

Multispecies and Ecological Theology, Justice, and Ministry

Instructors: Rev. Dr. LoraKim Joyner, Rev. Dr. Meredith Garmon

Phone: 914-948-1696

Email: garmonjoyner@uuma.org, amoloros@gmail.com

Course Overview

"What does it mean to be human?" This question has, for thousands of years, expressed our yearning for self-understanding. The question has, however, made distinguishing humans from nonhuman animals a central project of religious, ethical, and philosophical inquiry. In pursuit of such a distinction, a wide range of traits have been suggested as belonging to all and only humans. As these suggestions have largely failed to withstand scrutiny, we have begun to learn that, "What does it mean to be animal?" is at least as important a question as, "What does it mean to be human?" Understanding ourselves requires grasping our commonality with other animals, not demarcating differences.

Related essential questions include: How do we relate to other species as one animal among many? What ways of relating are possible? What is justice in the context of that relationship? And what is our self-interest? How do we make sense of the harm inherent in biotic community? How can possibly nonlinguistic voices be "brought to the table" (rather than placed on it), while also expanding our ability to listen to the voices of the human species and respond with justice for all? How is our, and their, and the biotic community's well-being and flourishing realized through our attentive regard for other species? How can we as Unitarian Universalists provide leadership and ministry in innovative ways that meet the spiritual needs of our people in this time of climate change, loss of biodiversity, and extinction? How can Unitarian Universalists prepare for the vote at General Assembly 2017 where we are asked to change the First Principle to the "inherent worth and dignity of every being?" How can we facilitate the paradigm shift from separation and individualism to unity and interdependence? How can we take risks when so much is at risk? Instructors and participants together explore the many complex nuances of understanding and personally realizing the emerging "beloved multispecies community."

Vision:

Religious leaders can skillfully engage with their congregations and communities as agents of change on a planet in which relations between humans and other species are myriad, overlapping, complex, evolving, and precious. Our faith and our congregations can play effective roles in building the beloved community of all species.

Goals:

The course goal is to understand, articulate, integrate, and be able to help others understand:

1. the historical and current context of theological, philosophical, and ethical thought pertaining to multispecies relationships.

2. biological, ecological and social aspects of interspecies behavior and relationships, including analysis of interlocking oppressions of humans and other species.
3. the meaning of “being animal,” and the ways identity is and can be rooted in relationship with other animals and with the biotic community.
4. emotional, social, spiritual, ecological, and multispecies intelligences, their role in development of multicultural and multispecies competence, and how they can support ministers, congregations, individual animals and ecologies.

Provide resources and concrete tools for:

5. a life-long practice and vocational use of the above to benefit ministers, their congregations, communities, and the world at large.
6. developing effective programs and ministries both within and without the congregation including worship, spiritual practices, faith development, pastoral care, small group ministry, and justice programs.

Course Format

Prior to the in-class sessions, there will be substantial reading which will guide us sequentially through an understanding of bodies in relation. Each in-class session is highly participatory and interactive, along with didactic instruction to spur on class and small group discussion. Materials and forms include required readings, class assignments, handouts, music videos, Youtube videos, interactive exercises, music, drama, inspirational readings, and worship and liturgical arts. Required readings will be highlighted each day. This is a pass/fail class and meets the requirement for units in theology/ethics.

Reading

Books:

Bekoff, Marc, and Jessica Pierce. *Wild Justice: The Moral Lives of Animals*. University of Chicago Press. 2010.

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Duke University Press. 2010.

Gruen, Lori. *Entangled Empathy: An Alternative Ethic for Our Relationships with Animals*. Lantern Books. 2015.

McCallum, Ian. *Ecological Intelligence: Rediscovering Ourselves in Nature*. Fulcrum Press. 2008.

Chapters/Articles:

Boff, Leonard. *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*. Orbis Books, 1977. pp. 104-139.

Macy, Joanna, and Chris Johnstone. *Active Hope*. New World Library. 2012. pp. 85-103.

Martin, Mike. "Rethinking Reverence for Life." *Reverence for Life: The Ethics of Albert Schweitzer for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Marvin Myer and Kurt Bergel. Syracuse University Press. 2002. pp. 166-183.

Mellor, DJ. "Extending the 'Five Domain' Model for Animal Welfare Assessment to Incorporate Positive Welfare States." *Animal Welfare*. 2015. 24:241-253.

Nussbaum, Martha. *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*. Harvard University Press. 2006. pp. 1-35; 325-407.

Pinker, Steven. 2011. *The Better Angels of Our Nature*. Penguin Books. 2011. pp. 454-481.

Schweitzer, Albert. "The Ethics of Reverence for Life." *Reverence for Life: The Ethics of Albert Schweitzer for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Marvin Myer and Kurt Bergel. Syracuse University Press. 2002. pp. 124-137.

Taylor, Bron. *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*. University of California Press. 2010. pp. 1-41; 200-222.

Waldau, Paul. "Seeing the Terrain We Walk." *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*, ed. by Paul Waldau and Kimberly Patton. Columbia University Press. 2009. pp. 40-61.

Weber, Andreas. 2016. *The Biology of Wonder*. New Society Publishers. 2016. pp. viii-85, 165-194, 315-357.

Wright, Robert. *Nonzero*. Vintage Books. 2000. pp. 243-297; 318-334.

Resources On Line:

Appiah, Kwame. "What Will Future Generations Condemn Us For?" *Washington Post*. 2010 Sep 26. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/24/AR2010092404113.html>.

Elk. "Why Animal Rights Fails at Intersectionality." <https://humanrightsareanimalrights.com/blog/oppresion/why-animal-rights-fails-at-intersectionality/>

"Ethical Theories and Nonhuman Animals." (all subsections). <http://www.animal-ethics.org/ethical-theories-and-nonhuman-animals-subsection>

Unitarian Universalist Statement of Consciousness "Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice." 2012 <http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/socialjustice/statements/13394.shtml>

Unitarian Universalist First Principle Project. Resource Manual. 2016.
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bz4V0S2Af4cBandwSWltQzRQQ28/view>.

Subjects

The course is organized into three components:

What Does It Mean to be Human?

Exploring the old question in the light of a newer questions, "What does it mean to be animal? For us? For nonhuman species?" Readings: Weber; Bennett; Wright; Bekoff & Pierce; McCallum.

Our Response/Ethics/Rights/Justice

What understanding of ethical obligations and justice requirements emerges from exploring the questions of the meaning of human and nonhuman animality? Readings: Pinker; Appiah; "Ethical Theories and Nonhuman Animals," Nussbaum; Schweitzer; Martin; Gruen; Mellor; Elk; Boff.

Community Life/Congregational/Pastoral Issues

How might religious and spiritual leaders manifest and be informed by multispecies and ecological theology? Readings: Waldau; Taylor; Macy & Johnstone; "Unitarian Universalist First Principle Project Resource Manual;" "Unitarian Universalist Statement of Consciousness "Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice."

Requirements:

Before Class Begins

1. Attend two webinars of 1.5 hour each. The first webinar is getting to know each other in context of the course and the second is how to bring our UU principles to life. Tentative dates of Thu Oct 13 and Thu Nov 10, both at 6 p.m, Eastern time. We can change these times if the group agrees.
 - a. Before the start of the first webinar, (i) review the syllabus and course calendar; (ii) submit to Populi a short biography, why you are taking the course, and what you hope to get out of it; (iii) read other participants' entries.
 - b. Before the start of the second seminar, prepare a one page reflection paper on your position on the proposed UUA bylaw changes (changing the First Principle to the "inherent worth and dignity of every being"). Explain why you hold that position and how it is good for individuals. Then argue the opposite of your preferred position and why. Come prepared to argue both sides during the webinar.

2. Complete all the readings keeping in mind:

a. How can what you are reading and reflecting upon contribute to your understanding of what it means to be human in a multispecies world and a human's response to that understanding? Specifically, how will this reading inform your life and ministries?

b. What would you like to see discussed more or reflected upon in the reading and in the classroom discussion?

3. Prepare a 15-20-minute sermon addressing "What does it mean to be human in a multispecies world and what is the human response to that understanding". This is an oral presentation that you will present during our class week.

During the Class

1. Participate in discussion and exercises.
2. Present your 20-minute sermon in #3 above

After Class (both paper and reflection form due 2.3.17)

Paper: Prepare a 6,000-word paper, either:

(a) (The free range option) Explore an aspect of your choosing of one or more of the issues brought up in the course. Please explore options with the instructor during the end of the in-person class week.

Or

(b) (The "could I get a little more guidance, please?" option): Structure your paper around these sections: (1.) What Does it Mean to Be Human? Include the theology and the understanding of science that you bring to this question. (Be sure to include the predator/prey relationship, harm and collaboration inherent in relationships.) (2.) Human Response. Include your ethics (how do you make decisions? Include ethical eating), intersectionality/anti-oppression (how do we take care of us all?). (3.) Community Life/Pastoral Care. Include intersection with Unitarian Universalism: What does UU have to say about this? What can we do different? (Include First Principle Project). What is your plan for self care/development regarding the 5 intelligences? What is your plan for community/congregational pastoral care, awareness, conscience, leadership, multispecies intelligence and competency, intersectionality, and justice activities in your ministries.

Reflection on Class Experience/Feedforward Form

Complete the reflection and feedforward information on form provided by instructors

Statement Regarding Accommodation

Meadville Lombard is committed to making reasonable accommodations to assist individuals with disabilities in reaching their academic potential. If a student has a disability that qualifies under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and requires accommodations, they should contact the Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, Ken McHugh

kmchugh@meadville.edu) (312) 212-0673. Please note that classroom accommodations cannot be provided without an approved Accommodations Form.