

Varieties of Religious Naturalism

Wesley J. Wildman — Boston University — Spring 2012 — STH TT861/TT961

Course Description

The aim of this course is learn about varieties of religious naturalism and how they have been, and can be, incorporated into philosophical and theological reflection. The seminar will read a variety of works in contemporary religious naturalism, from twentieth-century classics to current contributions, and from theoretical analyses of the meaning of naturalism to surveys attempting to map out the territory of plausible viewpoints. We will also track the close relationship between religious naturalism and both ecologically-rooted forms of spirituality and nature-centered forms of mysticism.

The class is intended for advanced masters students and doctoral candidates interested in contemporary forms of philosophical and theological reflection on nature and God, and in forms of spirituality rooted in the natural world. Students registered at the 900-level have readings and a bibliographic task to complete over and above the obligations of students registered at the 800-level. Classes will meet once a week on Wednesdays from 8:00 to 11:00 in STH 319. Each class will be conducted in the seminar discussion format with lectures given by the instructor as needed or requested. The 800-level version of this course counts (1) as an MTS Core Concentration course for Science and Religion, for Theology, and for Area B; and (2) as an MDiv Theology 3 Core Elective. It may also count (3) as a requirement for a BTI Certificate program in science and religion.

The main product of the course will be a research paper on some aspect of the course material, topic to be approved in advance by the instructor (50%; 3,000 words for 800-level students, 5,000 words for 900-level students). There will also be several 1,500-word reviews of books and articles presented in class, brief reviews of excerpts from Gottlieb (2004) or other sources, short analyses of usages of the terms “naturalism” and “religious naturalism” suitable for web posting, and annotation of links to relevant web sites, all to appear on a public website for the class (30%). The remainder of the grade (20%) will be based on the quality of seminar participation, including attendance, timeliness, and discussion. Incompletes are not allowed—except when they are; paperwork is necessary. Plagiarism is not allowed—ever. Know the rules.

In addition to the public website, the class will have a private website at blackboard.bu.edu. This site will contain announcements, a discussion board, and places to claim assignments to avoid overlap with other students.

Short Description

The aim of this seminar is learn about varieties of religious naturalism and how they have been, and can be, incorporated into philosophical and theological reflection. The seminar will read a variety of works in contemporary religious naturalism, from twentieth-century classics to current contributions, and from theoretical analyses of the meaning of naturalism to surveys attempting to map out the territory of plausible viewpoints. We will also track the close relationship between religious naturalism and both ecologically-rooted forms of spirituality and nature-centered forms of mysticism.

Learning Goals

By the end of this class, students should:

- understand the variety of religious naturalisms along with their characteristic strengths and weakness,
- understand how religious naturalism connects to the history of philosophy and theology, especially in western intellectual culture but also in other philosophical and religious traditions, and
- be able to express their own theological and philosophical outlook more clearly in relation to the variety of religious naturalisms.

Special Considerations

The STH Academic Code of Conduct may be found on the STH website at: www.bu.edu/sth/academic/academic-conduct. All students are required to familiarize themselves with this code, its definitions of misconduct, and its sanctions. Students should especially familiarize themselves with the section on plagiarism.

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Students with Disabilities—Any students who believe they have a disability should meet with BU Disability Services as soon as possible at the beginning of the semester to initiate disability verification and discuss accommodations that may be necessary to ensure your successful completion of course requirements. That office is at 19 Deerfield Street and can be contacted at 617-353-3658. Request for accommodations are then sent by that office to the Academic Dean who forwards them to the Instructor.

Students taking the course for doctoral credit are required to do all work at a doctoral level. In addition, students should submit one review of a recent book related to the course content for publication in an appropriate journal. The length should be between 500-1000 words.

Required Books (800-level and 900-level)

- Berry, Thomas. *The Great Work* (Three Rivers Press, 1999; 978-0609804995)
- Clark, Thomas W. *Encountering Naturalism: A Worldview and Its Uses* (Center for Naturalism, 2007; 978-0979111105)
- Crosby, Donald A. *A Religion of Nature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002; 978-0791454541).
- Goodenough, Ursula *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998; 978-0195136296)
- Gottlieb, Roger S. *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, 2nd ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 2004; 978-0415943604)
- Griffin, David Ray. *Two Great Truths: A New Synthesis of Scientific Naturalism and Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004; 978-0664227739)
- Hogue, Michael S. *The Promise of Religious Naturalism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010; 978-0742562615)
- Johnston, Mark. *Saving God: Religion After Idolatry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009; 978-0691143941)
- Peacocke, Arthur. *All That Is: A Naturalistic Faith for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Philip Clayton (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2007; 978-0800662271).
- Peters, Karl E. *Dancing with the Sacred: Evolution, Ecology, and God* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002; 978-1563383939).
- Raymo, Chet. *When God is Gone, Everything is Holy: The Making of a Religious Naturalist* (Sorin Books, 2008; 978-1933495132)
- Ritchie, Jack. *Understanding Naturalism* (Durham, U.K.: Acumen Publishing, 2009; 978-1844650798).
- Stone, Jerome A. *Religious Naturalism Today: The Rebirth of a Forgotten Alternative* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008; 978-0791475386)
- Whitehead, Alfred North. *Religion in the Making* (Fordham University Press, 1996; 978-0823216468).

Required Books (900-level only)

- Cohen, Jack Joseph. *The Case for Religious Naturalism: A Philosophy for the Modern Jew* (Jenkintown, PA: Reconstructionist Press, 1958)
- Corrington, Robert S. *Ecstatic Naturalism: Signs of the World* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994; 978-0253314413)
- De Caro, Mario; Macarthur, David (eds). *Naturalism in Question* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008; 978-0674030411).
- Peden, W. Creighton, ed. *New Essays in Religious Naturalism* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1994; 978-0865544260)
- Shook, John R.; Kurts, Paul (eds.). *The Future of Naturalism* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2009; 978-1591027317).

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Recommended Books for Further Reading

- Beilby, James K. (ed.). *Naturalism Defeated? Essays on Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism* (Cornell University Press, 2002; 978-0801487637)
- Berry, Thomas. *The Sacred Universe; Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009; 978-0231149525)
- Buchler, Justus. *Metaphysics of Natural Complexes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008; 978-0791401835)
- Craig, William Lane; Moreland, J. P.; eds. *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2000; 978-0415235242)
- Crosby, Donald A. *Living with Ambiguity: Religious Naturalism and the Menace of Evil* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008; 978-0791475201).
- Dewey, John. *A Common Faith*, 4th ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934; 978-0300000696)
- Eddy, Beth. *The Rites of Identity: The Religious Naturalism and Cultural Criticism of Kenneth Burke and Ralph Ellison* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003; 978-0691092492)
- Goetz, Stewart; Taliaferro, Charles. *Naturalism* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008; 978-0802807687) — against naturalism in the sense of materialism, not religious naturalism
- Habermas, Jürgen. *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays* (Polity, 2008; 978-0745638256)
- Hardwick, Charley D. *Events of Grace: Naturalism, Existentialism, and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; 978-0521088053)
- Kahn, Jonathan S. *The Divine Discontent: The Religious Imagination of W. E. B. Du Bois* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009; 978-0195307894)
- Murry, William R. *Reason and Reverence: Religious Humanism for the 21st Century* (Boston, MA: Skinner House Books; 978-1558965188)
- Nielson, Kai. *Naturalism and Religion* (Prometheus Books, 2001; 978-1573928533)
- Rea, Michael C. *World Without Design: The Ontological Consequences of Naturalism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; 978-0199247615; available to BU students at [Oxford Scholarship Online: Philosophy Collection](#)).
- Reich, Lou. *Hume's Religious Naturalism* (University Press of America, 1998; 978-0761809821)
- Rue, Loyal D. *Religion Is Not About God: How Spiritual Traditions Nurture our Biological Nature and What to Expect When They Fail* (Rutgers University Press, 2004; 978-0813539553)
- Santayana, George. *The Essential Santayana; Selected Writings*, ed. by Martin Coleman (Indiana University Press, 2009; 978-0253221056).
- White, Carol Wayne. *The Legacy of Anne Conway (1631-1679): Reverberations from a Mystical Naturalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008; 978-0791474662)
- Wildman, Wesley J. *Science and Religious Anthropology: A Spiritually Evocative Naturalist Interpretation of Human Life* (Ashgate Publishing, 2009; 978-0754665953)

Seminar Schedule

Introduction

Week 1 Naturalism, Religious Naturalism, and Ecological Spirituality

- > **Required Reading for ALL:** Raymo; read it after class if you can't get to it before class; all other readings in this course should be read prior to class.
- > **Task for ALL:** Read three diverse selections from Gottlieb 2004. Write a two-paragraph review of each selection. The first paragraph should be a summary of the piece. The second should be a personal response. Don't worry about overlaps with other students; the more the merrier for this exercise. *Voice:* For each review, the summary should be impartial and brief. The response can be as wild and colorful as you like; nothing conforming to basic rules of public decency is

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out of bounds. Target the review to curious students like yourself. Be yourself. Writing quality matters. *Deadline:* via email to the instructor by 11:59pm Friday after class.

- > **Task for ALL:** Find one online source about naturalism (not necessarily religious naturalism; that will be for next week). Rate (out of 1, 1.5, 2, 2.5, 3, 3.5, or 4 stars) and write a 100-word review of the site. Confine the scope of your review to the usefulness of the site for understanding religious forms of naturalism. Reserve your review site using the class website's discussion board designated for that purpose. *Voice:* Aim the review for web browsers like yourself. The review should be formal, fair, and helpful. Writing quality matters. *Deadline:* via email to the instructor by 11:59pm Sunday after class.

Part 1: Mapping the Territory—Without Mistaking Map for Territory

Week 2 Map #1

- > **Required Reading for ALL:** Stone.
- > **Required Reading for TT956 only:** Corrington, Introduction and ch 1.
- > **Task for ALL:** Read three more diverse selections from Gottlieb 2004 (that makes 6 so far). Write a two-paragraph review of each selection, as described above. *Deadline:* via email to the instructor by 11:59pm Tuesday *before* the next class.
- > **Task for ALL:** Find one online source about specifically religious naturalism. Rate and review as described above. To avoid duplication, reserve your review site using the class website's discussion board designated for that purpose. *Deadline:* via email to the instructor by 11:59pm Tuesday *before* the next class.

Week 3 Map #2

- > **Required Reading for ALL:** Ritchie.
- > **Required Reading for TT956 only:** Corrington, ch. 2.
- > **Task for ALL:** Read three more diverse selections from Gottlieb 2004 (that makes 9 so far). Write a two-paragraph review of each selection, as described above. *Deadline:* via email to the instructor by 11:59pm Tuesday *before* the next class.

Week 4 Map #3

- > **Required Reading for ALL:** Clark.
- > **Required Reading for TT956:** Corrington, ch. 3-4.

Part 2: Philosophical Dimensions of Religious Naturalism

Week 5 Whiteheadian Naturalism

- > **Required Reading for ALL:** Whitehead.
- > **Required Reading for TT956:** Four chapters of your choice from De Caro.

Week 6 Hartshornian Naturalism

- > **Required Reading for ALL:** Griffin.
- > **Required Reading for TT956:** Four more chapters of your choice from De Caro.

Week 7 Religion of Nature

- > **Required Reading for ALL:** Crosby.
- > **Required Reading for TT956:** Peden.

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Part 3: Theological Dimensions of Religious Naturalism

Week 8 *Naturalism and the Abrahamic Faiths*

- > [Required Reading for ALL](#): Johnston.
- > [Required Reading for TT956](#): Cohen (out of print so you'll have to track it down)

Week 9 *No Class: Spring Recess*

Week 10 *Naturalism and Christianity*

- > [Required Reading for ALL](#): Peacocke.
- > [Required Reading for TT956](#): Shook & Kurtz.

Part 4: Ecological and Spiritual Dimensions of Religious Naturalism

Week 11 *Naturalism, Spirituality, and Evolution*

- > [Required Reading for ALL](#): Peters.
- > [Required Reading for TT956](#): Four chapters of your choice from Peden.

Week 12 *Naturalism, Spirituality, and Ecotheological Responsibility, I*

- > [Required Reading for ALL](#): Hogue.
- > [Required Reading for TT956](#): Four chapters of your choice from Peden.

Week 13 *Naturalism, Spirituality, and Ecotheological Responsibility, II*

- > Visiting Professor: Dr. Mike Hogue
- > [Required Reading for ALL](#): Reread Hogue.
- > [Required Reading for TT956](#): none.

Week 14 *Naturalism, Spirituality, and the Depths of Nature*

- > [Required Reading for ALL](#): Goodenough.
- > [Required Reading for TT956](#): none.

Week 15 *Naturalism, Spirituality, and the Future of Life on Earth*

- > [Required Reading for ALL](#): Berry.
- > [Required Reading for TT956](#): none.

Conclusion

Week 16 *Naturalism and Religious Naturalism, Spirituality and Ecology*

- > [Required Reading for ALL](#): none.
- > [Required Reading for TT956](#): none.
- > **Task for ALL**: Submit essay on a topic approved by instructor. *Deadline*: via email to instructor before class.