Foundations of Environmental Thought: E15.2019-001
Fall 2009, New York University

SYLLABUS

Instructor: Robert L. Chapman, Professor of Philosophy & Environmental Studies
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Required Texts:
- *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson (any edition)
- *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Nash (New Haven, CT., Yale University Press) [WAM]

Recommended texts:

Articles:
- “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
• “Errand into the Wilderness,” Perry Miller
• On the Situation of the American Farmer,” J. Hector St John De Crevecoeur
• “Essay on American Scenery,” Thomas Cole
• “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” Lynn White Jr.
• “The Historical Dimensions of the American Crisis,” H Paul Santmire
• The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture, Wendell Berry: Chapter 2 “The Ecological Crisis is a Crisis of Character”

Survey:
General observations on the relationship between nature and culture provide the foundations of environmental thought, while value assessments provide contextualizing perspectives. Throughout history we witness repeated divisions between nature and culture; different ways of constructing that relationship, sometimes weighing value religiously, other times philosophically, politically, and economically, etc. Thus the foundations of environmental thought shift between what is perceived at the time as the nature and culture dualism. In this course, we will proceed with a review of this “procrustean” fit through the canonical works of ‘nature writing’.

We begin by identifying the prominent themes that have defined the various relationships between human art and nature through the influential works of renowned “environmentalists”. Next we assess the normative (value) components found in various nature – culture dichotomies: anthropocentrism; intrinsic, extrinsic and inherent value systems. Finally, we attempt a critique of the American environmentalism.

As this is a graduate seminar, the course is based on discussions on topics derived from the 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 assigned reading for possible dissemination at the seminar meetings. In addition there are two papers (7 – 12 pages) on topics approved by the instructor. (Unapproved topics result in failure for the assignment.) The first paper is due on October 24th and the final paper on December 19th. The final grade for the seminar is calculated as follows: Each paper 45% (90%) and class participation 10%.

Schedule:
S09: Introduction: Prologue, Chapters 1 & 2 (pp. 1 – 43) in Wilderness and the American Mind

S16: “The Great Chain of Being in Eighteen Century Thought, and Man’s Place

S23: MATHIS WACKERNAGEL TALK—OUR ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT@ JEFFERY GOULD WELCOME CENTER, 50 WEST 4TH
Chapter 3 “The Romantic Wilderness” and Chapter 4 “The American Wilderness” (pp. 44 –83) in Wilderness and the American Mind; and “Errand into the Wilderness,” Perry Miller

S30: “The Trouble with Wilderness: or getting back to the wrong nature,” William Cronon, and “On the Situation of the American Farmer,” J Hector St John De Crevecour


O14: Walden (pp. 1 – 93) and Chapter 5 (pp. 84 – 95) in Wilderness and the American Mind

O21: Walden (pp. 94 – 163)

O28: Walden (pp. 164 – 312); First Paper Due

N04: 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


N18: Sand County Almanac, Part 2 (pp. 95 – 164)

N25: Holiday

N28: Sand County Almanac, Part 3 (pp. 165 – 226)

D02: “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” Lynn White, Jr.

D09: “The Historical Dimensions of the American Crisis,” H Paul Santmire

D16: “The Ecological Crisis is a Crisis of Character,” Wendell Berry