**HCOL 185: SU: Sustainability: A Cultural History**

MWF 2:20-3:10; F 3:30-4:20 * University Heights North, The University of Vermont, Fall 2018; Instructor: Professor M. D. Usher; Office: Department of Classics, 481 Main Street, Room 303; Contact: 656-4431; home: 897-2822; e-mail: musher@uvm.edu

**Course Description:**

“What’s in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.”
—Romeo and Juliet Act II, Scene II

“Look unto the rock whence ye were hewn,
And to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged.”
—Isaiah 51:1

Proponents of sustainability tend to present their ideas and prescriptions as new and innovative and argue that sustainable living is a defining concern of our time. Sustainable living is indeed an urgent, pressing issue for today’s world, but students in this course will learn that many of the fundamental tenets of the modern sustainability movement are also hallmarks of ancient Greek culture and thought. This course, a foray into the genealogy of ideas, traces the trajectory of modern notions of ecological and socio-economic sustainability back through time. Through selected readings spanning over two thousand years, students will see old ideas and precepts cropping up again and again over the course of history, up to and including the present day. They will grapple with conceptual and philosophical aspects of sustainability and with sustainable living itself (and the inevitable trade-offs and contradictions therein) experientially via a field trip to the small, diversified farm my wife and I built from scratch as an experiment in sustainable living, where we raise sheep, tend a large garden, and manage a maple sugarbush. (For more information visit www.worksanddaysfarm.com.)

**Course Requirements and Grading:** Class sessions will be fully participatory and discussion-based, punctuated occasionally by mini-lectures and spontaneous excursions by the instructor. There will be short quizzes on the content of the assigned readings at the beginning of every class period (simple identification and short-answer). The point of this is to give you an incentive (and reward) for keeping up on the reading, and to ensure that you are prepared for class. These quizzes will comprise 30% of your grade. The other components of your grade are as follows: three 3-4-page essays: 30%; class attendance and course participation (= preparedness and discussion in class, including one small group presentation and the quality of your involvement in the course’s experiential component): 30%; one “soundbite” final assignment: 10%. NOTE: Quizzes missed due to an unexcused absence cannot be made up. An unexcused absence is one for which I have not received prior notification.
Books to Buy (*= available for purchase at the UVM Bookstore):


*John Ruskin, Unto This Last [1862] and Other Writings. Edited by Clive Wilmer. Penguin. ISBN: 0140432116; $16.00


Other Materials (PDFs to be distributed):

Articles/Book Chapters/Selections:


Henry David Thoreau, “Reading” from Walden [1854]; annotated edition of the whole book online at http://thoreau.eserver.org/walden00.html


M. D. Usher, “A City for Pigs,” “Cynics and Stoics,” “Mutual Coercion, Mutually Agreed Upon,” manuscript draft of Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of Cosmos to Commons: Systems and Sustainability in Classical Life and Thought (forthcoming, SUNY 2019)


Selections from Diogenes the Cynic: Sayings and Anecdotes, With Other Popular Moralists. Translated by Robin Hard. Oxford University Press.

Nick Paumgarten, “The Scold” (about Mr. Money Mustache, aka Peter Adeney), The New Yorker (February 29, 2016), pp. 22-27

Audio Lecture:


Children’s Book:

M. D. Usher, Diogenes (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2009)

Films:

The Corporation (Big Picture Media Corporation, 2005), a documentary film by Joel Bakan, based on his book of the same name. Directed by Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbott. Runtime: 2 hours 25 minutes.


No Impact Man (Oscilloscope Laboratories, 2010), a documentary film about Manhattan resident Colin Beavan’s experiment in sustainable living. Directed by Laura Gabbert and Justin Schein. Runtime: 90 minutes.

Journey of the Universe: An Epic Story of Cosmic, Earth, and Human Transformation (Shelter Island, 2013). Filmed on the Greek island of Samos, birthplace of Pythagoras, this documentary, narrated by ecological philosopher Brian Thomas Swimme, presents a systems view of Life over the course of one day, from dawn to dusk. Directed by Patsy Northcutt and David Kennard (director of Carl Sagan’s Cosmos). Runtime: 57 minutes.
“The Use and Abuse of Vegetational Concepts,” from All Watched over by Machines of Loving Grace (BBC, 2011), a 3-part documentary critique of systems theory and computer culture by Adam Curtis. Runtime: 52 minutes.

Grizzly Man (Lions Gate, 2005), a film about the tragic fate of naïve wildlife preservationist Timothy Treadwell. Directed by Werner Herzog. Runtime: 103 minutes.

Schedule:

8/27 (M)  INTRO/ORIENTATION
8/29 (W)  [Discussion] Henry David Thoreau, “Reading,” from Walden [1854]
8/31 (F)  [Discussion] Hesiod, Works & Days, West pp. 37-61

9/3 (M)  LABOR DAY - NO CLASS
9/5 (W)  [Discussion] Hesiod cont. and Thucydides, “Funeral Oration”
9/7 (F)  [Discussion] Plato, Republic, Reeve pp. 1-20

9/10 (M)  [Discussion] Republic, Reeve pp 21-49
9/12 (W)  [Discussion] Usher, “City of Pigs” and Republic, Reeve pp. 50-59
9/14 (F)  [Film] Journey of the Universe (57 minutes);

9/17 (M)  [Workshop/Discussion] Draft of 1st Paragraph of 1st Essay Due Republic, Reeve pp. 122-149
9/19 (W)  [Discussion] Republic, Reeve pp. 178-189
9/21 (F)  [Farm Overnight]

9/24 (M)  [Discussion]: Usher, Diogenes and Diogenes, Sayings, Hard pp. as on PDF handout; Usher, “Cynics and Stoics” FIRST ESSAY DUE
9/26 (W)  [Discussion] Paumgarten, “The Scold”
9/28 (F)  [Film] No Impact Man (90 minutes)

10/1 (M)  [Discussion] Williams, “Ideas of Nature”
10/3 (W)  [Workshop/Discussion] Thoreau, “Walking” (audio); Draft of Second Essay due
10/5 (F)  [Film] Grizzly Man (103 minutes)

10/8 (M)  FALL RECESS - SECOND ESSAY DUE
10/10 (W) [Discussion] Ruskin, Unto This Last, “The Roots of Honour” (pp. 167-179)
10/12 (F)  [Film] Manufactured Landscapes (1 hour 27 minutes)

10/15 (M)  [Discussion] Ruskin, “The Veins of Wealth” (pp. 180-189)
10/17 (W) [Discussion] Ruskin, “Qui Judicatis Terram” (pp. 190-203)
10/19 (F)  [Discussion] Ruskin, “Ad Valorem” (pp. 204-228)
10/22 (M)  [Discussion] Sen, “Capabilities Approach”
10/24 (W)  [Discussion] SYSTEMS READING, TBA
10/26 (F)  [Film] “Use and Abuse of Vegetational Concepts” (52 minutes)
10/29 (M)  [Discussion] Hardin, “Tragedy of the Commons”
10/31 (W)  [Discussion] Usher, “Mutual Coercion, Mutually Agreed Upon”
11/2 (F)  [Film] The Corporation (2 hours 25 minutes)
11/5 (M)  [Discussion] Schumacher, Small is Beautiful, pp. TBA
11/7 (W)  [Discussion] Schumacher, pp. TBA
11/9 (F)  NO CLASS - THIRD ESSAY DUE
11/12 (M)  NO CLASS - Nearings, The Good Life, pp. TBA
11/14 (W)  NO CLASS - Nearings, The Good Life, pp. TBA
11/16 (F)  [Discussion] Nearings, The Good Life, pp. TBA
11/19 (M) - 11/23 (F) THANKSGIVING RECESS - NO CLASS
11/26 (M)  [Presentations]
11/28 (W)  [Presentations]
11/30 (F)  [Presentations]
12/3 (M)  [Presentations]
12/5 (W)  [Presentations]
12/7 (F)  LAST DAY OF CLASSES - SOUNDBITE ASSIGNMENT DUE according to Exam Matrix