HBRJ D-UA 177 Topics in Judaic Studies: Jewish Environmental Ethics

Day, Time, and Location TBA

Summer 2018

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Office Hours: By appointment

The course will interrogate the role of ancient Jewish texts and traditions in discussions surrounding environmental ethics. Biblical texts are often read as emphasizing humanity’s divorce from nature and the human drive to conquer and exploit the planet. This course will reconsider the role of biblical and early Jewish texts by looking at the traditions themselves with a sensitivity to issues of textuality and meaning making, historical context, and philology. We will pose various ways to read any given text, and assess the environmental or animal ethic of those readings by bringing them into conversation with various discourses in the Environmental Humanities including, but not limited to, Environmental Ethics, Critical Animal Studies, and New Materialism.

Goals:

- Decipher the Hebrew Bible’s position on the relationship between the human and the non-human, and the implications of this relationship for a Jewish ethics of the environment and the non-human

- Grasp the challenges and promises of engaging ancient sources in the context of contemporary environmental problems

- Understand the contemporary ecological crisis and its sources and causes.

- Assess the positions, discourses and possibilities found within the classical Rabbinic corpus that can be harnessed and mobilized to engaging with environmental ethical issues.

- Understand the relationship between law and ethics in the Jewish tradition and how this dialectic impacts our thinking about environmental ethics.

- Understand the connections and differences between contemporary academic fields that engage with questions of the environment and nature such as Critical Animal Studies, Posthumanism, Ontological Anthropology, Technology and Media Studies, and Environmental Ethics proper.

Objectives:

- Understand what Jewish Environmental Ethics is, and both the limitations and possibilities for its development as a discourse and practice.

- Gain frameworks from both within and without the Jewish tradition for assessing environmentally related issues such as mass extinction, global warming, and pollution.

- Develop methods for reading pre-modern Jewish texts as sources of inspiration and direction for contemporary environmental ethical issues.

- Understand how to evaluate and engage various philosophical and ethical positions on the environment and nature.

- Hone close reading skills of both primary and secondary sources
Readings:


Mike Hulme, *Why We Disagree about Climate Change*, Cambridge, 2009. (=WDCC)


The Bible (suggested version: TaNaKH, published by the Jewish Publication Society)

I will post other secondary sources on NYU Classes, as well as primary sources which are not listed below.

Requirements:

1) Class preparation and participation: 30%.

2) Response Paper (5 pages) and Presentation. Response paper is due the day of presentation: 15%

3) Take Home Mid-Term (7-8 pages): 25%

4) Take Home Final or a longer final paper (8-10 pages) that deals with a specific environmental problem using the material we have studied and material from contemporary philosophy and theory and/or other sources. All topics should be cleared with me before work begins¹: 30%

¹ Policy on late papers: Late papers will lose one-half grade for each day late. I understand that circumstances sometimes arise which make it impossible for you either to be in class or to get the paper done by the deadline. I am therefore willing to accept late papers on the next day if such circumstances occur. You must notify me by emailing me before class on the due date. This is not a permission to turn in papers late for no good reason (and having other classwork and tests are not good reasons.) You are on your honor.
Schedule:

Unit One: Introduction to the field, and the Textual Debate

1. Intro, Jewish Ethics, Environmental Ethics, Jewish Environmental Ethics
   - Mike Hulme, *WDCC*, xxv-xxxix
   - Elliot N. Dorff and Jonathan K. Crane, “Introduction: Why Study Jewish Ethics?” 23pp
   - Martin Yaffee, *JEE*, 1-24

2. Framing the Textual Debate, Climate Change, and Anthropometrism
   - Genesis:1-3
   - Benstein, *WJE*, 33-70
   - Jeanne Kay, “Concepts of Nature in the Hebrew Bible” in *JEE*, 86-104 (skim enough to understand)
   - Hulme, *WDCC*, 1-32
   - Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” 1203-1207
   - Warren, K. J., “The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism,” 3pp
   - Allen Thompson, “Anthropocentrism: Humanity as Peril and Promise,” in *Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics*, 13pp

3. Ontological Anthropology, The Great Divide
   - Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 1-18, 31-35, 227-245 (skim relevant parts)
   - Eduardo Kohn “Introducing Ontological Anthropologies,” 312-323

Unit Two: Environmental Ethics and Jewish Law

4. Jewish Law and Jewish Ethics
   - Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, “Ethical Theories in Rabbinic Literature” in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Ethics and Morality*, 23pp
   - Peter Skaifish “Introduction” to *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 9-39
   - J. David Bleich, “Vegetarianism and Judaism” in *JEE*, 371-383

   - Benstein, *WJE*, 71-100
-Eilon Schwartz, "Bal Tashchit: A Jewish Environmental Concept", in JEE, 230-249
-Eliezer Diamond, review of Yaffe's volume, in Environmental Ethics, 214-5
-Yaffe, JEE, 32-34 (critique of Schwartz's article)
-Hulme, WDCC, 109-177

6. Sustainability, Intergenerational responsibility, and Pollution

-Benstein, WJE, 182-200
-Gerald Bliedstein, “Man and Nature in the Sabbatical Year,” in JEE, 136-42
-Daniel Hillel, The Natural History of the Bible, 46-7, 154-5
-Evan Eisenberg, The Ecology of Eden, 22-34
-Hans Jonas, “Contemporary Problems in Ethics from a Jewish Perspective” in JEE, 250-263
-E. Diamond, “How Much is Too Much? Conventional versus Personal Definitions of Pollution in Rabbinic Sources” 61-80
-Mike Hulme, WDCC, 178-243

7. The issue of conspicuous consumption

-Benstein, WJE, 113-164
-Eliezer Diamond, “The Earth is the Lord’s and the Fullness Thereof: Jewish Perspectives on Consumption,” 391-402
-Eliezer Diamond, “The Way of Torah as Askesis,” 563-577
-Hulme, WDCC, 248-283

8. Animal Suffering and Animal Experimentation

-Benstein, WJE, 101-111
-Bleich, “Judaism and Animal Experimentation” in JEE, 333-371 (skim)
-Donna Haraway, When Species Meet, 69-93
-Peter Singer, Animal Liberation, 1-23

Unit 3: Animals, Technology, and The End of Nature

9. Jewish Ritual Slaughter, Factory Farming and Postville

-Gross, The Question of the Animal, 16-59, 147-202
-Jacques Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)”
-Descola, Beyond Nature and Culture, Short selection on tribal animal eating
-Haraway, When Species Meet, 265-274

10. Eating Animals

-Jonathan Safran Foer, Eating Animals, selections
-Benstein, WJE, 165-175
-Leon Kass “Sanctified Eating” in JEE, 384-409
11. Lynn White Jr., the Question of Technology, and the Question of the Human

-Katherine Hayles, How We Became Post-Human, 283-291
-Haraway, When Species Meet, 275-284
-Hulme, WDCC, 284-321

12. The End of Nature

-Hulme, WDCC, 322-365
-Benstein, WJE, 201-230
-Donna Haraway, When Species Meet, 285-302