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Fall 2015
POLS 390B
Tuesday & Thursday, 2:20PM - 3:50PM
East College 019

Environmental Political Theory

Nature is a foundational concept in the history of Western politics. Sometimes politics is seen as a chance to overcome nature: people are naturally nasty and politics is our best chance to become our best selves; or, the wilderness is terrifying and humans need to develop it in order to build a good life. Other times politics is seen as a chance to realize the good of nature: if we could just get back to nature we would be able to overcome the greed and violence that society, politics, culture, capitalism, or whatever else fosters in us; or, civilization is seen as a blight on an essentially good world that ought to be drawn from to guide our collective life. In short, politics is intimately tied up with our understanding of the value of the nature.

Thinking through this relationship between nature and politics is particularly important given the profound effect that humans have on the Earth. Natural and social scientists are increasingly referring to the present epoch as the “Anthropocene,” a term meant to mark the new power that we have to reshape the earth’s ecosystems. Beginning with the first large-scale agriculture and accelerating through the industrial revolution, atomic bomb tests, and climate change, humans have demonstrated a profound power to shape world ecologies. Our understanding the environment and our relationship to it is constantly evolving, shaping our sense of humanity’s powers, privileges, and obligations to the non-human world.

In light of this, our course starts from an assumption: environmental questions and problems are always simultaneously political, philosophical, moral, scientific, economic, and cultural. Our goal will be to avoid reducing issues like pollution, climate change, energy production, water use, or campus sustainability to purely scientific or policy questions. Environmental questions are deeply historically embedded and conceptually complex.

Happily, political theory is an ambitious discipline that (at its best) tries to consider questions holistically. By considering the history and present of political theory, our goal will be to understand the assumptions, arguments, challenges, and opportunities that are facing us in our own complex experiences of the environment. By understanding how politics and nature have come to be entangled in one-another, I hope that we can begin to untangle and address some of the key environmental questions of our time. I doubt we’ll all leave the semester knowing exactly what to do to save the world. Hopefully, though, this class can help you on your way.

Required Texts

Nearly all of this course’s readings will be made available to you electronically, either in the form of .pdf documents posted on the course’s page or as journal articles accessible through the library website. From time to time you will be responsible for locating these articles on your own (it’s a good skill to practice). You will, however, have to buy one book (trust me, it’s a great one!):

William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company (1992). ISBN: 0393308731.

Given that this is an environmental political theory course, we are going to try two risky things in order to minimize our footprint this semester. First, you will be allowed to bring readings to class on your laptop, iPad, Kindle, or whatever other electronic device you prefer. We all have to learn how to participate in a discussion with a glowing screen in front of us. The expectation will be, however, that your screens will be off if you're not directly referring to the texts. Even with that expectation, I reserve the right to shift us back to the printed word if this proves too distracting (if you are having problems with other students surfing the internet during class, slip an anonymous note under my office door and I'll issue a warning). Second, we will have less reading than comparable courses (generally around 50 pages/pages/class, opposed to the typical theory seminar load of 75-100 pages/class). You should know that this is a trap: the reduction in pages corresponds to higher standards for reading comprehension. Take your time with the pages assigned!

Classroom Expectations

A good classroom environment takes work from everyone. This is particularly important in a discussion-based class in which everyone will be expected to participate on a weekly basis. Those of us who tend to speak up more than others may need to consciously step back and allow other people a chance to contribute. Those of us who tend to be more reserved or hesitant may need to make efforts to share our thoughts in order to do our part in the classroom. Every respectful voice helps us all learn more, and I will expect you to behave accordingly.

In order to establish a good classroom environment, I hope to observe a few guidelines:

- Come to every class. I'm not going to be a fastidious attendance taker but it's going to help everyone's comprehension (and your final grade!) to have you there and engaged. Bring all assigned materials to every class.
- We will start with the assumption that we will not have to raise hands before we speak in class. If this does not seem necessary, we can reassess.
- If you're likely to get sleepy in class, bring whatever provisions you need to stay engaged.

Assessment, Grading, Attendance

Your final grade for the course will be calculated based on five assessments:

1. Presentation – 10%
2. Micro-essays – 15%
3. 5-6 page midterm essay (details to come) – 20%
4. 10-12 page final essay (details to come) – 30%
5. Discussion participation and attendance – 25%

Presentations

Every student will be responsible for an in-class presentation after fall break. Presentations should aim to:

1. Offer a (brief) summary and (longer) critical interpretation of one reading, focusing on issues that are significant in the larger context of the course.
2. Present two or three questions for class discussion.
3. Do this in less than ten minutes (really, it's pretty low-key).

Micro-essays

Fifteen times over the course of the semester, I'll ask you to write an in-class micro-essay. These essays should fit on the front and back of one index card (I'll bring the index cards). My goal is not to "catch" you for failing to comprehend the readings perfectly. Instead, I hope to provoke you to critically engage a key topic from the readings and pose questions to me about our discussions.

The essays will be graded on a generous pass/fail basis. Basically, if you show up having done the readings, can fill up an index card, and repeat this fifteen times, you'll ace this section of the course. Think of it as a free A for 15% of your grade just for showing up and having something to say.

Class Schedule

Note: this schedule is liable to change a little bit over the course of the semester. In practice, this really means I'm likely to cut some articles and selections, particularly later in the semester. I wanted to warn you about this at the outset. If a change happens in the syllabus, I'll pass word along both in class and through email.

August 27 – Course introduction

- The syllabus.
- Bernard Williams, "Nature," *Keywords*.
- John Cushman, "In the Utah Wilderness, A Question of Definition," *New York Times*, January 28, 1997, A12.
- Jim Woolf, "Federal Road Law Anything But Smooth," *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 27, 1996, A1.

September 1 – Ecologizing Politics

- Robyn Eckersley, "Exploring the Environmental Spectrum," *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Toward an Ecocentric Approach*, 33-47.
- Jane Bennett and William Chaloupka, "Introduction: TV Dinners and the Organic Brunch," *In the Nature of Things: Language, Politics, and the Environment*, ed. Jane Bennett and William Chaloupka, vii-xvi.

September 3 – Politicizing Ecology

- Jeffrey C. Ellis, "On the Search for a Root Cause: Essentialist Tendencies in Environmental Discourse," 256-268.
- William Cronon, "The Trouble With Wilderness," 69-90.

September 8 – Political Naturalism

- Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I, chapters 1-8; Book VII, chapters 4-17.
- John Meyer, "Natural Ends and Political Naturalism?" *Political Nature*, 89-118.

September 10 – Christianity

- *Genesis*, Books 1-9.
- Lynn White, Jr. "The Historical Root of the Ecological Crisis."
- Guth, et. al., "Faith and the Environment: Religious Beliefs and Attitudes on Environmental Policy," *American Journal of Political Science*, 9: 364-82.

September 15 – Early Liberalism

- Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, frontispiece and Part 1, chapters 13-18.
- Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*, chapters 5, 6.

- John Meyer, “Mechanical Nature and Modern Politics,” *Political Nature*, 57-88.

September 17 – Classical Liberalism

- John Locke, “Of Property,” *The Second Treatise of Government*, Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing (1980), 18-30.
- Milton Friedman, “The Relation between Economic Freedom and Political Freedom,” in *Capitalism and Freedom*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1982), 7-21.

September 22 – Promethean Liberalism

- Friedrich Hayek, “Planning and Democracy,” in *The Road to Serfdom*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994): 63-79.
- Ayn Rand, “The Anti-Industrial Revolution,” *The New Left: The Anti-Industrial Revolution*, 127-151.
- Gregg Easterbrook, “The Ecoreal Manifesto,” 66-69.

September 24 – Failures of Liberalism

- Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” Link.
- Gary Snyder, “Understanding the Commons,” Link.

September 29 – Back to Nature 1

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on Inequality,” all.

October 1 – Back to Nature 2

- Joel Kovel, *The Enemy of Nature*, London: Zed Books (2002), 1-27
- Eleanor Ostrom, et. al., “Revisiting the Commons.”

October 6 – Radical Ecology: Anti-Enlightenment

- Tim Hayward, “Ecology and Enlightenment,” *Ecological Thought: An Introduction*, Cambridge: Polity Press (1994), 39-52.
- Herbert Marcuse, “Nature and Revolution,” *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, Boston: Beacon Press (1972), 59-78.

October 8 – Radical Ecology: Socialism

- Ted Benton, “An Ecological Historical Materialism,” *Nature, Production, Power*, eds. Fed P. Gale and R. Michael M’Gonigle, Northampton: Edwards Elgar (2000), 83-104.

October 13 – Radical Ecology: Ecofeminism

- Val Plumwood, “Has Democracy Failed Ecology? An Ecofeminist Perspective,” *Environmental Politics* 4, 134-168.
- Donna Harraway, “FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse. Mice into Wormholes: A Technoscience Fugur in Two Parts,” *Modest Witness@Second Millennium. FemaleMan Meets OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience*, 49-118.

October 15 – Giving up on Nature

- **MIDTERM ESSAYS DUE IN CLASS.**
- Bruno Latour, “Why Political Ecology Has to Let Go of Nature,” *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press (2004), 9-52.

October 20 – BREAK!

October 22 – BREAK CONTINUES!

October 27 – Trees & Representation

- James D. Proctor, “Whose Nature? The Contested Moral Terrain of Ancient Forests,” 269-297.
- Christopher D. Stone, “Should Trees Have Standing?” 3-53.

October 29 – Animals & Rights

- Susanne Antonetta, “Language Garden.”
- Tom Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights.”
- Peter Singer, “Equality for Animals.”

November 3 – Cities & Human Ecologies

- R.H. Platt, “Toward Ecological Cities: Adapting to the 21st Century Metropolis,” *Environment* 46, 10-27.
- Timothy Luke, “Global Cities vs. ‘Global Cities:’ Rethinking Contemporary Urbanism as Public Ecology,” *Studies in Political Economy* 70, 11-31.

November 5 – America

- John Jay, et al. “#2,” *Federalist Papers*.
- William Cronon, “Dreaming the Metropolis,” *Nature’s Metropolis*, 23-54.

November 10 – America

- Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” *A Sand County Almanac*, 201-226.
- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden Pond*, chapters 1 (paragraphs 1-15), 2, 5, 9 (paragraphs 1-4), 11, 18.

November 12 – Chicago

- William Cronon, “Rails and Water,” *Nature’s Metropolis*, 55-95.

November 17 – Chicago

- William Cronon, “Annihilating Space: Meat,” *Nature’s Metropolis*, 207-272.

November 19 – Sustainability 1

- Michael Jacobs, “Sustainable Development as a Contested Concept,” *Fairness and Futurity: Essays in Environmental Sustainability and Social Justice*, ed. Andrew Dobson, New York: Oxford University Press (1999), 21-45.
- Tim Hayward, “Political Theory for a Sustainable Polity,” in *Political Theory and Ecological Values*, New York: St. Martin’s Press (1998), 151-166.

November 24 – Sustainability 2

- Paul Robbins, “Destruction of Nature: Human Impact and Environmental Degradation,” *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*, New York: Blackwell Publishing (2004), 87-106,
- Parul Robbins, “Construction of Nature: Environmental Knowledges and Imaginaries,” *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*, New York: Blackwell Publishing (2004), 107-126.

November 26 – THANKSGIVING BREAK

December 1 – Imagining Climate Change 1

- Jonathan Franzen, “Carbon Capture,” *The New Yorker*.
- Editorial staff, “Science Ignored, Again,” *New York Times*, October 14, 2006.
- Robert Dahl, “A Democratic Dilemma: System Effectiveness versus Citizen Participation,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 109, No. 1 (Spring 1994): 23-34.

December 3 – Imagining Climate Change 2

- Timothy Luke, “International or Interenvironmental Relations: Reassessing Nations and Niches in Global Ecosystems,” *Alternatives* 28, 393-422.
- Douglas Torgerson, “Farewell to the Green Movement? Political Action and the Green Public Sphere,” *Environmental Politics* 9(4), 1-19.

December 8 – Whither Democracy?

- Timothy Luke, “Eco-Managerialism: Environmental Studies as a Power/Knowledge Formation,” *Living with Nature: Environmental Politics as Cultural Discourse*, ed. Frank Fischer and Maarten Hajer, New York: Oxford University Press (1999), 103-120.
- John O’Neill, “Authority, Democracy and the Environment,” *Ecology, Policy and Politics: Human Well-Being and the Natural World*, New York: Routledge (1993), 123-144.
- Frank Fischer, “Science and Politics in Environmental Regulation: The Politicization of Expertise,” *Citizens, Experts and the Environments: The Politics of Local Knowledge*, Durham: Duke University Press (2000), 89-108.

December 10 – Ecocitizenship

- Andrew Dobson, “Thick Cosmopolitanism,” *Political Studies* 54, 165-184.
- Tim Hayward, “Constitutional Environmental Rights and Liberal Democracy,” *Sustaining Liberal Democracy: Ecological Challenges and Opportunities*, ed. John Barry and Marcel Wissenburg, New York: Palgrave (2001), 117-134.

December 18: FINAL PAPERS DUE AT 5:00 PM