

On Nature: Ideas of the Natural from Antiquity to the Renaissance

What is nature and what does it mean to call something ‘natural’? People who think and write about the environment often use these terms without reflecting on their deeper significance. But the concept of the natural has had a long and distinguished history in western thought, which has very much shaped our current understanding of nature and of the place of human beings in relation to it. This course will study the evolution of the concept of nature in the western tradition, beginning with ancient Greek philosophy, moving through Roman philosophy and literature, medieval physics and theology, and concluding with the scientific revolution and the beginning of the Enlightenment. We will compare and contrast a number of authors on this front, examining the ways in which ideas from the past have been refracted to the present, influencing contemporary debates about the environment.

The course will be team-taught by two Emory faculty members, one from the Classics Department who specializes in ancient Greek and Latin literature, and the other from the Philosophy Department, with expertise in natural philosophy from antiquity through the later Middle Ages. Our texts will come from a variety of genres, including poetry and prose literature, history, philosophical dialogues, commentaries, and scientific textbooks.

Required Books

Ancient Sources

- Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, tr. Ronald Melville (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)
- Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, tr. A. D. Melville (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986)

Medieval Sources

- *Nicole Oresme and the Marvels of Nature*, ed. & tr. Bert Hansen (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1985)
- Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, ed. Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000)
- *A Source Book in Medieval Science*, ed. Edward Grant (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974)
- David C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science: The European Scientific Tradition in Philosophical, Religious, and Institutional Context, 600 B.C. to A.D. 1450* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992)
- Coursepack of photocopied materials

Topics and Readings

I. Views of Nature in Greek and Roman Antiquity (6 weeks)

(1) The environment in the ancient world

- Donald J. Hughes, *Pan's Travail: Environmental Problems of the Ancient Greeks and Romans* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994)
- Patricia Jeskins, *The Environment and the Classical World* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1998)

(2) Ancient texts on the natural world

(i) Natural science and philosophical theory

- Aristotle, *Physics*
- Pliny, *Natural History*
- Seneca, *Naturales Quaestiones*
- Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*
- Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

(ii) Pastoral visions

- Vergil, *Eclogues*
- Longus, *Daphne and Chloe*

(iii) Natural philosophy in late antiquity

- Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*
- Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*

II. Views of Nature in the Western Middle Ages (6 weeks)

(1) The environment in the medieval world

- Salisbury, Joyce E., *The Medieval World of Nature : A Book of Essays* (New York: Garland, 1993)
- Roger D. Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature : Tradition and Innovation in Western Attitudes Toward the Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988)

(3) Medieval texts on the natural world

(i) The doctrine of creation and the contingency of the universe

- Augustine, *City of God*, Book VIII
- William of Ockham, *Ordinatio*

(ii) Scripture and religious belief

- Bonaventure, *Retracing the Arts to Theology*
- Meister Eckhart, "On Detachment"

(iii) 'Traces of divinity'

- John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon*
- Thomas Aquinas, *The Principles of Nature*

- Boethius of Dacia, *On Dreams*
- (iv) Reason and the natural order
 - Albert the Great, *Twenty-Six Books on Animals*
 - Thomas Aquinas, *The Divisions and Methods of the Sciences*

III. The Transformation of the Medieval Worldview (1 week)

- Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*

Course Requirements

90% of your grade for the course will be based on two writing projects, the second of which will be a substantial research paper written in two drafts.

Short Paper (30% of final grade)

An essay of approximately 1500-2000 words (= approximately 6-8 double spaced, typewritten pages) from a list of topics to be provided by the instructors, assigned in the fourth week of classes and due the week before Fall break. Late submissions will be accepted, but subject to a penalty of one grade per calendar day (thus, an A paper turned in one day late will receive an A-, a B+ paper handed in three days late a C+, and so on).

Research Paper (60% of final grade)

An essay of approximately 3000-4000 words (= approximately 12-16 double spaced, typewritten pages) on a topic of your own choosing, in consultation with the instructors. You must have consulted with us at least once about your research paper topic by the last week of October. The first draft is due the Monday after Thanksgiving. We will return it to you with comments and suggestions on how to improve it by Friday of that week. You will then have until the last day of classes to fully revise your paper and submit a final draft.

Assignment Format

This course strives to be paperless. Essays are to be submitted electronically, via LearnLink, and will be returned to you marked up with the instructor's comments and a grade using MS Word's text editor function (more detailed instructions to follow).

Attendance and class participation (10% of final grade)

Regular attendance and class participation are both course requirements. 10% of your final grade will be based on your attendance, as well as on the quality and quantity of your contributions in class.

Discussion

Discussion is an important part of the practice of philosophy. After the first week or so, we will spend time each class discussing, reviewing, criticizing, and debating ideas introduced by our authors and by each other. This means that besides attending regularly, you must come to class having completed the reading assignment for that day. You should also prepare some questions or points of your own to contribute to the discussion.

Office Hours

Jack Zupko
Bowden 211
MWF 1-2 p.m.
and by appointment
office telephone: x7-0104
e-mail: jzupko@emory.edu

Garth Tissol
404B N. Callaway
MW 10:30-11:30 a.m.
and by appointment
office telephone: x 7-7595
e-mail: gtissol@emory.edu

You are **always** welcome to see us if you have any questions about the course or your assignments. You may also make an appointment to see us outside regular office hours. This can be arranged by either speaking to us at the end of class, or calling us at our office numbers (see above), where you can leave a message on voice mail if we're not in. Written messages may also be left for Jack Zupko in his mailbox in the Philosophy Department office (Bowden 214), and for Garth Tissol in his mailbox in the Classics Department Office (404 N Callaway).