Sustainability and the field of complex systems are often presented as new areas of human endeavor. To the extent that these approaches to understanding and living in the world utilize new technologies and scientific advances, they are indeed new, and important. The fundamental tenets of both are, however, rooted in ancient Greek thought and culture. This lecture is the first installment of Professor Usher’s new book project in which he traces the trajectory of modern ideas about sustainability and complexity theory back to the Greeks.

M.D. Usher is the Chair of the Classics Department. He has taught at UVM since 2000, and is an undergraduate alumnus. In addition to academic books and articles on Greek and Latin literature, he has published three books for children, original poetry and translations, and two opera libretti. The impetus for this new project on sustainability and complex systems stems from his training as a Classicist, his appointment as a Sustainability Faculty Fellow for 2010-11, and twelve years of hands-on experience in farming. (He and his wife built and operate Works & Days Farm, a small, diversified farmstead in Shoreham that produces lamb, poultry, eggs, maple syrup, and honey on 125 acres.)