

## Summer 2019

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### Nature: a history of Western ethics defined with nature in mind

HIST S-35

#### **Course description**

Why take this class? The planet is in crisis—fortunately, we have ways to decide how to handle the crisis. This class is designed to give students a mental toolkit for dealing with the important debates over imperiled natural resources and competing human needs that will only become more important as the years go by.

It may seem that questions about human responsibility toward the natural world are new, but there are long-standing traditions within western philosophy of arguing for ethical behavior in relation to nature, whether to benefit humans or to help non-humans. This course offers a critical and historical analysis of selected texts that identify human beings as a distinctively ethical species within the natural world, with particular attention to the emergence of normative theories that rank humans with and against other natural beings. Topics include: definitions of wilderness and property; agriculture, industrialization, and consumerism as historic transformations of humanity; social hierarchies based on perceived natural abilities; ideas of natural rights; conservation and environmentalism; and animal rights. Readings include Aristotle, Locke, Kant, Rousseau, Bentham, Malthus, Ricardo, Emerson, Marx, Darwin, Nietzsche, and Singer. We will also examine how contemporary debates over the human place within nature have continued to cite and critique normative traditions defined in the past.

This class represents a particular approach: ethics presented as the history of ideas. That historical approach entails a focused analysis of how certain beliefs have emerged within particular historical contexts and then changed over time. In this instance, the beliefs are about the human place in relation to the rest of nature.

#### **Required readings**

All readings are required. Most readings are available online, with links embedded in the syllabus below. Two readings are available in a course reader, available through Ca' Foscari. One book (Frankenstein) may be purchased independently—make sure to get the 1818 edition. Readings will be discussed intensively and comprehension of them will be essential for the papers and final presentation.

#### **Policies and procedures**

When taken for a letter grade, this course fulfills Harvard's General Education requirement for Ethical Reasoning or the Core requirement for Moral Reasoning; the course also fulfills the requirement that one of the eight Gen. Ed. courses engage substantially with study of the past. If a student takes the course Pass/Fail, s/he will not be granted a passing grade unless s/he submits all of the required work.

Students must attend all course meetings. Any absence must be registered by the CFHSS office (email [cafoscari-harvard@unive.it](mailto:cafoscari-harvard@unive.it)). Extensions for assignments can only be granted in cases of

unforeseen personal and medical emergencies. You must verify all such circumstances to your TF; without such verification, late papers will be penalized at the rate of one-third of a letter grade per day.

If you have a letter of introduction from the Accessible Education Office, please submit the letter to Professor Chaplin as soon as possible so that any necessary accommodations may be made in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although AEO may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation.

### **Academic Integrity and Collaboration**

Course policy on collaboration is the following. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing (and your writing alone) and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc., that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your research and writing (feedback on drafts, etc.), you must also acknowledge this assistance. Plagiarism—the representation of ideas or words by another source as your own—is cause for failing this course. Words taken directly from another source (whether the item was found in published or unpublished print material, manuscript source, or the internet) should be presented in quotation marks, with the source clearly indicated in parentheses or footnotes. Ideas paraphrased from another source should likewise be footnoted to indicate and credit the source.

For help with citation usage and formatting, please consult Harvard Guide to Using Sources, which can be found online at: <http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu>

### **Course requirements**

1. Intelligent, informed participation in seminars and sections (30% of final grade). You will need to do and think about the reading in order to do well in section and on the writing assignments and exam. The reading is not extensive—on average, we read fewer than 200 pages per week. But the material is by nature demanding; please do not plan to read any of it quickly and at the last minute. You will need to be a critical reader, ready to analyze the readings, not just describe them.
2. Three short papers (first one 900-1000 words/15% of the final grade; the other two 1250-1500 words/20% each); due dates indicated on the syllabus below. The paper topics will be posted on the course website. Your writing will be analytical: you cannot simply describe the readings but must assess them critically, in relation to each other.
3. A final presentation (15%).

## Seminars

Lesson	Title and Description	Date
<b>1</b>	<b>Nature is us; we are it</b>	<b>Tue 25 June</b>
Readings	<p>Tuva: <i>Voices from the Center of Asia</i> (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 1987), read liner notes for, and listen to, tracks 1, 20, and 33.</p> <p><i>Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador</i> (2008), English trans., Title II, ch. 7.</p> <p><u>Guiding questions:</u> animists and environmentalists represent philosophical views from the chronological extremes of our course. How does each define happiness and the good life in relation to natural entities?</p>	
<b>2</b>	<b>Dominion and stewardship vs. wilderness and the wild</b>	<b>Thu 27 June</b>
Readings	<p><i>Book of Genesis</i> (Authorized King James Version), chapters 1-4, 6-9.</p> <p><i>Epic of Gilgamesh, prologue, tablet I.</i></p> <p>Gospel According to St. Matthew (KJV), chapters 3-4.</p> <p>Aristotle, <i>On the Parts of Animals</i>, book I, pt. 5.</p> <p><u>Guiding questions:</u> how have human beings defined themselves as superior to all other parts of the natural world? Have these justifications depended on empirical observations? Or on non-empirical criteria? What is “wild” and what is it good for?</p>	
<b>Paper</b>	<b>First paper due 5pm</b>	
<b>3</b>	<b>Natural hierarchy vs. natural rights</b>	<b>Tue 2 July</b>
Readings	<p>Aristotle, <i>Politics, book I.</i></p> <p><i>The Acts of the Apostles</i> (KJV), chapter 17, verses 22-31.</p> <p>John Locke, <i>Two Treatises of Government</i> (1689), in Past Masters electronic edition, book II, ch. 5, paragraphs 25-51.</p> <p>Mary Wollstonecraft, <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i> (1792), in Past Masters, 73-77.</p> <p><i>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</i>, United Nations (1948).</p> <p><u>Guiding questions:</u> how have arguments for inequality among human beings depended on ideas about the natural world? What beliefs have challenged concepts of natural inequality? What is at stake in defining human rights as “natural”?</p>	
<b>4</b>	<b>Good for whom?</b>	<b>Thu 4 July</b>
Readings	<p><i>The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi</i>, in Francis of Assisi, <i>Early Documents</i> (Past Masters), vol. III, 468-71, 485.</p> <p>Immanuel Kant, <i>Metaphysics of Morals</i> (1797), ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 192-93, § 16-17. [Note:</p>	

	<p>an “amphiboly” is a logical fallacy.]  Jeremy Bentham, <i>An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> (London, 1789), 11-16, 282-83, 282b-283b (click on the †b symbol on p. 282 for this important note).</p> <p><u>Guiding questions:</u> who can do good, and to whom can good be done? Why did St. Francis preach, including to birds? How does Kant define duty or imperative as the essence of doing good, and how does he conceive of nature in relation to morality? How does Bentham define a utilitarian ethics? What is at stake in including or excluding non-humans within an ethical community?</p>	
<b>5</b>	<b>Aesthetics</b>	<b>Tue 9 July</b>
Readings	<p>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, <i>Reveries of the Solitary Walker</i> (1782), trans. from the French (Dublin, 1783), II, 245-60 (Fifth Walk).</p> <p>Ralph Waldo Emerson, <i>Nature</i> (1836), in <i>The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson</i>, vol. 1 (Past Masters), 7 45.</p> <p><u>Guiding questions:</u> how have the non-human parts of the natural world been redefined as essential to a good life for humans, even—or especially—when they are not transformed by human action? If nature is good, what good are people?</p>	
<b>6</b>	<b>Science (I)</b>	<b>Thu 11 July</b>
Readings	<p>Francis Bacon, <i>The New Atlantis</i> (1627), in <i>The Major Works of Francis Bacon</i>, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford, 2002; Past Masters electronic ed.), 457-61, 480-89.</p> <p>Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i> (1818), book I.</p> <p><u>Guiding questions:</u> how has modern science redefined nature? How has it defined the scientist as a person who, by manipulating natural materials, does good—or not?</p>	
<b>Paper</b>	<b>Second paper due by 6pm</b>	
<b>7</b>	<b>Science (II)</b>	<b>Tue 16 July</b>
Readings	<p>Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i>, books II and III.</p> <p>Charles Darwin, <i>On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection</i> (New York, 1861), 420-25.</p> <p>Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>Twilight of the Idols</i> (1888), trans. Thomas Common (London, 1896), 124-25, 177-78, 198 204.</p> <p><u>Guiding questions:</u> how has science redefined humanity? What good is nature, to these scientifically-defined humans? If, after Darwin, good and evil no longer exist as</p>	

	transcendent truths, how can humans argue for preferred outcomes?	
<b>8</b>	<b>Distribution</b>	Thu 18 July
Readings	<p>Thomas Robert Malthus, <i>An Essay on the Principle of Population</i> (1798), in Works (Past Masters), chs. 1, 5.</p> <p>David Ricardo, <i>On The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation</i> (London, 1817), iii-vi, 146-65.</p> <p>Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, <i>Manifesto of the Communist Party</i> (1848), authorized English translation (Chicago, 1906), 11-47, 62-64.</p> <p><u>Guiding questions:</u> how does the economic development of nature contribute to a good life? How do proponents of capitalism and communism differ in their ideas about the fair division of natural resources among individuals and nations? How do Malthusianism and cornucopianism have differing ethical significance?</p>	
<b>9</b>	<b>Conservation</b>	Tue 23 July
Readings	<p>John Muir, "The Hetch Hetchy Valley," <i>Sierra Club Bulletin</i>, 6 (1908), 211- 20.</p> <p>John Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition</i> (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 118-25 – course pack.</p> <p>Sheila Watt-Cloutier, with the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, <i>Petition to the Inter American Commission on Human Rights Seeking Relief from Violations Resulting from Global Warming Caused by Acts and Omissions of the United States</i> (2005), 1-8.</p> <p><u>Guiding questions:</u> how do conservationists define nature? What reasons do they give for preserving natural resources? Who benefits from conservation? How could Rawls' "veil of ignorance" preserve equitable access to nature?</p>	
<b>10</b>	<b>Environmentalism</b>	Thu 25 July
Readings	<p>Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic," in <i>A Sand County Almanac</i> (New York, 1966; 1st ed. 1949), 217-41 – course pack.</p> <p>C. D. Stone, "Should Trees Have Standing?" <i>Southern California Law Review</i>, 45 (1972), 450-501.</p> <p>Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long Range-Ecology Movement: A Summary," <i>Inquiry</i>, 16 (1973), 95-100.</p> <p><u>Guiding questions:</u> well, should trees have standing? If so, how? If not, why not? To what extent can arguments for saving the non-human parts of the natural world not</p>	

	rely on definitions of the good of humanity?	
<b>Paper</b>	<b>Third paper due 5pm</b>	
<b>11</b>	<b>Animal rights</b>	<b>Tue 30 July</b>
Readings	<p>Peter Singer, "<i>All Animals are Equal</i>," (1974), in <i>Animal Rights and Human Obligations</i>, ed. Tom Regan and Peter Singer, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1989).</p> <p>Bonnie Steinbock, "<i>Speciesism and the Idea of Equality</i>," <i>Philosophy</i>, 53 (1978), 247-56.</p> <p><u>Guiding questions:</u> on what grounds do animals have rights? Does the possibility of animals' equality to humans threaten human uniqueness and dignity? Is a concept of animal rights contradictory, because it implies human moral superiority to animals?</p>	
<b>12</b>	<b>Final presentations</b>	<b>Thu 1 August</b>