

## AMERICAN NATURE PHILOSOPHERS

Dr. Stephanie Kaza, Professor  
656-0172 mess; office hrs Mon/Wed 1-3  
The Bittersweet, 153 So. Prospect  
skaza@zoo.uvm.edu

Wednesdays 3:35-6:25  
L/L B101

### Course Description

The class sessions will survey American nature philosophies as developed and expressed through the lives and ideas of some of the most prominent thinkers in this field. Historical trends in romanticism, transcendentalism, conservation, wilderness preservation, land ethics, and radical ecology will be traced through review of biographies and critical primary texts. Themes throughout will include a) the role of wild nature in shaping culture, b) the experience of place and region in shaping ideas, c) the influence of class, gender, and profession on perspectives on nature.

### Course Purpose

- 1) to develop skills in analyzing philosophical claims and values in an environmental context;
- 2) to become familiar with the key ideas of leading American writers on environmental ideas;
- 3) to apply principles from a range of nature philosophies to modern day issues.

**Course Text:** collected readings in a course reader, available at the Bittersweet  
Additional readings will be suggested as supplementary material to each class.

### Course Outline

Aug 28	Introductions What is a nature philosophy?
Sept 4	Henry David Thoreau voluntary simplicity, values of wilderness
Sept 11	John Muir wilderness preservation
Sept 18	Aldo Leopold land ethics and conservation
Sept 25	Holmes Rolston III valuing nature and species Guest: Ian Worley
Oct 2	Rachel Carson call to action based on science

### Assignments

"Enabling Environmental Practice" (Anthony Weston); "The Pleasures of Eating" (Wendell Berry)
"Walking", "Where I Lived and What I Lived For" <b>DUE: Personal Philosophy</b>
"Our National Parks", "Yosemite Valley", Hetch Hetchy Valley";
"Marshland Elegy", "The Land Ethic", "The Round River", "Thinking Like a Mountain"
"Can and Ought We to Follow Nature?" "Values in Nature" "Duties to Endangered Species";
excerpts from <u>Silent Spring</u> , <u>The Sea Around Us</u> , <u>A Sense of Wonder</u>

Oct 9	Garrett Hardin ethics of the commons	"Tragedy of the Commons", "Lifeboat Ethics", "Who Cares for Posterity?"
Oct 16	Tom Regan animal rights	"The Case for Animal Rights" "The Miniride and Worse-off Principles" "Christianity and Animal Rights" <b>DUE: Take-Home Exam #1</b>
Oct 23	Wendell Berry agriculture, culture, and community	"Conservation is Good Work" "People, Land, and Community" "The Work of Local Culture"
Oct 30	Gary Snyder Buddhist deep ecology	"Good, Wild, and Sacred" "The Place, the Region, the Commons" "Four Changes", "Reinhabitation"
Nov 6	Karen Warren ecological feminism	"The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism", "A Feminist Philosophical Perspective on Ecofeminist Spiritualities"; handout
Nov 13	David Abram embodied knowing	"Philosophy on the Way to Ecology", "Returning to Our Animal Senses" <b>DUE: In-depth paper</b>
Nov 20	Thomas Berry ecozoic spiritual ecology	excerpts from <u>The Dream of the Earth</u>
Nov 27	Thanksgiving break	
Dec 4	Review: compare and contrast the various philosophies	<b>DUE: Personal philosophy (final)</b>
Dec 13	Finals week	<b>DUE: Take-Home Exam #2</b>

### **Class Structure**

Each class session will focus on a single writer and his or her key works. We will begin with a short opening reading, to hear the writer's voice without commentary. Then I will give some biographical background on the writer to set a context for his or her ideas. We will spend about an hour discussing the philosophical points in the readings. Then we will have a snack break, followed by a summary of the key ideas in the reading. The last 50-60 minutes will be facilitated by student leaders, applying the key ideas to modern concerns. This part of the session should be at least partially experiential, engaging more senses than the rational, challenging the class to work with the material in a fresh way.

## **Assignments**

1) Take-Home Exams: These are open book, open everything exams. You are free to use your class notes, readings, library materials, and review discussions with each other. I encourage collaborative learning via study sessions and potlucks, as it is clear people learn better through testing their ideas out on others. Your writing for the exam, however, should be your own. You will choose from a selection of questions and write an in-depth 3-4 paragraph essay for each question. The questions will be comparative across philosophers, as well as in-depth for specific writers; they will also include some subjective reflection. Exams will serve to review the material covered in the readings and in class discussion and help you to integrate the concepts into your own frame of thinking.

2) In-depth Paper: This paper is an opportunity to go into some depth with one of the essays or writers. You should draw on both subjective (i.e. personal) and analytic approaches, incorporating biographical information as appropriate. I expect you to consult additional reference materials to further investigate the implications of the writing. You may choose from any of the essays, and write a 10 page paper exploring one or more of the key ideas in the essay.

3) Personal Philosophy: At the beginning of the course you will articulate the key ideas of your own nature philosophy. This should include a) brief autobiography regarding sources of your philosophy (2 pages), b) key areas of concern (1-2 pages); c) key values (1 page); d) personal beliefs (1/2 page); and e) personal credo (1/2 page). These sections can be illustrated with brief personal stories. We will discuss examples of each section in class to clarify the task. After exposure to the ideas presented in the course, you will have the chance to amend or rewrite your preliminary philosophy to show the evolution of your thinking.

4) Applied Ethics Oral Presentation: You will sign up for one of the class sessions with a partner, and prepare to lead the class for the last hour. Your task is to take the key ideas of the philosopher for your session and consider how we would apply his or her ideas in today's context. You can use discussion questions, experiential exercises, informative games, news articles, etc. We will talk more in class about how to work with this presentation/facilitation challenge. On the day of your facilitation, you will also prepare the opening reading for the group.

5) Class Participation: You are expected to attend every class session. Participation will be graded on a combination of attendance and contributions to class discussion. Please come prepared to discuss the readings; this is a seminar, not a lecture course. Annotate your reader, write questions in the margins, and bring your comments to class to share. The caliber of our discussions will directly reflect your thoughtfulness in reading the works with an investigative and attentive mind.

## **Course Policies**

### Late work

Because there are a number of assignments, it will be very confusing if work comes in late. When work comes in late, it is usually of lower quality as it has been put off and lost in the shuffle. Therefore, to encourage your best work for this class, I expect all work to be turned in on time, in class on the date due. If you need an extension due to illness or family emergency, please speak with me personally.

### Absences

Attendance will be taken via sign-in sheet; it is your responsibility to be sure to have signed in. Because this course only meets once a week, missing a single session is the equivalent of missing a whole week. Even if you are feeling a little under the weather, try to come to class and keep up with the course rhythm, even if you don't feel like talking. Unexcused absences will factor into your final grade; each unexcused absence will drop your grade by one full letter (i.e. A to B). Absences for illness, family death, or other serious needs are not "excused" unless they are personally cleared with me by phone or email. I expect everyone to make their best effort to attend every class, both for your own personal learning, and to contribute to the community of learners in the group.

### Grading

Graded course work consists of two take-home, open book, open everything exams; an in-depth paper on your choice of one of the essays; a class presentation; and your participation in weekly discussion of the readings. Your grade will be based on approximately two-thirds written work and one-third oral contributions. These will be weighted as follows and due on:

10%	Personal nature philosophy	Sept 4, Dec 4th
20%	Mid-term take-home exam	Oct 16th
20%	Final take-home exam	Dec 13th
15%	In-depth paper	Nov 13th
20%	Applied ethics oral presentation	as assigned
15%	Class participation	all sessions
100%	Total	

If you are having trouble in the course in any way (intellectually, emotionally, physically) or just want to discuss these topics further, please come in and talk to me after class or during office hours. You are always welcome, even if appointments are filled (just be prepared to wait a bit).

### Cooperative Learning:

Almost all successful environmental work is done in cooperative teams and through joint efforts. I highly encourage you to work with others in the class on your assignments (even and especially the exams!), sharing resources and ideas and helping each other with direction, focus, and clarity. Please make an effort to get to know your colleagues. Much of the environmental movement has been built on collaborative networking, so you should take this opportunity to develop these skills now and make new friends among your environmental colleagues.