

Sustainable Philosophy of Architecture
PHIL 399
Spring 2016

Meeting Times: MW, 16:00-17:15
Office Hours: Mondays, 1:45-3:45
Office: Room 345, Susan Campbell Hall

Course Objectives

Estimates are that 40% of greenhouse emissions come from buildings. Among multiple meanings of “sustainable”, this course focuses philosophies around environmentally-sustainable theories and practices for the built environment. The moral grounds for our pursuit of better ways of working with, not against, our environment involves where we dwell, which has at least two senses: our dwelling in a *qualified* sense, our sheltering-dwellings (homes, schools, public buildings), and our dwelling in an *unqualified* sense, our shared earth. Against this backdrop, we examine the refugee crisis in terms of claims around environmental justice, which norms are requisite to sustainability in general. Our theoretical task is to engage with relevant literature in articulate and profitable ways.

The practical task is to compare design alternatives in terms of natural systems and our impact upon them, in terms of a contemporary crisis in environmental justice, viz., refugee housing. And, given that, if lands continue to swelter at 50 degrees C., and they likely will, more--this time environmental--refugees will follow...not to mention our need to shelter the homeless all over the U.S..

Bridging theory and small-scale design choices, the course is designed to sharpen our appreciation of how ecologically-sustainable practices may inform our design choices concerning

the built environment. In addition to exploring various concrete possibilities, our goal is better to to understand both theory and practice in order to be effective advocates for ecologically-sustainable building materials and practices. For architects report their lived experience of struggling to articulate, and how far to advocate for, sustainable practices and outcomes, while trying to discern how far “to push” their clients. Together, we can ask what kind of a built environment do we want to have built?

The course objectives are threefold:

- 1) First, students will examine how sustainable values are framed and articulated, with an eye to their implications for the built environment. The goal is to sharpen our sustainable philosophy/rationale, equally relevant for presentation to a philosophy conference, a client, or an NGO).
- 2) Second, students will explore sustainability in practical terms, as well. The design of temporary sheltering of those fleeing violence or disaster, now numbering 60 million people, is arguably the biggest challenge planet-centered designers face today. Group projects will involve architecture and philosophy students collaborating together to evaluate a variety of emergency shelter/refugee housing models. Projects should reference best urban planning practices. How might one go about doing an environmental audit of how such shelters and their systems perform vis-à-vis the natural world?
- 3) Third, the goal, in general, is to be able to articulate sustainable values while proposing sustainable design choices. In particular, the goal is to practice sustainable values in our design responses to the world’s refugee

crisis while being able to articulate our rationale for doing what we can.

Required Texts

Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect, Second Edition, Revised Edition, David W. Orr, Washing, D.C.: Island Press, 2004.

Ecology and the Architectural Imagination, Brook Muller, New York: Routledge, 2014.

Environmental Justice and the Rights of Ecological Refugees, Laura Westra, London: Earthscan Publishing, 2009.

Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril, Kathleen Dean Moore, San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2010, Selections.

Recommended Reading:

The Philosophy of Sustainable Design, Jason F. McLennan, Bainbridge: Ecotone Publishing: 2004.

Heidegger for Architects, Adam Sharr, New York: Routledge: 2007.