

Okay,

welcome to lecture number three. This

is interestingly probably the most

controversial

lecture that we will have, maybe the

most controversial one. So, why is that?

Well, let's look at the lecture we had

last week on the Epic of Gilgamesh.

You know we mentioned a number of gods

and goddesses there,

and I don't think anyone was you know

particularly upset with my treatment of

them,

no one is going to say, for example, I

just wasn't quite fair to the goddess

Ishtar and the way I portrayed her.

Even though the text that we have

today

is nowhere near as old as Gilgamesh, but

we're talking you know for

maybe 3000 years or so in age,

the fact is, the religion that is

inaugurated with this

text, or I should say religions, are still

alive and well

today. So what we're going to be looking at is the Hebrew Testament of the Bible, otherwise known as the Old Testament.

This is not only the you know principle, sort of -er biblical religious text

for you know Jewish people today, but for Christians and Islam as well.

So we're talking literally billions of people still

look to this text, and depending on how they read it,

they often take it

very literally. So why people get upset when I talk about this text

is because, you know no one's upset if I talk about the goddess Ishtar,

but if in some way you know this

reflects on the

Jewish, Christian, Muslim god, well then

you know

this is an issue. So

I'm not in any way trying to malign

anyone's religion,

but we really have to confront sort of
an
intersection of what we're doing, which
is
textual analysis, looking at texts
interpreting them
with religion, and that actually is
a huge controversy today across the
planet.

So what do I mean by that? Well there are
a number of
religious groups, principally
fundamentalists, and what this means
is that they interpret the text that
they have
in a very very literal way. In other
words,
whatever the text says it's exactly
what it is, it's the word of god
in this case. There are other people, and
these are equally devout you know
Christians
whatever, who interpret the texts more
liberally. And I don't mean they're not

faithful to the text,
but, for example, what we're going to be
looking at today
with the story of Adam and Eve in the
Garden of Eden, which is the opening of
the Hebrew Testament, the Old Testament.
You know if you read that literally, and
people do
today, and people have actually figured
out: well how old is the earth if god
created it
as it says in the Bible, and Adam and
Eve came right after it, and we know how
old each successive generation was.
Well for hundreds of years people have
put an age on the planet now
of 6,000 years old or so, certainly under
10,000
years old. Now that of course creates
a problem with respect to modern science,
and
this is central to the debate that we
have over creationism, and have had for
you know 100 years in this country.

If you read the Bible, and that's if you
deploy a
textual analysis, an approach, a
hermeneutic approach, which we saw-
which what we named it in the first
lecture. If you employ a hermeneutic
approach that reads it just
literally, that's what you have, and
that's what you have to go with.

So you have to then believe essentially
in creationism, that the world is created
you know under 10,000 years ago,
human beings were created then. That of
course is at odds with modern science.

On the other hand, you can find a way of
interpreting that text that jives with
modern science.

For example, the catholic church has done
that, when the catholic church has
probably a billion people worldwide who
you know subscribe to that religion.

And catholic church, the vatican, has a
vatican astronomer and they had for
hundreds of-

for not hundreds of years, but
certainly by the middle of the 20th
century they did. And they certainly
don't you know- they certainly believe in
evolution, that they believe that the
planet
is billions of years old, the universe is
whatever 13
billion years old. And certainly
environmentalists, like Al Gore,
also take this interpretive strategy. But
it's so interesting because this whole
debate
centers on what we're doing, which is
hermeneutics. So,
let's see how this works out with
respect
to environmental issues. So the first
thing we want to do
is go down and look at
our prez here. So notice one thing;
from Mesopotamia to the Hebrew culture,
even though they're both
ancient, they're both in the Middle East,

and by that I mean Northern Africa,
there's a big jump, a couple thousand
years here. So
we're moving right along. So let's go in
here.

And the first thing I want to note,
jumping down here,
is that again we're doing environmental
humanities
as a part of what we're doing with
eco-criticism,
and this lecture is principally going to
deal with
eco-theology, that field of the
environmental humanities.

Of course, as I just explained, all this
hinges on you know
hermeneutic issue of interpretation. So
what we're doing, the way we're doing
it, you know interpreting a text is
really important here.

But yeah, Christianity and the Bible-
you can tell right away,
looking at this title, that it's going to

be controversial. And
please don't don't you know don't be
upset with the messenger here, I'm not-
it's not my intent to malign

Christianity

at all, it is just that we we need to
confront this issue.

So, Genesis.

The three opening chapters of the
Judeo-Christian Bible,
that's the Bible, are perhaps the most
influential
two pages ever written. I would argue
that they are
absolutely the most influential because
they provide the founding myth,
you know how the world, the universe, was
created
for you know a couple billion people
today.

And it touches on a variety of still
important ideologies today,
things like creationism.

It can't be under-stressed how important

it is.

Moreover, and this is the fascinating thing, these two pages have arguably shaped Western literature more than any other text, as they've repeatedly been referenced and interpreted. So as the current you know debate over creationism,

and we're going to see the debate over the climate crisis, you know unfolds it's still alive and well

today. It's not like this text is like

the Epic of Gilgamesh,

something that is ancient and no one is ever talking about,

everyone talks about this. Or I don't

mean everyone, but it's certainly

in the United States, still a major issue.

So we're going to see the environmental import of this. But these

three chapters, and these that you've

read or will read, and really this is

just about

two pages depending on how how full your-

what size the pages are, they've influenced how we think about women in a huge way. The representation of women, well we'll talk about that as we go. But important, gender, the idea that there's this binary of male and female.

Again, we've talked about creation and creationism. Evil, the whole notion of evil and sin

originates here, in these two pages we get the idea of original sin, which will become incredibly important for centuries. Sex, the idea that sex is, depending on how you interpret this, a bad thing, that what precipitated all this, what was this at the center of original sin..ahh sex.

Free will, did Adam and Eve have a decision here? Or was it all preordained by God, since he is all-knowing and all-powerful and omniscient,

what was His role in all this? Human destiny, because human destiny is going to change in these two pages, the relationship that human beings have to the planet and to our lives is going to change right here. Cosmology, again, this is a creation myth, this is how the world was created. Labor, why human beings do the sort of labor that they do, and again this reflects on our relationship to the earth. And labor in the other sense of that word, the fact that women have children, you know that sort of labor. Pop out here so you can read it. Animal rights, the new relationship of human beings to animals is going to be important here, and we'll see how. Our notion of deity, so be very clear here in terms of our previous lecture, this is not a culture that has a range

of deities, range of earth deities,
this deity is completely separate, as
we'll see in detail,
from the planet. This is a metaphysical
deity, a soul metaphysical deity. And
there are actually more things
that get taken up in these two pages
which is again just amazing.

It is Genesis, and the
ideology, and ideas expressed there, are
clearly echoed in our post-christian
world.

So even though you may not be a
Christian,
it has influenced the world notions of
you know sin and all are still
alive and well today. And we'll see that,
and specifically what we're talking
about,
the idea that's put forth here
environmentally,
are still alive and well. So,
where does this re-evaluation of
Christianity on environmental grounds

begin? It's arguably, this is kind of the epicenter right here, in 1967 with this guy Lynn White Jr. And he wrote a really influential article, and by the way it's short, it's like- we're going to read it, it's like eight pages long.

And I always tell students who are writing papers, and they always say: well what can they write in eight pages, or you know how can they convince anyone of anything.

Here, in eight little pages, Lynn White Jr kind of you know shook the whole world. And it caused you know environmentalists, and eco-theologians, people who are you know interested in theology in a religious way, and Christians themselves a lot of thought.

So let's get into what he actually says here.

But note that because of this, and let me be very clear

in this 1967 article

why it is not kind to Christianity, and

he implicates it for a lot of our

environmental problem.

Again you don't have to believe that,

it's fine. And

he really kind of throws down the

gauntlet for Christians,

Muslims, and Jewish people to

find a way of interpreting their

religion

in a very earth-friendly way, and he

argues it's not necessarily

intuitive that you do that or it hasn't

happened. That doesn't mean that you

can't do this, okay? Let me be very clear,

in fact, you can go buy a copy of the

Bible now,

it's sort of environmental Bible, I

forget the name of it. But

you may if you are very devout, or

you have a religious background,

you may know that some bibles, Christian

bibles, those that have an Old New

Testament, the Christian and Hebrew

Testament,

in the Christian Testament have all the writing of Christ in red for example.

Well this Bible

environmental Bible, has all the important environmental passages in green, so you can literally go through the Bible and look at where it addresses environmental issues.

But it was- White's article was influential it caused a lot of people to reinterpret Christianity as not being earth-friendly.

And one of the reasons that there is a sort of a boom

in interest in religions like I

mentioned here: Taoism,

Shinto, Buddhism, Native American spiritualism, and

New Age spiritualism, is because people have looked for alternatives to

Christianity because of the problems

that White has

brought up here. You kind of have like two things to do if you're Christian, or two extreme say. One, reinterpret the religion in an earth-friendly way, and by the way that's been done by some very important and influential people:

Pope Francis, for example, very devout Christian obviously, and also

I would argue a really important environmentalist,

and of course probably you know the number one environmentalist that

everyone thinks of on the planet right now is probably Al Gore,

also a very devout Christian. But if you don't do that,

interpret it, in a green way, then you're- you may well look for other traditions like the ones listed here.

Yeah. Al Gore incidentally is a Nobel laureate environmentalist,

yeah. And I'm stressing here again,

I just want to be clear and

I don't people think I'm you know again
trying- have an axe to grind trying
to malign Christianity,
this is a hermeneutic issue, it's how we
interpret the Bible.

Whether we interpret it in a very
literal way,
in which case you're going to run into
problems environmentally,
or if you take a different sort of
interpretive strategy, and it's
an interesting issue in that sense.

So again, we're not in a- in a live
classroom so I'm not
asking people to pull out their
i-clickers. But,
did this article bother you? If you
haven't read it yet,
you can't answer it but it- the very
fact that I'm asking it, and if you haven't
read it should suggest to you that it
might bother you, or
that it has been my experience that it
bothers a large swath of people

in the room, so take it for what it is.
Before warn then, or you know... And
you know many people may take the
position which many Christian
theologians have taken over the
centuries really,
that you know they welcome, not a
attack or criticism, but they welcome you
know different viewpoints so that they
can
think about their own religion again, and
that has led to some amazing
reinventions of Christianity. And even in
the- you know like in the early modern
period,
reimagining of Christianity during the
reformation, which the very word, we're
going to get to this in
lectures ahead, but there were very word
reformations means reforming,
right? Reformation of Christianity
happened because people reinterpreted it
so. Okay. Let's
talk about the text, actually I'll read

it for you.

Opening, this is the very beginning of,

again, the Hebrew

Bible, you've probably heard these words.

In the beginning God created the heaven

and the earth.

And the earth was without form, and void;

and darkness was upon the face of the

deep.

And the Spirit of God moved upon the

face of the waters.

And God said, you may have heard this

line once or twice before,

“Let there be light: and there was light.”

And God saw the light,

that it was good: and God divided the

light from darkness.

And God called the light Day, and the

darkness he called Night.

And the evening and the morning were the

first day. And God said,

“Let there be a firmament in the midst of

the waters, and let it divide the waters

from the waters.”

And God made the firmament, and divided
the waters. Well,
we could go on and on here. Now, just
like the Epic of Gilgamesh,
you may not you know at face value
think that there is, even in these
opening lines,
any environmental import, doesn't mention
environmental things quite. But,
let's look at it because even in the
opening lines here,
there is a great deal of
environmental significance.

So, chapter one, which is what we were
just reading from.

The very first line, let's look at this
first line
from an eco-critical or an
eco-theological
perspective. "In the beginning God created
the heaven and the earth."

So what? Well from the very beginning
we have a metaphysical God here, one is a
part and superior

from, and creator of the whole of
creation.

He's similar to a God we've already met,
which is the god Shamash. You'll
recall in the Epic of Gilgamesh,
Gilgamesh is able to do that overturning
of that older religion
because he has this god who's not
connected from the earth, the more
powerful god.

Well here, we have the most powerful god,
he created everything. There is debate,
there has been debate for thousands of
years

quite how he did that in the sense that,
did he create it out of nothing?

Some people believe that, and that's
called an ex deo, which is
latin- which- I'm sorry that's
ex nihilo. Sorry, that's ex deo, which is
from latin which means from God. But he
didn't create it out of nothing in that
sense, he created it out of himself. Like
he took part of his

whatever essence or mass, and created the earth, or

something called what I just mentioned, ex nihilo, which means from nothing. Did he just go

poof, and created that out of nothing? Well from our point of view that debate doesn't matter much, but what does matter is

he is not an earth god. He is not like

Humbaba, that genius

loci, which is you know just right there at the Cedar Forest.

He is separate and apart from the earth, he created the earth, he is superior from the earth.

And we'll see, in certain

Christian traditions especially, he

creates the earth and then leaves,

and he doesn't have much to do with it.

He is not generally assumed

until later in history and in

this

course. By the time we get to the early

modern period people are beginning to
talk about God
being in mountains and all, but
there's a danger with this opening line
to see him discard as separate and apart
from the earth. By the way,
it's not our project today to be looking
at this thing from the point of view of
gender,
but also note from the very first line
we have a male
patriarchal God here.

Yeah, he is radically different than like
Humbaba.

Who Humbaba is intimately connected to
the earth, he's part of the earth, the
earth is filled with Humbabas, and so
many religions it is filled with genius
loci.

This god stands apart from the earth, and
we'll see
as we get into further lines, it's clear
that he
is separate from the earth, he addresses

the earth, talks to the earth separately
from himself,
and he's you know in this view kind
of apart
from all the creation. Ever since the
early modern period,
when we began realizing that you know
there were other planets and stars and
things like that,
people have wondered just where God is. I
mean in the simplistic earlier view, God
is sort of you know
up there in heaven, and by the way hell
is down there,
but once people realize that there's
a lot more out there, it's a question of
where is God. Is He like
somewhere beyond that? Is He in sort of
another dimension or whatever?
That was unclear to people, but right
off the bat that should tell you
something, He's
very different than being part of the
planet, being part of the earth.

One you have to wonder, how is He even part of the the universe and all the planets?

And again, how does all this work? Well Bible's not really clear on this, so this is all

doing- you have- to figure that out you have to do what we're doing, which is interpret this text,

you have to do hermeneutics.

Yeah, so here's the problem,

from this opening line onward a rift opens up in Judeo-Christian thought

between the physical and the

metaphysical. I mentioned last time, I'm

passing we'll get

this in greater detail, by metaphysical

we mean beyond

nature, beyond certainly the

planet earth.

And this will- this metaphysical rift

saying that God is beyond the earth and

all,

that's going to appear again in

philosophical thinking like with Plato,
and we'll see how.

But you should also note that where God
resides, which is heaven,
you know question as plague thinkers for
centuries,
where is heaven exactly? Well it's
clearly
different than the earth, and it's not
here.

So then you have a rift between these
two realms,
and one, not to be a spoiler for what's
coming, but is imagined as a superior
realm to the other,
and then you're beginning into a
potential problem too, right? Because the
metaphysical realm, heaven,
is better than earth, and matters more
than earth, and what does that mean
for how we inhabit this planet if we
think of it as the sort of
inferior second best place? So,
chapter one. So let's get right into the

environment.

This is Lynn White Jr I'm quoting here,

in what is arguably

his most damning lines. "In Antiquity

every tree, every spring, every stream,

every hill had his own genius loci."

We now know what these are, a guardian

spirit. "These spirits were accessible to

men,"

who "were very unlike men; centaurs, fauns,

mermaids show their ambivalence.

Before one cut a tree," and

this is what we just saw in the Epic of

Gilgamesh, before Gilgamesh did that.

"Before one cut a tree, mined a mountain,

or dammed a brook,

it was important to placate the spirit

in charge of that particular situation,

and keep it placated." Again, Gilgamesh is

such a radical figure because

he doesn't care about doing that. "By

destroying pagan animalism," and by that

White it means just what he talked about,

the belief that the earth is

animated by all these beings, that
they're here everywhere,
unlike the metaphysical God we just saw
and we're seeing here in
Judaism, who was separate from it. By
destroying animal paganism
"Christianity made it possible to exploit
nature
in a mood of indifference to the feeling
of natural objects." I'm
going to repeat that line,
"Christianity," and really mean
Judeo-Christian thinking,
"made it possible to exploit nature
in a mood of indifference to the
feelings of natural objects."
That's the big damning statement really
and that is because there were no longer
earth gods,
minor gods like Humbaba or big ones like
Ishtar. Because they weren't here on
earth
and this new God, this metaphysical God,
was separate,

human beings could do whatever they please
to the planet, they could exploit nature,
and they could just be indifferent to it.

White argues this

was the Judeo-Christian revolution with
respect to the planet,
and of course the planet suffered.

White would argue that this was the
beginning of our problems with-
western problems with the environment.

But we've already seen, and I

specifically gave us the Epic of

Gilgamesh first, that

this thinking is not just

Judeo-Christian, and there are other

you know religious systems in the area

that had the same basic

problem, but White is correct in that

this

you know is also partial with

Christian by way of a metaphysical

God.

Not that we had- you know human beings

had to exploit nature, but this was a

potential interpretive problem here.

Yeah. So we saw what Gilgamesh did.

Gilgamesh went and you know destroyed an earth deity, and did as he pleased with a natural resource, which is the Cedar Forest, and that meant destroying it, clear-cutting it. White argues the Christianity did this across the planet. In other words, this is not just the story from thousands of years ago, this is the story of the spread of the West to other religions, and that's pretty damning. What I mean by that is as the West colonized other places, one across the planet, you know whether it's the global south, you know global east, wherever, systematically we did this, we destroyed the religions that were there or pushed them into submission.

What I mean by that is Christianity,
in you know the spreading
evangelically
Christian thinking, encountered other
religions and converted people away from
those religions to Christianity.

I'm not going to talk about the you know
morality of doing that, but from an
environmental point of view,
since those religions were for the most
part earth-based
religions that had these kind of
prohibitions that White was talking
about,

you can see why the spread of
Christianity to people like White is so
concerning because it's like the
story of Gilgamesh, the part that we read,
happening again and again and again
across the planet. Christianity
encounters a culture,
the culture was sort of living in a
pretty respectful way with nature
because they regarded it as,

in part their deity or one of their
deities, and Christianity
got rid of that religion, put
Christianity in its place.
And according to White and to others,
that is the history of the West, and
that's a pretty
worrisome thing. Okay.
Yeah. I cannot
over stress the importance of this.
This work, again just to shoot a few
short pages,
cause many many environmentalists, and
many
Christians themselves, to rethink
Christianity. And that could be good
in the sense that you know to embark
on a hermeneutic
reinterpretation of the religion on
environmental grounds, but many
people just
abandoned Christianity because of it. So
it's-
this is- I would argue of the modern text

that we read,
yeah I'm thinking it through, this is
probably the most influential, the
Lynn White Jr article. White argues, we'll
continue
further, with the advent of Christianity,
"the spirits in natural objects" these
are genius loci, "which formerly had
protected nature from man,"
the way Humbaba had protected
the natural-
the Cedar Forest from Gilgamesh and
his people,
"evaporated. Man's effective
monopoly on
one spirit in this world was confirmed,
and the old inhibitions to the
exploitation of nature
crumbled." So yeah, there it is.
You could say the same almost
of the Shamash religion
that Gilgamesh is following with
the sun god, but this again
is the history of Christianity in a

way.

The spirits in natural objects, all the
genius loci
that were you know across the planet, and
so far as people believed in them and
the scores of different religions,
that evaporated. And again, those
religions weren't set up to protect
nature, I wouldn't say
that was their design, but they did
protect
you know features of the natural
world like
forests, and water, and rivers, and
mountains, and all from the exploitation
of people,
or the indiscriminate exploitation. But
White argues this all crumbled with
Christianity.
Yeah. And they can do this by the way
in this kind of thinking because
like Gilgamesh, Christians, and
we're talking you know Judeo-Christian
world,

is championed by this metaphysical God,
this all-powerful God.

So you know when

Christianity, and by the way you may

think I'm being unfair here because I

keep saying Christianity

rather than Judaism, and Judaism is of

course the first religion that

comes out of this

text, out of the Old Testament, this is

you know otherwise known as the hebrew

text.

But in terms of worldwide influence,

Judaism has been negligible really in

comparison to Christianity. What I mean

by that

is, I think right now there are like 17

million Jewish people on the planet

compared to over a billion Christians.

And in part that number is so low

because Christianity has been an

evangelical religion

and Judaism principally hasn't. And what

I mean by that is,

Christianity grows because it converts people to Christianity, and that's what we're talking about here, how Christianity converted people away from earth-based religions to Christianity.

That didn't happen in Judaism, and probably kind of reflected in the fact that there are you know huge difference in the number of people following Judaism as opposed to Christianity. So this has really principally been, as the West has spread, a Christian thing, not entirely, I'm not saying that, but it's been a major driving force behind it.

So yeah. And but again, the reason in part because of this is we have a different kind of God that's argued as being superior to the sort of little pantheon of other

gods, at least that's the way the

argument is

often deployed.

Yeah. And again, this is why you may

wonder you often hear environmentalists

talking about

Native American spiritualism the way

that

Native Americans react at the first

nations to the

planet, and people have looked

very hard at that, in fact we're going to

be looking at another alternate

tradition at the the end of this course,

which is Buddhism.

The reason that you know people have

looked at it

is because in addition to doing what

we're doing, which is an interpretation

of Christianity,

people would argue well what sort of

religion would

be kind of free of these problems?

What else could we

look at to try to understand how we
could you know
live in a more sustainable, better way
with the planet? And that's
what's caused, I would argue a
great deal of this interest
in- from westerners in the
traditions that are not of the sort of
bulk western- the primary western
thing that we're talking about, which is
this Judeo-Christian tradition.

Yeah another strong statement by White:

“The victory of Christianity over
paganism was the greatest psychic
revolution in the history of our culture.”

So it's not like White is just saying
well this happened, and you know it's a
little part of our history. No,
according to White, this is the biggest
part of our history from an
environmental
point of view anyhow; that paganism
was overturned by Christianity, that
these earth-based religions were

overturned by Christianity. That's the biggest, according to White, psychic revolution in the history of our culture. And you know since our culture, the western culture, has been so influential, we're really talking about that's the you know biggest revolution in the history of well of western history.

Yeah. White has seen this as so important because it's a shift in deity right, and it's a metaphysical God taking over the role that had been played by physical gods. In other words, the God separate from nature takes over all these deities that were part of nature and protecting nature. And a note here, and it's worth noting, who are these deities protecting nature from?

I've noted this last lecture, but let's

say it again to be

clear..from us. That's what the

deities do, genius loci.

There are these beings that will harm

nature, that will do things like cut

forests down, and nature has to be

protected from them.

Who are these beings that do these terrible

things? Well in this view, it's

us, we are those beings.

Yeah. To many environmentalists, and White

is really inaugurating this,

this is a decisive moment in human

history, when

humans changed for worse our posture

toward the environment.

In other words, as Christianity spread in

this view and encountered earth-based

religions

you know throughout especially in recent

centuries,

this caused environmental problems with

it. Again, you can see why people would

take offense by this, right? And

again, please don't you know
be upset with me, the messenger. But you
could see why people would take offense
because what's being said here:
as Christianity spread throughout the
world,
our relationship to nature got worse,
Christianity is the problem here. And
again, this is
Judeo-Christian tradition, but
Christianity is
principally the religion that was
doing a lot of spreading over the
centuries.

Yeah, so...does this seem unjust to you?

Well I can't answer that of course,
but if it does, again
you come down to a question of
interpretation. If you're not happy with
this interpretation of Christianity, or
Judaism, or Islam,
then you know you are
welcome to reinterpret it. And that
reinterpretation

is still going on now, I mean once- when

Lynn White Jr sort of threw down the

gauntlet,

a range of people who adhere to this

view of creation

immediately jumped on board and

started this reinterpretation, so- which

continues today.

It's interesting by the way, all this

discussion and the hugeness of the

problem

we've been talking about it all, we're

still on the first sentence of Genesis

to give you an idea of how influential

it is.

Okay. Let's move forward

a little bit. So we're still in chapter 1

of Genesis, but now we're down to

verse 11. And God said, "Let the earth

bring forth grass, and the .yielding seed,

and the fruit tree yielding fruit after

its kind, whose seed is..itself,

upon the earth: and it was so." So

another sentence you may not think has a

lot of environmental significance, but you know shows clearly here what we learned in the very first sentence, that this is a metaphysical God, but his relationship to the earth is being demarcated, explained here. He's not only superior to the earth, but the earth is subordinate and obedient to God, so let the earth bring forth. What that means is, God commanded the earth to bring forth, and the earth did as God commanded. So not only is the metaphysical God disconnected from the earth in the sense of not inhabiting it as most people thought at this time, we'll get to the point whether God's still here, but as it was often interpreted, this meant that God is separate and apart from the earth and the earth is submissive to God, the earth does what God

does. All of the natural processes on
earth then
are ruled over by this metaphysical God,
this is the God who
calls the shots for nature.

So it's not like the other way around,
it's not like you know local features
have some
import on the deity that the pantheon of
God is all sort of
a collection of all these natural
features that are themselves deities
like rivers, and mountains, and
and forests, and all. No, God is separate
from nature,
and as this line reveals, God is in
control
of nature, of the earth. Yeah.

Now, here we need to introduce a word
that we've been talking about
all along, but I haven't formally called
it dualism.

And dualism just means two things
together,

and typical dualism, which we're actually going to address as a function of this, is the dualism in the way that human beings are imagined.

Human beings for many people are imagined as sort of an amalgam of spirit, and body, mind, and body, and if you subscribe to this, incidentally as many Christians did, it means that you have a soul which is separate and apart from your body, and your soul will one day when you die leave your body.

So that's seeing human beings having a dual nature, you know one part is spirit, the other part is body.

They are connected, we can talk about them the same, but they are also separate, and can be separated, and will for everyone be separated.

And this view, the dualistic view of the earth in that the deity is not connected to it. So Humbaba was thoroughly

connected, he's like a tree, he's
described like a tree.

This God is not connected to the earth
in the same way,
and as a consequence, it's argued, that
you know you have dual things going on:
you have the physical world,
which is here and now; and then you have
this metaphysical world, with the
metaphysical deity.

It's also argued, in this view and this
is sort of what Lynn White Jr is
unfolding,
that it's not just you have these two
things, but one is regarded as superior
to the other.

So go back to the example of you know
mind-body dualism,
human beings as a mind and a body.
That has different names by the way,
you know you often hear the mind part.
Mind actually sort of enters the
discussion like in the 17th century, now
most famously with

like philosophers like Descartes and all,
prior to that it was often called that
part of the human being, the soul,
or the spirit. The body is called the
body, or sometimes the flesh.

But anyhow, in mind body dualism, one half
of this two-part thing is clearly seen
as superior, and that's the spirit,
the soul, the mind. And in this view,
going back to the planet, one thing is
definitely superior here,
that's God in the metaphysical realm. I
mean generally speaking people thought
that heaven
was definitely the better superior realm,
and the earth was
an inferior one, and in hell, the third
place which we'll talk about especially
when we get to the early modern period,
was a really inferior realm.

So, now we're getting to the creation of
human beings,
and we have two passages that talk about
that, I'll read them.

This is Genesis 1:26; “And God said,
Let us make man in our image, after our
likeness:

and let them have dominion over the fish
of the sea, and over the fowl of the
air, and over the cattle, and
all of the earth, and over every creeping
thing that creepeth upon the earth.”

So just to be clear, this means human
beings have dominion over
pretty much everything right. And again,
we have the same thing
being restated. Now, why is this
restated? Well,

if you were into like textual analysis
you might argue
that this is another text that came from
an older tradition
before it was written down, just like we
saw with Gilgamesh.

When the writer or writers of this
for many many centuries people assume
that Moses actually wrote all this,
modern scholars might tend to disagree

with that. But whoever wrote this,
wrote down things from the oral
tradition, and sometimes may have like
written it down twice or in
slightly different
interpretations, so
you have what may seem kind of redundant
passages, but
this is the Bible that we have.

Incidentally the Bible that we have,
what we're reading from, the edition that
we're reading from,
is generally called the King James
Version,
it was more accurately sometimes
called the Authorized Version.

And who authorized it? That would be King
James. So this Bible just had an
anniversary, it's over 400 years old.

You may know like in Shakespeare's era
Queen Elizabeth was the monarch in
England,
after her James came, and James among
other things,

authorized an english version of
the Bible that has stayed with us for
400 years, and this is it. And
the people who put this together decided
that these two passages,
even though they kind of repeat each
other, should be in there. So we just read
Genesis 1:26,
this is 1:28; “And God blessed them, and God
said unto them,
Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish
the earth,...” So this is
the human beings that were created.
“..and subdue it: have dominion over the
fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the
air, and over every living
thing that moveth upon the earth.” By the
way this raises another question, you
might say wait he created
them- that very quickly I thought the
whole story had to do with Adam and Eve
being created.
Well yes, that's coming. So in addition to
the story of Adam and Eve, these two

passages are popped in here
talking about God in the plural,
of God you know saying that let us
create human beings. So there
are two separate creations of human
beings
in Genesis, this being the first one.
Most people will reference the second
one, which we're going to deal with, which
has to do with Adam and Eve,
but just so you know.

Yeah so here's a problem, right?

Environmentalists have argued, Lynn
White Jr and that camp, that this gives
human beings dominion over the entire
planet,
which is ours as we please- to do with as
we please.

In short, it postulates the whole earth, and
all life on it, as
here, and centered on, human beings. In
other words, in this view,
in this passage that we've been
reading, God created the earth

and basically handed us the keys, human beings the keys. He created us, and then he said here this is yours, you have dominion over it, you have dominion over everything. And let me be very clear, all the animals, all the fish, everything flying over everything, it's yours, take the keys.

That creates a very earth-centered religion

because the God, you know this Hebrew God Yahweh, or He has a number of names, Jehovah.

This God is like not here, and who is here in his stead? Who is sort of the mini God on earth now?

Well gee, that would be us, and God has transferred sort of ownership, or possession, to us in this view as many people have interpreted, and again, it's an interpretive issue. So you can see this is very much

centered on human beings, it's not really
centered

on God as much as what goes on in the
earth, it's centered on human action.

Lynn White Jr makes another very damning
statement regarding this, and he says,

“Christianity

is the most anthropocentric religion the
world has ever seen.” So what does the
word anthropocentric mean?

Anthropocentrism is literally means

human

centered, right? It comes from two

ancient words; anthropo,

we get anthropology from this, it means

human, and obviously centrist means

centered.

This is a key concept for

environmentalists, that such a world view

suggests that everything on earth,

and again Genesis 1:26 and 1:28

seem to suggest this, that everything

centers

on us is here just for us. To White,

no other religion on the planet centers
on human beings this way.

So go back to the religion that we're
looking at in Gilgamesh, well
that's centered on the earth, right? It
had to do with earth's deities and all,
human beings had to act very, and this is
before Gilgamesh's time,
Gilgamesh obviously is inaugurating a
change.

But you know human beings in this older
view had to
act a certain way toward the planet, be
careful of how the planet is
is taking- you know how they relate
to the planets, they can't do things like
you know
clear-cutting a forest, or there could
be real problems for human beings.
Yeah, in this view you don't have to
worry about any of that, we we are in
control.

This amazing God, who created everything,
singled us out, and gave us control.

Yeah. So the opposite of anthropocentrism is "biocentrism," and the belief that no one form of life (such as human beings) is superior to any other. So again, see how anthro is being separated by "bio," and "bio" the word means life, and we have it in words like biology and all.

But in that view all life is equal and of equal value on the planet, and there's not one that is of more value.

In many religions that seems to be, well that's definitely one way of interpreting them.

Christianity, the way White is arguing and it's been interpreted, isn't doing that, it is centering on one particular form of life, human beings, calling them superior. And you know you you can see why environmentalists would look to these biocentric religions

from an environmental point of view
because they are
you know far friendlier to the earth,
because they help protect the earth in
important ways,
and that's something that you know it
just wasn't done by
Christianity according to White and
others.

So staying with chapter one, let's go to
another passage.

This is the one in fact we've looked at
before, so the second
passage that talks about dominion.

Let's look at the words here. In Hebrew
"replenish," so
where's replenish happening here, God said
"Be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the
earth,
subdue it: and have dominion." So we're
going to look at these words, "replenish,"
"subdue," "dominion," start with replenish.
"Replenish" is male' in Hebrew, it means to
make

full or abundant, to fill.

So human beings are given a mandate by

God,

fill the earth.

“Subdue” is kabash, means to force-

or to subdue, or to force something, to

trap it down

literally. So what are we to do to the

earth? What is the mandate?

We are to trap it down, subdue it, get

control

of it. So we are supposed to, in this view

and again

it's all of our interpretation, we are to

multiply as a species as much as we can,

spread across the earth, and as we're

spreading across the earth,

subdue it, trap it down.

“Dominion” in which is the word you often

hear about environmentally,

“dominion” is radah, it means to rule,

to dominate, and again to trap down. And

it's important to note that

in the Bible that most people read

throughout
history in the last couple of
millennia,
it was the Vulgate Bible, which is a
Latin Bible. And in Latin-
in that Latin Bible, the word for
dominion is dominos, which is master,
so to be the the ruler, the master, of the
earth,
and to dominate it. So
again, this mandate spread all over the
planet; take control of it,
dominate it, be the master of it.
Yeah. As you may not be
surprised, environmentalists have these
words all- suggest that these words
suggest a very disturbing posture toward
the earth.
Male' by the way is particularly
worrisome because
it's been interpreted as encouraging
human beings to overpopulate the planet,
which obviously has a negative
environmental consequence. You know we

have,
right now, about 7.75 billion people on
the planet,
and it's been growing dramatically. When
I was born, 60 years ago, there were only
three billion people;
and by 2050, which is coming out as fast,
there may be
not quite 10 billion, but approaching it.
Incidentally, I told you that these
opening pages are
important for all kinds of things, and I
talked about the creation evolution
debate, but
one regarding birth control was in
Christianity.
And you may know that like you know
Catholicism
in particular does not you know
condone
certain birth control methods, as well
as other Christian
sects. And of course abortion is the
big touchstone issue, so

creationism is being fought out in
the US all the time,
and abortion is as well. Well, you may
wonder why
you know Christians care so much about
this. Well
they go back to this particular passage,
among others, but this particular one
suggests that
yeah we're not supposed to be using
birth control, we're supposed to be
filling the earth, God suggests
that we fill it, and how would
we be
you know taking that seriously if we use
birth control.
Now there are other passages too, but
this one is
part of that debate going on
regarding, in particular
abortion in the US. But you can see why
environmentally we would
you know hope that the planet actually
drops back

in population. However difficult that may be for economic and other reasons, from a strictly environmental point of view, it would probably be great if we only had you know-

well be great if we had about as many people on the planet as when I was born, about three billion. Our environmental problems would be a lot you know fewer than if we had 10 billion people, we'll shortly have.

Yeah, so again the passage again "Be fruitful, and multiply, replenish the earth."

Yeah. These animals- these lines have suggested to Lynn White Jr and others, that they show how we should relate to other animals and life on earth because, according to this passage, you know we are lord and master to echo the latin words of all life on the planet,

which is here just to serve us.

From an environmental point of view, this

is obviously worrisome because it

dictates our posture toward other

animals,

and in this view where you know life is

not on an equal footing,

some life matters a lot more than others,

and that's human life

matters more than animal life. And just

kind of be a spoiler to what we have

coming up

directly, we're going to see a human

creation, Adam and Eve

being- Adam being created out of clay

directly by God,

being very different than the animal

creation. In fact, we already just saw the

animal creation when God

called forth the earth, when I- we noted

that

this is a point where God is sort of in

control and says

you know I want you to do earth, and

the earth doesn't, and submissive.

Well that thing that God asked the earth to do was to bring forth all the animals, so they have a very different creation than Adam- than human beings.

And it- as a consequence, human beings and animals are seen as fundamentally different in this view.

All their animals, all of their life on earth, is created by- brought forth by the earth, but we are special, we have a separate creation, we are directly fashioned by God, both Adam and Eve are, although they have different- they're created differently, but we are created in God's image and are like Him.

In the modern evolutionary scientific view, that's not the way it works, all life is the same on the planet, insofar as we all share similar dna. And as you may know, you know compared to other like higher primates like chimpanzee, we have you know almost like 90

odd some percent similar dna. Even like yeast and all, we're like 80 the same dna. So we are fundamentally in that creation story, the creation story of evolution, fundamentally the same, but in this one, we're fundamentally different. And as I note here from environmental view-point, that's worrisome right.

Yeah, and this is it.

We are seen as fundamentally different, and this is Genesis 124 through 27; recounts different creation stories, so it's very different than evolution. So you might have thought that the you know evolution you know creationism debate had import for various reasons, well it does and for lots of different reasons, but one of them is just that, that it imagines us as human beings differently, than creationism imagines

human beings differently,
than the way evolution does, with respect
to our relationship to animals.

In this view, the biblical view, we are
fundamentally different than everything
else on the planet;
and in the evolution story, we are very
similar to everything else on the planet.

And this will also play out in dualistic
thought I should mention because one of
the ways that we are different in this
view, which we'll get to,
is that because it's a dualistic view,
human beings have
souls. It's a debated issue throughout
history as you might imagine
whether animals have souls and all, but
the general view has
usually been in Christianity, that no
other animals have souls,
and that they're not going to Heaven.

Your dog is not going to be there in
Heaven for you
because your dog doesn't have a soul, and

that doesn't have a metaphysical aspect
to get to Heaven,
nothing does but human beings
because we're like God
in that sense.

So again, this passage, which we're
going through again and again because
it's so important, "Be fruitful,...
multiply,...over every living thing that
moveth upon the earth."

Yeah this is what we mentioned earlier,
that in addition to male',
you know that human beings
here are encouraged to overpopulate the
the planet. And this you know
it's not just that it can be used this
way, it has been, and still
is used by human beings making an
argument against birth control and
abortion,

that that's not what God wants you to do.
If this text, the Bible, were different,
there wouldn't be this debate. And again,
I should note, that this comes down to

an issue of interpretation. There are plenty of Christians, and plenty of Christian you know denominations that do not have a problem with birth control at all, and there are plenty that do not have a problem with abortion. But on the other hand, there are very influential worldwide Christian denominations, like Catholicism, that has a strict ban on abortion.

And what this means, because Catholicism is so influential in say South America, you know 97% of women in South America do not have access to abortion as a you know sort of an option of last choice for birth control.

And in the United States, Catholicism of course influential and the Southern Baptist Conference also is very influential, and

often plays a role in the debate against abortion. And as you may know, you know Roe v Wade, which is the landmark decision from decades ago making abortion legal in the US, may well come under fire- has been coming under fire, but may well show up in the Supreme Court and where this will be debated.

And all this is happening in part, I would say in large part, because of this text and the way people interpret it.

And we interpret it literally, human beings should go forth and fill the earth.

So, I'm going to pop back in again.

Yeah. And again, what I was saying you know

most people think we need to at least stay environmentalists, and all sorts of scientists think we should stabilize our population, or drop it down.

So the fact that this passage is causing people to you know to fight for not allowing women access to birth control and abortion, yeah environmentalists see that as problematic.

“And God formed man in the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” So in spite of the fact that Adam is literally made out of clay, and in Hebrew that word is- Adam's actual name is Adam is 'adam, means made of clay. For nearly two thousand years, human theologians, Christian theologians, have argued that human beings have a dual nature, half body and half soul. So where does that begin? It begins back in this passage, and this is that you know life is being blown

into

man. Adam, what is that life? That's the soul.

So human beings now have a dual nature.

We are made of the earth,

yes. We are earth beings, we are 'adam,

'adama, and the word for

you know the earth is 'adama. But

we have this second thing, which is like

God part,

no other animals according to most

Christian theologians have that.

And where does that all begin? It

begins in this particular passage.

Yeah. So what is the real human being

then

if we have these two parts, body and soul?

Well the real one is the one that will

survive

death, in the sense of corporal life here,

and go up with

God and exist in the

metaphysical realm.

So we are also metaphysical beings;

you know we are beyond the earth too, but
but only that aspect
of us, the soul part.

Everything on earth is potentially in
this view,
illusory, this is not the real world.

Earth might seem like the real world, but
a real world, or at least our real home,
is in Heaven
with God. And worst,
this realm is going to be seen, the
earth realm, nature, as
inferior and even as evil, or at
least the playground of evil. This is
where evil exists, and there isn't evil
in Heaven.

Yeah. Disconnecting people from their
physical bodies
and seeing it potentially as evil, is
clearly problematic environmentally.

Well
it's problematic in different ways, right,
because it means the things that
are associated with our body, like bodily

function, say eating.

You know you might think eating is a really great thing and enjoy it because it connects to your body,

but in some views, in Christianity,

this is

a problem, this is where you can get overtaken by your physical urges.

And what I mean by that is, your body can cause you to sin

through gluttony, which is

considered a major sin

for many Christians, like one of the seven major sins.

And how that works is because,

it's not your soul that wants to eat, but your body, your animal nature, wants to consume,

and if it eats too much-

it's pushing you to do that. So if you wonder why you're you know you're you have a problem over eating when you see a great piece of cake, the way I might,

it's because it's your physical nature that is overcoming your spirit, your spirit should be stronger.

And of course it's not just you know eating, it's a lot of things associated with the body, sex being a great example. Sex you know, the soul- different theologians think of this differently, we're gonna get to

John Milton in the early modern period that thought angels and all had sex.

But for the most part, people didn't think that sex was something connected with

the soul, that was another body thing, and that was the body pulling you down to the earthly sinful aspect of your existence. So you know it's not just glutton you have to worry about, your body's also trying to get you to sin by having sex.

So dualism, just to talk about that directly.

What are the implications of this dualism? So we have in two ways now we've encountered dualism right, well more than two, but two principle ways.

One, that God is separate from the creation, that's a dualistic view of the creation.

And two, that human beings are separate- or disconnected, and that we are two together, we are a dualistic being, half spiritual half earthy.

But if human beings are just you know souls that sort of get popped in a body, live here for a lifetime, and pop out and be with God.

We're kind of like visitors on the earth, you know suffering bondage and physical bodies on a physical planet, making our way to be back with God in a distinctly, unphysical,

unearthly realm.

Then how much does the earth really matter in this view?

This is not, in this view, our home; this is just some place we're visiting.

And as a consequence, you know we are not really of this world, and that-

that is- will get articulated by people in the new testament especially.

You know we might be in this world for a while, but we're not really of it, we're a spiritual being that's separate and apart from it. Okay,

but in this view then, what is the relationship? What is the obligation that we have to the world

if it's not really our home? That, people will find troubling, we'll talk about the reason why. Yeah.

Encourages in this view, this is what people have argued, and kind of act like a hotel guest right. So if you're not at your home, you're just

visiting a place for a while. Well
the temptation is to be like a bad hotel
guest,
not care much about it, and sort of
trash the room because well
it's not your home, who cares about that
room. You're going to be going to a far
far better place very soon to be in your
true home with God.

Now, there are ways around this, and we're
actually going to see them in the early
modern period begin to emerge,
that you can think of yourself as a
steward
of the environment, that you're here to
protect it, you can reinterpret dominion
as not
you know trashing the place, but rather
being the protector of it.

There are people who really take that
position now who's ascribed to Christian
thinking;
two big ones are Pope Francis, the
current pope,

and Al Gore, they are very much of the Christian stewardship tradition. But environmentalists have argued, well that's great that didn't begin to emerge you know 400 years ago and it's alive and well today, but for a long part of human history, and for a lot of Christians today, and they argue, they don't take that position, they take this one: that the earth is just this place we're visiting. And you can see you know if you subscribe to like another religion where this is your true home, you know there is no metaphysical realm, this is it, and this is all there is. Well you would want to be very respectful for the way you treated it, and especially because you're giving it to your children, and if you have children, a future generations, and they will respectfully you know do the same because it's the only home you have. Why

would you destroy your home?

But in this other view, this Christian

view,

there is another home, a true home.

Yeah. I'm just curious what you make of

this assessment of dualistic religions,

if it's accurate or not, or if

it's

fair. Again, with something like

stewardship, there are other

ways of imagining the relationship

between

the metaphysical and the physical, and

especially us as both

physical and metaphysical beings. But it

is

a conspicuous feature of this religion,

in Christianity.

Not as- Judaism is

more difficult in certain ways, it

doesn't really imagine Heaven,

and it's more complicated issue. But

we are focusing on Christianity here, not

to

you know depict on Christianity, but because it has been so influential for so many centuries, and it still is today.

So, chapter 2 of Genesis.

“And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden..to dress it and to keep it.”

In Hebrew, dress is abad, which is to work for another, to serve another by labor. And the phrases is to dress and to keep, and “to keep” is shamar, which is to keep guard, to keep watch, protect, save life. So environmentalists have you know focused on things like Genesis 1:26, 1:28, but you know others have looked at Genesis 2.15 and suggest that well okay you know maybe 1:26 and 1:28 are kind of problematic, or need to be really interpreted you know carefully, but 2.15 seems pretty clear

that there's something else going on
here,
that from the very beginning and the
opening verses of the Bible
that human beings are
told what their position is to the earth,
which is to take care of it.

Although I will note that these passages
are before the fall,
and we're going to see directly that
after the fall things change a little.

But again, just to keep you know making
this clear, what we're doing here,
interpretation, plays a major role in
understanding
this text. You know how you interpret it
is everything,
and I'd add of course, this is with any
text that you read.

So chapter three. Now we're getting to
the biblical fall,

Adam and Eve. And unto Adam he said,
this is after the fall, so God's found
out that they've sinned

and he says to them because- he says to Adam, "Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife..."

All right, we're not going to get into the gendered aspects of this text, but as you may well know

feminists have had a lot of problems with this text as well,

and here it's specifically being said women

caused the problem, here a woman caused the problem, Eve sinned and then caused Adam to sin. And throughout history,

and you know the tradition coming out of this, and this

is not only in Christianity, but in the Islamic

world as well, we'll go back to this.

It postulates women as being the sort of temptation for man,

leading men into sin, sort of sexual snares.

And you know why do people you know

believe that? Well,
it's an interpretation of a text like
this, that you know
thou listened to the voice of thy wife,
and is eaten of the tree.
She told you to do it, I commanded thee
not to do it, saying "Thou shalt not eat
of it: cursed is the ground."
And as a consequence, "cursed is the
ground for thy sake; in
sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days
of thy life."
So Adam listens to Eve, eats the
fruit.
But then something odd happens, it's not
just that human beings are going to die
because of it and sin is released in the
world,
that's all true, but the earth
is now going to have to suffer too.
"Cursed is the ground." So not just that
you know you Adam are cursed, or Eve is
cursed,
but the ground is now cursed. And what

does that mean

by being cursed? Well, "Thorns also..thistles

shall it bring forth to thee; and thou

shall eat the herb of the field."

So before the fall, the earth was like a

benevolent mother earth,

took care of everything. Imagine

living in like a perfect paradise,

you didn't have to worry about

agriculture, you didn't have to worry

about putting food by,

you just walk out and there's you know

big things of grapes and food

everywhere, and the earth takes care of

you;

never scary storms, never floods, never

anything like that,

everything is fine. Well it's not fine

anymore.

And this is actually sort of a

historical

interpretation of why we now have

agriculture,

because the earth isn't that way, human

beings have to
do all these things agriculturally to
feed ourselves, because the earth isn't
going to be benevolent and take care of
us,
we have to do it and we have to
take part in that labor, which we'll see
here.

In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat
bread, till thou return unto the
ground; for out of it thou wast taken:
for dust thou art, and unto dust thou
shall return.

Yeah, God's pretty mad here. And as a
consequence, you know
Adam is going to have to work now to to
get everything, you can't rely on
your mother earth anymore, you've been
kicked out, kicked out of the garden.

And the realm
that human beings, the way the earth is
now, is not benevolent.

You know it is potentially very
misogynistic here,

but these lines have environmental
import as well.

So here's the line: "...cursed is the ground
for thy sake...Thorns also and thistle
shall it bring forth..."

And into the next passage, into the sweat
of- "...In the sweat of thy face shalt
thou eat bread, till thou return us
unto the ground." So this is the
punishment. So

Adam and Eve have disobeyed God, original
sin, they've taken the apple, they've
eaten it, they were commanded not to do
it.

So what is Adam's punishment? Well
because of original sin,
human beings have a new relationship to
the planet, which is essentially
adversarial,
it's not like a mother taking care of
her children. And you know
environmentalists have found this
problematic because it postures
us as sort of you know fighting against

the earth, the earth isn't going to give
it up anymore
freely, we have to take everything, and we
have to do that through hard labor.

Yup.

That's a problem, right? I mean it's not
seeing us as
sort of connected to the earth in the
same way,
or you know in an earlier earth-based
religion
you of course pay homage to the earth in
the hopes that the earth takes care of
you; so you
you know you give offerings to the earth,
you have all sorts of ceremonies
to ensure that there's a nice harvest,
that you get lots of food and all.
And that's not what's happening here,
there's no kind of making nice with the
earth,
we have to just take it. And
environmentally, you can see where this
could be seen as problematic.

We're going to get to Hesiod actually
in the next lecture.

And in Hesiod there's talk of an
Iron Age and this gets repeated
hundreds of years later by Romans
like Virgil,
and in this view, the same thing is
happening. So
from this part of the world, the Middle
East and then
into Southern Europe, we have the same
story told again and again,
that human beings once lived this
perfect relationship to the planet.

Whether that's in Eden or in Virgil's
you know
golden race or- I'm sorry Hesiod's
golden race, or Virgil's
Golden Age, but then that changes when
human beings
have a new relationship, which is
essentially adversarial,
earth is no longer a perfect place.
Again, "...cursed is the ground for thy sake..."

In the sweat of
thy face shalt thou eat of
bread, till return unto the ground.”

Yeah because of this and other passages,
Christians thinkers have often argued
that at the fall something happened,
the earth entered a state of
irretrievable decay,
the earth is now no longer a perfect
place,
and is decaying, and dying. And to
many theologians, Christian theologians,
before the fall,
human beings were certainly imagined as
immortal, we were going to live forever.
Animals were imagined as immortal, they
were going to live forever before the
fall.

And everything lived in harmony, it's not
just that benevolent mother earth took
care of us,
people imagined that animals for example
were all vegetarians, that they didn't
eat each other, that

the lions and all somehow ate you know
I guess a good vegan diet. But
that all changed because of this. And
many will argue that the earth will
end,
and when we get to Christianity,
the end of Christianity, John's
revelation, which is in the
Judeo-Christian Bible, the Christian
Testament, it's the very
end of it. So Genesis is the very
beginning of that Christian Bible,
and John's revelation is the end, that
the earth will ultimately burn and be
destroyed
because it's in a state of decay. And in
this view, the only thing that can
survive that
are dualistic human beings because we
sort of pop out of our body as
souls, and go up- or wherever- to be with
God in Heaven.
Everything else is going to decay, is
decaying.

So you can see where this environmentally is is a problematic, because it not only postulates as human beings as being fundamentally different from the earth, but you know what happens to the earth and what happens to us is very different. Even though, in this view, we brought all this about right, we caused the fall here.

So you think that this isn't very influential over the years, 17th century poet, John Bunn- John Donne, put it very succinctly.

You know, "The world (the earth) is but a carcass," like a dead animal.

"Forget this world, and scarce think of it, / As of old clothes, cast off a year ago." So in this you know the big danger of this dualistic thinking is that you may agree with

Donne, that the earth really
doesn't matter, it's like old clothes,
forget it. You're not part
of this world, you're just temporarily
here,
you belong somewhere else. Yeah.
You hear, and we'll talk about with
climate change, that we're in-
people are concerned that we might have
reached tipping point, and when that
happens, you know the climate will sort
of go
out of control as you know methane is
released all across the
the top of the planet. And by that I mean
the northern hemis- top of the northern
hemisphere as
you know permafrost melts, and
releases carbon into the atmosphere.
We may no longer be able to stop it, you
know even if we stopped burning fossil
fuels tomorrow, it will continue.
Well in this view, the tipping point was
five thousand- six thousand years ago, if

that's when Adam and Eve lived.
When they did something fundamental to
change the earth
and now the earth is doomed, is decaying
is dying,
and everything when it dies, and
everything is dying, and the planet
itself will ultimately burn. And there's
only
one group that can get out of this you
know
escape this fate, and that's
ironically human beings, which according
to this story,
are the ones that started all that. So.
I should note, that in recent years
scholars, so this is
by recent years I mean after the 1967
publication of
Lynn White Jr. Lynn White Jr, in
addition to causing a range of
environmentalists to reinterpret
Christianity and sometimes
to outright reject it, it also caused a

range of Judeo-Christian thinkers to reassess the tradition, to enter in a hermeneutic- enter into a hermeneutic project of interpreting their religion greenly, and also of just trying to understand it in environmental ways. And one of these is Jeremy Cohen, who wrote a book in the late 1980s, and he questioned whether pre-modern Jews and Christians actually believed that they could act in a mode of indifference. So in other words, God gives human beings you know dominion over the planet, and the assumption that White takes is that well then human beings thought they could do everything, and destroy the planet in any way they wanted to. And Jeremy Cohen says well yeah but if you look at you know pre-modern before like 400 years ago, Christians and Jews, they they didn't take that position, they acted more

respectfully to the planet.

So that book by the way is a reference to Genesis. The title of that book is "Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the World and Master It,"

and that is of course, we just saw, Genesis 1:28, that's where it's coming from.

And it is a compelling book, and it really

brings home the idea that this is a hermeneutic issue,

it's one of interpretation; Lynn White

Jr interpreted the Bible a certain way,

Jeremy Cohen interprets it another way.

And I'm encouraging you,

if this matters to you, if you happen

to come from this tradition

and you have an investment in it,

yeah to take up that challenge.

Which- which- and again, that's a

favorable way of looking at White

because he really

is not saying this is definitely the
problem, well he kind of does. But
if you are of the mind, you can do what
we're doing in this course,
you know you can interpret a text, then
you should
jump into interpreting it. And I think
that's the way of seeing the
challenge.

So epilogue. This
debate continues today. So Lynn White Jr
you know
wrote over 50 years ago, and you'd assume
all
debate was like a late 60s thing. Well, no,
it continues today. He started the debate,
but it's by no means over.

I note, that in 2007, a number of
prominent
Christian activists led by a guy named
James C. Dobson.
He's a founder of a group called Focus
on the Family,
I don't follow it, but I believe there's

a radio show that's very popular, he does probably a podcast now.

Anyhow there was a member of the National Association of Evangelicals, which is a major

Christian group that at the time, back in 2007,

suggested this

person in the National Association of Evangelicals, an official,

suggested the climate change be taken seriously. In other words, he suggested that this Christian group

you know publicly say the climate change is a problem,

and Dobson and others called for this

guy to be immediately fired

on Christian grounds, on biblical

exegesis

interpretation, hermeneutic grounds argued

that

this was a problem. So you can see right

here,

in this one group, the American

Association of Evangelicals- the National
Association of Evangelicals, which Dobson
is course apart,
the debate is still raging. And it is
still
being raged pretty fiercely, I mean if
you're asking for someone
to be fired. Yeah. And the reason for this
is that many people,
many individuals like in this group of
evangelicals, felt that their political
agenda was being co-opted by those
sympathetic
to people like Al Gore and other
liberals. Now that's kind of funny right,
because Al Gore comes from a southern
baptist
Christian tradition, and yet they felt
that
this was sort of a liberal thing, rather
than a religious thing.
But on the other hand, to some, it
raised this question as it did to John
Donne,

you know who said the world was but a
carcass and throw it off like old
clothes,

you know just how much this place, this
planet, should matter.

So in a way that's where White brings us,
to that question, which is a question now
being debated within Christianity or
within even specific

Christian groups like the National
Association of Evangelicals,

how much does the earth really matter? If
you're like that official

who they wanted to fire, it matters a lot,

and we should care about it, and

we should take something like the threat
of climate change very

seriously. To others, well, the earth has

been decaying for six thousand years,

it's- we can't turn it around, so why

should it matter that much.

It may well be the most important

question facing us

today, and I mean that more generally, you

know how much does the earth matter? You don't have to be a religious thinker at all to raise that question, and if you're well like me and like Al Gore as a Christian, you know it doesn't matter what you believe, but the earth may matter a great deal to you, or it may not matter much to you at all and it may be a function of your religious belief.

But it is the question that's being debated now across the planet.

And the good news, from my perspective as an environmentalist, is that you know some very prominent Christians like Al Gore and Pope Francis are taking the strong position that the earth matters a great deal, and that's really good news. But where this will all turn out for individual people subscribing in this

tradition

will all come down to a question of hermeneutics, of how how they interpret the text that- the passage that we were reading,

and in fact, the whole long book of the judeo-Christian Bible, which which we won't be reading.

So, here's the question.

And I guess I ask it to you, and

depends on

you know your own feelings. And you can see why I started this

lecture by saying well you know this is gonna-

how you feel about this lecture may have to do with how you feel about

Christianity and all.

You may find it worrisome, you may-

standing outside of Christianity,

you may think because of this lecture

were lots of things you've known before

whatever, that it's a very worrisome

thing.

On the other hand, you may feel that you know that it's not as worrisome, that because of people like you know Pope Francis and all, Christianity was- would be reinvented to in fact be a force for good environmentally in the world, that they would take the forefront.

And we'll get to what Christian stewardship is when we hit it historically, but just kind of as a spoiler, and Pope Francis is thoroughly in this tradition, that you know dominion means to him that Christians are here to take care of the planet. So yes God handed the keys over to us, but maybe as a test, maybe not as a test, but at least so that human beings would take care of it. In other words, God created this wonderful place and he

handed us the keys,
he sure as heck didn't want us to
destroy it, he wanted us to take care of
it for him, we're in charge of this
divine possession,
you know we should do every possible
thing
to make it great. If that's the
interpretation of Christianity you have,
which is different than James Dobson
saying that you know don't even take
climate change seriously, if that's the
interpretation of Christianity you have,
that's great. But here's the question- but
here's the question, and I you know
I leave it for you, is Christianity
environmentally worrisome or not?
That's the issue. And that takes us to
the end of lecture
three. And if we've gotten through this,
it- next one won't be so bad we're gonna
be talking about
you know Greek religion and Greek gods
next, and most people still you know

probably won't get offended if I say
anything against Zeus. Actually
we're not going to talk about Zeus much
but. So,
this is the end then. I hope if you
haven't read the Bible, you
enjoy reading it, or
enjoy thinking about it from an
environmental point of view. Many of you
may have
read these passages before, the beginning
of
Genesis, but hopefully now you'll read it
in a new and different way.
Okay, so I'll see you next time.