

PHIL*4040

Advanced Philosophy of the Environment

Syllabus, Fall 2016

Room: Graham Hall 2302

Time: Tuesday & Thursday, 4:00- 5:20pm.

Instructor: Dr. Stefan Linquist

Office: Mackinnon 358

Office Visiting Hours: Thursday 2:30-3:30, or by apt.

Course Website: <http://biophilosophy.ca/Teaching/Philosophy4040.html>

Course Description

Many of us believe that human impact on the environment continues to be mostly negative, despite the many ways in which we value and depend on nature. It is sometimes argued that contemporary humans are out of synch with the natural world, perhaps reflecting a deep cultural or moral failing. This seminar will critically examine the main assumptions and arguments informing this contemporary version of environmentalism.

Part 1 of the course will focus on the concepts of 'nature' and 'ecosystem' as they are employed in the writings of some influential environmental thinkers. We will then consider some recent objections to the use of these concepts. For instance, we will consider whether naturalness is a philosophically coherent concept and whether it can be assigned normative force. We will also question whether ecosystems, as environmentalists describe them, even exist.

A related set of issues concerns the idea of "pristine" wilderness that existed before the arrival of Colonial Europeans. Environmentalists often view this era as a sort of golden age, such that remaining habitats which have been least impacted by Europeans are considered the most valuable. This view has always run into problems in dealing with First Nations' relationship to the land. For one thing, indigenous Americans were modifying

their environments long before the arrival of Europeans. What is the principled difference between the ways that these two cultures interacted with nature? Another salient issue is that the idea of preserving nature in some “pristine” state is potentially at odds with the sovereignty and autonomy of First Nations. Part 2 of the course will explore some of these tensions, first by reading William Cronin’s historical account of European and First Nations impact on the land, then by reading some contemporary writings by First Nations authors.

By this stage of the course, some students might start to view environmentalism as a problematic doctrine. Perhaps the idea of conserving pristine environments because they are “natural” should be abandoned. If so, what sort of doctrine would be a better substitute for contemporary environmentalism?

In a recent book called *Thinking Like a Mall: Philosophy After the End of Nature*, Steven Vogel explores this question. He proposes that many of the arguments that environmentalists put forward for the preservation of natural habitats (they are complex, have a function, provide important human services, etc.) are likewise exhibit by shopping malls. But most environmentalists would not advocate for the conservation of shopping malls. This comparison leads Vogel to defend a version of environmentalism that embraces human impacts and dispenses with the “myth” of pristine nature. As you can imagine, this is a controversial book and we will consider some of the leading objections to Vogel’s thesis.

Learning Objectives

- One aim of this course is for students to develop a critical understanding of environmentalism. This will involve detailed knowledge of its core commitments and the arguments used to defend them. Students will achieve this level of understanding by doing the readings before class and then discussing them in the seminar. Students will also submit written answers to discussion questions, which are due before the readings are discussed.
- A second aim is for students to develop their skills in independent research. To this end, each student will undertake an individual research project over the course of the semester. These projects will take students through all states of the research process, from selecting a topic, to narrowing down on a question, to presenting their findings to the class.

Assignments and Grading

Group Research Projects and Presentations (40%)

At the beginning of the semester each student will choose a research project. Topics can be on any theme that pertains to the environment. The project will then proceed over a succession of phases. Phase 1 will involve choosing a research question. Phase 2 will involve choosing a body of literature to review. Phase 3 will involve a synthesis and critique of that literature. Phase 4 will involve writing a critical review paper addressing the focal question. Phase 5 will involve presenting your findings to the class in a brief (20 minute) presentation.

Discussion Questions (30%)

For most of the readings, students will be provided with a list of short discussion questions that raise issues in the article or chapter for students to focus on. These questions must be submitted electronically (via the Dropbox function of Course link) prior to the class in which the relevant article is discussed. Due dates and times will be marked on each set of questions. Students are required to hand these assignments in on time regardless of whether they plan to attend the class in which a given reading is to be discussed.

Class Participation (30%)

Students are expected to talk about their answers to discussion questions in class. They are also expected to attend and ask questions about other students' presentations. This sort of verbal exchange is an important part of doing philosophy, and we will make a concerted effort to remain respectful of everyone during this part of the course. I will be keeping track of your contributions in class, and at the end of semester will assign a grade based on those records.

Course Outline

Part 1. Conceptions of 'Natural' and 'Ecosystem' in Environmental Thought

Date

- **Sept. 8:** Course introduction
- **Sept. 13:** Discussion of Angermeier (2000), "The Natural Imperative for Conservation." *Conservation Biology* 14: 373-81.
- **Sept. 15:** Discussion of Steinhoff (2015), "Why we should protect natural areas." *Arizona J. of Env. Law & Policy* 5: 365-387.
- **Sept. 20:** Discussion of Callicott (1980) "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair." *Environmental Ethics*, 2: 311-338.
- **Sept. 22:** Dedicated time to consider topics for independent research projects and to work on proposals.
- **Sept 27:** Discussion of Callicott (1999) "Holistic environmental ethics and the problem of ecofascism." In Callicott *Beyond the Land Ethic*.
Research Project Proposal due.
- **Sept. 29:** "Discussion of Varner et al (2016), "Ecoholism: Callicott on Leopold's Land Ethic." Forthcoming in *Defending Biodiversity*.
- **Oct 04:** Discussion of Sober (1986), "Philosophical problems for Environmentalism." In Norton (ed.) *The Preservation of Species*.
- **Oct. 06:** Viewing in class: Documentary by Adam Curtis: All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace. Part 2: The Use and Abuse of Vegetational Concepts.

Part 2 Colonial & First Nations Perspectives on Land and Environmentalism

- Oct. 11:** Fall Study Break.
- Oct 13:** Discussion of Cronin (2003), *Changes in the Land*, Chapters 1-4 (p.3-81).
- Oct. 18:** Discussion of Cronin (2003), *Changes in the Land*, Chapters 5, 7 & 8. (p. 82-107, 127-170)
- Oct. 20:** Discussion of Sioui (2016) "The sacred circle of life" and Morito (2016), "The 'Ecological Indian' and environmentalism." In Williston (ed) *Environmental Ethics for Canadians*.
- Oct 25:** Taiaiake & Corntassel (2005), "Being indigenous: Resurgences against contemporary colonialism." In R. Bellamy (ed.) *Politics of Identity IX* (p. 597-614).
- Oct 28 & 29:** Fieldtrip to Bloor Hotdocs Cinema in Toronto: "Angry Inuk" screenings at 5:30 pm (Friday) and 6:30pm(Saturday).
- Oct 27:** ***Research Literature Summary Due***

Part 3: Embracing the Anthropocene.

- Nov. 1:** Discussion of S. Vogel (2015), *Thinking Like a Mall*, Chapters 1&2 (p. 1-64).
- Nov 3:** Discussion of S. Vogel (2015), *Thinking Like a Mall*, Chapters 3&4 (p. 65-127)
- Nov. 8:** Discussion of S. Vogel (2015), *Thinking Like a Mall*, Chapters 5 & 6 (p. 129-198)
- Nov. 10:** Discussion of S. Vogel (2015), *Thinking Like a Mall*, Chapter 7

(p. 199-238)

-Nov. 15: Discussion of debate between Kareiva & Marvier (2012) "What is conservation science?" *BioScience*, 62(11): 962-969; and Doak et al (2014) "What is the future of conservation?" *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*, 29:77-18.

-Nov. 17: Overflow class.

Written Portion of Research Project due.

-Nov. 22: Presentations of student research projects.

-Nov. 24: Presentations of student research projects.

-Nov. 29: Presentations of student research projects.

-Dec. 1: Presentations of student research projects.

Other important Information

EMAIL COMMUNICATION

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their uoguelph.ca email account regularly: email is the official route of communication between the University and its students.

WHEN YOU CANNOT MEET A COURSE REQUIREMENT

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) in writing, with your name, id#, and email contact. See the Undergraduate Calendar's [information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration](#).

DROP DATE

The last date to drop one-semester courses, without academic penalty, is November 4, 2016. See the Undergraduate Calendar's [regulations and procedures for Dropping Courses](#).

COPIES OF OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Keep paper and/or other reliable backup copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

ACCESSIBILITY

The University of Guelph is committed to creating a barrier-free environment. Providing services for students is a shared responsibility among students, faculty and administrators. This relationship is based on respect of individual rights, the dignity of the individual and the University community's shared commitment to an open and supportive learning environment. Students requiring service or accommodation, whether due to an identified, ongoing disability or a short-term disability should contact Student Accessibility Services as soon as possible. For more information, contact SAS at 519-824-4120 ext. 56208 or email sas@uoguelph.ca or refer to the [SAS website](#).

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and it is the responsibility of all members of the University community—faculty, staff, and students—to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University's policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that discourages misconduct. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection.

Please note: Whether or not a student intended to commit academic misconduct is not relevant for a finding of guilt. Hurried or careless submission of assignments does not excuse students from responsibility for verifying the academic integrity of their work before submitting it. Students who are in any doubt as to whether an action on their part could be construed as an academic offence should consult with a faculty member or faculty advisor.

The Academic Misconduct Policy is [detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar](#).

RECORDING OF MATERIALS

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded or copied without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer. Material recorded with permission is restricted to use for that course unless further permission is granted.

RESOURCES

The Academic Calendars are the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate, graduate and diploma programs: <http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars>