

Environmental Philosophy

Phil 340: Fall 2016; 129 McKenzie Hall

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GTFs/GEs

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Course Description

Environmental philosophy is interested in a variety of concerns related to living creatures and the natural world. At the heart of its concerns is the question of how the human species fits into the web of relations in the natural world. We often consider ourselves as a species abstracted from the reality of the natural world without whom we would not exist. This course seeks to re-ground our species in its web of relations as we inquire into the various ways humans view themselves in this relation. We begin this exploration from the Western European and American perspective and then foray into other worldviews inquiring into the impacts such perspectives have on our experience of the natural world and our treatment of that world. Some guiding questions that I recommend for our consideration are: What kind of relation to nature leads to thriving for individuals, societies, and the natural world? Are humans special in the animal kingdom to anyone but ourselves? How ought our status to be defined and how ought that to impact our action in the world? What conceptualizations appear to nurture a thriving interspecies relations, and which suggest endangerment to other species and to ourselves? Are we natural? How are the natural world and civilization at odds or in harmony? Thus, we will explore differing theoretical vantage points that may help spur productive ways of imagining and being in the world.

Learning Objectives

Students who successfully complete this course are expected to have gained the ability to:

- Articulate an understanding of key concepts and issues in environmental philosophy
- Compare, contrast, and critique representative theoretical perspectives in environmental philosophy
- Present and assess views that differ from one's own, including perspectives informed by gender, ethnicity, class, and culture, as these bear on the framing and interpretation of environmental issues
- Engage critically and reflectively with traditional and contemporary interpretations of the human-nature relationship and evaluate their practical implications
- Reflect on the meaning of our relationship with nature and identify key conceptual and practical ways in which we can collectively live in and with nature

Required Texts – Always bring current reading to class (either pdf prints or textbook)

- ✓ *Main Currents of Western Environmental Thought*, Peter Hay
- ✓ *The Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram
- ✓ Articles available as PDF files on Canvas; it is required that you **print articles** and **bring them to class**. We are saving money by having them online rather than paying copyright fees, so please print.

Student Responsibility

Students are responsible for all assigned work in this course. It is expected that student work be unique to this course and have the integrity of being the **student's own production** (See academic honesty below). Students are responsible for **daily checking of email** to ensure awareness of any necessary changes in syllabus or class activities.

Course Requirements

° **Class participation:** You are expected to participate actively in this class, which includes attending the lectures, **reading all assigned material prior to class**, and participating productively and respectfully in

class discussions. I and the GTFs/GEs provide a variety of ways for students including small group work and office hours. Although no relevant remark is out of bounds in this class, courtesy and respect for all members of the class is required at all times. The quality and quantity of your participation in discussions will be evaluated in assigning 10% of your final course grade. Absences from class will negatively affect your participation grade.

° **Weekly reading quizzes:** Each week will include a brief quiz drawn from the assigned readings for the week. Read all assigned materials *carefully*. Some quizzes may be “open text,” so bring copies of the assigned readings to class. **No makeup quizzes will be given for any reason.** Your best five quiz grades + the reflective essay will be worth 10% of your final grade.

° **Essays** must be submitted both through Canvas Electronic Assignment and in printed copy to GTF by the dates noted on the syllabus. Essay values: 1=10%, 2=20%, 3=20%, 4=30%.

Electronic Assignment is a software tool designed to help students avoid plagiarism and improper citation. It encourages original writing and proper citation by cross-referencing submitted materials with an archived database of websites, essays, journal articles, and other published work (including all past and current essay submissions at the University of Oregon).

Grading rubric for essays¹:

A = Excellent. No mistakes, well-written, and distinctive in some way or other.

B = Good. No significant mistakes, well-written, but not distinctive in any way.

C = Okay. Some errors, but a basic grasp of the material.

D = Poor. Significant errors. A tenuous grasp of the material.

F = Failing. Problematic on all fronts indicating either no real grasp of the material or a complete lack of effort.

Grade Breakdown

1. Participation in class discussion and discussion sections, 10%. 2. Weekly reading quizzes & Reflective Essay, 10%. 3. Essays, 80%.

Policies

- ✓ Incompletes and extensions will be given only in the event of documented emergencies.
- ✓ Retain copies of all returned work until the final course grade has been posted to ensure that you receive proper credit for all work.
- ✓ No electronics without explicit permission from professor.
- ✓ **Academic Misconduct:** The University Student Conduct Code (available at <http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards.aspx>) defines academic misconduct which is prohibited. Students should not give or receive (or seek) unauthorized help on writing assignments or exams without express **permission from the instructor**. Students should acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g., quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and **use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor**. If you have any questions about academic honesty, please consult either your GTF or professor. We are here to help. To understand plagiarism visit: <http://library.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/index.html>. **Academic misconduct on an assignment or exam will be reported to the Director of Student Conduct and Community Standards and met with disciplinary action (the usual punishment is an “F” for the course).**

¹ Writing Guidelines provided later in the term.

- ✓ **Inclement Weather:** It is generally expected that class will meet unless the University is officially closed for inclement weather. If this happens, you will be notified via text or your UO email.
- ✓ **Sexual Violence:** The UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and gender-based stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences gender-based violence (intimate partner violence, attempted or completed sexual assault, harassment, coercion, stalking, etc.), know that you are not alone. UO has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more. **Please be aware that all UO employees are required reporters.** This means that if you tell me or your GTF about a situation, we may have to report the information to our supervisor or the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity. Although we have to report the situation, you will still have options about how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need. If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, **you can call 541-346-SAFE, UO's 24-hour hotline, to be connected to a confidential counselor** to discuss your options. You can also visit the SAFE website at safe.uoregon.edu.
- ✓ **Individual Learning Differences:** If you experience difficulty in this course for any reason, please consult with us. If you have an accessibility issue, contact us personally as soon as possible so we can discuss necessary accommodations necessary. **Every learner matters to us.** Accommodations will be made to support you, but if you have particular support needs, please contact Accessible Education Center at 541-346-1155. They can help arrange for material supports, extended testing times, etc.

Resources:

- University Teaching and Learning Center (TLC): TLC provides numerous resources (including courses, workshops, and tutoring) to help UO students succeed. They work with a diverse student body with a wide range of needs. Web: <http://tlc.uoregon.edu/> Phone: 541-346-3226
- University Counseling and Testing Center(UCTC): The UCTC provides comprehensive mental healthcare and testing services to the University of Oregon campus. They provide quality clinical/therapeutic services, psychological testing and assessment, psychoeducational workshops, and outreach as well as emergency services. Web: <http://counseling.uoregon.edu/dnn/> Phone: 541-346- 3227
- Accessible Education Center (AEC): The AEC is dedicated to facilitating and supporting accessible education through active collaboration with students, faculty, staff, and the community. The AEC works to create and sustain physical, curricular, and informational environments that are informed by and responsive to the diverse characteristics and experiences of students with disabilities and variations of ability. Web: <http://aec.uoregon.edu/> Phone: 541-346-1155

Tentative² Reading & Writing Schedule

Unit One - Views of Nature from Civilization

Week 1, 9/26,28 – Intro: Civilization versus Nature; Who are we humans? Where do we belong? The Cradle of Civilization depicted in the Epic of Gilgamesh; The question of nature, humanity, barbarity, and civilization

W: **Hays**-Preface & Ch1; **Canvas:** Hawthorne-*Young Goodman Brown*, RW Emerson-Intro & *Nature* Discussion Cotton Mather, Early European-American thought (herb lore), Nature, Good, & Evil

Week 2, 10/3, 5 – M: **Canvas:** Emerson-*Method of Nature* 1841, Thoreau-*Walking & Walden* Ch2 “Where I Lived...”,

² Note that reading assignments are subject to change; students will be notified via Canvas announcements. Be sure to check email daily for any new information.

H: **Canvas:** Jack London, *To Build a Fire*; John Muir-Yosemite Glaciers (Big Trees optional), Documentary

Week 3, 10/10, 12 – M: **Canvas:** Asian Thought: *Rig Veda*, Confucian *Analects*, Daoist *Dao De Jing*,
W: **Canvas:** Nietzsche, Zhuangzi & Nietzsche, Zen Buddhism –Shunryu Suzuki; Themes: *Dao*-Way of Nature,
De-Virtue, *He*-harmony, *Wu-wei*-effortless action, *Ziran*-spontaneity; *Anatman*—No-Self, Indra’s Net, *Dropping-*
off body (Dogen, Soto Zen) (Recommended *Sensing the Wind*)

Unit Two – Some Ways of Understanding the More-than-Human World

Week 4, 10/17, 19 – M: **Abrams:** Intro, Ch1-2; **Submit Unit One Essay:** *Identify problematic attitudes for thriving in nature and argue for a possible correction utilizing texts thus far. Explain & defend your view. (2-3 pages)*

W: **Abrams** Ch 3-4

Week 5, 10/24, 26 – M & W **Canvas:** Native American Readings

W: **Oct 26th Guest Lecture: Dr. Scott Pratt** on Native American Pragmatism

Week 6, 10/31, 11/2 – **Canvas:** Native American Thought; **Abrams** Ch 5

Unit Three - Attempts to Awaken: Crossing Over—Natural? Spiritual?

Material? Or?

Week 7, 11/7, 9 – M: **Hays** Ch 2; **Submit Unit Two Essay:** *Do either Abrams or the Native Theories provide insights for potential ways to alter our current popular thought or practice? Explain & defend your view (3-4 pages).*

W: **Hays** Ch 3; **Canvas:** Mann *Dependence on Place...*; What is the meaning of place?

Week 8, 11/14, 16 – M: **Hays** Ch 4, **Abrams** Ch 6; **Canvas:** Pagan Ecology; Thematic question: *Are spiritual/religious perspectives on our relation to nature helpful or harmful in actually inciting us to change for the better?* Consider traditional Western spiritual perspectives, spiritual perspectives of First Nations, Asian religious views, Pagan religious views

W: **Canvas:** Spiritual Thought & Practice; Thich Nhat Hanh, Thomas Berry pdfs

Week 9, 11/21, 23 – **Hays** Ch 6; **Canvas:** Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty

M: Submit Unit Three Essay: *Are spiritual/religious perspectives on our relation to nature helpful or harmful or something else in actually inciting us to change for the better? Explain & defend your view (3-4 pages).*

Nov 21: Guest Lecture: M. Kelsey Juliana, plaintiff in “Juliana, et al. versus the USA” (aka Juliana v. Obama)

Week 10, 11/28, 30 – M: **Hays** Ch 10; **Canvas:** Peter Singer & Michael Pollan (Recommended **Abrams** Ch 7 & Coda); Return to the question posed in the cradle of civilization. Our worldview or ideology houses metaphysical and theoretical commitments, however unconsciously, and these impact how we live in the world. What are tenable perspectives? What are views that promote health and wellbeing in our world?

W: Submit Reflective essay—*Spend a day in the natural world. Quietly reflect on who you are in this world and on the ideas and theories we’ve studied this term. What has altered your perception or helped you to have a better or deeper appreciation of the problems we face in our dependence on the earth for life and wellbeing (1.5-2 pages). Evaluation based on depth of reflective engagement and quality of writing.*

Final Essay Due Monday of Finals Week: *What is the meaning of the human animal in a more-than-human world and what is its proper place? Can the natural world coexist with our need for civilization? Explain &*

defend your view (4-6 pages). Put Course title and GTF/GE name on essay, and submit to Phil Department Office SCH 211.