The climate crisis is widely seen as the most difficult collective action problem humankind has ever faced. The enormity of the problem, and the magnitude of the changes human society will endure to combat it, are almost unimaginable.

It’s no wonder that the issue stirs up controversy, as it touches on the deepest beliefs and commitments people have -- about their world, their place in the world, their responsibility for the problems the world faces, and solutions to those problems.
Fundamental values and aspects of culture, including religious beliefs and worldviews, inform our understanding of the problems and shape our capacity and willingness to respond. Even the term “climate crisis,” now preferred by environmental activists, is controversial. “Global warming” and “climate change” are increasingly seen as too staid and unemotionally engaging. More accurate – and more motivating – are terms like “environmental destruction” and “climate crisis.” This semester we’ll use all these terms to try to capture the nuance in how the issue is debated.

This course is an introduction to the complex interaction between religion (God), environmental and especially climate science (Gaia), and politics and policy (Government). Religious beliefs are the most fundamental of human society’s value systems: they influence our ideas of where we came from, why we exist, what is right and wrong, what is virtuous and what is evil. They even shape our social and economic systems in powerful ways: Max Weber famously attributed the rise of capitalism and its associated social, economic and political structures and behaviors, to Protestant religious beliefs, in his still-relevant Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.

And religion shapes our responses to the environment as well, and especially in the case of climate change. During the course, we will assess the relationship of various religions, and particularly Christianity, in climate change politics and policy. This approach is a bit unconventional, though by no means any longer novel: there is a robust debate about religion and ecology, nature, the environment that we’ll draw on in the course. Questions the course will address include:

- What is the role of religion in influencing our beliefs about environment and nature?
- How do differing cosmologies interpret the scientific understanding of climate and environmental change?
- How do religious beliefs affect their adherents’ responses to climate change as a problem?
- What ethical or spiritual challenges does climate change present?
- Does religion provide guidance to faith communities, and the wider public, about how to respond?
- Can, or does, the faith community serve as a catalyst for a social movement to combat climate change?

Learning outcomes

By the end of the semester students will be able to:

- Identify important elements of climate science and climate change;
- Explain relevant policy controversies;
- Identify the core aspects of the major religious beliefs relating to nature and the environment;
- Identify and use key concepts relevant to climate communications and social movements.

The course teaches students pertinent approaches to the study of climate and environmental politics and policy, through the lens of ethics and religious belief. By the end of the course, students will be well positioned to pursue further work on environmental and climate change policy in any context.

Books

These books are on order at the bookstore. I strongly encourage you to check used book websites, such as http://www.alibris.com before buying new copies. They can often be found for a fraction of the cost.

The two free U.S. Government documents below are not available at the GMU Bookstore. Order hardcopies directly from USGCRP, at https://www.globalchange.gov/browse/reports, by clicking on “View or request a free copy” each of volumes I and II. Electronic versions can be downloaded at these URLs.


Requirements, grades and examinations

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<thead>
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<th>Requirement</th>
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<tr>
<td>Blackboard postings</td>
<td>15 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation in class discussions</td>
<td>15 percent</td>
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<td>Assignment 1</td>
<td>10 percent</td>
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<td>Final exam</td>
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Writing intensive course requirements

The Faculty Senate Writing Across the Curriculum Committee has approved this course to fulfill all/in part of the Writing Intensive requirement in political science major.

Readings

Readings without URLs in the syllabus are available on Blackboard or through the Library’s journal databases. Book chapters scans are on Blackboard, while journal articles can be accessed using the Library’s search page: https://library.gmu.edu/

Assignments

The major writing assignments are designed to explore our three topics, climate change and environment, religion and politics. Detailed guidance will be distributed in class.

1. Assignment 1 is a summary of what is known about climate change risks in a specific part of the United States. You will be assigned a specific location at the beginning of the semester.

   You will use the 2018 U.S. National Climate Assessment, Climate Central’s “States at Risk” study, state and local university climate studies, and other local sources to develop a description of climate trends in the area and associated climate risks.

   These risks include drought, flooding, excessive heat, wildfires, extreme weather events, sea-level rise, effects on agriculture, transportation, health, and the like.
A research memo of 2,500 words and at least four data graphics summarizing your findings is required.

2. Assignment 2 – an extension of Assignment 1 -- is to research, through literature and interviews, your location’s religious communities’ conceptions of science, nature and climate change. This assignment is focused on how religious communities see the problem of climate and environmental change.

Along with the information you developed in the first assignment, supplemented by GMU and Yale climate communications opinion research, and informed by our class work on religion and nature, you will interview the leaders of three predominant religious organizations in the area.

The goal is to get insight in the community’s environmental ethics and climate change attitudes. What do people think about their responsibilities, if any, to protecting or preserving nature/land/water/air/climate? What trade-offs or mitigating factors play a role in their thinking?

A research memo of 2,500 words summarizing your findings is required.

3. Assignment 3 – an extension of the first two assignments -- is to develop an action strategy on climate change from a religious community perspective. The assignment deliverable is a 2,500-word memo outlining an action strategy and its rationale and reflecting on how religious faith interacts with
   a. a) attitudes about science and nature, and
   b. b) about political action to respond to climate and environmental challenges.

What do people believe about climate change and God? What role do ethics and religion play in informing motivations to act – or not act?

Blackboard posting, presentations, précis and class discussion

We will use the public Discussion Boards on Blackboard to jumpstart class discussions. Comments and critiques online will give you time to consider what your classmates have to say about the readings, help us focus on core issues more quickly, and provide a shared resource to prepare for exams.

Comments must be posted no later than midnight the day before class. Postings should be 250 words minimum, in which you:
   1. Summarize the main ideas about the reading for the session.
   2. Raise issues or problems you see with the arguments: this is essential.
   3. Connect the readings with earlier sessions, helping synthesize the material.

These postings will be the basis of your Blackboard posting grade: thoughtful postings will be highly valued, superficial postings will be seen as inadequate.

You should respond to comments on forum threads, and you are encouraged to respond to earlier posts in the thread. The main idea is to add to the discussion, so staying on topic is essential.

Late postings: I give no credit for late postings, no exceptions.
No laptops or mobile phones in class

Laptops and mobile phones are not welcome in class. The only exception to this policy is if you have permission from the Office of Disability Services. Despite our heavy reliance on them, electronic devices turn out to be detrimental to learning in classrooms for two reasons:

1. Devices impede knowledge acquisition by turning note-taking into unreflective information transcription rather than concept synthesis.
2. “Always connected” devices divert attention whenever they ping or buzz, regardless of our best efforts to ignore them.

*The bottom line:* When devices are present grades are lower by a full point for every person in the class, not just their owners. Here are links to the research:

Nield, David, “Even Just the presence of a phone or laptop in class can push down grades, study finds,” July 28, 2018, https://www.sciencealert.com/phones-in-lectures-can-hurt-grades-even-when-not-used

Essential news and information sources

You are **required** to subscribe to the following news service; the other sources will be useful for the writing assignments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside Climate News</th>
<th>Sign up for e-mail newsletter:</th>
<th><a href="https://insideclimatenews.org/">https://insideclimatenews.org/</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Real Climate: rich resource by climate scientists</td>
<td><a href="http://www.realclimate.org">http://www.realclimate.org</a></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate Central: journalist-, public-friendly resource, strong on charts and visual data</td>
<td><a href="http://www.climatecentral.org/">http://www.climatecentral.org/</a></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Skeptical Science: resource for opponents of climate skeptics</td>
<td><a href="http://www.skepticalscience.com/">http://www.skepticalscience.com/</a></td>
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**SYLLABUS**

**First class: Session 1:** Introduction to the course: what does religion have to do with the politics of climate change?

We’ll set the stage for this course with a brief encounter with some provocative statements about the problems the world faces: the challenge of climate change. We’ll also watch (before class) several recent popular media presentations that raise questions about climate change and energy in easily accessible ways.

**Required for the first class:**

1. **Films:** Watch these films before classes begin:

   *Years of Living Dangerously* (2014 - ) http://yearsoflivingdangerously.com/watch-years/

   Of historical interest:
   *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), many streaming services

**2. Climate primers:** If you are **really** unfamiliar with the main issues surrounding climate change, one of these introductions is for you. Otherwise optional.

*Global Weirding with Katherine Hayhoe*, YouTube playlist (watch in reverse order: last video on playlist was produced first), [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCi6RkdaEgqRVKi3AzidF4ow](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCi6RkdaEgqRVKi3AzidF4ow)


**3. Readings:** Read each of these – the order given is best – and use them to formulate your responses in Blackboard postings. **Postings are due 24 hours before class.**


**4. Questions for Blackboard discussion:**

In both his film and his article in *Rolling Stone* McKibben says if the planet is to avoid a climate catastrophe, societies need to keep in the ground a large quantity of already-discovered fossil fuels. In other writing he has argued that humankind has irrevocably changed Earth, that our traditional reliance on economic growth is a source of our environmental problems, and that we need new ways to think about the place of humans on it.

Subramanian’s series of articles from *Inside Climate News* shows how in some areas a traditional understanding of weather conflicts with scientific explanations. This article on how some rural West Virginians interpret natural disasters highlights the challenges of finding common ground on the issue, a prerequisite for more effective response.

The “Climate change: Faith and fact,” interview on the *Moyers and Company* video looks at how Christian evangelical leaders and scientists are divided separating them over matters of climate change and faith. Katherine Hayhoe is both a climate scientist and an evangelical Christian. She is engaged in trying to convince her co-religionists that climate change is real, yet at the same time is not against the fundamental values of her religious faith.

Finally, as we begin our work together, we have to recognize that since the election of 2016, the country has been riven by political conflict, on many fronts, not least of which concerns environment and climate matters. How we engage with others with whom we profoundly disagree is of utmost importance if democratic norms are to be preserved, and important public problems are to be solved, if not in the immediate present, then in the near future.

1. What are McKibben’s conclusions about climate change and human involvement? Does he make a persuasive case? Why or why not? What, in your opinion, will it take to achieve the goals McKibben lays out?

2. What divides climate scientists and conservative religious groups? Is it skepticism about science? Or reluctance to accept specific explanations of the problem?
3. What aspects of the stories from West Virginia and the interview with the evangelical climate scientist did you find most interesting? Most surprising?

Session 2: Religion and ecology: God, man and nature

What role does religion play in our understanding of the relationship between humans and nature? This session introduces a major historical argument by medieval historian Lynn White: that Christianity is a cause of our current “ecological crisis.” This claim was controversial at the time it was made in the mid-1960s, and it spawned a huge debate across the religious world.

Berry gives us a very different perspective on religion and nature, while Roser-Renouf and company provide an overview of how American religious communities see climate change.

Questions for Blackboard discussion: What is White’s thesis, and what evidence does he provide to support it? In what ways could Christianity – and modernity more generally – be a threat to Nature? What does Berry think is required of us if we are to avoid ecological destruction? What does it mean that some religious groups seeing global warming as a harbinger of “end times”?


Session 3: Taking science seriously and religiously

Science and religion have had a complicated relationship throughout history. Matters of science and matters of faith have often been seen as separate realms, requiring people to choose between different ways of apprehending and interpreting humans’ existence in the world. Barbour’s work is essential in charting the ways and whys science and religion relate to one another. It is one of the most important pieces we’ll read this term. The Journey of the Universe film gives a dramatic interpretation of science as deeply connected to religious ideas – it’s quite a story that may challenge your ideas about life in the universe. It represents an optimistic view of how science and religion complement one another. The Pew study provides additional insight in the religious landscape in the United States. It should be read with the global warming “end times” study from the previous session.

Questions for Blackboard discussion: What are the four main ways in which science and religion interact, according to Barbour? Is an either/or choice between them required? How might they be reconciled? Where would Journey of the Universe fit in Barbour’s framework? Who in America, according to the Pew study, would fit into which major group?


Session 4: Human impacts on the environment and climate

Historically, Nature has been far more vast and powerful than humankind. But humans may be now considered on a par with previous geological signatures. The term “Anthropocene” has been coined to capture these human effects.

Do humans really have such an effect on the Earth that a new geologic age is needed? Steffen and his colleagues provide alarming evidence for the claim, and Wallace-Wells gives us a worst-case scenario of what climate may have in store. Finally, let’s put all this into a local context: the short video by Horton shows him revisiting his boyhood hometown to see how it has been affected by climate change.

Questions for Blackboard discussion: What is the evidence for the Anthropocene? Is the apocalyptic scenario of Wallace-Wells convincing? Horton makes a different kind of argument about the effects of humans, in this case on the Chesapeake Bay—is it persuasive?


Assignment: Browse Global Footprint Network, https://www.footprintnetwork.org/ and view the video. Calculate your or your family’s footprint, and bring the results to class: http://www.rprogress.org

Session 5: The scientific consensus about climate change: Ridiculous, tragic, short

We have until 2030 to cut carbon emissions by nearly half. The science of climate change is certain: global warming is occurring, its effects are evident, humans are the cause, and time is ridiculously, tragically short if the worst effects are to be avoided. It isn’t a pretty picture.

This session will look at findings of National Climate Assessment, the most recent scientific big picture of climate change, what those findings mean for people and places. This blockbuster report will influence public debate on climate change for the next decade. To make sure you are familiar with climate basics, review the web video series by Katherine Hayhoe. The news reports listed below help give context to the report.

Questions for Blackboard discussion: What are the major climate messages of the National Climate Assessment? What accounts for the sense of alarm and urgency advocates feel about climate change? Looking at your assigned community, what are the principal climate risks it faces, according to the regional assessments in the full report (available at: https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/downloads/NCA4_2018_FullReport.pdf) Use provided template to report summary findings: this will form a part of Assignment #1.

Session 6: Climate science in the policy process

Science is about understanding how the universe (Nature) works, using processes of experimentation and theory-testing to produce solid knowledge. Politics and policy are about forging authoritative agreements about what people (individually) and society (collectively) should and shouldn’t do. Between them there is much scope for cooperation, but also for friction. Hulme helps us understand how science works in situations where scientific expertise and decision-making are both required, such as curbing greenhouse gas emissions or protecting wilderness.

Questions for Blackboard discussion: How has the role of science in society changed over time? How do “systems uncertainties” and “decision stakes” affect the authority of science? What is “post-normal” science, and how does it affect the way science is viewed and used in policy? And how does the climate of science today relate to controversies about climate change?


Session 7: Climate policies: the economics of climate change

The economics of an issue are often what dictates whether and how policy is formulated to respond. Conventionally, climate change is seen as waaay too costly to address in the short-term, and so action has been delayed. Yet much of the problem of climate change is due to how economies are set up and function. Speth finds capitalism itself is the culprit in environmental and climate challenges. Hulme outlines why differences in the way people value things lead to differences in how they respond to climate issues.

Our legal conventions powerfully shape our ability to behave morally. The Corporation film describes the moral dilemma business leaders face when confronted with environmental and moral imperatives due to the legal form of industrial companies, via the role of economic externalities. Roberts highlights a neglected aspect of economic costs of climate change: subsidies for carbon-based fuels, leading to an uneven playing field for more benign energy sources.

Questions for Blackboard discussion: While capitalism is a powerful force in society for creating economic prosperity for many, it has serious problems, according to Speth. What are they? What are the principal ways people can disagree about the economic aspects of climate change? What is it about corporate capitalism (the dominant variant, though not the only one) that causes such environmental harm? Could we have a less harmful capitalism? What might it look like?

Click links for clips we will specifically discuss, but you are welcome to watch the whole film: Externalizing Machines (18:10)
Environmental Dilemmas (3:03)
Spear to the Chest (2:52)


Session 8: Risk perceptions and skepticism ...

Everyone thinks about risks in different ways. Hulme surveys scholarship on risk perception to understand why reasonable people can disagree about climate change, despite the scientific consensus that it is a serious and urgent problem. The *Six Americas* and the *Climate Opinion* projects provide details on public attitudes about climate risk, while *States At Risk* shows what risks are most prevalent state-by-state, and how well -- or poorly -- states are to respond to them.

**Questions for Blackboard discussion:** In each of the studies below, take note of the attitudes and risks for your community, as near as you are able. This information will be useful in your writing assignment. Based on it, what can you say about the “cultures of risk” that Hulme describes? From what you see in your data, explain how Douglas’ and Wildavsky’s ways of life either do or do not make sense.


Climate Central, *States at Risk*, http://statesatrisk.org/

Session 9: ... and the organized politics of denial

Organized climate denial has dogged climate policy for decades. Extending the discussion from the previous session, we’ll examine the roots of climate denial, and ask whether it is based on honest skepticism, or something more political. Oreskes has been at the forefront of research on this phenomenon. It is a remarkable story.

**Questions for Blackboard discussion:** Choose one of the top 10 “climate myths” on the website Skeptical Science. Discuss it on Blackboard, and prepare a short presentation to present to the class: http://www.skepticalscience.com/


Session 10: Climate change, responsibility and ethics I

Given the stakes of climate change for Earth and its people, action to prevent or moderate it takes on an urgent moral dimension. Yet arguments about responsibility and action seem muddied, and inaction results. Garvey aims to clarify the moral claims about climate change in clear and compelling language.
Questions for Blackboard discussion: What is the case for humankind taking responsibility? And what are the arguments that doing nothing is moral? Do you find them convincing? Why or why not?


Session 11: Climate change, responsibility and ethics II

Continuing the discussion from last session: Maniates takes on the question of whether individual actions, like planting a tree, changing a lightbulb, or taking shorter showers, are enough “to save the world,” while Garvey asserts that we are all on the hook to do something and to do it now. We hear such arguments often, despite widespread agreement that climate change is a collective action problem.

Questions for Blackboard discussion: What is a collective action problem? What do Garvey, Maniates, Jensen argue should be done? Are those arguments convincing? Sufficient? What is the case for people collectively to do something about climate change? How is that different from getting involved in politics?


Session 12: Religion and climate change

So far, we’ve addressed risk, economics, politics and morality. This session broaches the role of religion as a specific type of moral code and guide to action. The documentary “Climate and the Cross,” from the Guardian newspaper in the United Kingdom, traces the main issues in the how evangelical religious faith and conservative politics engage with climate change and climate science. It’s a good introduction to the issues that we’ll address throughout the rest of the term.

Hulme extends the discussion from the previous sessions in arguing that religion provides a framework for attitudes shaping our ideas about “our duty to others, to Nature and to our deities.” He notes the work of Lynn White, who we met at the beginning of the term.

Loy argues that in capitalist countries like the United States, unquestioning faith in market economics is the core force behind environmental destruction.

Questions for Blackboard discussion: Describe Loy’s argument about the religion of the market: do you see examples of it in your community and daily life? If economic theology isn’t a solution, do the world’s religions offer answers to climate change? Hulme describes “theologies of blame” and “just solutions:” what do these consist of? Can you imagine ideas like these being accepted and implemented politically?

Session 13: Christian traditions: Dominion...?

Now let’s look closer at specific religious traditions, to see how well White’s claims about Christianity fare in different contexts. Christianity gives humankind a privileged position in Creation, but because of original sin and the Fall, humans require redemption. Thus, Christian doctrine emphasizes the importance of spiritual transcendence to receive God’s grace in Heaven. The Earth is given to humankind for its benefit, but the main event for Christians is getting to a perfect spiritual afterlife.

![Giotto di Bondone, No. 38 Scenes from the Life of Christ: 22. Ascension, between 1304 and 1306](image)

With this dynamic in mind, we’ll start with a historical look at Christian traditions as they developed during the European settlement of North America. Nash describes the experience of European settlers confronting a radically new kind of Nature than what they had left behind. How they understood what they found, and what they decided to do with it, is the main issue to be explored in this class session.

**Questions for Blackboard discussion:** For people in the Old World, how was wilderness was described, symbolically and practically? Was wilderness feared? Celebrated? What about Nature in North America did settlers from Europe find so compelling, and so disturbing? What aspect of Christianity shaped attitudes and behavior toward Nature, according to White? Did these attitudes evolve over time, and if so, how?


**Session 14: Christian traditions: ... or stewardship...? Responses to White**

Within Christian thought, beginning with the book of Genesis, the notion of *stewardship* is often contrasted to that of *dominion*. The difference may lie in how the ancient texts are translated; nevertheless, how the term is understood underpins important differences in attitudes and behavior about Nature.

Many theologians and religious scientists have developed counterarguments to White, arguing that their religious traditions in fact revere Nature and advocate for its preservation. DeWitt is one of the most articulate of these religious scientists in the Christian tradition.

*Questions for Blackboard discussion:* What does DeWitt say about of the relationship of Christianity to Nature different from what White argues? What are DeWitt’s three big questions? And his answers? Are they convincing? Why or why not?


**Session 15: Indigenous traditions, ecology and climate change**

Long before the advent of Christianity, indeed all other major religions, indigenous peoples developed rich explanations of their place in the universe, of the meaning of life, codes of conduct, and systems of spiritual belief and practice. Spiritual traditions are fundamental to indigenous cultures’ self-conception and identity, in which Nature plays a central role.
This idea of *immanence*, of the sacred in Nature, where God or spiritual life is found and celebrated everywhere in the Universe, is at odds with what we’ve early found in non-Abrahamic religions, that of *transcendence*, where the sacred is an abstract or ethereal Heaven while the non-sacred or profane is located material, even profane nature of the Earth. This distinction, between *transcendence* and *immanence*, is fundamental to how religious faiths differ on questions of attitudes about human responsibility for the environment.

Deloria introduces key elements of these varied traditions, most of which share common elements. Berry focuses on the historical Native or American Indian tradition. All such traditions have been pushed aside by aggressive proselytizing by the dominant religious faiths to varying degrees, yet they represent among the most authentic and true integration of Nature with human society.

**Questions for Blackboard discussion:** Place seems to matter a great deal in indigenous religious traditions. Why is this so? What is the relationship of humans to God, in indigenous traditions? What is it about indigenous traditions that made them the subject of attack by other religions and their followers? What can other religious faiths learn from indigenous people about Nature and the environment?

**Session 16: Buddhist environmental ethics**

Buddhism focuses largely on the idea that suffering is an inherent part of human life, and that humans are just one part of Nature, rather than distinct from it. The idea of *immanence* is important to Buddhists, as contrasted to the Abrahamic, particularly Christian idea of *transcendence*. Gross and Kaza articulate the key elements of the Buddhist environmental worldview, while Loy finds that Buddhism has some shortcomings when it comes to the politics of climate change. The short but clear Buddhist statement of beliefs lays out this tradition’s principles on climate change and the protection of Nature.

**Questions for Blackboard discussion:** Compare and contrast the concepts of immanence and transcendence with respect to Buddhism and Christianity. How do these concepts translate to attitude and beliefs regarding humankind’s relationship to Nature? What is the source of Loy’s concern about a Buddhist politics of climate change? Is the Buddhist statement more aspirational than practiced by Buddhists worldwide?

**Session 17: Islam, ecology and climate change**

As the youngest Abrahamic religion, Islam differs from its older brother religions Judaism and Christianity in its approach to Nature and the environment. Foltz, a leading expert on Islamic environmentalism, lays out the basic tenets. McKibben reviews the recent Islamic Declaration on Climate Change and points out the irony that much of the world’s oil is in Islamic-majority states, and argues that dependency on fossil fuels...
undermines its credibility on environmental and climate change reforms, despite Islamic teaching on the subject.

Questions for Blackboard discussion: How does Islam differ from Christianity in its approach to Nature? What roles do environmental vulnerability and ideas about social justice play in Islamic environmentalism? Practically speaking, what is the state of Islamic political environmentalism, and what needs to be done to strengthen it?


Session 18: Feminist/Womanist theology: science, Nature, domination and patriarchy

While not strictly a religion, women-focused worldviews such as feminism and the broader womanist, offer powerful perspectives on the relationship of humankind to Nature. Merchant, an environmental historian, analyzes how the roots of Enlightenment science was infused with a nature-dominating anti-woman bias. Ruether’s chapter argues that eco-feminism poses serious challenges to Christian theology and patriarchy.

Questions for Blackboard discussion: How did the 16th and 17th century panic about witchcraft affect early scientific understanding of Nature? How were ideas about economics and progress influenced by early science and technology? How did patriarchal attitudes about women come to affect attitudes about Nature? What are the “call to sustainability” and the “call to preferential option for the poor,” and how do they inform our thinking about Nature?


Session 19: Contemporary Catholic approaches: Pope Francis weighs in

In past decades Catholic leaders have taken strong positions environmental protection. Pope Francis issued the most recent in 2015, to general acclaim by environmentalists. The way he frames his argument is worth studying, as it may contain the seeds for affirming the findings of scientists and reconstructing the politics of the environment that engages people across a range of political ideologies. In fact, his vision is far more complex than just a view that we should stop emitting greenhouse gases. McKibben provides context for the Pope’s work, and Maiback and his team show what the effect of Laudato Si’ was in the aftermath of its publication.

Questions for Blackboard discussion: What are the main themes of Francis’ encyclical? How does he view the effects of modern technological progress and economics on society, communities and families? And how does that affect Nature and the climate?


**Session 20: Christian evangelical climate skepticism...**

Though Catholics and evangelical Christians share some conservative political views, there are important differences. American evangelicals are skeptical of climate science, climate change and other issues in far larger numbers than other Christian faith communities and are a major obstacle to significant climate action. Why is this so, given the agreement among other religious faith communities that Nature and the environment are worthy of protection? Using recent journalistic reporting, this session explores the roots of evangelical climate skepticism.

*Questions for Blackboard discussion*: How did climate change become a question of faith? Why are so many white evangelicals unfriendly or skeptical about climate change? How did fossil fuel money influence evangelical views about climate change?


**Session 21: ... and Christian evangelical climate science**

But clearly not all evangelicals oppose action on climate issues. Hayhoe, a climate scientist, and DeWitt, a biologist, make thoughtful, religiously informed arguments about why climate change needs to be taken seriously. Recall that video series *Global Warming* is the brainchild of Hayhoe, who is also a frequent commentator on the issue from a religious conservative point of view.

*Questions for Blackboard discussion*: What approach does Hayhoe take that makes her so successful in communicating about climate change with skeptics? How does DeWitt see the relationship of science to faith and action?


Review: *Global Warming with Katherine Hayhoe*, YouTube playlist (watch in reverse order: last video on playlist was produced first), https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCi6RkdaEqqRVKi3AzidF4ow
Session 22: Cosmology, science and climate change

Cosmology is the study of the origin of the universe. It has both a scientific aspect (what happened in the first millisecond of the Big Bang?) and a religious aspect (how and why everything is the way it is and the meaning of it all). The tension between science and religion as ways of knowing and explaining the world and knowing what to do is nowhere better seen than here. But are the two really all that different?

Tucker believes that science and religion together can help advance a positive climate change political agenda. Barbour earlier outlined a progression of ideas about how science and religion complement each other in to provide a better understanding of the nature the universe and Nature. We see a similar story in the film *Journey of the Universe*: review both for this class session.

**Questions for Blackboard discussion:** Let’s revisit some of the questions from Session 3: What are the main ways in which science and religion interact, according to Barbour? How might differing perspectives be reconciled? What explanation does *Journey of the Universe* offer as a way forward?


Tucker, Mary Evelyn, “Can science and religion respond to climate change?” *Zygon*, vol. 50, no. 4, December 2015, pp. 949-61.
Session 23: Climate change communications...

So, what do we do about climate change? How are we going meet the 2030 milestone of 45 percent carbon emissions reduction? Public opinion matters a great deal to the policy process. Legislation backed by strong public support is the most durable way to effect major economic and social change.

The Yale climate opinion study offers some reassurance: the country isn’t as divided as pundits suggest. The Six America’s study describes the characteristics of the populations that do and don’t support a strong climate policy. But religious conservatives, a key political constituency for climate skeptics, still could play a spoiler role. In-the-weeds strategies and tactics? Krygsman and Speiser provide an outstanding template for communicating about climate change and responsibility to religious congregations.

**Questions for Blackboard discussion:** What are the prospects for productive climate change advocacy? What should a communications strategy be sure to include to reach the most skeptical groups in society? What communications lessons do Krygsman and Speiser recommend to people new to this game?


Session 24: ... and political and social movements

Communications strategies are important, for sure. But mobilizing -- and sustaining -- a social and political movement is essential. Actions speak louder than words. The readings for this class touch on a few of the salient efforts that could make big difference for climate policy change. And change won’t come just from the usual suspects but will have to include participation from many other social groups, like farmers, one of the groups profiled below, as well as broad coalitions, like what seems to be forming up with “The Green New Deal.”

**Questions for Blackboard discussion:** Surveying all these pieces, what common threads about creating a movement can you identify? How might (usually conservative) farmers and (usually progressive) backers of “the Green New Deal” work together? Are Millennials the key to successful climate action? Why or why not?

Session 25: Christian climate social movements: are they different?

What about a social movement springing up from within the least likely group: evangelicals themselves? We need to understand the possibilities and difficulties that evangelicals face if they are to mount a successful effort to shift opinion on climate policy. The Subramanian and Teirstein stories and the report from ecoAmerica lay the foundation for this question. In a fascinating account, Bean and Teles detail the deep maneuvering that produced the current impasse. Anyone working for change must understand the difficulties that await.

Questions for Blackboard discussion: Thinking back over the last weeks, and taking into account the data for this last several class sessions, what are the key political considerations for a forceful climate policy strategy? How would you advise religious conservative activists on climate change?


Session 26: Future of climate change: Eden, Apocalypse, Babel or Jubilee?

We’ve come to the end: it’s time to take stock. Biblical imagery and metaphors can powerfully convey the deeper meanings of climate change in the world. As Hulme argues, such imagery can help us to understand the nature of our disagreements about it, disagreements rooted less about facts and more about what we value. For him, the main question isn’t what we should do about climate change, but what climate change can do for us. Eden, Apocalypse, Babel and Jubilee, as Biblical stories but also spiritually resonant concepts, contain lessons about ourselves in a world that is rapidly and irrevocably changing.

Finally: Wendell Berry, a working farmer, poet and novelist, is one of America’s most revered environmental writers. He provocatively argues that “to save the climate, live in the present.” This sentiment will resonate long after you’ve grappled with its counterintuitive message.

Questions for Blackboard discussion: Biblical references, noted in the session title, have important symbolic significance for our understanding of climate change, at least in Hulme’s view. What does he argue is the meaning of each reference? What does he think climate change can do for us? Like Hulme’s conceptual reversal, Berry’s idea also turns things around. What does he mean that we should live in the present to save the future? Isn’t that contradictory? How would it work for those of us who don’t live on a farm?


The eyes of the future are looking back at us and they are praying for us to see beyond our own time. They are kneeling with hands clasped that we might act with restraint, that we might leave room for the life that is destined to come. To protect what is wild is to protect what is gentle. Perhaps the wilderness we fear is the pause between our own heartbeats, the silent space that says we live only by grace. Wilderness lives by this same grace. Wild mercy is in our hands.