

Environmental Humanities

REL 3990, Ref. # 2321

M-W 12:45-2:00, S305

Purpose: To explore environmentalist concepts and concerns in the humanities. Topics will include historical expressions of the human-nature relationship in art, philosophy, religion, and science. Contemporary movements such as environmentalism, ecofeminism, ecotheology, and deep ecology will also be examined.

Learning Outcomes: Students will be able to discuss a variety of perspectives regarding the human-nature relationship as it has evolved throughout Western and Eastern traditions. Students will develop their own understanding of that relationship as it relates to the historical survey, contemporary culture, and their own lives. Students will also be able to describe scientific and religious perspectives as they relate to the dialogue between human technology and environmental awareness. Besides gaining familiarity with major names and concepts involved in the area of study, students will become versed in the variety of ideas regarding stewardship and the sacred in nature.

Readings: (1) *Nature's Web: Rethinking Our Place on Earth*, Peter Marshall; (2) Handouts (3) Reserve materials.

Requirements: Attendance and participation (10% and no more than 1 unexcused absence); two exams (40%); one paper (40%); one project presentation (5%); and two paper presentations (5%). The exams will consist of fill-in-the-blank questions and essays. The paper will be a creative, scholarly position paper of approximately 2,000 words, which will be the focus of the paper presentations. The project presentations will relate a work of art (for instance, a poem, painting, or architectural structure), a scientific or religious theory, or some other humanities oriented perspective relevant to the reading assignment of the day.

Topic Schedule:

Week One-

Introductions and overview of course material, goals, and assignments.

Introduction to *Nature's Web*. Mixed media presentation on art, science, and religion perspectives from the East and West.

Week Two-

Student project presentations. Read: (1) **Taoism**; (2) **Hinduism**.

Discussion of Asian philosophy and its understanding of nature. What is the Tao, and how does it relate to nature? Is nature divine? If so, in what sense? What does that have to do with "being in the world," or the creation of an "ecological society"? What do Hindu texts, myths, and rites say about the human-nature relationship? What sort of models could they proffer?

Week Three-

Student project presentations. Read: (1) **Buddhism**; (2) **North American Indians**.

Discussion of Buddhist ethics and Native American Earth Wisdom. How does Buddha-Nature relate to environmental awareness? What is the role of nature in Zen? What is Indian Earth Wisdom? What happened during the triumph of Western civilization? What do the Sioux and Hopi traditions have to offer us today?

Week Four-

Student project presentations. Read: (1) **Ancient Egypt and Early Greece**; (2) **The Romans and Celtic Mysteries**.

Discussion of Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Celtic visions of the human-nature relationship. What do the Egyptian World Parents myths and animal worship reveal about our relationship to nature? How do the Greek concept of Gaia, the divine mysteries, and Platonic philosophy relate to the West's understanding of nature? What do Roman gods and philosophers add to that understanding? What is Celtic culture, and how do the Druids relate to the human-nature dialogue?

Week Five-

Student project presentations. Read (1) **The Judaeo-Christian Tradition**; (2) **Christianity and Islam**.

Discussion of the potentially harmful and beneficial aspects of Abrahamic traditions. What does God-given dominion relay in terms of the humans and nature? What does the kabbalah offer to the dialogue? What is Christian stewardship and what do saints have to say about it? How do Islamic myths and Sufi practices offer insights into healing the divide between humans and nature?

Week Six-

Student project presentations. Read (1) **Alchemy and The Scientific Revolution**; (2) Handout on "The Science of a Spiritless Logos". What is alchemy and what is the relevance of its cosmology? What is the relationship of alchemy to the scientific revolution? How does that revolution develop, and how does it change our attitudes toward animals and nature in general? What do the theories of Copernicus and Newton have to do with those attitudes? How did Logos, the divine word, become the logic of science, and how did the transformation add to our alienation from nature?

Week Seven-

Review and student paper presentations.

Paper topics and outline due.

Week Eight-

Midterm exam.

Discussion of exam and student paper presentations.

Week Nine-

Student project presentations. Read (1) **Philosophers of the Brave New World and The Philosophical Counter-Revolution;** (2) **The Enlightenment and To Follow Nature.**

Discussion of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and its countercultural voices—including the edict to “follow nature.” What do the theories of Bacon, Descartes, and Hobbes have to do with the West’s view of nature? How do Bruno, Montaigne, and Spinoza offer alternative visions? What is “the Great Chain of Being” and what is its relationship to the notion of nature as life’s greatest teacher?

Week Ten-

Student project presentations. Read (1) **Primitivism and the Noble Savage and Changing Sensibilities;** (2) **The Romantic Mind.**

Discussion of the creation of the noble savage, the correlative views of nature, and its role in initiating Romanticism. Who were the dissident voices of the Enlightenment, and how could *Gulliver’s Travels* relay one of them? What do Diderot, Rousseau, and the 1892 *Animal Rights* book say about wilderness? What is the Romantic Mind, and how did Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge help construct it?

Week Eleven-

Student project presentations. Read (1) **Romantic Cosmology and Utopian Seers;** (2) **Darwinism and the Web of Life and The New World of Ecology.**

Discussion of Romantic science and spirituality, German idealism, Socialism, Evolution, and the rise of ecology. What is Romantic cosmology, and how do Goethe, Shelley, and Hegel serve as its harbingers? What is the legacy of the Enlightenment-Romanticism dialogue? Who are the “prophets” of utopia, and how do they counteract industrialism? What influence do Marx and Darwin have on ecological theory? What will be the spiritual ramifications of evolutionary theories? What is “ecological thinking” and how is it represented in systems theory?

Week Twelve-

Student project presentations. Read (1) **Philosophers of the Earth and Time and Being;** (2) **The Cosmic Joy of the New Science and The Resurrection of Gaia.**

Discussion of early environmentalists, organic philosophy, the new physics, and Gaia theory. How did Muir, Schweitzer, Leopold, and Carson initiate the philosophical ideas and issues that founded environmentalism? What do the theories of Whitehead, Bergson, and Heidegger reveal about nature, cosmology, and the divine? What impact do theories of relativity, quantum mechanics, and chaos have on our understanding of nature? What is creative evolution and how does it relate to Gaia theory?

Week Thirteen-

Student project presentations. Read (1) **Environmental Ethics and Deep Ecology versus Social Ecology;** (2) **Towards a Libertarian Ecology and Ecotopia Revisited.**

Discussion of the ecumenical dimensions of ecological ideas and sensibilities. What are the philosophical underpinnings of environmentalism, and how are they furthered by ecofeminism, deep ecology, social ecology, and ecopsychology? What

constitutes Libertarian ecology? Could a reverence of life and sustainable environmental relations help heal our alienation from nature and guide future human endeavor?

Week Fourteen-

Student paper presentations.

Week Fifteen-

Student paper presentations. **Review.**
Exam. Paper due.

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Academic Honesty: The University of West Florida believes that academic honesty is a key to the learning process. You are expected to be ethically responsible and to uphold appropriate standards of behavior and to respect the rights and privileges of others. Student academic conduct must be lawful and in accordance with all federal, state, and local laws, and with all university regulations.

Plagiarism Policy. The UWF Student Handbook, Code of Student Conduct, Academic Misconduct, states: "Plagiarism. The act of representing the ideas, words, creations or work of another as one's own." Plagiarism combines theft with fraud, and the penalty is correspondingly severe: failure for the assignment and, in some cases, for the entire course. At the instructor's discretion, she/he may recommend that the student be suspended from the university. Ignorance of the rules about plagiarism is no excuse for it, and carelessness is just as bad as purposeful violation. Students who have plagiarized have cheated themselves out of the experience of being responsible members of the academic community and have cheated their classmates by pretending to contribute original ideas. (For complete information regarding Academic Misconduct, refer to the UWF Student Handbook or contact Student Affairs in Building 21, 474-2384. If you have any questions about the University and its policies, please refer to the student handbook at: <http://www.uwf.edu/uwfmain/stuhandbk/>

Students with Special Needs: If you have special needs and require specific other course-related accommodations, you should contact Barbara Fitzpatrick, Director of Disabled Student Services (DSS), dss@uwf.edu, (850) 474-2387. DSS will provide you with a letter for the instructor that will specify any recommended accommodations.

Extenuating Circumstances: The schedule, requirements, and procedures in this course are subject to change in the event of unusual or extenuating circumstances; in such cases, students will be provided with written notice sufficient to plan for and accommodate the changes. If the college closes for inclement weather or other emergency, any exams, presentations or projects or papers due during the closure period will automatically be rescheduled for the first regular class meeting held once the college re-opens.