

American Nature Philosophers (Kaza)

Course Title American Nature Philosophers
ENVS 195

Instructor(s) Stephanie Kaza
Associate Professor Environmental Program
University of Vermont

Discipline Philosophy

Subject(s) American History; Philosophy; Nature Philosophers

Pedagogical Level Undergraduate

Date Fall 1997

Presentation University of Vermont

Overview **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:

1. The role of wild nature in shaping culture.
2. The experience of place and region in shaping ideas.
3. The influence of class, gender, and profession on perspectives on nature.

Format No special format listed

Prerequisites None listed

Requirements **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. Your writing, however, should be your own. You will choose from a selection of questions and write a 3–4 paragraph essay for each question. These 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.

In-depth Paper

This paper is an opportunity to go into some depth with one of the essays. You should draw on both subjective and analytic approaches, incorporating biographical information if appropriate. 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.

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, show and tell of demonstration models, etc. We will talk more in class about how to work with this presentation/facilitation challenge.

Class Participation

You are expected to attend every class session, especially since the class meets only once a week. 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. The caliber of our discussions will directly reflect your thoughtfulness in reading the works with an investigative and attentive mind.

Evaluation

Grades

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. These will be weighted as follows:

Midterm Take-Home Exam	25%
Final Take-Home Exam	25%
In-Depth Paper	20%
Applied Ethics Oral Presentation	15%
Class Participation	15%

Texts

Required Texts

Collected readings in a course reader

Schedule

Sep 3

Introduction

What is Nature Philosophy?

Assigned Reading

- Anthony Weston

Sep 10

Henry David Thoreau

Voluntary Simplicity/Wilderness Preservation

Assigned Reading

- “Walking”
- “Where I Lived and What I Lived For” from *Walden*

Sep 17

John Muir

Wilderness Preservation

Assigned Reading

- “Our National Parks”
- “Yosemite Valley”
- “Hetch Hetchy Valley”

Sep 24

Aldo Leopold

Land Ethics and Conservation

Assigned Reading

- “Marshland Elegy”
- “The Land Ethic”
- “The Round River”
- “Thinking Like a Mountain”

Oct 1

Rachel Carson

Call to Action Based on Science

Assigned Reading

Excerpts from:

- *Silent Spring*
- *The Sea Around Us*
- *A Sense of Wonder*

Oct 8

Garrett Hardin

Ethics of the Commons

Assigned Reading

- “Tragedy of the Commons”
- “Lifeboat Ethics”
- “Who Cares for Posterity?”

Oct 15

Holmes Rolston III
Valuing Nature and Species
 Assigned Reading

- “Can and Ought We to Follow Nature?”
- “Values in Nature”
- “Duties to Endangered Species”

Oct 22

Tom Regan
Animal Rights
 Assigned Reading

- “The Case for Animal Rights”
- “The Miniride and Worse-off Principles”
- “Christianity and Animal Rights”

Assignments Due

- Mid-Term Take-Home Exam

Oct 29

Wendell Berry
Agriculture, Culture, and Community
 Assigned Reading

- “Conservation is Good Work”
- “People, Land, and Community”
- “The Work of Local Culture”

Nov 5

Gary Snyder
Buddhist Deep Ecology
 Assigned Reading

- “Good, Wild, and Sacred”
- “The Place, the Region, the Commons”
- “Four Changes”
- “Reinhabitation”

Nov 12

Karen Warren
Ecological Feminism
 Assigned Reading

- “The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism”
- “A Feminist Philosophical Perspective on Ecofeminist Spiritualities”

Nov 19

David Abram
Embodied Knowing
 Assigned Reading

- “Philosophy on the Way to Ecology”

Dec 3

Thomas Berry
Ecozoic Spiritual Ecology
 Assigned Reading

Excerpts from:

- *The Dream of the Earth*

Assignments Due

- Essay paper

Dec 10

Review: Compare and Contrast the Various Philosophers

Dec 17

Salon of Student Writing
 Assignments Due

- Final Exam

**Other
 Research
 Items**

American Nature Philosophers Reader Contents

1. Wendell Berry
 “The Pleasures of Eating”
2. Anthony Weston
 “Enabling Environmental Practice”
3. Henry David Thoreau
 “Where I Lived and What I Lived For”
 “Solitude”
 “Walking”
4. John Muir
 “Our National Parks”
 “The American Forests”
 “Hetch Hetchy Valley”

5. Aldo Leopold
 - “Marshland Elegy”
 - “Thinking Like a Mountain”
 - “The Land Ethic”
 - “The Round River”

6. Rachel Carson
 - excerpts from *The Sea Around Us*
 - excerpts from *Silent Spring*
 - excerpts from *A Sense of Wonder*

7. Garrett Hardin
 - “The Tragedy of the Common”
 - “Lifeboat Ethics”
 - “Who Cares for Posterity?”

8. Holmes Rolston III
 - “Can and Ought We to Follow Nature?”
 - “Values in Nature”
 - “Why Species Matter”

9. Tom Regan
 - “The Case for Animal Rights”
 - “The Miniride and Worse-off Principles”
 - “Christianity and the Oppression of Animals”

10. Wendell Berry
 - “Conservation is Good Work”
 - “People, Land, and Community”
 - “The Work of Local Culture”

11. Gary Snyder
 - “Good, Wild, and Sacred”
 - “The Place, the Region, the Commons”
 - “Four Changes with a Postscript”
 - “Reinhabitation”
 - “Smokey the Bear Sutra”

12. Karen Warren
 - “The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism”
 - “A Feminist Philosophical Perspective on Ecofeminist Spiritualities”
 - “Toward an Ecofeminist Peace Politics”

13. David Abram
 - “Philosophy on the Way to Ecology”

14. Thomas Berry
excerpts from *The Dream of the Earth*

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