9-2002

EVST 504.01: Philosophy of Ecology

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Several recent environmental philosophers have insisted that because our traditional moral frameworks are inherently anthropocentric and can never be genuinely respectful of nature, the only way we can avert environmental disaster is to slowly, thoroughly, holistically reimagine what it is to be "human," what we mean when we talk about "nature," and the kind of relationship(s) we want to have with nature. This is doing "ontology," and ontology must precede or at least must go hand in glove with ethics. O.K., sounds real fine. But how does the imagination begin to reconstruct an entire worldview? Does analytic argument have a role in this reconstruction or is analytic reason part of the problem? Is this a job for literary prose? If so, why? What devices does literary prose have at its disposal that are not available to analytic philosophy? How do these devices work their magic? And, importantly, how does all this relate to activism? For the most part, we will read, deliberately and lovingly, three works of environmental imagination that represent three different genres--fiction (Ceremony), creative nonfiction (Walden), and prose poetry (Woman and Nature)--to see what insights we can glean from these texts. We will read some critical theory in order to better frame our questions. But mostly I want to linger over these subtle and rich works of environmental imagination, to tease out and appreciate their content as well as the craft that made possible the communication of the content.
9/24 Economy, Thoreau
   Buell, chpt. 5
9/26 Economy
10/1 Where I Lived..., Reading, Sounds
   Buell, chpt. 8
10/3 Solitude
10/8 Visitors, The Bean Field
10/10 The Ponds
   Buell, chpt. 6
10/15 Baker Farm, Higher Laws, Brute Neighbors
10/17 Baker Farm, Higher Laws, Brute Neighbors
10/22 Housewarming, Former Inhabitants, Winter Animals
   Buell, chpt. 7
10/24 The Pond in Winter, Spring
10/29 Conclusion
10/31 mid-term paper due, bring short xeroxed summary of your topic for all
11/7 Flawed Crystals, Martha Nussbaum (x)
   Finely Aware and Richly Responsible, Nussbaum (x)
11/12 Landscape, History, and Pueblo Imagination, Leslie Silko (x)
   Buell, chpt. 9
   complete first reading of Ceremony at this time. Begin rereading.
11/14-11/26 Ceremony
12/3-12/12 Woman and Nature, Susan Griffin
12/20 finalsday, 10:10-12:10, final papers due. We may want to reschedule this for another day during finals week.

Texts
The Environmental Imagination, Lawrence Buell
Walden, Thoreau
Ceremony, Leslie Silko
Woman and Nature, Susan Griffin
(x)—articles on e-reserve and hard copies at Mansfield desk. Secret password:Phil 504.

Requirements
Mid-term paper (6-8 pages)—40%
Final paper (15-20 pages)—50% You may revise and expand the first paper.
Presentation—10%