

## SYLLABUS

### **Fundamentals of Environmental Thought: E15.2019**

Fall 2015, New York University

Instructor: Robert L. Chapman, Professor of Philosophy & Environmental Values

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**Survey:** Philosophical observations on the relationship between nature and culture provide the fundamentals for environmental thought, while value assessments provide the contextualized perspectives.

We begin by identifying the metaphysical-theological premises that support the edifice of the Western tradition toward nature and observe their evolution through the influential works of prominent “environmentalists”. Next we will assess the normative (value) components in regards for nature – culture dichotomies: anthropocentrism; intrinsic, extrinsic and inherent value systems, etc. This will have prepared us for a critique of American environmentalism.

As this is a graduate seminar, the course is based on discussions on topics derived from the assigned readings and related sources. Students are expected to participate regularly, and to advance this end each student will prepare a one-paragraph commentary on each reading for possible dissemination at the seminar meetings. In addition there are two papers (5 – 10 pages) on topics approved by the instructor. (Unapproved topics result in failure for the assignment.) The first paper is due on October 21<sup>st</sup> and the final paper on December 16<sup>th</sup>. The final grade is calculated as follows: Each paper 50%

#### **Texts:**

- *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau, ed. Bill McKibben (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997) [W]
- *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1949) [SCA]
- *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Nash (New Haven, CT., Yale University Press) [WAM]
- *What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know about Capitalism*, Fred Magoff and John Bellamy Foster (Monthly Review Press, 2011)

#### **Recommended texts:**

- *American Environmental History*, Louis Warren, editor (Blackwell Publishing, 2003)
- *The Landscape of Reform: Civic Pragmatism and Environmental Thought in America*, Ben A. Minteer (MIT Press, 2006)

- *Thoreau's Nature: Ethics, Politics, and the Wild*, Jane Bennett (Altamira Press—Rowan and Littlefield, 2000)
- *The Naturalists: Scientific Travelers in the Golden Age of Natural History*, Stephen R. Bown (Barnes & Noble Books, 2002)
- *A Word for Nature: Four Pioneering Environmental Advocates, 1845 – 1913*, Robert L. Dorman, editor (University of North Carolina Press, 1998)
- *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996)
- *The Rights of Nature: History of Environmental Ethics*, Roderick Nash (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989)
- *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, Lawrence Buell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995)

**Articles: (available on Blackboard)**

- “The Chain of Being in Eighteenth-Century Thought, and Man’s Place and Role in Nature,” Arthur Lovejoy
- “Providence, Capitalism, and Environmental Degradation: English Apologetics in an Era of Economic Revolution,” William Coleman
- “Cedar Keys,” John Muir (excerpt from *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*)
- “Errand into the Wilderness,” Perry Miller
- “The Trouble with Wilderness: or getting back to the wrong nature,” William Cronon
- “Essay on American Scenery,” Thomas Cole
- *The Rights of Nature*, Roderick Nash: Chapter 2 “Ideological Origins of American Environmentalism”
- “Aesthetic and Scientific Attitudes,” chapter 3 in *Foundations of Environmental Ethics*, Eugene Hargrove
- “Nature,” J S Mill
- *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*, Wendell Berry: Chapter 2 “The Ecological Crisis is a Crisis of Character”
- “On A Certain Blindness In Human Beings,” William James

**Recommended Articles:**

- “On the Situation of the American Farmer,” J. Hector St John De Crevecoeur
- *Nature & Culture: American Painting and Landscape 1825 – 1875*, Barbara Novack: Chapter 3 “Sound & Silence: Changing Concepts of the Sublime”
- “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” Lynn White Jr.
- “The Historical Dimensions of the American Crisis,” H Paul Santmire
- “The Tragedy of the Common,” Garrett Hardin
- “Environmental Ethics: Values in and Duties to the Natural World,” Holmes Rolston III
- “Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving the Environment,” Thomas Hill
- “Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics,” Anthony Weston

- “Paths Beyond Human Centeredness: Lessons in Liberation Struggles,” Val Plumwood

**Provisional Schedule:**

Prologue, Chapters 1 & 2 (pp. 1 – 43) in *Wilderness and the American Mind*

1. “The Great Chain of Being in Eighteen Century Thought, and Man’s Place and Role in Nature,” Arthur Lovejoy and “Providence, Capitalism and Environmental Degradation: English Apologetics in an Era of Economic Revolution,” William Coleman and “On Nature,” J.S. Mill
2. Chapter 3 “The Romantic Wilderness” and Chapter 4 “The American Wilderness” (pp. 44 –83) in *Wilderness and the American Mind*; and “The Trouble with Wilderness: or getting back to the wrong nature,” William Cronon and “Errand into the Wilderness,” Perry Miller
3. “Sound & Silence: Changing Concepts of the Sublime” and “Essay on American Scenery”
4. *Walden* (pp. 1 – 93) and Chapter 5 (pp. 84 – 95) in *Wilderness and the American Mind*

FIRST PAPER DUE 10/21

5. *Walden* (pp. 94 – 163)
6. *Walden* (pp. 164 – 312)
7. Chapter 6 “Preserve the Wilderness”; Chapter 7 “Wilderness Preserved”; Chapter 8 “John Muir: Publicizer”; Chapter 9 “The Wilderness Cult”; Chapter 10 “Hetch Hetchy” (pp. 96 – 181) in *Wilderness and the American Mind*
8. “Ideological Origins of American Environmentalism” in Roderick Nash *The Rights of Nature* and *Sand County Almanac*, Part 1 (pp. 3 – 92)
9. *Sand County Almanac*, Part 2 (pp. 95 – 164)
10. *Sand County Almanac*, Part 3 (pp. 165 – 226)
11. “The Ecological Crisis is a Crisis of Character,” Wendell Berry
12. *What Every Environmentalist Should Know About Capitalism*, Madoff & Foster

FINAL PAPER DUE 12/16