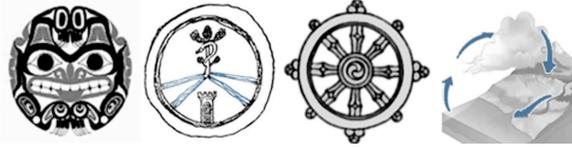


H A&S 253D

# World Religions and the Environment

Spring 2008 · 5 credits · TTh 10:30-12:20, MGH 284



<http://faculty.washington.edu/banasn/religions/>

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south of Health Sciences, at the bottom of 15th Ave →  
206 221 4402 (but I usually forget to check my voice mail)

office hours

by appointment: *make a suggestion!*

to show up unannounced:

Wed 9:30-10:30

or directly after class Tues or Thur



## Course announcement

This course will explore intersections between religious belief and practice and the natural world, on both grand and intimate scales. Grand like the all-encompassing vision of interconnectedness in Mahayana Buddhism, or the message of glory and salvation John Muir brought down from the Sierra mountains, or the quiet ferocity of the lords of the undersea world in Haida mythology. Intimate like the ethical dilemma posed by mosquitoes in a zen center in the woods, the poet Gary Snyder's reflections on Grace before meals, or the message of "creation care" spreading among contemporary evangelical congregations.

We will discuss the debate over whether the biblical tradition is the root cause of our environmental crisis, the solution to the crisis, or both; how religious belief shapes current environmental activism in Seattle, Thailand, and beyond; and parallels between religious thought and the "deep ecology" of naturalists like Aldo Leopold. The course will be driven by student discussion, writing, and close reading of compelling primary texts.

There is one required text: a **course reader** available at **Ave Copy Center**, 4141 Univ Way, just north of Aladdin's. You'll need the reader for the second week of class.

## Format

This course is about *reading*, not just religion and the environment.

The goal: after this course, you should be able to pick up a related book on your own, figure out what it's saying, make connections across religious traditions and across environmental issues, and decide in a measured way what you think about it.

For every class meeting for which reading is assigned, there is also a standing assignment to identify and share your *questions* about it (details below). **Reading and rereading until you have questions** is the heart of the course. In a way, what happens when we're together on Tuesdays and Thursdays is a support for your reading, not the other way around!

I will lecture sometimes, but only *after* you guys have raised your questions, answered as many as you can among yourselves, and worked as far as you can into each week's material! I will suggest directions and provide background as requested, but the primary responsibility for bringing good questions to the table is yours. *Use me as a resource; ask me for help; ask my opinion about specific things; don't wait for me to take the lead.*

## Assignments

1) **Post questions on the online discussion board.** Every class for which reading is assigned (see Calendar below), post two questions about the reading:

a) a **content** question: i.e., what does the text say?

"I don't understand the concept of \_\_\_\_\_."

"When the author says \_\_\_\_\_, do they mean \_\_\_\_\_?"

"What is this author trying to tell me about \_\_\_\_\_?"

b) an **analysis** question/comment: making connections, evaluating

"How does this relate to \_\_\_\_\_ that we read last week?"

"Is the author right about \_\_\_\_\_?"

Deadline: midnight the night before class.

(Note: your analysis question can be a comment instead of a question. Your content question must be an actual question, and it must be about content. Identifying the specific things that you do not understand is a crucial step in active reading. It's your admission ticket to thinking big lofty thoughts, or deciding that the author's wrong!)

2) Once during the term, serve as **question synthesizer** (sign up in class on Thur 4/3). This means

- read the discussion board questions before class
- identify ones that seem especially interesting / important / shared by many classmates
- come to class ready to summarize your favorite 2-4 in one sentence each.

We'll start most discussions with me asking the synthesizers for their report. Note: you can be a volunteer synthesizer any time you want. Good on ya!

3) **Write three papers, about 5 pages each.**

**Paper 1 (due 4/24): Discuss one of the analysis questions we spend time on in class.**

This should have a well-developed main idea and also thorough, specific reference to texts on the syllabus. Using class time to generate ideas collaboratively and find good textual support is encouraged (kind of like working on a science lab in a group but writing your own lab report afterwards). Citing your classmates by name for their ideas is also encouraged.

**Paper 2 (due 5/22): A book review.**

This should be on something outside the syllabus but related: another author, another religious tradition, another environmental issue. You can write about one book in depth, or pick a theme and review a variety of sources on that theme.

Use the *New York Times Book Review* or book reviews in scholarly journals as models: I will provide some specific examples.

I will be full of suggestions (all the amazing books and ideas there wasn't room for on the syllabus!).

**Paper 3 (due 6/10): A work of synthesis.**

Pick a theme that links at least three religious traditions or areas of science. Make connections. This might end up looking a lot like paper 1 or paper 2, or it might be something very different (a newspaper opinion piece? a map of an intellectual landscape? an Indra's Net? a narrative in the style of Annie Dillard or Aldo Leopold?)

For all these, but especially for paper 3, if you have a creative alternative to propose, I will probably say yes. Check with me first.

## Grading

25% discussion board questions and synthesizer service: C/NC

25% paper 1

25% paper 2

25% paper 3

For papers, my grading scale is

2.0 major deficiencies

⋮

3.0 fully adequate, no more, no less

⋮

3.4 good

⋮

3.8 excellent (the equivalent of 100% on a test)

⋮

4.0 above and beyond (I don't give out many of these)

and I'll weight *ideas* and *communication* (= *clarity and persuasiveness*) about equally.

Extensions policy: it's worth asking, but I expect you to do the considerate thing and *ask in advance*.

## Calendar

= reading assigned, discussion board questions required

	<i>Tues</i>	<i>Thur</i>
Week 1	4/1	<input type="checkbox"/> 4/3
Week 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 4/8	<input type="checkbox"/> 4/10
Week 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4/15	4/17
Week 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 4/22	4/24: paper 1 due
Week 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4/29	<input type="checkbox"/> 5/1
Week 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 5/6	<input type="checkbox"/> 5/8
Week 7	<input type="checkbox"/> 5/13	<input type="checkbox"/> 5/15
Week 8	<input type="checkbox"/> 5/20	5/22: paper 2 due
Week 9	<input type="checkbox"/> 5/27	<input type="checkbox"/> 5/29
Week 10	<input type="checkbox"/> 6/3	6/5
Finals	6/10: paper 3 due	

## Week 1: Introduction

Thur 4/3:

Annie Dillard, excerpts from *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (handout)

*What to read for:* Dillard is a literary nature writer who thinks hard about how science, religion, and the raw experience of nature fit together. She is excellent at pointing out things we ought to find troubling. What problems or questions about *how nature works* and *our place in nature* is she trying to raise? She isn't just telling cute stories; she's trying to change us. What is she trying to say?

Or: how does the picture of nature Dillard paints compare with others that are common in our culture? (For that matter, where *do* the common images of nature come from in our culture? What's missing from them?)

## Part 1: Buddhist traditions

### Week 2: Early buddhism and deep ecology

Tues 4/8:

Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (excerpt)

John Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism* (excerpt)

*What to read for:* okay, ready for 500 years of buddhist mythology, history, and philosophy in one sitting? Go! Obviously, there is too much here to explore fully in one week of class. We need to choose a few **core concepts** that will relate interestingly to ecology, and have the discipline to put all the other cool stuff aside.

Here is my list of **core concepts**:

**impermanence**

**no-self**

**interdependence**

(what else should we add to this list?)

Early buddhism explored the concepts above mainly in terms of psychology: the examination, through meditation, of what goes on in the mind. When we transfer this buddhist view of our *internal* nature to *external* nature (rocks and trees and bacteria and stuff), we have "deep ecology." Thursday's readings are about making that analogy.

Thur 4/10:

Aldo Leopold, "Odyssey," from *A Sand County Almanac*

Edward O. Wilson, "The Little Things That Run the World"

Lewis Thomas, "The Medusa and the Snail," from *The Medusa and the Snail*, and "The Lives of a Cell," from *The Lives of a Cell*

Supplemental reading ("supplemental" = "you decide if you want to read it or not"):

Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic" (course reader)

## Week 3: Buddhist practice and environmentalism

Tues 4/15:

Kuya Minogue, "City Practice and Bush Practice"

Wendy Johnson, "Garden Practice"

Wes Nisker and Babara Gates, "Guarding the Earth: A Conversation with Joanna Macy"

Kenneth Kraft, "Nuclear Ecology and Engaged Buddhism"

Thur 4/17:

no new reading, but please think about content and analysis questions from the last two weeks that you still like answers to.

You might also want to get a head start on next Tuesday's reading: perhaps read Smith and Strong now so you can concentrate on Dōgen and Snyder for next week.

Supplemental:

Sulak Sivaraksa, "Development As If People Mattered"

Pipob Udomittipong, "Thailand's Ecology Monks"

Susan Darlington, "Tree Ordination in Thailand"

Snyder, "Grace" and "Song of the Taste" (handouts)

## Week 4: Mahayana buddhism: moving beyond language

Tues 4/22:

Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (excerpt)

John Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism* (one great paragraph)

Dōgen, *Mountains and Waters Sutra*, in *Dharma Rain*

Gary Snyder, "Blue Mountains Constantly Walking," in *Dharma Rain*

*What to read for:* treat Smith as background; reading fast for main ideas is fine. Figuring out Dōgen is the primary task for this week: give this one time. Maybe read it once indoors and again on a rock at the edge of a river. Snyder is commentary on Dōgen. A good list of *specific* content questions about these two readings is absolutely essential this week.

Thur 4/24:

no new reading; **paper 1 due in class**

Supplemental:

Francis Cook, "The Jewel Net of Indra"

## Week 5: Saigyō and John Muir

(from buddhism to christianity)

Tues 4/29:

William LaFleur, "Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature," in *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought*, Callicott and Ames, eds.

*Saigyō: Poems of a Mountain Home* (Burton Watson, trans.; excerpt)

Tues 5/1:

Michael Cohen, *The Pathless Way: John Muir and American Wilderness* (excerpt)

Supplemental:

Peter Timmerman, "Western Buddhism and the Global Crisis"

Catherine Albanese, *Nature Religion in America*, chapter 3: "Wildness and the Passing Show: Transcendental Religion and Its Legacies"

## Part 2: Christian traditions

### Week 6: Critiques of christian legacies

Tues 5/6:

Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis"

Thur 5/8:

Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (excerpt)

### Week 7: Dominion, stewardship, and beyond

Tues 5/13:

Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (excerpt)

Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selborne* (excerpt)

David Roberts, "The Soul of DeWitt: An interview with environmental scientist and evangelical leader Calvin DeWitt," in *Grist* (grist.org), Oct 17, 2006

Thur 5/15:

choose one:

Sallie McFague, "Imaging a Theology of Nature: The World as God's Body," in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology* (Birch, Eakin, McDaniel, eds.)

J. Baird Callicott, "Genesis and John Muir," in *Covenant for a New Creation* (Robb and Casebolt, eds.)

Supplemental:

Genesis 1-3 (New Revised Standard Version)

## Part 3: Native American traditions

### Week 8: Genesis through Inuit eyes *(from Western to indigenous traditions)*

Tues 5/20:

Hugh Brody, *The Other Side of Eden: Hunter-Gatherers, Farmers, and the Shaping of the World* (excerpt) (a long excerpt) (and the last bit is important!)

Thur 5/22:

no new reading; **paper 2 due in class**

### Week 9: Personhood, transformation, and continuity

Tues 5/27:

A. Irving Hallowell, "Obijwa Ontology, Behavior, and Worldview," in *Culture in History* (Diamond, ed.)

Wayne Suttles, "On the Cultural Track of the Sasquatch," in *Coast Salish Essays*

Thur 5/29:

Skaay of the Qquuna Qiighawaay, "The Man Who Married a Bear" (Robert Bringhurst, trans.), in *Being in Being*

Supplemental:

Robert Bringhurst, "Introduction: The Hunter of Visions," from *Being in Being*

### Week 10: Exchange, balance, and reciprocity

Tues 6/3:

Skaay, "The One They Hand Along"

David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (excerpt)

Thur 6/5:

guest speaker: Russel Barsh, Director of Kwiáht, the Center for the Historical Ecology of the Salish Sea

optional reading: Russel Barsh, "Traditional Sustainable Use"

### Finals week

Tues 6/10: **paper 3 due, 5 pm**