Eco Ethics is an investigation into appropriate and inappropriate relationships between human beings and the environment. As such, it is a very wide and diverse field of philosophical inquiry, with at least two major approaches: "Deep ecology," a term coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (1912-2009) contrasts with "ecological ethics." Deep ecology is way of thinking that investigates the world in experiential ways informed by phenomenological points of view. The philosophical contributions of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger are central to this investigation. In contrast, the approach of ecological ethics is focused on specific issues regarding management of resources. For ecological ethics, environmental questions are part of an established ethical tradition that presupposes scientific descriptions of nature as privileged (i.e., true and complete). Ecological ethics considers questions about preservation of species, pesticides, population control, and animal rights, for example, as central. Ecological ethics is a utilitarian, pragmatic approach to ecological issues. Deep ecology, on the other hand, takes a much more speculative approach to the environment. Its roots are in the phenomenological investigations of technology, science, and human experience that surfaced in the early years of the twentieth century and that continue to be of profound concern. Deep ecology assumes a broader vision and proceeds to question more deeply than does ecological ethics.

This course, which takes the perspective of deep ecology, regards questions about the management of resources as secondary to the speculative possibilities of a more broad-based engagement with the natural world. That is, the course presumes that we should rethink our place in the world before we presume its management. It seems that this approach is philosophically responsible because the authentic task of philosophic thinking is to assist us in locating ourselves in the world, and not to simply clarify the non-philosophic thoughts of the natural and social sciences. The latter view of philosophy sees it as a sort of "servant of the sciences;" such a view ignores Socrates' admonition that we "know ourselves." Coupled with his assertion that "the unexamined life is not worth living," indicates to us that philosophy is primarily an exercise in self-discovery. That is, philosophy is personal reflection that seeks re-formation of the human spirit; it is not a body of knowledge and it is not an ancillary to science. Philosophy is something one does rather than something one knows. It is the personal activity of investigating the world for ourselves that is valuable, not because it gives us a set of statements we can point to as "knowledge," but because the process of that investigation re-situates us, personally, in the world.

The course is divided into five sessions. The readings are listed on the attached "reading list."
The readings and assigned writing for each session are to be completed prior to the session - including the first session.

Session One - Thursday, June 24

Three Reading Assignments: "Introduction: The Nature of Environmental Philosophy" in Rethinking Nature and Discourse on Thinking, by Martin Heidegger, (Entire Text, including "Introduction" by John M. Anderson, "Memorial Address," and "Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking" and Tao Te Ching, Lao Tsu (entire text. Please use the Feng and English translation.). You need not report on Anderson's introduction, but if you would like, feel free to include some of his ideas.

Written Assignment #1: A two page essay (all written work in the course is required to be word processed, double spaced) that you will share with the class that reflects your understanding and your specific questions about Heidegger's essays. The goal of this written assignment is that you bring to class a written essay that you can read aloud for class discussion.

Written Assignment #2: Prepare short (two or three paragraphs each) commentaries on five chapters in the Tao Te Ching. (Take heart! Few of the eighty chapters are longer than a single page!) Read through the text, and select chapters that you find interesting enough to discuss in class. Also, select chapters from a variety of locations. For example, select one from the first ten chapters, one from the second ten, and so on. That way, the class will be able to discuss chapters from several places in the text.

In addition to our discussion of Martin Heidegger and Lao Tsu, our first session will include a brief introductory lecture to the thought of Edmund Husserl as preparation for the second session (July 1).

We will briefly discuss the format of the student reports during the first session; you should be prepared to select your report material during the second session (July 1).

Session Two - Thursday, July 1

One Reading Assignment: Edmund Husserl, "Vienna Lecture: Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man" (Online version is fine, but you should print it and bring it with you to the session.)

Written Assignment #1: Prepare a brief (two page) essay that you will share in discussion - What Husserl means by "the crisis in European man." Note connections you see between Husserl's ideas and the Heidegger and Lao Tzu materials we studied in the last session.

Written Assignment #2: Prepare a written list of at least five questions about Husserl's terminology, ideas, and general meaning. The goal of this written assignment is that you bring to the class session a written basis for discussion. You will find the Vienna Lecture to be difficult reading; please set aside an appropriate amount of time (several hours) for your reading and writing.
In addition to our discussion of Husserl, Heidegger, and Lao Tzu students will select essays from Rethinking Nature for the student reports. Please be prepared to select your report from the anthology at this session. If you haven't a selection, one will be assigned to you. Selections are limited to those identified on the reading list (last page of this syllabus)

Session Three - Thursday, July 8
Student Reports and class discussion

Session Four - Thursday, July 15
Student Reports and class discussion

Session Five - Thursday, July 22
Student Reports and class discussion

Student Reports are summaries and commentaries on the pieces from Rethinking Nature listed on the reading guide. (Essays in that text that are not listed on the reading guide are not appropriate for student reports.) The student commentaries should involve references to the Husserl, Heidegger, and Lao Tzu materials as well as other materials in the Rethinking Nature anthology from previous reports. The student presenting the report leads a discussion that encourages a wide ranging sharing of ideas that centers on philosophical issues of interest to deep ecology. The report, which is word processed and double-spaced, is turned in at the conclusion of the session.

Final Papers should be at least eighteen pages in length and in appropriate academic format. They should be philosophical reflections on issues central to the course. The student report materials can play a central role in the paper, but the paper is required to demonstrate a wide appreciation of the course material and should not be limited to the issues associated with the student report. The articles in Rethinking Nature are appropriate models of the style of final paper the course requires; your paper, however, will have more explanation of the Husserl, Heidegger, and Lao Tzu materials. The final paper is due July 31. Please email the paper to the address on this syllabus.

Grades in the course are based on the first two written assignments (25%), the student report (25%) and the final paper (50%).

See the attached reading list for assigned readings. The Don Ihde interview, while not required, may be of interest for general background purposes.

Online Reading
Edmund Husserl, Vienna Lecture
http://www.users.cloud9.net/~bradmcc/husserl_philcris.html
Don Ihde Interview
http://albrechtslund.net/texts/interviewwithDonIhde.pdf
Books to Purchase (available at the Gonzaga University Bookstore)

Discourse on Thinking, Martin Heidegger, translated by John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund. Harper and Row, 0061314595
  • Introduction by John M. Anderson
  • Memorial Address
  • Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking

Tao Te Ching, Lao Tsu. Translated by Gia fu Feng and Jane English Vintage 0679724346
  • Entire text

  • Introduction: The Nature of Environmental Philosophy

Choose a report from
  • The Uncanny Goodness of Being Edible to Bears, James Hatley
  • Trees and Truth, or Why We are Really all Druids, David Wood
  • Boundary Projects versus Border Patrol, Irene J. Klaver
  • Children and the Ethics of Place, Ingrid Leman Stefanovic
  • Reciprocity, David Abram
  • Eco-logic: An Erotic of Nature, Trish Glazebrook
  • The Elemental Earth, John Sallis
  • Philosophy in the Field, Robert Frodeman
  • Beyond Doubt: Environmental Philosophy and the Human Predicament, Robert Kirkman
  • Biodiversity, Exuberance, and Abundance: Cherishing the Body of the Earth, Stephen David Ross
  • Mapping the Earth in Works of Art, Edward S. Casey
  • The Music of Space, Alphonso Lingis
  • A Sand County Almanac: Through Anthropogenic to Ecogenic Thinking, Kenneth Maly
  • Nature and Nurture: A Non-Disjunctive Approach, Bruce Wilshire with Ron Cooper
  • Nature and Freedom: An Introduction to the Environmental Thought of Bernard Charbonneau, Daniel Cérèzuelle
  • Nature's Other Side: The Demise of Nature and the Phenomenology of Givenness, Bruce V. Foltz