



Religion and the Environment

Spring, 2003

Syllabus

1. Course Information

Course Number: PHIL 3283, Section 1
Meeting Times: M,W,F, 2:30-3:20
Meeting Place: 102 Gould Hall
Instructor: Dr. Zev Trachtenberg
Office: 610 Dale Hall Tower
Phone: 325-6324
E-Mail: ztrachtenberg@ou.edu
Office Hours: M,T 10:30-11:30

2. Course Goals

The purpose of this course is to help you understand, on a cross cultural basis, how people's conception of the natural environment, and the value it holds for them, are influenced by ideas drawn from their religious traditions. You will work toward four specific goals:

1. articulating the ideas found in several religions from around the world about the proper human relation with nature;
2. understanding how the Judeo-Christian tradition has been seen as a source of some attitudes that are environmentally damaging, and others that are environmentally responsible;
3. grasping "environmental spirituality," and making sense of the idea that environmental problems are spiritual problems; and
4. critically assessing the extent to which identifying the spiritual aspect of environmental problems can contribute to their solution.

3. Required text

The text book for this course will be Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment: A Global Anthology by Richard C. Foltz (Wadsworth, 2003).

4. Course work

<u>Work</u>	<u>Weight</u>
Abstracts of readings (10 @ 2%)	20%
Final Exam	20%
Midterm Exam	25%
Term Paper (10 pp.)	35%
up to 3 Extra Credit Reports (each @ 1%)	up to 3%

The work for this course is designed to help you make progress on each of the course goals, listed above, and to test how well you have achieved them.

Abstracts of readings The Abstracts will help you reach Goal 1, by having you read closely articles on a variety of religious traditions. At the beginning of each unit of the course (see schedule below) you will submit an abstract of an assigned article from the reading for that unit. (An abstract is a 100-150 word summary.) The Abstracts will not be graded; you will receive credit or no credit on the basis of my judgment of your effort.

Final Exam The Final will test you on Goal 1, by asking you to explain how a given reading uses Christian ideas to convey the religious significance of nature, and to compare it to non-Christian discussions of nature covered during the semester. The Final will be held Thursday, May 8, at 4:30 PM.

Midterm Exam The Midterm will test you on Goal 2, by asking you to explain Lynn White's thesis that the Judeo-Christian tradition is a cause of environmental degradation, and to discuss a response to White's ideas. The Midterm will be held in class on February 24.

Term Paper The Term Paper will test you on Goals 3 and 4. In your paper you will explain the idea of environmental spirituality, as you understand it, based on readings from the course. You will then use this idea to explain how a particular environmental problem has a spiritual dimension. Finally, you will consider whether identifying this spiritual dimension can aid in solving the problem.

You will work on your Term Paper in stages. On April 11 you will submit a draft of your paper; at that class you will participate in a "peer editing" session in which students will review each other's papers according to criteria I will provide. I will review your draft and make comments on it, and return it as soon as possible. Your final version will be due one week after I return your draft in class.

Your draft is worth 5% of your total grade. Your grade on it will be based on my judgment of your effort. Your final version will be worth 30% of your total grade.

Extra Credit Reports During the semester I will announce talks or other events relevant to the course. Students may submit up to 3 brief (1-2 pp.) reports on such events.

5. Various Policies

Attendance Full attendance is expected, and you will be unable to do well without attending class. Attendance here includes paying attention. Your mere physical presence is not enough--I expect you to take part in the activities of the class.

Religious observances It is the policy of the University to excuse the absences of students that result from religious observances and to provide without penalty for the rescheduling of examinations and additional required classwork that may fall on religious holidays. If any assignment in this class conflicts with your religious observance, or if you have any questions on this matter, please contact me.

Grading Your work will be given numerical grades between 0 and 100. Excellent work will receive 90's, good work will receive 80's, average work will receive a 70's, work that is barely passing will receive 60's, and failing work will receive a 0.

Your final grade will be determined by combining all your grades according to the weights listed in Section 4. Your grade for the course will be the corresponding letter grade, where 90 and above is an A, 80 to 90 is a B, 70 to 80 is a C, 60 to 70 is a D, and below 60 is an F. However, if you are close to the borderline for a higher mark, your grade might be rounded up on the basis of my evaluation of your attendance (see above).

Re-writes No re-writes of any assignment will be permitted.

Late work Late work will be accepted only at my discretion, and with a substantial grade penalty. Exceptions to this policy will be granted only on the basis of a substantial and demonstrable hardship (e.g. a verified medical, family, or job-related conflict), arranged in advance (unless in case of emergency). However, students who enroll in the course after January 15 may submit the first Abstract at the second class period after their enrollment date without penalty.

6. Academic Conduct

I will rigorously enforce the University's policies on academic conduct, as set forth in the Student Handbook. In written work you must cite all the sources you consult. However, respect for academic honesty is consistent with discussing the ideas of the course with others. I urge you to discuss the issues of the course outside of class--but you must do your written work on your own, and must cite any assistance you receive from others. Please ask me if you have any questions about academic honesty in general, or about specific situations that might arise during this course.

7. Reasonable accommodation

If you have a disability that may prevent you from fully demonstrating your understanding of the material in this course you should contact me personally as soon as possible so we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure your full participation and to facilitate your educational opportunities.

8. Note to Philosophy Majors

In order to aid in the assessment of its program, the Philosophy Department has a specific requirement for majors in Philosophy and in Ethics and Religion. Majors will be required to assemble a portfolio of written philosophical work--typically papers or exams written for philosophy classes--produced over several semesters. Majors will NOT be graded on their portfolios. Instead, portfolios will be sent, anonymously, to outside readers, to help them evaluate the quality of the Philosophy Department's teaching. Majors will discuss the progress of their portfolios with their advisors.

You should submit the Term Paper for this course for your portfolio. To do so, simply turn in two copies of the final version of your paper, one of which must include a title page that lists: the paper title; the course name and number; this semester and year; and the date the paper is turned in. This portfolio copy must not show your name anywhere except on the title page.

9. Course schedule

Jan. 13: Introduction to the course

Jan. 15, 17, 22, 24: Unit 1 – Classic Statements of the Problem. Reading: Chapter 1.

Jan. 27, 29, 31, Feb. 3: Unit 2 – Contemporary Discussions of the Problem. Reading: Chapter 2.

Feb. 5, 7, 10, 12: Unit 3 – Judaism. Reading, Chapter 8.

Feb. 14, 17, 19, 21: Unit 4 – Christianity. Reading: Chapter 9.

Feb. 24: Midterm Exam

Feb. 26, 28, March 3: Unit 5 – Islam. Reading: Chapter 10.

March 5, 7, 10, 12, 14: Unit 6 – Indigenous People's Religious Traditions. Chapter 3.

March 17, 19, 21: Spring Break

March 24, 26, 28, 31: Unit 7 – Hinduism. Reading: Chapter 4.

Apr. 2, 4, 7, 9: Unit 8 – Buddhism. Reading: Chapter 5.

Apr. 11: Term Paper drafts due; peer editing session.

Apr. 14, 16, 18, 21: Unit 9 – Chinese Traditions. Reading: Chapter 6.

Apr. 23, 25, 28, 30: Unit 10 – New Visions. Reading: Chapter 15.

May 2: Semester Review

May 8, 4:30 PM: Final Exam