ENV 1008H S
Worldviews and Ecology
The University of Toronto
School of the Environment

Instructor: Simon Appolloni, PhD
Time: Thursdays 2-4 p.m.
Location: Room ES 1042, 5 Bancroft Avenue
Office: Earth Sciences Building, room 2104

Course Description and Rationale

Our modern industrial civilization, while having yielded many benefits for human kind, has also brought about the acidification of oceans, the destruction of countless forests, the loss of fresh water, the degradation of soils, and the pollution of the atmosphere. Humans have brought about the sixth major extinction in Earth’s history and the alteration of our very climate. It is not an exaggeration to state, what many environmental thinkers and scientists have been saying for some time now, that humans have become a geological force. Scientists are referring to the current geological era as the “Anthropocene” to stress the extent to which anthropogenic pressures upon Earth systems are producing disastrous planetary environmental change. Our modern industrial civilization was born out of a set of worldviews that view nature as an adversary to be overcome and resources as existing only for the benefit of humans.

A worldview could be described as a “culturally constructed way in which one sees the world and one’s place in it” (Foltz, 2003). In this manner a person’s model of reality, her beliefs, assumptions and values about what matters – whether she is aware of them or not – will assuredly influence the way she might perceive the world and its problems. There is, then, a strong connection among worldviews, religion and ecology, a topic which, while perplexing for many, has been of growing academic and pragmatic concern in recent years. What is becoming increasingly apparent is that when differences in worldviews are not taken into account, misunderstandings arise.

When it comes to fostering an environmentally sustainable and socially just society, questions arise: are all worldviews equal? Can the prevailing neoliberal economic model of reality ever become conducive to fostering such a goal, or is it intrinsically part of the problem? Should our goal be to pursue one homogenous global worldview? Or should we entertain and welcome a plurality of worldviews, some that have existed yet have been suppressed for some time?

In small group discussions, through critical questioning, and sharing of ideas on readings and videos, and through visits to various places in Toronto, and from
discussions with visitors, this course will allow the student to understand the place and importance of studying worldviews in ecological thinking, a task that includes being able to articulate her/his own worldview.

**Evaluation**

- Attendance & Participation 15%
- Book review presentation 20%
- 5 two-page written reflections 25%
- Research paper 40%

**Class attendance and participation (15%)**

It is essential for the success of this course that students attend class regularly and participate in class discussions. (All of us are part of this learning process!) Each student will kick off a discussion of the readings at least once.

**Book review presentation (20%)**

Each student will choose a book from the bibliography below (those highlighted in bold), and, at a date agreed upon mutually by the student and instructor, will present the book report at the beginning of a class (30 minutes).

**5 two-page written reflections (25%)**

After each of the four sections, students will hand in a two-paged (double-spaced) written reflection that addresses issues or themes covered in one or two of the readings in that section. Students will identify the issue or theme, how it is connected to the author(s)' article, and pose one fully developed critical question based on the theme or issue. Please note that the question section of the assignment is not a "questions for discussion" item. Rather, these are fully developed, probing, critical questions directed at the issue or theme. The last, fifth reflection, due at the end of the term, is the same length. Only this time, the student will identify and reflect upon what is her/his own worldview.

**The research paper (40%)**

The research paper must address an environmental issue from a worldview/religious perspective. Students will get a flavor of such perspectives and potential topics from the course subject matter and readings. It is imperative, however, that by late February each student clears his/her paper topic with the instructor by presenting a one-page assignment with the proposed title, thesis statement, and preliminary bibliography. This will afford an opportunity to discuss pertinent readings, format, and any problems that may be surfacing with the assignment.

The paper, 8-10 pages double-spaced (6-8 pages for 4th-year undergrad), typewritten, must include a "thesis statement," and argue that "thesis" or particular perspective in a clear and comprehensive fashion. In other words, the assignment
requires not merely a description of a particular environmental issue, but rather a constructed argument based on the students' critical reflection upon collected data, and creative grappling with the religious, theological or ethical issues involved. Additional guidelines and expectations for the paper will be provided in class. Late papers, without a legitimate excuse, will be returned without comments, and a late penalty assigned.

**Introduction**

**Week 1 (Jan. 14)**

Readings


**Ontology**

**Week 2 (Jan. 21)**

Readings


**Week 3 (Jan. 28)**

Readings


**Week 4 (Feb. 4)*class video to watch***

Readings


Ethics

Week 5 (Feb. 11)
Readings


Reading Week (Feb. 15-19); no classes

Week 6 (Feb. 25)
Readings


Anthropology

Week 7 (Mar. 3) *trip to St. Gabriel’s Parish*
Readings


Week 8 (Mar. 10)
Readings


Week 9 (Mar. 17)
Readings

**Epistemology**

**Week 10 (Mar. 24) *Possible Trip in Toronto’s downtown***

Readings


**Week 11 (Mar. 31) *Jonah kick’s off discussion***

Readings


**Week 12 (Apr. 7)**

Readings


**Websites**

Earth Charter Initiative: [http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/](http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/)

**Extra readings**


