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PHL 505.01: Issues in Antropocene

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ISSUES IN THE ANTHROPOCENE
PHIL 505

Professor: Christopher J. Preston

Office: LA 157

Office hours: T. 11 a.m.-12.15 p.m., W. 1.15-3.15 p.m.

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Classroom: LA 204

Class: T, R, 3.30 – 5.50p.m.

Phone: 243-2937

1. Course Introduction:

On January 8th, 2016 a working group from the International Commission on Stratigraphy made the recommendation that Earth has left the Holocene and entered the Anthropocene. This renaming is said to be justified on the grounds that the planet is now both “functionally” and “stratigraphically” shaped by the impacts of humans.

This class looks at how the consequences of the Anthropocene designation reach far beyond geology. In particular we will look at how the idea of the Anthropocene might challenge some of the key concepts that shape environmental thinking. The two big conceptual changes we will consider are the ideas of the “post-natural” and the “post-wild.” Our two main books will argue against the idea of “nature” and against the traditional idea of “the wild.” To help us think about the post-natural and the post-wild, we will also investigate a number of Anthropocene technologies and practices that appear to point – or not – in this direction. These will include technologies for geoengineering the climate, synthetic biology/de-extinction, and the practice of re-wilding. Throughout the course, we will keep ethical considerations at the forefront.

2. Course Objectives:

- To learn why it is proposed that the planet has left the current geological epoch
- To understand what sort of challenges this presents to the concepts of ‘nature’ and the ‘wild’
- To put this discussion into the context of some wider discussions in environmental philosophy
- To determine (with examples) whether there exists a set of distinctive “Anthropocene technologies”
- To investigate how the practice of re-wilding might impact the Anthropocene discussion

3. Reading Material:

Please note that the course requires the use of Moodle. A significant portion of the reading will be posted there, in addition to reminders about assignments and other

important administrative materials. If you have not already done so, please familiarize yourself with the use of Moodle.

Steven Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall: Environmental Philosophy After the End of Nature* (MIT Press, 2015)(V)

Fred Pearce, *The New Wild: Why Invasive Species will be Nature's Salvation* (Beacon Press, 2015)(P)

Materials on Moodle (M)

4. Proposed Reading Assignments (subject to change):

Week 1 (Jan 23-25). HOLOCENE ENVIRONMENTAL THINKING. **M:** Rolston, Wilderness Act (sect. 1 & 2), Public Law 93-622 (sect. 2)

Week 2 (Jan 30-Feb 1). THE ANTHROPOCENE'S ENDING OF NATURE. **M:** International Commission, McKibben, Minter and Pyne. **V:** Ch 1

Week 3 (Feb 6-8). DEEPENING THE CRITIQUE OF NATURE. **V:** Ch 2, Ch 3

Week 4 (Feb 13-15). ECOMODERNISM VS UNCIVILIZATION. **M:** Marris et al., Eco-Modernist Manifesto, Karieva et al., Dark Mountain Project Manifesto, Monbiot

Week 5 (Feb 20-22). ECOMODERNISM AND THE ALLURE OF BIG TECHNOLOGY. **M:** Smaje, Nye, Borgmann, Specter, Keith

Week 6 (Feb 27-Mar 1). HUMILITY, HUBRIS, AND HOMO FABER. **V:** Ch 4. **M:** Preston, Hamilton, Minter

Week 7 (Mar 6-8). THE NEW WILDS. **V:** Ch 5. **P:** Ch 1-5

Week 8 (Mar 13-15). NATURE'S VENTRILOQUISTS, MYTH-MAKERS, AND DEMONS. **V:** Ch 6. **P:** Ch 6-9

Week 9 (Mar 20-22). PUSHBACK FROM THE OLD SCHOOL. **M:** Hettinger, Mark, Meine, Vucetich, Caro

Take-home mid-term due as an attachment to an email (in MS Word) by 6 p.m. on Thursday March 22nd.

-----SPRING BREAK-----

Week 10 (Apr 3-5). A WAY FORWARD. **M:** Marris, Todd, Vaidya. **P:** Ch 10-12

Week 11 (Apr 10-12). SYNTHETIC BIOLOGY. **M:** Calvert, Boldt and Mueller, Sandler, Kabenick

Week 12 (Apr 17-19). DE-EXTINCTION. **M:** Revive and Restore, Gyngell and Suvaescu, Kohl, Turner, Minter

Week 13 (Apr 24-26). REWILDING. **M:** Monbiot, Salutis, Landres, Drenthen, Goldfarb

Deadline for office meeting on final paper outline is Wednesday April 25th

Week 14 (May 1-3). FINDING SOME COMMON GROUND: **M:** Marris, Tallis & Lubchenco. **V:** Ch 7

Term paper due in an email (MS Word) by 6 p.m. on Thursday, May 10th.

5. Course Requirements:

Please note that for each assignment you will be given points (not a grade). Your goal this semester will be to score as many points as possible. **Instead of worrying about your grade, concentrate on accumulating as many points as you can during the semester.**

(For written assignments, it is required that you use 12 point font, one inch margins all round, and double-spacing. Do not put extra spaces between paragraphs or headings.)

a) Attendance and participation (10 points). Attendance and participation are required in this class. As a graduate seminar, we will be discussing what we have read together rather than listening to a lecture. Please come to class prepared to discuss our topics. If you need to miss class for a legitimate reason, please e-mail or talk to me directly as soon as you can so that I know what is going on.

b) Bones of Contention (15 points). Twice during the semester, each student will be required to bring from a chosen reading one particular bone of contention. This means finding in a reading a point of discussion that you think particularly controversial, interesting, helpful, etc. This is not an assignment to present an overview of the reading. I will assume that everybody knows what is in the reading. It is a chance to ensure one particular discussion topic that interests you does not get missed.

c) Class Overviews (10 points). At the start of most classes, someone will be asked at random to give a brief (2-3 minute) overview of the discussion from the previous class. **Take 5 minutes to go over the notes from the previous class before our meeting. Jot down the 5 or 6 major topics we discussed.** You do not need to give a play-by-play account of everything that happened the last time we met. Simply give us all some brief reminders about the key topics that were covered. (I will collect your *hand-written* reminder of the topics right after you offer them).

d) Mid-term (30 points). I shall be giving a take-home mid-term before spring break. I will hand out a number of questions on which you will be required to write-up answers before the end of the day on March 22nd. The mid-term will test your comprehension of the texts and discussions to date.

e) Final Paper Outline (5 points). You must bring to an office hour a 1-2 page outline of your final paper **at least** 2 weeks before the due date of the paper (i.e. by Wednesday April 25th). I will offer feedback and suggestions on your topic.

f) Final Paper (30 points). On or before Thursday, May 10th at 6 p.m., you are required to turn in a 12-15 page term paper on a topic of your choice related to our reading.

6. General Expectations:

Please come to class with the readings for that week already carefully read. Usually we will proceed through the readings each week in the order listed on the syllabus (The first 2 on the Tuesday, the second 2 on the Thursday). Be prepared for me to call you out on what you think about something in the reading and be prepared to engage fellow class members politely in discussion.

Attendance of every class is expected. Please let me know as early as possible if you need to miss class for any reason. Please arrive before the beginning of class and do not leave early.

You may not use the internet during class.

Late work will warrant a point reduction that will be determined by the circumstances.

I expect complete academic integrity at every point of the course. Any academic dishonesty will lead to an automatic F for your semester grade (and that of any collaborators) and a meeting with the appropriate academic authorities. There will be no exceptions to this zero tolerance policy on academic dishonesty.

7. Additional remarks:

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with DSS, please contact DSS in Lommasson 154. Please let me know as soon as possible about any assistance I might be able to offer. I will work with you and DSS to provide an appropriate accommodation.

Finally, please do everything you can to contribute positively to our community of learning this semester. Please treat all other members of our classroom (including myself)

with a quiet and considered respect at all times. Please support your peers as they struggle with difficult questions and topics. Be prepared to work hard and to help me see the material in new and rewarding ways. Seminars require a concerted group effort in order to really take off. You all have a role to play! I hope you will take that role seriously.