Course Syllabus

ENGLISH 389. Special Topics in Literature: Greening (E)utopia

Description

Earth is on the brink of environmental catastrophe. Perhaps you hadn’t heard.

Worldwide, only a tiny minority realize it. In the United States, the one nation most responsible for the present crisis, only a tiny percentage of our fellow citizens in positions of responsibility will acknowledge that there just might be a problem. This course will help us understand what we as Americans may be able to do about environmental degradation before it's too late.

The course will engage with the five-hundred-year-old tradition of utopian fiction in England and America as a way of learning how to think about one crucial issue: how would the ideal human community (or polity) relate to the natural environment? or how might the worst imaginable human community treat nature? It will repeatedly ask one simple question: How best can human beings arrange to live together, sustainably, in the natural world? Our collective intellectual enterprise thus might be called “The Greening of Utopia.”

Goals

The goal of the course is understanding -- an intellectual grasp of the changes that must be made in social systems if human beings are to live sustainably in harmony with nature. If Americans don’t reach such understanding soon, we and the rest of the world face cataclysm and anomie. But if we do learn this lesson -- and if we are then bold enough act on our knowledge -- we can be reasonably confident of a golden future.

Requirements

In pursuit of this goal, the course will call for readings both in primary works of utopian writing, and in a wide range of non-fiction secondary works in disciplines such as environmental science, philosophy, economics, political science, and religion. The reading load will be heavy but always relevant and rewarding, raising issues that are critical to the survival of our civilization. It will expand our horizons. The majority of these secondary readings will be available on electronic reserve at the Woodruff Library.

The course will also require a good deal of writing, in the form of 1) weekly short papers (of no more than some 500 words) on a primary or secondary work, and 2) a term project of some twenty pages in length. Most of this writing will be accomplished and turned in in
paperless form, submitted electronically to the course’s “Blackboard” web page (where it will be accessible to all students).

[The weekly short papers are to be critical response to a single aspect of a primary work. Students should bring a hard-copy first draft of these papers to class on Thursdays for use in discussion. A final version of the paper must be turned in to the course web page by Monday at 5:00 p.m.]

The nature of the final project will be decided by class consensus.

Groups of two or three students each will direct discussion on Thursdays; they will be responsible for integrating the primary and secondary readings by making a formal presentation to class, posing issues common to both and eliciting discussion from the rest of the students.

Most importantly, the course requires regular and vocal participation in class discussion. Despite the number of students who may enroll, the format of each class will be that of a large seminar, where all participants are expected to contribute to the search for answers to the questions posed by the texts. All students must therefore be prepared for every class. This means knowing each assigned reading well enough to be able to discuss it in class. Participation will count heavily toward the final grade.

Attendance is mandatory. Absences will be noted and will affect the student’s grade.

If possible, the course may also include a visit to a utopian community in Georgia.

Primary texts

Sir Thomas More, Utopia
Sir Francis Bacon, New Atlantis
Henry David Thoreau, Walden
Edward Bellamy, Looking Backward, 2000-1887
William Morris, News from Nowhere
H. G. Wells, A Modern Utopia
Aldous Huxley, Brave New World
B. F. Skinner, Walden Two
Frederick Pohl, The Space Merchants
Marge Piercy, Woman on the Edge of Time
Ernest Callenbach, Ecotopia
Future Primitive, ed. Kim Stanley Robinson [selected short stories]
T. Coraghessan Boyle, A Friend of the Earth.

Reading schedule

Thur Jan 17 Introduction to the course

WEEK 1: The idea of “utopia” / imperialism / social engineering / city planning / commune-ism
Tues Jan 22

TEXT: Sir Thomas More, *Utopia* (1516?)


eRESERVE: Lester Brown, from *The State of the World 1994*

Thur Jan 24

eRESERVE: from Plato, *The Republic.*

eRESERVE: [piece on monastic communism, monastery’s ecology]

VIDEO: *Affluenza*, PBS.

______________________________________________________________________________

WEEK 2: Domination of nature / rationalism / empiricism / the birth of modern science

Tues Jan 29


Thur Jan 31

eRESERVE: from Sir Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*

eRESERVE: from Sir Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*


eRESERVE: John Passmore, *Man's responsibility for nature*

eRESERVE: William Leiss, *The domination of nature*

eRESERVE: from Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

______________________________________________________________________________

WEEK 3: Living close to nature / American Romanticism / wilderness / individualism

Tues Feb 5

TEXT: Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Thur Feb 7


WEEK 4: Industrialism / nationalism / centralization of economic power / the totalitarian state


Thur Feb 14 eRESERVE: Herman E. Daly, Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development. [HC79 .E5D324 1996] or [HD75.6 .D35 1994]

eRESERVE: Daniel Chiras, Lessons from Nature, Ch. 1 "Can the Human Race Survive the Human Race?"


WEEK 5: Nostalgic Romantic medievalism / anti-urbanism / craft socialism / rejection of industrialism

Tues Feb 19 TEXT: William Morris, News from Nowhere.


eRESERVE: F.W.J. Schelling, from Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature

eRESERVE: Neil Evernden, The Social Construction of Nature


WEEK 6: World problems / world government / technology as savior / macro solutions

Tues Feb 26
TEXT: H. G. Wells. *A Modern Utopia*

Thur Feb 28
eRESERVE: Herman Daly, *Steady-state Economics, Toward a Steady-state Economy*

eRESERVE: Herman E. Daly, *Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development.*


eRESERVE: from *Agenda 21: The Earth Summit Strategy to Save Our Planet.*


eRESERVE: Langdon Winner. Ch. 5, "Decentralization Clarified," 85-97, in *The Whale & the Reactor*

eRESERVE: George Orwell, from *1984.*

WEEK 7: Natural science allied with industry against nature

Tues Mar 5
TEXT: Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*

Thur Mar 7

eRESERVE: from Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*


eRESERVE: Edward Wilson, *The Diversity of Life*

eRESERVE: Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*

___________________________________________________________________________

Spring Recess

___________________________________________________________________________

WEEK 8: Efficiency / simplicity / conservation / behavioral engineering / enforced ecology / micro-utopias

Tues Mar 19 TEXT: B. F. Skinner, *Walden Two*

Thur Mar 21 eRESERVE: Schumacher, E.F. *Small is Beautiful.* [HB 171.S384]

eRESERVE: Arne Naess, from *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*

eRESERVE: Eben Fodor, *Better Not Bigger: How to Take Control of Urban Growth and Improve Your Community.*


___________________________________________________________________________

WEEK 9: Capitalism and overpopulation

Tues Mar 26 TEXT: Frederick Pohl, *The Space Merchants.*

Thur Mar 28 eRESERVE: Thomas Malthus, from *An Essay on the Principle of Population*


eRESERVE: Hawken, Paul; Lovins, Amory; Lovins, L. Hunter; edd. *Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution.* [HC106.82 .H39 1999]
WEEK 10: Ecofeminism.

Tues Apr 2  TEXT: Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*.

Thur Apr 4  eRESERVE: from Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein, eds. *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*.

        eRESERVE: from Judith Plant. *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*.

        eRESERVE: Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, from *Ecofeminism*

        eRESERVE: Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, chs. 1, 2, 5, or 7.


WEEK 11: Attaining sustainability

Tues Apr 9  TEXT: Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia*


WEEK 12: Imagining a variety of sustainable futures.

Tues Apr 16  Selected stories in Future Primitive, ed. Kim Stanley Robinson


eRESERVE: Lester W. Milbrath, "Learning Our Way to a New Society" in Envisioning a Sustainable Society.


WEEK 13: Environmental apocalypse


Thur Apr 25  eRESERVE: Christopehr Manes, Green Rage: Radical Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization

eRESERVE: Donella Meadows, The Limits to Growth, Beyond the Limits: Confronting Global Collapse


eRESERVE: Eugnene Linden, The Future in Plain Sight: Nine Clues to the Coming Instability.

eRESERVE: Garrett Hardin, The Limits of Altruism: An Ecologist's View of Survival

eRESERVE: Garrett Hardin, Exporing New Ethics for Survival: The
Voyage of the Spaceship Beagle

VIDEO: Blade Runner.

eRESERVE: Bill McKibben, The End of Nature

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY


Botkin, Daniel B. No Man's Garden: Thoreau and a New Vision for Civilization and Nature

Callicott, J. Baird. Beyond the Land Ethic: More Essays in Environmental Philosophy (Suny Series in Philosophy and Biology) [QH75 .L38 1999]

Daly, Herman E. Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development. [HC79 .E5D324 1996] or [HD75.6 .D35 1994]

Beatley, Timothy. The Ecology of Place: Planning for Environment, Economy, and Community.


Kassmannm, Kenn. Envisioning Ecotopia.


Leopold, Aldo. A Sand County Almanac.


____________. *Small is Beautiful.* [HB 171.S384]

____________. *Small Is Beautiful: Economics As If People Mattered: 25 Years Later...With Commentaries by E. F. Schumacher, James Robertson (Preface), Paul Hawken (Introduction) [NOT OWNED BY EMORY.]
