopher Chapple, Loyola Marymount University  
Mark Singleton, St. John's College, Santa Fe

Business Meeting:

Shreena Gandhi, Kalamazoo College  
Jeffery Long, Elizabethtown College

## A19-131

### Religion and Ecology Group

Theme: *Ecological Evil: Buddhist, Yoga, Hindu and Christian Perspectives*

Matthew Riley, Drew University, Presiding

#### Monday - 9:00 AM-11:30 AM

Room Assignments Available Only to Members. Login [here](#) and then click the Program Book link at the top of the page to return.

Ecological Evil: Buddhist, Yoga, Hindu and Christian Perspectives

This panel explores the term ecological evil within four religious traditions. The three poisons of Buddhism and the five fundamental impurities of Yoga suggest that the source for evil behavior lies within each individual, due to unsatisfied cravings. Traditional Asian thought proposes that with internal control, this tendency can be corrected. Ivone Gebara claims that when we refuse the conditions of life - mortality, vulnerability and finitude - we ‘fall into domination’. Commitments to resurrection, paradise and immortality counter these conditions. Ecological evil from Christian liberationists, feminists, Patriarch Bartholomew and Zizioulas are expanded with Gebara's insights. A Hindu narrative about Balarama and the Yamuna River illustrates how agricultural violence is perceived of as normal and necessary, and is in ritualized in agrarian contexts. The topic of industrial agriculture as ‘ecological evil’ complicates a transition towards a sustainable food system

Panelists:

Whitney Sanford, University of Florida  
Heather Eaton, Saint Paul University  
Christopher Chapple, Loyola Marymount University  
Hilda Koster, Concordia College

Responding:

Ivone Gebara, Tabatinga, Brazil

Business Meeting:

Whitney Bauman, Florida International University  
Heather Eaton, Saint Paul University

Focus on Sustainability

## Sessions

**A19-207**

## Religion and Ecology Group

Theme: *Religion, Ecology, and the Body: Inscribing and Enacting Eco-Imaginings*

Whitney Bauman, Florida International University, Presiding

**Monday - 1:00 PM-3:00 PM**Room Assignments Available Only to Members. Login [here](#) and then click the Program Book link at the top of the page to return.

This paper session will address how we inscribe our bodies and perform alternative identities based upon the ideas, imaginings, and literature in the broad field of "religion and ecology."

Chara Armon, Villanova University

*Great Works, Transitions, and Turnings: Activists' Portrayals of Connections Among Spirituality, Ecological Restoration, and Teaching Service Learners*

This paper inquires into connections between spiritual or religious belief and ecological restoration. The paper's central question is, "How do people who are deeply engaged in ecologically beneficial action and committed to a religious or spiritual perspective understand their work in light of concepts such as the Great Work, Transition, or the Great Turning, and how do they communicate this understanding via their teaching work?" Sources for the paper include interviews with a European-trained biodynamic farmer who operates a CSA farm and educational center; a Catholic nun who teaches a variety of courses aimed at helping people to re-consider or re-discover their relationship and responsibility to the natural world; and a Muslim scholar-farmer who has founded a local CSA and an international program directed at farming and environmental stewardship. These activists' personal values, work, and teaching of service-learners might be said to illustrate the Great Work or Transition in action, but do they themselves identify with these concepts?

Jacob Erickson, Drew University

*Indecent Ecologies: Karen Barad, Naturecultural Performativity, and Queer Ecotheology*

Queer theology often performs remarkable interdisciplinary conversations over the injustices of heterosexist societal configurings. One of the futures of these interdisciplinary conversations is the remarkable scholarship emerging as "queer ecology." This paper explores queer ecology for a restaging of ecotheology by creatively exploring the work of feminist philosopher of science Karen Barad (*Meeting the Universe Halfway*) as she rethinks queer concepts of "performativity" in a posthumanist mode. Through the lens of Barad's concept of "performativity," this paper turns to constructive theology to stage a new performance of two traditional Christian theological concepts: incarnation and the perichoresis of Spirit. Strangely, the sixteenth century Reformer Martin Luther's notion of God's indwelling presence in creation and that all creatures are *larvae Dei* (masks of God) open the door to a constructive conception of the divine "performing" panentheistically earthy creatures and bodies to disturb, bring about, or make known new possibilities in ecological life.

Sarah McFarland Taylor, Northwestern University

*Inscribing Green Bodies: Environmental Tattoos as Sacred Ordeals of Identity, Protection, and Devotion*

As rituals of sacred ordeal, identity, protection, devotion, self-discipline and piety, environmental tattoos have become a way of literally embodying environmental values and then communicating them to others. Like a number of areas of popular culture, the ritualistic and highly symbolic phenomena of tattoos and tattooing merit scholarly attention in the study of religion and ecology since most Americans encounter messages about spirituality, nature, and environmental values not through reading ecotheologians, eco-philosophers, or listening to "green" clergy, but as viewers/users of and indeed participants in popular culture.

Diane Yeager, Georgetown University

*"Love the Wild Swan": The Biocentric "Inhumanism" of Robinson Jeffers*

In matters of ethical decision-making, is there actually any acceptable alternative to thinking anthropocentrically about humanity in its relationship to the ecosystems in which it is embedded? Benedict XVI says no. James Gustafson encourages theocentrism as an alternative, but insists that it is a fact about human reflection that it will always be necessarily be self-referencing. The American poet Robinson Jeffers (1887–1962) offered, without theory or justification, a thoroughly biocentric, or perhaps cosmocentric, vision—and was, at the time, almost universally repudiated for his misanthropy. This paper revisits the poetic achievement of Jeffers with the purpose of (1) re-assessing his work in light of current interest in alternatives to anthropocentrism and (2) exploring what sort and measure of ethical guidance can be derived from the savage beauty of his biocentric piety.

Focus on Sustainability





## Print Program Book

### Sessions

## A17-112

### Body and Religion Group and Religions, Medicines, and Healing Group

Theme: *The Ideal/ized Body as Problem and Goal*

Linda Barnes, Boston University, Presiding

#### Saturday - 9:00 AM-11:30 AM

Room Assignments Available Only to Members. Login [here](#) and then click the Program Book link at the top of the page to return.

This panel explores the ideal/ized body as a goal or problem, along with practices for achieving wholeness, healing, or control in nonideal bodies. The ideal Jain ascetic is indifferent to illness and suffering, yet one paper demonstrates that reconciling the vulnerable bodies of real ascetics with the ideal is complex, even contradictory. Another paper suggests that Byzantine monks understood illness as the nonideal body's participation in the divine economy. Indeed, illness also creates the opportunity for identification with the divine body, as our third paper explores with regard to contemporary Mariyamman rituals in South India. In the final paper, an alternative body provides an ideal as a Chinese medium travels to the underworld to perform rituals on a flower shrub — the client's "original body" — to heal female infertility.

Mari Jyväsjarvi, Reed College

*Neglect of the Body versus Care of the Body: Attitudes to Medicine and Healing in Jainism*

The ideal Jain body is an ascetic body—indifferent to all discomforts, including sickness. Canonical descriptions of Tirthankara Mahāvira portray him as enduring all unpleasant bodily experiences and undertaking severe ascetic disciplines, while at the same time maintaining a balanced, healthy, good-looking body. Later postcanonical texts suggest, however, that the monks and nuns who followed in Mahāvira's footsteps did not find this ideal of Stoic tolerance of afflictions while maintaining physical well-being easy to attain. They acknowledge that the human body is vulnerable, subject to illness, and sometimes in need of treatment and care. At least one authoritative commentary, the sixth-century *Brhatkalpabhāṣya*, even prescribes medical treatment as obligatory for Jain ascetics. The extensive discussions of illness and healing in this text reflect an attempt to reconcile the reality of vulnerable, flesh-and-blood bodies of real ascetics with the orthodox Jain "ideal body" that endures strict asceticism and discomfort.

Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen, Pacific Lutheran University

*Curing and Enduring: Medical Care for Monks and the Multitudes in Byzantine Beneficial Tales*

In the medical landscape of the early medieval Byzantine Empire, illness as a by-product of life in the flesh was understood by patristic theologians and monastics as participation in God's saving activity and interaction in the created world, otherwise known as the divine economy. In some cases, cures were neither sought nor granted, if illness was interpreted as beneficial for the soul. This paper argues that a seventh-century collection of monastic tales, John Moschos's *Spiritual Meadow*, reveals that alongside widespread acceptance of illness as endurable were beliefs about ailments that were curable, to the end that the medical and spiritual management of suffering or healing contributed to the construction of religious and social identity in the early medieval Byzantine Empire. This claim will be supported with examples from *The Meadow* that address cancer, blindness, edema, and psychological disorders as well as corroborating evidence from additional contemporary tales and patristic texts.

Perundeivi Srinivasan, Siena College

*Deity-Making and Territory-Making: Body, Poxes, and Healing in South India*

My paper focuses on a healing performance of chickenpox, associated with the worship of Mariyamman, a goddess of poxes, in south India. Drawing from my ethnographic research conducted at a village in Tamil Nadu, it analyzes the dynamics of the performance, which encompasses a lengthy lullaby song on the goddess along with margosa (neem) leaves in its repertoire. The performance, especially through the lullaby, performatively constitutes the afflicted person as the goddess to facilitate a cure. At the same time, it articulates the afflicted person's body-space as a vast territory, inhabited by various "local" goddesses from nearby villages, alluding to the nature of the affliction as that which is not specific to one locality. Through such articulation, which is strategically deployed for the purpose of healing, the discursive practice of "ritual" healing produces the categories of place and personhood as equivalent and interchangeable.

Emily Wu, University of San Francisco

*Pruning the Flower Shrub: Chinese Ritual Healing of the Infertile Body*

For questions or support, email [support@aarweb.org](mailto:support@aarweb.org).

In traditional Chinese culture, infertility is a condition that could drastically compromise the social position of a woman. Even in modern-day Chinese society, where women have mostly equal rights and opportunities for citizenship, leadership, education, and work, infertility still severely affects the self-esteem of women. In this paper, I explore a folk Chinese channeling ritual that affirms the cultural narrative of the ideal woman body as fertile, but also provides an otherworldly space where an alternate body can be tended back into health and fertility. Guided by a spirit who was deprived of motherhood herself, the spirit medium travels to the underworld to visit a flower shrub that is the "original body" of the client. Rather than healing the physical body, the spirit medium negotiates with deities and performs rituals at the flower shrub to improve her client's fertility.

Responding:  
Ariel Glucklich, Georgetown University

## A17-210

### Animals and Religion Group

Theme: *Communicating across the Human–Animal Divide: Animals, Religion, and Language*

David Clough, University of Chester, Presiding

#### Saturday - 1:00 PM-3:30 PM

Room Assignments Available Only to Members. Login [here](#) and then click the Program Book link at the top of the page to return.

To bridge the divide between humans and other animals, we need to attend not just to what they mean to us but also *how* they mean, in their languages as well as ours. This panel provides four diverse perspectives on analyzing the language of and about animals in religious narratives. The first paper explores how talking animals in twelfth century Japanese Buddhist didactic tales can help open a dialogue about who has moral standing. The second paper illustrates how a previously unknown sixteenth century Yiddish text uses extensive animal metaphors to highlight our shared mortality. Drawing on both Apache and Koyukon oral traditions, the third paper argues that attending to avian speech plays a crucial role in developing a sacred relationship between Native Americans and birds. The final paper offers a fresh approach to the question of whether animals themselves may be religious, building on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account of behavior acting like a language.

Michael Bathgate, Saint Xavier University

*Wittgenstein's Lion and the King's Nine-Colored Deer: Speaking with (and about) Animals in the Konjaku Monogatari*

If language-use can serve among the characteristics that distinguish human and non-human animals, so the imagery of talking animals can serve to interrogate the nature of that distinction. This presentation brings tales of talking animals in medieval Japanese didactic literature (especially the 12th-century Konjaku monogatari) into conversation with modern discussions (especially those prompted by Ludwig Wittgenstein and Hakamaya Noriaki) on the nature and limits of language, discussions that are bound up with the nature and limits of our moral obligations. Narratives of talking animals, I will argue, provide a vantage from which to consider commonplace dichotomies (critical vs. topical, discourse vs. silence, human vs. animal) in a more nuanced fashion.

Justin Jaron Lewis, University of Manitoba

*Thinking With Animals About Death*

When the itinerant Jewish preacher Menakhem Oldendorf penned his "Thoughts on Death", he evidently found that, in Lévi-Strauss' phrase, "animals are good to think with". This brief text, written near Venice in 1504 in rhyming Yiddish couplets and rooted in rabbinic learning and grim humour, is saturated with references to animals, from foxes to peacocks.

There is a scholarly consensus that Judaism, while favouring compassion toward non-human animals, maintains a sharp distinction between them and human beings. In Oldendorf's reflections on death, this division breaks down. Mortality links humans and animals; we are like a bird caught in a net or a fish on a hook. A human corpse stinks as much as a dead dog.

In this context, furthermore, Oldendorf's references to animals are not merely symbolic but reflect shrewd observation and are permeated with empathy—even when he describes worms enjoying their feasts.

Ines Talamantez, University of California, Santa Barbara

*Birds in Apache and Koyukon Cultures: What Are They Trying to Tell Us?*

This paper presents a combination of ethnography, personal reflections, and Native American natural history. Intimacy with the natural world is the basis for both Apache and Koyukon peoples' understanding of the importance of birds. From the Apache Nation to the Zuni Nation, Native Americans tell stories about birds and how they are able to tell us the truth. Indigenous peoples of the Americas often recognize that birds have power to communicate with people. This power referred to as *diiyi* in the Mescalero Apache language is a belief that we can converse with birds, and that we can understand each other. Oral traditions attest to long time observation of the bird world and their place in nature. This presentation will develop on

**Sessions**

indigenous theory that defines the sacred relationship between people and birds. We will also examine how converting bird songs with people's thoughts results in powerful sacred relationships and how birds become members of Native American communities. Deep oral knowledge about birds over centuries reflects why they are important culturally and why they are an essential aspect of the natural world. For the Koyukon, one of the most valued birds is the sparrow. There are three kinds of sparrows recognized by the people. During the spring they hear its sad song and they acknowledge what it means.

Ryan Brand-Neuroth, Vanderbilt University

*What Gets to Count As Religious Behavior?: Merleau-Ponty, Atran, and Instinct*

The question of nonhuman animals as religious subjects goes to the heart of our category "religion." Is the stuff of religion *a priori* limited to what counts as human? *What* gets to count as religious behavior and *who* gets to inhabit religious categories? Historically, the possibility of religious subjectivity typically includes an ontological divide between humans and other animals, principally that of the free and reflective human and the animal captivated by instincts. My paper examines Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of instinct in order to unfurl possibilities for scholars of religion to address the question of animals as religious subjects. I argue that Merleau-Ponty's critical phenomenological account of behavior, juxtaposing it with anthropologist Scott Atran, provides a notion of instinct that undermines the mechanistic causality of classic behavioralist assumptions, which, though mostly disavowed, have not altogether gone extinct in contemporary evolutionary approaches to the study of religion.

Responding:

Sarra Tlili, University of Florida

**M17-202****International Society for Chinese Philosophy**

Theme: *Mind, Emotion, and Nature in Confucianism*

**Saturday - 1:00 PM-4:00 PM**

Room Assignments Available Only to Members. Login [here](#) and then click the Program Book link at the top of the page to return.

**A17-311****Animals and Religion Group and Buddhist Critical-Constructive Reflection Group**

Theme: *Thinking Animals, Rethinking Buddhist Ritual: Transformations in Modern Practice*

Aaron Gross, University of San Diego, Presiding

**Saturday - 4:00 PM-6:30 PM**

Room Assignments Available Only to Members. Login [here](#) and then click the Program Book link at the top of the page to return.

The longstanding importance of human-animal relations to Buddhist ritual is perhaps seen most dramatically in the complex historical processes of rejecting animal sacrifice that date back to Buddhism's beginnings in ancient India and continue in its introduction to a wide range of cultures in the modern era. Buddhist animal rituals not only have helped in forging communal sensibilities among nascent Buddhist communities, but further have served as a vehicle to propagate diverse understandings of core ethical and ontological concepts. Attentive to the "religious implications of animal subjectivities," the session will utilize four richly contextualized cases of Buddhist animal rituals described by experts of Japanese, Mongolian, Tibetan, and Western Buddhism respectively. Collectively, these papers simultaneously document the ongoing negotiation of everyday human-animal-ecosystem relationships; theorize the nature of Buddhist ritual (and thus "ritual" as a category in the study of religion); and engage constructive-critical questions from a Buddhist perspective.

Vesna A. Wallace, University of California, Santa Barbara

*Buddhist Views and Rituals in the Mongolian Equine Husbandry*

In traditional, Mongolian pastoral culture, domestic animals, which are the main source of sustenance and material wellbeing, are integral to the life of the family and the state. Among all domestic animals, it is the horse, especially a sire or a racehorse, with which Mongols developed a unique relationship. This presentation will focus on various aspects of the Mongols' relationship to domestic horses that have shaped the Buddhist rituals of protecting, healing, and empowering horses. It will also demonstrate the ways in which the Buddhist concept of the "wind horse," astrology, and veterinary knowledge shaped the Mongols' equine typology and practices. I conclude by discussing the ways in which the Mongols' traditional attitudes toward horses and pastoral etiquette in dealing with horses became intertwined with Buddhist ethical and ontological perspectives on animals, giving rise to a rich body of Buddhist theories and ritual practices

## Sessions

related to horse husbandry.

Barbara Ambros, University of North Carolina

*Masking Commodification and Sacralizing Consumption: Buddhist Animal Memorial Rites in Twentieth-Century Japan*

Animal memorial rites have often been nostalgically linked to Japanese tradition and been given as proof of the inherently harmonious relationship of the Japanese with nature; however, I argue that they flourished as a response to modernity and the commodification of animals. Drawing on J.Z. Smith's ritual theory, I contend that they constitute ritualized perfection in the face of the mechanized and often bloody realities of modernity. This rationale applies to modern Japanese animal memorial rituals for military animals, animals in the food and fishery industries, laboratory animals, and zoo animals: from the fascist 1930s and 1940s, when such rituals served to bolster Japanese patriotism; through the memorial-rite boom in the 1970s and 1980s, when Japan underwent a period of economic prowess that strengthened ideas of Japanese uniqueness; to the contemporary period, when demographic and economic changes have brought about a reevaluation of Japan's national identity.

Nathaniel Rich, University of California, Santa Barbara

*(Don't) Eat Me!: On Empathy, "Life-Release" (Tshe Thar), and Vegetarianism among Contemporary Tibetan Buddhists in the People's Republic of China*

This paper will present a contemporary case study of the practice of "life-release" (*tshe thar*), the ransoming of animals destined for slaughter, in a Tibetan Buddhist community network centered in western Sichuan. It will explore the ways in which this traditional practice has recently been adapted in and for the promotion of vegetarianism among traditionally non-vegetarian Tibetans. In particular, this paper will examine how these practices use the contemplative cultivation of empathy for animals, which presupposes and makes use of the human-animal binary, in order to weaken and finally subvert or undermine that binary in the "equalization" and exchange of self and others that bodhisattvas can practice not only in meditation but also, as in our case study, in the marketplace and at the dinner table.

Stephanie Kaza, University of Vermont

*Being Animals: Western Buddhist Perspectives*

This paper addresses the "problem" of being animals, drawing on traditional Buddhist understandings and modern western Buddhist practices. I review the modern ritual developed by Joanna Macy, "The Council of All Beings," regarding the human/animal superiority complex common in the West. The Mahayana metaphor of Indra's Net underpins the ritual structure, though it does not reflect systems drivers or normative environmental ethics. I investigate the application of mindfulness practice to understand how we ourselves are animals and what that conditioning means. This paper identifies critical constructive challenges in these areas: 1) animal evolutionary inheritance as it drives behaviors which Buddhist ethical practice seeks to enlighten; 2) western Buddhist cultural conditioning towards animals and on what basis we rationalize our distinction from non-human animals; and 3) Buddhist cultural practices in the West and how they reinforce western ideas about animals, though hidden under the guise of Buddhist ideals.

Business Meeting:

Christopher Ives, Stonehill College

Grace G. Burford, Prescott College

Focus on Sustainability

## A17-331

### Religion in the American West Seminar

Theme: *(Re)Sacralizing the American West*

Sara Patterson, Hanover College, Presiding

**Saturday - 4:00 PM-6:30 PM**

*Room Assignments Available Only to Members. Login [here](#) and then click the Program Book link at the top of the page to return.*

This session will explore not only the many ways that diverse religious communities have imagined the American West as sacred space and sacred place, but also the ways that religious imaginations can be found in often overlooked places and activities that characterized life in the West. Discussion will also consider how the papers, taken together, highlight the contributions the American West makes to understanding American religion and the ways studying religion helps us understand the American West. Seminar attendees are asked to read the four papers in advance; they will be posted on the Seminar's website (<http://www.yale.edu/relwest/>) a month before the session convenes. This year's session marks the final meeting of the Religion in the American West Seminar, as seminar program units are limited to one five-year term. As a result, the session will also consider ways to continue the seminar's momentum into the future.

**Sessions**

Shari Rabin, Yale University

*Between Manifest Destiny and Diaspora: American Judaism in the Era of Westward Expansion*

This paper will explore the specific historical and religious factors mediating Jewish engagements with manifest destiny and the West in antebellum America. American Jewish responses to manifest destiny were embedded in the specifics of the Jewish historical and religious context. Whereas Jews had been subject to harsh residency and travel restrictions in central Europe, they arrived in an America free of such rules and heady with the excitement of westward expansion. The resulting mobility and dispersion also, however, invoked notions of exile and proved problematic for traditional Jewish practice. This paper will discuss reports about Jews in the West, the travel writing of religious leaders and plans for itinerancy and colonization in the West in the American Jewish press. In so doing, it will nuance understandings of manifest destiny and western Jewish history, showing the complexity and situatedness of religious responses to the West.

Sarah Koenig, Yale University

*Material "Goods": Towards a Commercial History of Religion in the American West*

Using the nineteenth-century Columbia Basin as a case study, this paper will demonstrate the possibilities for a commercial history of religion in the American West. Through analysis of Hudson's Bay Company records, the manuscripts of Anglo-American missionaries and settlers, and anthropological accounts of Pacific Northwest Indian life, it will highlight the ways in which analysis of commercial exchanges—and the meanings that Western cultures attached to them—can illuminate historians' understandings of the often informal, extra-institutional, and multi-layered processes by which religious groups interacted in the West. In this study, then, the term "goods" takes on a double meaning: material goods also served as expressions of the good life, of right religion, of relational reciprocity.

Thomas Bremer, Rhodes College

*The Evangelical Origins of National Parks and a Religio-Aesthetic Vision of the American West*

Although many people believe that America's national parks originated in an Emersonian religio-aesthetic of preserving sacred parcels of nature, the parks are more a product of a Protestant evangelical initiative to expand industrialized civilization westward across the American continent. This paper examines the connection between the popular imagination of nineteenth-century American evangelical Protestants and the origin of Yellowstone National Park. The 1872 legislation that made Yellowstone the world's first national park was consistent with evangelical commitments that understood western lands as assets to be developed, exploited, but also appreciated; the grand scenery, bountiful lands teeming with game, and the remarkable thermal features of Yellowstone all indicated the glory of the evangelical God, an aesthetic reminder to devout Christians of God's majesty. In short, preserving Yellowstone was consistent in the evangelical imagination of nineteenth-century Protestants with the more destructive aspects of settling and civilizing the American West.

Tammy Heise, Florida State University

*Real and Imagined Territories: Restoring the Independent Oglala Nation and Reviving the Ghost Dance Ritual at Wounded Knee in 1973*

This paper weaves together the two major trajectories of the Ghost Dance movement after its supposed demise at Wounded Knee in 1890. Comparing the quietistic New Tiding Ghost Dance community discovered by Alice Kehoe in the 1960s with the aggressive political activism of the American Indian Movement's restoration of the Ghost Dance during the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973, the essay discloses the union of religion and politics obscured in earlier studies. Many existing narratives have linked "authentic" Native American identity to "traditional" reservation culture and have not adequately examined the innovations in indigenous culture the federal reservation system and assimilation programs produced. Tracing the emergence of urbanized Native Americans seemingly disconnected from "traditional" native culture to the comprehensive assimilation programs initiated by the U.S. government after the massacre at Wounded Knee, this paper connects federal Indian policy -- especially as executed in the Far West -- to both trajectories of the Ghost Dance.

Responding:

James Bennett, Santa Clara University  
Quincy Newell, University of Wyoming**M17-408****Unitarian Universalist Scholars and Friends**Theme: *Unitarian Universalist Scholars and Friends Discussion: Unitarian Universalists and Nature*

Alma Crawford, Meadville-Lombard Theological School, Presiding

**Saturday - 7:00 PM-9:30 PM**Room Assignments Available Only to Members. Login [here](#) and then click the Program Book link at the top of the

## Sessions

*page to return.*

Our annual conversation will explore the ways Unitarian Universalists have thought about, talked about, and interacted with nature, from the beginnings of our tradition to the present. By placing broad philosophical and theological traditions such as Transcendentalism and religious naturalism into dialogue with environmental activism and nature-based spiritual practices, we hope to deepen our understanding of the Unitarian Universalist heritage and to sharpen our vision for the future. Participants are also encouraged to attend the UU Scholars and Friends Reception, to be hosted by Meadville Lombard Theological School (610 South Michigan Avenue) on Friday evening, 7-8:30 pm.

## Panelists:

Sofia Betancourt, Yale University  
Clare Butterfield, Faith in Place  
Ron Engel,  
Sheri Prud'homme, Graduate Theological Union  
Jerome Stone, Meadville Lombard Theological School

## Responding:

Adam Robersmith, Second Unitarian Church

**A18-221****Islamic Mysticism Group**

**Theme:** *Nature and Human Nature in Sufi Traditions: Mystical Reflections on Emotion, Sexuality, and the Cosmos*

Martin Nguyen, Fairfield University, Presiding

**Sunday - 1:00 PM-2:30 PM**

*Room Assignments Available Only to Members. Login [here](#) and then click the Program Book link at the top of the page to return.*

The object of the Sufi path can be characterized as passing away from the created world to subsist in creation through God alone. Thus it is not surprising that the representatives of the various world views associated with Islamic mysticism have had a lot to say about the nature of the created world in their discussions of the divine-human relationship. This panel will offer a range of perspectives on nature, and so the nature of the divine-human relationship, from the complexity of human psychology, to the hidden meanings of gender and sexuality, to the way to that the natural world points to the Divine. The first paper explores the connections and correspondences between human emotions and the states (hal) and stations (maqam) of the Sufi path, the second paper is a feminist reading of the understanding of human embodiment, sexual intimacy and spirituality inherent in the mystical cosmology of the 13th century Sufi thinker Muhyiddin Ibn al-'Arabi, and the third paper looks at the 12th Century Andalusian Sufi thinker and Qur'an commentator Abu al-Hakam Ibn Barrajan's vision of the cosmos as a theater of divine self-disclosures.

Yousef Casewit, Yale University

*Natural Phenomena as a Gateway into the Celestial Realm: The Sufi Tafsir of Ibn Barrajan*

This paper will explore the Sufi vision of existence that relates natural phenomena as contemplative passageways into the unseen world in the writings of the Andalusian mystic Ibn Barrajan (d. 1141). I base this investigation on my recently completed critical edition of his Qur'an exegesis entitled *Idah al-hikma bi-ahkam al-'ibra* which has been completely neglected by modern scholarship. Ibn Barrajan's intricate Qur'anic symbology of the natural world is comprised of two types of symbols. The first are divine symbols (ayat khassa) in which certain natural phenomena, for instance the sun and the moon, exclusively manifest God's presence. The second are symbols that are ontologically rooted in celestial or infernal states, and that open to otherworldly realities such as the archetypal day, heavenly trees, or infernal beings. Having explained his cosmology, I will show how this early vision the cosmos as a theater divine self-disclosures informed the writings of Ibn 'Arabi and his school.

Alan Godlas, University of Georgia

*"States" as a Problem in the Study of Sufism*

Emotions have largely been marginalized in paradigms for cultivating intelligence in both Western civilization and the Islamic world. Nevertheless, this study of Sufi concepts of states (ahwal) and stations (maqamat)—focusing on the Sufi compendia of the formative period (10-11th cent. CE) and utilizing advances in the scientific study of the cognitive dimension of emotions—brings emotions out from the margins of Islam, clarifies a variety of early Sufi attitudes to the epistemic value of emotions, and should result in increasing the significance of emotions and Sufi states to contemporary scholars. The interdisciplinary recognition of the need to give greater scholarly attention to emotions (led by Corrigan in the study of Religion), the paradigm-shifting research in emotional intelligence spearheaded by Salovey and Mayer, as well as the neuroscientific evidence marshalled by Antonio Damasio enable us to discuss similarities and differences of emotions and moods to states and stations in Sufism.

**Sessions**

Sa'diyya Shaikh, University of Cape Town

*Sufi Imaginings of Sexuality: Ibn Arabi and Gender*

This paper offers a feminist reading of issues relating to sexuality, spirituality and embodiment in the works of 13th century polymath, Muhyi al-Din Ibn Arabi. Using a feminist lens, I explore his mystical cosmology and its related understandings of personhood, spiritual refinement and sexual intimacy. Drawing on the famous cosmogonical myth of Adam and Eve, Ibn Arabi's presents love, and intimacy as ontologically conditioned by humanities origin and manifestation from Divine yearning. These ideas present a particularly rich field of inquiry for rethinking dualistic and patriarchal anthropologies. Ibn Arabi's views offer feminists novel understandings on the nature of human embodiment, and the relationship of spirituality to materiality. His notion of sexual union between partners as the potential site for the greatest self-disclosure of God contributes to a full embrace of the embodied, desiring and sexual dimensions of human nature in ways that are contained within the boundaries of Islamic ethics. Despite a clearly male heterosexist subjectivity informing many of his notions of human sexuality as an avenue of spiritual realization, his nuanced writings are simultaneously open to multiple readings which facilitate the destabilization of the normative male heterosexual subject. Drawing on Ibn Arabi's work, this paper concludes by reflecting on how a feminist reader sensitive to power and patriarchal exclusions might constructively contribute to rethinking the parameters of sexual ethics in Islam.



## Print Program Book

### Sessions

#### M16-405

##### Friends of Animals and Religion

Theme: *Friends of Animals and Religion Reception*

**Friday - 9:00 PM-10:00 PM**

Room Assignments Available Only to Members. Login [here](#) and then click the Program Book link at the top of the page to return.

Please join the Friends of the Animals and Religion Group to make connections, share resources and enjoy good company.

#### A17-210

##### Animals and Religion Group

Theme: *Communicating across the Human–Animal Divide: Animals, Religion, and Language*

David Clough, University of Chester, Presiding

**Saturday - 1:00 PM-3:30 PM**

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To bridge the divide between humans and other animals, we need to attend not just to what they mean to us but also *how* they mean, in their languages as well as ours. This panel provides four diverse perspectives on analyzing the language of and about animals in religious narratives. The first paper explores how talking animals in twelfth century Japanese Buddhist didactic tales can help open a dialogue about who has moral standing. The second paper illustrates how a previously unknown sixteenth century Yiddish text uses extensive animal metaphors to highlight our shared mortality. Drawing on both Apache and Koyukon oral traditions, the third paper argues that attending to avian speech plays a crucial role in developing a sacred relationship between Native Americans and birds. The final paper offers a fresh approach to the question of whether animals themselves may be religious, building on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account of behavior acting like a language.

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Responding:  
Sarra Tlili, University of Florida

## A17-311

### Animals and Religion Group and Buddhist Critical-Constructive Reflection Group

Theme: *Thinking Animals, Rethinking Buddhist Ritual: Transformations in Modern Practice*

Aaron Gross, University of San Diego, Presiding

**Saturday - 4:00 PM-6:30 PM**

Room Assignments Available Only to Members. Login [here](#) and then click the Program Book link at the top of the page to return.

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Vesna A. Wallace, University of California, Santa Barbara

*Buddhist Views and Rituals in the Mongolian Equine Husbandry*

In traditional, Mongolian pastoral culture, domestic animals, which are the main source of sustenance and material wellbeing, are integral to the life of the family and the state. Among all domestic animals, it is the horse, especially a sire or a racehorse, with which Mongols developed a unique relationship. This presentation will focus on various aspects of the Mongols' relationship to domestic horses that have shaped the Buddhist rituals of protecting, healing, and empowering horses. It will also demonstrate the ways in which the Buddhist concept of the "wind horse," astrology, and veterinary knowledge shaped the Mongols' equine typology and practices. I conclude by discussing the ways in which the Mongols' traditional attitudes toward horses and pastoral etiquette in dealing with horses became intertwined with Buddhist ethical and ontological perspectives on animals, giving rise to a rich body of Buddhist theories and ritual practices related to horse husbandry.

Barbara Ambros, University of North Carolina

*Masking Commodification and Sacralizing Consumption: Buddhist Animal Memorial Rites in Twentieth-Century Japan*

## Sessions

Animal memorial rites have often been nostalgically linked to Japanese tradition and been given as proof of the inherently harmonious relationship of the Japanese with nature; however, I argue that they flourished as a response to modernity and the commodification of animals. Drawing on J.Z. Smith's ritual theory, I contend that they constitute ritualized perfection in the face of the mechanized and often bloody realities of modernity. This rationale applies to modern Japanese animal memorial rituals for military animals, animals in the food and fishery industries, laboratory animals, and zoo animals: from the fascist 1930s and 1940s, when such rituals served to bolster Japanese patriotism; through the memorial-rite boom in the 1970s and 1980s, when Japan underwent a period of economic prowess that strengthened ideas of Japanese uniqueness; to the contemporary period, when demographic and economic changes have brought about a reevaluation of Japan's national identity.

Nathaniel Rich, University of California, Santa Barbara

*(Don't) Eat Me!: On Empathy, "Life-Release" (Tshe Thar), and Vegetarianism among Contemporary Tibetan Buddhists in the People's Republic of China*

This paper will present a contemporary case study of the practice of "life-release" (*tshe thar*), the ransoming of animals destined for slaughter, in a Tibetan Buddhist community network centered in western Sichuan. It will explore the ways in which this traditional practice has recently been adapted in and for the promotion of vegetarianism among traditionally non-vegetarian Tibetans. In particular, this paper will examine how these practices use the contemplative cultivation of empathy for animals, which presupposes and makes use of the human-animal binary, in order to weaken and finally subvert or undermine that binary in the "equalization" and exchange of self and others that bodhisattvas can practice not only in meditation but also, as in our case study, in the marketplace and at the dinner table.

Stephanie Kaza, University of Vermont

*Being Animals: Western Buddhist Perspectives*

This paper addresses the "problem" of being animals, drawing on traditional Buddhist understandings and modern western Buddhist practices. I review the modern ritual developed by Joanna Macy, "The Council of All Beings," regarding the human/animal superiority complex common in the West. The Mahayana metaphor of Indra's Net underpins the ritual structure, though it does not reflect systems drivers or normative environmental ethics. I investigate the application of mindfulness practice to understand how we ourselves are animals and what that conditioning means. This paper identifies critical constructive challenges in these areas: 1) animal evolutionary inheritance as it drives behaviors which Buddhist ethical practice seeks to enlighten; 2) western Buddhist cultural conditioning towards animals and on what basis we rationalize our distinction from non-human animals; and 3) Buddhist cultural practices in the West and how they reinforce western ideas about animals, though hidden under the guise of Buddhist ideals.

Business Meeting:  
Christopher Ives, Stonehill College  
Grace G. Burford, Prescott College

Focus on Sustainability

## A18-265

### Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms Group

Theme: *Dietary Regulations, Food Transactions, and Social Boundaries: Classical and Contemporary Configurations in Hindu and Jewish Traditions*

Jody Myers, California State University, Northridge, Presiding

**Sunday - 3:00 PM-4:30 PM**

Room Assignments Available Only to Members. Login [here](#) and then click the Program Book link at the top of the page to return.

This session will focus on the role of food regulations and practices in Hindu and Jewish communities as modes of ritual and social transaction that serve as a means of constructing communal identities, circumscribing external and internal boundaries, and delineating sociocultural hierarchies. It considers four specific cases: the ways in which food is theorized in the early Sanskrit literature, the "gastrosemantics" of contemporary Indian food systems, evolving early rabbinic food laws, and the contemporary American practice of *shechita*, kosher slaughter.

Patrick Olivelle, University of Texas

*Food for Thought: Dietary Rules, Social Organization, and Ascetic Practice in Ancient India*

The paper deals with two aspects of food. First is the ways in which food is theorized in the early Sanskrit literature. In this context, I deal with the classification of animals and dietary regulations and how they correspond to social categories and relationships, especially those relating to social hierarchy and marriage. These classifications are based on several criteria, including habitat, eating habits, and the biological structure of the feet and teeth. The second aspect relates to the ways in which the ascetic traditions of ancient India theorize food and use food as a marker of spiritual progress. They start from the premise

## Sessions

already found in the Vedic texts that connect food to creation. The inversion of this process produces the ascetic attitude towards food and the food effort, ending in the total elimination of such effort, which sometimes may involve fasting unto death as a religious exercise.

R. S. Khare , University of Virginia

*Culinary Aesthetics, Purity Practices, and Socioreligious Hierarchies: Reconfiguring Foodways in Contemporary India*

In the “gastrosemantics” of Indian food systems, the ritual, social, economic, and medical dimensions of food are inextricably connected. The brahmanical food system, for example, includes complex laws of commensality that regulate food transactions among castes, determining who may receive food and water from whom and strengthening the hierarchical boundaries that both separate and connect castes. This system also includes taxonomies classifying foods as pure or impure, regulations pertaining to the purity of cooking vessels and utensils, and rules concerning proper methods of food preparation and food consumption. This paper will consider the ways in which changing culinary aesthetics and purity practices among different social groups positioned in different locations in the socioreligious hierarchy are reconfiguring foodways in contemporary India. Traditional Ayurvedic food practices intermingle with Western biomedical models and dietary regimes. The quest for ritual purity persists alongside markets filled with adulterated foods and environmental pollution in globalizing metropolitan India.

Jordan Rosenblum, University of Wisconsin

*Bacon, Bras, and Banquets: Rabbinic Food Regulations and Boundary Formation*

The intersection between food regulations and boundary formation has become a popular topic for academic inquiry in recent years. When Judaism is the object of comparison, scholars almost inevitably turn to the laws of Leviticus, due to the influence of Mary Douglas. In the development of Jewish food laws, however, rabbinic interpretations, expansions, and innovations on biblical law have had a far greater impact than the explicit words of Leviticus. This paper seeks to redirect the object of comparison from biblical to rabbinic texts, as it is in the rabbinic corpus where the concept of food as social boundary is explicitly addressed and, in fact, advanced. For example, while the Hebrew Bible allows Israelites and non-Israelites to share a table, rabbinic texts express much ambivalence—and sometimes outright concern—about this practice. In order to understand how ancient Jews constructed borders at the table, we must turn the page from Leviticus.

Aaron Gross , University of San Diego

*“An Animal Slaughtered by a Gentile . . . or by an Ape”: Kosher Practices, Killing Animals, and Drawing Borders*

In Jewish exempla that range from ancient rabbinic dietary rules to the contemporary American kosher abattoir, the space of religious slaughter, *shechita*, is also the space in which boundaries are simultaneously drawn between human and animal, Jew and Gentile, and the “proper” Jew and the heretic. In dialog with both Jewish studies and animal studies, this paper analyses the practice of *shechita* with attention to the intertwined role played by farmed animals and the associated Jewish imagination of animality in forging social boundaries. The different social imaginations generated in the diversely regulated act of *shechita* are carried to the dining table as kosher meats that, depending on their certification, are acceptable to specific Jewish communities and not others. The paper argues that the basic link between slaughtering animals, consuming meat, and drawing social boundaries is far from unique to the Jewish case and that this constellation needs further scholarly explication.

## A19-209

### Science, Technology, and Religion Group

Theme: *Thinking Theologically about Extinctions*

James Haag, Suffolk University, Presiding

#### Monday - 1:00 PM-3:00 PM

Room Assignments Available Only to Members. Login [here](#) and then click the Program Book link at the top of the page to return.

Evolutionary history is replete with mass extinctions, and the future is threatened by further extinctions both local and global in scale. This paper session will address the questions raised by such facts. What is the theological relevance of this history and possible future? What does it mean for God to create by such seemingly “wasteful” means? What are the implications for our ethical decisions? In addition, it will aim to clarify the various kinds of extinctions and their scope in order to construct adequate theological questions and responses.

Bethany Sollereider, University of Exeter

*The 99% Problem: The Goodness of God and Evolutionary Extinction*

It is estimated that over 99% of species that have ever existed have now gone extinct. This reality raises many questions: Was there meaning in the lives of those animals lost and those species discarded? Were they simply means toward an anthropic end or were they only chance occurrences along an evolutionary

**Sessions**

pathway that was in essence ateleological? Could a God who created through such wasteful means possibly be good? After an investigation of the proposals of Christopher Southgate, this paper will draw on Ruth Page's notion of "Teleology Now!" and an open theist framework of providence to argue that the questions of evolutionary extinction can be meaningfully approached through a dual-aspect teleology that finds value in both the individual lives of extinct creatures and the whole evolutionary scheme.

Braden Molhoek, Graduate Theological Union

*Dust to Dust: Are Humans The Pinnacle or A Pinnacle?*

This paper identifies two types of human extinction: extinction through dying out and extinction through continued evolution. After briefly exploring how these might occur, the question is asked whether there is a theological difference between these categories of extinction. Trying to identify the theological implications of human extinction is not simply a project in looking to the future; the theological questions raised about humanity's future can also be asked of other hominids that coexisted with modern humans.

Gayle Woloschak, Northwestern University

*Reconciling Eden and Evolution: Reflections on Species Extinction*

The study of the relationship between a particular environment and the co-existence of several species, the field of ecology, is tightly linked to evolutionary principles. When the disciplines of evolution and ecology are ignored or disengaged from each other, then the true basis of understanding creaturely co-existence (or lack of existence, leading to species extinction) is gone. Features underlying this disengagement of ecology and evolution are a series of arguments against evolutionary theory. A few of these include: (1) concerns about a Biblical understanding of some primordial state of perfection exemplified by Eden and the "animal-like baseness" that is attributed to early proto-humans (all of whom have become extinct) and modern humans; (2) questions of God or science as the cause of all things; and (3) questions of chance in evolution and extinction of species.

Willa Lengyel, University of Chicago

*Finitude, Extinction, and Christian Ecological Ethics*

In this paper, I will explore the ways in which our confusions about the way scientific and religious truth claims interact affect our ability to cogently and faithfully approach the problem of (human and non-human animal) extinction today, as well as the related environmental issues that issue from such a problem. I will both suggest the beginnings of a methodology for arbitrating the two realms and discuss how it may enlighten, or at least point to, some clarifications with regards to extinction and Christian faith

Focus on Sustainability

**A19-317****Animals and Religion Group**

Theme: *Thinking Animals, Rethinking Race, Ethnicity, and Religion*

James W. McCarty III, Emory University, Presiding

**Monday - 4:00 PM-6:30 PM**

*Room Assignments Available Only to Members. Login [here](#) and then click the Program Book link at the top of the page to return.*

To correct the widespread but mistaken view that animal studies only attracts white and privileged scholar-activists, this panel grounds its reflections from our experiences within and concerns for Native American, Latino/a, Asian American, and African American communities. Specific topics include: 1) Colonialist wildlife management policies in the Yellowstone National Park region that privilege some (e.g., whites and cattle) over others (e.g., indigenous peoples and bison); 2) How consuming animals in the United States contributes to oppressive structures in Latin America; 3) Institutional racism surrounding the planned building of a factory farm near a historic Japanese American internment camp; 4) Exoticization and stigmatization of certain Asian ethnicities following animal activist campaigns against the consumption of dog meat or recent statewide bans on shark fins; and 5) The role that the legacy of slavery and the cultural significance of food in the black church plays in preventing many African Americans from caring about animal rights.

**Panelists:**

Michelene E. Pesantubbee, University of Iowa  
Miguel De La Torre, Iliff School of Theology  
Grace Yia-Hei Kao, Claremont School of Theology  
Christopher Carter, Claremont Lincoln University

**Responding:**

Rosemary R. Ruether, Claremont School of Theology

**Sessions**

Business Meeting:  
David Aftandilian, Texas Christian University  
Focus on Sustainability