Course Description

The course will examine the philosophical issues of environmental ethics from an ecological point of view. Ecology is the study of the interrelations of the organisms with their environments. We will review how western philosophy has considered the human place in nature. This anthropological and ecological question will be related to the history of philosophy and of science, considering the moral value of culture and techniques, commonly opposed to nature. We will start with studying the “myths” of origin of humanity in the biblical tradition (Genesis) and in ancient Greece (Golden age, Prometheus) and we will proceed with the modern reprises of the exit from the state of nature, examining the ethical, political and anthropological meaning of the recurring edenic narratives, especially in the American myth of the wilderness. Then we will consider the turn of Modernity in the attitude of humanity towards nature, by the institution of culture and nature as two radically different world (Descartes, Kant) and by a new legitimization of man’s mastery over nature. In particular, we will focus on Decartes’ mechanistic conception of the body and its consequences on the human practices on the animals, in opposition to the utilitarian tradition going from Bentham to contemporary philosophers such as Tom Regan. The human responsibility towards nature will finally be treated in its recent developments, with regards to its new implications in the technological age (Anders, Jonas). In an ecological perspective we will consider Jakob von Uexküll’s notion of biological environment and its posterity in Tim Ingold’s anthropology. Finally, the “anthropology of nature” implied by Bruno Latour’s theory of Gaia and by Gilles Clément’s planetary garden will be considered as a possible exit from the traditional edenic narratives. The course will be integrated by visits to the Anatomical Theatre of the Archiginnasio (XVII century) and to the Botanic garden of the University of Bologna (XVI century).

Course Objectives

A student will be challenged to read and comprehend classical and contemporary philosophical texts, and learn the vocabulary and logical tools to develop philosophical arguments. At the end of the course the student will know the lines of the philosophical debate about nature and will be able to critically orient her/himself on the many ethical and political problems that such question is closely linked.

Course Requirements

CLASS PARTICIPATION: 10%
During the semester you are required to actively participate to debates. In order to receive a high mark for participation it is expected that you ask critical questions that are directly related to the week’s reading list, and that you contribute to our discussions with your own remarks and arguments.
All the reading is required (i.e. mandatory). Though I cover the main concepts of the lectures in class, it is nonetheless your responsibility to make sure that you read the texts thoroughly and ask questions if you do not. I will lecture assuming that you have both read and understood the texts, and that you have developed a basic timeline for the topic analyzed in each class. If you experience any difficulties with the reading assigned for any given lecture, do not hesitate to contact me. I shall be happy to help.
At the beginning of our lecture, I may ask random questions to make sure you have all read and understood the basics of your set readings for that day. With this in mind, it is particularly important that you inform me of any problems you might have with the reading before the beginning of class.

**Homework: 10%**

It is required to write a short reflection of 200-300 words with your personal perspectives on the readings and the movies. It is expected to define the philosophical concepts with references to the required course readings.

Send your homework to caterina.zanfi2@unibo.it. Any homework received past the deadline will automatically be penalized.

**4 Tests (unannounced): 10% each**

Yes/no questions and open questions about the readings.

**Final Paper: 40%**

For your final paper, you are required to write a 2,000 to 2,500 words essay. You may select a topic among the issues analyzed in our course syllabus, or among the events that will take place during your study trips. Topics need to be discussed in advance with me on an individual basis. You will need to email me with a provisional title and an essay plan (consisting of a rough table of contents, and two-three explanatory sentences) by the end of the sixth week of class.

It is imperative to keep conceptual precision, logic coherence, historical awareness, and to quote correctly the sources. Example of structure:

1) Definition of the problem and its terms;
2) Development of the argument;
3) Conclusion.

A strong final paper will use a minimum of four refereed journal articles and two primary sources, including:

References from the required course reading;
References from the recommended readings (provided by the teacher);
References from outside and new sources, suggested by the student (primary sources are encouraged).

Send your final paper to caterina.zanfi2@unibo.it by December 13, by 23:59 (Italian time). Late papers will be considered under exceptional circumstances but may be marked down one third of a letter grade for each day that they are late. Contact the professor asap (preferably at least 24 hours in advance of the due date) if you think you may need a paper extension with the request and reason for the request. Documentation and college approval may be necessary in certain cases. Completion of all major assignments (the exams and the essay) are required for passing the class. Essays that are not submitted via email by the due date will be considered late unless otherwise stated or other arrangements are made with the professor.

Johns Hopkins SAIS Graduate School Library (via Belmeloro, 11) is a superb library and recent journals, books and academic publications are available for consultation here. You cannot take books out of the SAIS library but you can use them when studying in the library. See http://catalog.jhube.it. The Sala Borsa library (Piazza Nettuno, 3) is part of the University of Bologna, and there are also some books and reviews in English which you may wish to consult or take out on loan. See www.bibliotecasalaborsa.it.

---

**Spring Hill College Italy Center Attendance Policy**

Attendance at all classes is required of all students. *Students are expected to arrive at class on time, having completed the week’s course readings and assignments*, with a pen, paper and books in-hand. Students are expected to read their email daily to keep abreast of important academic and safety related issues. It is the student’s responsibility to notify his/her teachers of an anticipated absence,
make arrangements to complete the work, and then complete the work as agreed. In the event a student misses more than two classes he/she will automatically be marked down one grade point. A student may be absent two times before being penalized. For example, if a student is excepted to receive a “B” for a course, but has 2+ unexcused absences on his/her report, the final grade for the course will be dropped to a “B-”. Excused absences require a note from the Spring Hill medical Doctor (Stephen Williams, M.D.) or from Dr. Todd Waller. Any change in status which will result in absence, the student must contact their professor immediately. It is a student’s responsibility to keep him/herself informed of pending strikes, changes in air travel and any other potential obstacles that may prohibit one from being at class on time. Excuses related to travel delays will not be accepted. Examinations missed by reason of absence must be made up at the convenience of the instructor. Students are required to familiarize themselves with the course schedule and should not attempt to make travel plans that may conflict with course meetings, on site visits, and exams.

Grades

The college describes grade designations in the Bulletin. Briefly, an A constitutes “excellent, truly outstanding scholarship and an unusual degree of intellectual initiative”; a B “truly superior or well above average attainment”; a C “average or satisfactory work as is done by a majority of students”; and a D “deficient, but passed.”

Grades Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>930 up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>900 up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>871 up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>828 up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>785 up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>742 up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>699 up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>656 up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>613 up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Course Schedule

Please note, adjustments to the schedule will be announced in class and/or per email. Reading assignments are due on the date listed. During the course of the semester there will be 10 amount of cultural field trips.

Class #1
Introduction
* Jean-Marc Besse, *Nature and Culture*

Class #2
Myths of origin: Prometheus, the Golden Age
* Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* (~460-470 BC), pp. 16-23, 28-34.

Class #3
Myths of origin: the Garden of Eden
* Genesis, 1-3.

Class #4
State of Nature as a political myth: Hobbes

Class #5
State of Nature as a political myth: Rousseau

Class #6
The case of the Feral Child

Class #7
Myths of origin: from the Golden Age to the Myth of Wilderness
* Henry David Thoreau, *Walden or the Life in the Woods* (1854); *Walking* (1861).

Class #8
DVDs available at SHC Library.

Class #9
* Georges Canguilhem, Machine and Organism (1952), pp. 75-88.

Class #10

**Homework for Class #11:**
Write a reflection paper on the movies Into the Wild and Grizzly Man. The two main characters have a similar biography, but they are introduced under a different point of view from the directors Sean Penn and Werner Herzog. Explain which are the common points between the two “heroes of the wilderness” and which is the judgment of Penn and Herzog on their attitude towards nature. The paper must be submitted via email and must be 200-300 words.

Class #11
**Rights of the Animals**
* Tom Regan, Animals are not our Taster.

Class #12
**Natural and Rational Law**
* Bertrand Russell, “Kant”, in Id., History of Western Philosophy (1946), pp. 637-651.

**Final Paper Topic by Class #13**

Class #13
**Rights of Nature**

Class #14
**Promethean Shame**

Class #15
**Biology and Ecology**
* Jakob von Uexküll, Theoretical Biology (1920)

Class #16
**Anthropology and Ecology**
* Martin Heidegger, Building, dwelling, thinking (1954).

Class #17
**Gaia**

Class #18
Visit to the Botanic Garden of the University of Bologna
Via Irnerio 42 – Monday-Friday: 8.30 - 15.30

Class #19
The Planetary Garden

| FINAL PAPER DUE – TBD |