

# Nature in Social Thought

Spring 2019 | Room 303 | Mo 2:45 – 5:15 pm

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Prerequisite: Satisfactory completion of Global Perspectives on Society (SH) or sophomore standing (NY, AD)

*This course satisfies the Social Science Major Core Course (Classic Problems in Social Science) requirement for students matriculated through NYU Shanghai, and the Environmental Studies Major/Minor Elective Course requirement for students matriculated through NYU Washington Square.*

## Course Description

What's nature? What's our relationship to it? In this course, we examine various answers to these questions from past generations of social thinkers. We survey a range of texts from different parts of the world, written under different historical circumstances. We consider the ideas on these pages in their respective social and political contexts. Whereas some of the ideas are washed out by time, others become sediments of time – continuing to shape, and be shaped by, our thoughts and deeds. In fact, many of these ideas still inform and inspire empirical research and theoretical debates in the social sciences. As an introduction to environmental social theory, this course provides a selective overview of (1) the intellectual lineage of “nature” in different social scientific traditions, and (2) the ongoing empirical investigations into our relationship with nature in the Anthropocene.

## Learning Outcomes

This course helps you to (1) situate understandings of human-nature interactions in different social and political contexts, (2) achieve a general familiarity with major social thinkers and theoretical traditions in the social sciences, (3) compare and contrast different social theories of nature, and (4) critically evaluate empirical social scientific investigations into human-nature interactions.

## Readings

No textbook is required. All readings are available on NYU Classes. It is extremely important for you to keep up with the required readings for each class meeting. Lectures are prepared with the assumption that you have read all the texts before class. In order for you to benefit from lectures, it is in your best interest to read the assignments in advance. It is recommended that you read the assigned texts in the order by which they appear in the syllabus.

## Requirements

Your grade for this course will be based on the following assignments, arranged in ascending level of challenge. See page 3 for formatting guidelines. See page 8 for an outline of all written assignments at-a-glance. See NYU Classes for a generic grading rubric.

### *Case Reports* 50 pts \* 2

You are required to submit two Case Reports; there are three opportunities for you to choose from. Each opportunity entails a specific real-world case for you to research and critically analyze. Report your findings and analysis in approximately two pages. See grading rubric below.

Expectations	Mark
You provide in the Case Report, using your own words, a concise summary of the issue at hand, by drawing from the relevant readings and some external sources.	___/40
You provide a critical analysis of the case, in relation to some of the current week's readings. You demonstrate appreciation for major themes in the readings.	___/10

### *Empirical Summary* 50 pts \* 1

You are required to submit an Empirical Summary; there are two opportunities for you to choose from. In it, summarize one of the current week's empirical readings. Limit the summary to two pages. See grading rubric below.

Expectations	Mark
You provide a concise and faithful account of all main components of the focal study: literature, research question, methods, evidence, and conclusion.	___/50

### *Mid-term* 300 pts

The mid-term exam consists of identification and short-answer questions, based on materials from weeks 1 to 6. You will not be tested on your ability to mechanically memorize names of authors, years of publication, titles of books, spelling of a term, or the like. The exam gauges your organic comprehension of ideas, theories, traditions, and how they relate to each other.

### *Reflections* 100 pts \* 3

You are required to submit three Reflections; there are five opportunities for you to choose from. Each opportunity entails a specific prompt that pertains to the current week's readings. Each Reflection should be approximately four pages. See grading rubric below.

Expectations	Mark
You provide a faithful account of the main arguments in each and every of the theoretical readings of the week, in response to the prompt.	___/40
You identify major agreements and/or disagreements among the authors, and demonstrate appreciation for the constructive dialogue therein emerges.	___/30
You critically evaluate the current week's literature by drawing from your own experiences and/or observations, leading to an organic dialogue with the authors.	___/30

### *Final Research Proposal* 250 pts

How would you use some of the materials from this course to conduct your own social scientific research project? Outline the theoretical literature that inspires you, the question you wish to investigate, and the specific ways in which you plan to collect empirical evidence to answer your questions. The writing of this proposal is a step-by-step process.

- Submit a one-page outline by April 1 (50 pts),
- Briefly present your ideas in one of the class meetings from weeks 9 to 13 (50 pts),
- Submit a full draft by the end of week 13, by 11:55 pm on Friday May 10,
- Provide comments on two peer drafts in week 14, by 11:55 pm on May 17 (50 pts),
- Revise and resubmit your proposal in week 15, by 11:55 pm on May 24 (100 pts).

## Paper Formatting Guidelines

All written work should follow these formatting requirements, unless otherwise specified.

- Your papers should be formatted on A4-size paper, with one-inch (or 2.54 centimeters) margins on all four sides, double-spaced.
- Use your student ID (N\*\*\*\*\*) to identify yourself; do not write your name.
- Submit each paper to the designated folder on NYU Classes on or before the due date.
- Attach a list of works cited only if you cite sources other than the ones on the syllabus. The list does not count toward the page limit.
- Failure to follow these guidelines may result in lowering of your mark.

## Attendance and Preparation

Attendance is required. Throughout the semester, there will be attendance checks in different forms, including but not limited to pop quizzes, group activities, surveys, and sign-in's. These will only be graded on a check/no-check basis. Your final grade will be adjusted according to the table below.

Number of No-checks	Final Grade Adjustment
0	Twenty points of extra credit
1	Ten points of extra credit
2-3	No adjustment
4 or more	A ten-percent grade penalty for each additional no-check beyond the third

This policy, in its gist, allows for up to three no-checks without grade penalty. This is meant to accommodate late enrollment, medical conditions, student activities, conference attendance, family emergencies, visa applications, internships, or other extenuating circumstances that prevent you from doing the readings and/or attending classes on time. Therefore, additional excuses will not be granted.

## Grading Scale

Grades in this class are not curved. The final letter grade, determined by the following scale, is based on the cumulated points you earn.

A=95% or higher      A-=90-94.9%      B+=85-89.9%      B=80-84.9%  
C=70-79.9%      D=60-69.9%      F=59.9% or lower

## Academic Honesty

All work that you submit for this class must be your own. All sources and assistance used in preparing your work must be precisely and explicitly acknowledged. It is NOT acceptable academic practice to copy, paraphrase, translate, or otherwise “borrow” without acknowledging the sources. Cheating on exams and/or writings will not be tolerated. Students caught cheating and/or plagiarizing will receive a grade of F for the entire course, and will be referred to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action. NO EXCEPTIONS. You should familiarize yourself with NYU Shanghai rules regarding academic integrity. Consult the Academic Resource Center (ARC) with questions, or visit my office hours to discuss any questions you may have.

### **Lateness**

If you submit your work after its due date, your mark will be penalized by 10% for each day of lateness. The date and time of your submission are determined by the timestamp on NYU Classes. On NYU Classes, be sure to set your time zone to China Standard Time (GMT+8).

### **Classroom Etiquettes**

One of my responsibilities is to ensure that the environment in the classroom is conducive to learning. If you are late, you should find a seat in the back of the classroom. If you need to leave early, please let me know in advance and sit in a location where it will be easy to quietly leave the room. Turn off all cell phones and put away newspapers before class begins. Please hold side-conversations and discussions until after class.

### **Make-up Exam**

A make-up exam will be given only if you provide, in writing, an acceptable excuse endorsed by an accredited professional regarding the situation. You should submit the written notice before the day of the exam. Last minute requests will not be accommodated. The make-up exam will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for all students who miss the exam, but no later than a week from the original exam date.

### **Responsible Use of Technology**

Although electronic devices are valuable for research and study, they are inimical to participation and collegiality in the classroom. You may take notes on a laptop, provided that you use it responsibly. Refrain from using the laptop for purposes other than note-taking. Make sure your screen does not present a distraction to those around you. Do not let the device distract yourself from participating in class.

### **Communications**

Course-related information will be communicated to you via messages through NYU Classes. Make sure you check your nyu.edu emails at least once a day. You are welcome to communicate with me via emails. If you prefer to meet in person, please use the office hour.

### **Accommodation**

I wish to include fully all students with special needs. Please let me know (the earlier the better) if you need special accommodation in the curriculum, instruction, or evaluation procedures in order for you to fully participate. We work with the Moses Center on Washington Square to provide you with assistance and accommodation as needed. Please note that Moses Center registration is required for any special needs to be considered. The Academic Resource Center (ARC) can help you with obtaining necessary documentation.

### **Resources**

The Library runs a number of helpful workshops, some of which introduce you to the resources available through the NYU Libraries, and others teach you how to use different kinds of tools for citation, statistical analysis, mapping, and much more.

The Academic Resource Center provides writing and speaking consultations. The helpful members of staff there can give you feedback on draft papers, so you can revise and improve before you submit them. Make an appointment with an ARC fellow now!

## Weekly Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Please read all texts in the order by which they appear below.

### Part I: Discovering Nature: Lineages of the Idea

#### Week 1: Introduction: Nature in the Background and Foreground

February 11

No readings.

#### Week 2: Human Ideas of Nature and Un-nature

February 18

Patel, R., & Moore, J. W. (2017). *A history of the world in seven cheap things*. University of California Press, pp. 44-63.

Williams, R. (1980). Ideas of nature. In *Problems in materialism and culture*. Verso, pp. 69-77.

White Jr, L. (1967). The historical roots of our ecologic crisis. *Science*, 155(3767), 1203-1207.

Tuan, Y. F. (1968). Discrepancies between environmental attitude and behaviour: examples from Europe and China. *The Canadian geographer/Le géographe canadien*, 12(3), 176-191.

Goodall, J. (2010 [1971]). *In the shadow of man*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, pp. 234-247.

**\*Case Report #1\*** Study the monkey selfie copyright dispute, and produce a case report of approximately two double-spaced pages. Submit electronically to NYU Classes before this week's class. Note that you are required to submit two out of the three case reports.

#### Week 3: Greek Inventions and American Reincarnations

February 25

Lloyd, G. E. R. (1991). *Methods and problems in Greek science: selected papers*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 417-424.

Thoreau, H. D. (2004 [1854]). *Walden*. Houghton, pp. 78-96.

Cronon, W. (1996). The trouble with wilderness: or, getting back to the wrong nature. *Environmental history*, 1(1), 7-28.

Mooallem, J. (2013). *Wild ones: A sometimes dismaying, weirdly reassuring story about looking at people looking at animals in America*. Penguin, pp. 61-72.

**\*Case Report #2\*** Study the teddy bear origin story, and produce a case report of approximately two double-spaced pages. Submit electronically to NYU Classes before this week's class. Note that you are required to submit two out of the three case reports.

#### Week 4: Daoist Cosmology and Its Western Encounters

March 4

Weller, R. P. (2006). *Discovering nature: Globalization and environmental culture in China and Taiwan*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 19-42.

Tu, W. (1989) The continuity of being: Chinese visions of nature. In Callicott, J. B., & Ames, R. T. Eds. *Nature in Asian traditions of thought: Essays in environmental philosophy*. SUNY Press, pp. 67-78.

Rogaski, R. (2004). *Hygienic modernity: Meanings of health and disease in treaty-port China*. University of California Press, pp. 104-135.

Songster, E. E. (2018). *Panda nation. The construction and conservation of China's modern icon*. Oxford University Press, pp. 72-83.

**\*Case Report #3\*** Study the panda origin story, and produce a case report of approximately two double-spaced pages. Submit electronically to NYU Classes before this week's class. Note that you are required to submit two out of the three case reports.

## **Part II: Investigating Nature: Evidence from the Anthropocene**

### **Week 5: Greenery**

March 11

Veblen, T. (1899). *The theory of the leisure class*. Macmillan, pp. 49-69.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Harvard University Press, pp. 53-63.

© Robbins, P. (2012). *Lawn people: How grasses, weeds, and chemicals make us who we are*. Temple University Press, pp. 18-32.

© Tomba, L., & Tang, B. (2008). The Forest City: homeownership and new wealth in Shenyang. In Goodman, D. ed. *The New Rich in China: Future Rulers, Present Lives*. Routledge, pp. 171-186.

**\*Empirical Summary #1\*** Select one of the empirical readings (they are marked with “©”) and summarize the study in terms of its literature, research question, methods, evidence, and conclusion. Limit the summary to two pages. Submit electronically to NYU Classes before this week’s class. Note that you are required to submit one out of the two empirical summaries.

### **Week 6: Rodents**

March 18

Lupton, D. (1995). *The Imperative of health: Public health and the regulated body*. Sage, pp. 1-15.

© Jerolmack, C. (2008). How pigeons became rats: The cultural-spatial logic of problem animals. *Social problems*, 55(1), 72-94.

© Ramsden, E. (2011). From Rodent Utopia to Urban Hell: Population, Pathology, and the Crowded Rats of NIMH. *Isis*, 102, 4, 659-688.

**\*Empirical Summary #2\*** Select one of the empirical readings (they are marked with “©”) and summarize the study in terms of its literature, research question, methods, evidence, and conclusion. Limit the summary to two pages. Submit electronically to NYU Classes before this week’s class. Note that you are required to submit one out of the two empirical summaries.

### **Week 7: Mid-term**

March 25

The exam will be held during the regular class hours in the regular classroom.

### **Week 8: Muddling**

April 1

No class meeting today. (Not an April Fool’s Day prank!)

Use this time to *muddle through* your ideas for the final research proposal, ideally in a small group.

What are some of the environmental issues that interest you most? How might you be able to approach these issues from a social scientific perspective? What is a social scientific perspective anyway? *Muddle through* these questions with your peers.

Need some ideas? Don’t forget the case reports you *muddled through* earlier!

Need some structure? Don’t forget the empirical summary you *muddled through*!

**\*Final Research Proposal\*** Outline due on NYU Classes by 11:55 pm on April 1.

## Part III: Exploring the Spectrum: From Anthropocentrism to Ecocentrism

### **Week 9: Nature as Comparisons: The Darwinian Influence and Human Ecological Thought**

April 8

Spencer, H. (1864). *The principles of biology*. Williams and Norgate, pp. 443-449.

Wirth, L. (1938). Urbanism as a way of life. *American journal of sociology*, 44(1), 1-24.

Skinner, G. W. (1977). *The city in late imperial China*. Stanford University Press, pp. 3-5.

© Boessen, A., Hipp, J. R., Butts, C. T., Nagle, N. N., & Smith, E. J. (2018). The built environment, spatial scale, and social networks: Do land uses matter for personal network structure?. *Environment and Planning B*, 45, 3, 400-416.

**\*Reflection #1\*** Based on your reading of Spencer and Wirth, what are some of the ways in which they conceive of nature for social sciences? According to Skinner, what are some of the problems in such conceptions? What is your take? Address these questions in an essay of approximately four pages. Submit to NYU Classes before this week's class. Note that you are required to submit three out of the five reflections.

### **Week 10: Nature as Containers: The Malthusian Tradition and Economic Thought**

April 15

Malthus, T. R. (1798). *An essay on the principle of population*. J. Johnson, 23-31.

Chappell, M. J. (2018). *Beginning to end hunger: Food and the environment in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, and beyond*. University of California Press, pp. 6-12.

Spaargaren, G., & Mol, A. P. (1992). Sociology, environment, and modernity: Ecological modernization as a theory of social change. *Society & natural resources*, 5(4), 334-338.

Buttel, F. H. (2000). Ecological modernization as social theory. *Geoforum*, 31(1), 57-65.

Schumacher, E. F. (1975). *Small is beautiful*. Harper & Row, pp. 53-62.

© Fritz, M., & Koch, M. (2016). Economic development and prosperity patterns around the world. *Global Environmental Change*, 38, 41-48.

**\*Reflection #2\*** Based on your reading of Malthus and Spaargaren & Mol, what are some of the ways in which they conceive of nature for social sciences? According to Chappell, Buttel, and Schumacher, what are some of the problems in such conceptions? What is your take? Address these questions in an essay of approximately four pages. Submit to NYU Classes before this week's class. Note that you are required to submit three out of the five reflections.

### **Week 11: Nature as Constraints: The Marxian Tradition and Sociological Thought**

April 22

Marx, K. (1977 [1867]). *Capital: A critique of political economy (Vol. 1)*. Vintage, pp. 283-292.

Catton Jr, W. R., & Dunlap, R. E. (1978). Environmental sociology: A new paradigm. *The American Sociologist*, 13, 1, 41-49.

Foster, J. B. (1999). Marx's theory of metabolic rift: Classical foundations for environmental sociology. *American journal of sociology*, 105(2), 366-405.

© Liévanos, R. S., Greenberg, P., & Wishart, R. (2018). In the shadow of production: Coal waste accumulation and environmental inequality formation in Eastern Kentucky. *Social science research*, 71, 37-55.

**\*Reflection #3\*** Based on your reading of Marx, what are some of the ways in which he conceives of nature for social sciences? According to Catton & Dunlap, what are some of the problems in such conceptions? To what extent do you think Foster resolves these problems? Address these questions in an essay of approximately four pages. Submit to NYU Classes before this week's class. Note that you are required to submit three out of the five reflections.

## Week 12: Nature as Categories: The Feminist Critique and Legal Thought

April 29

Scharff, V. (2003). *Seeing nature through gender*. University Press of Kansas, pp. 3-19.

Singer, P. (1975). *Animal liberation*. Random House, pp. 1-23.

Wise, S. M. (2002). *Drawing the line: Science and the case for animal rights*. Perseus Books, pp. 9-34

© Alger, J. M., & Alger, S. F. (1999). Cat Culture, Human Culture: An Ethnographic Study of a Cat Shelter. *Society & Animals*, 7, 3, 199-218.

**\*Reflection #4\*** What is Scharff's critique of how nature is conceived in social sciences? How do Singer and Wise build on that critique? What is your take? Address these questions in an essay of approximately four pages. Submit to NYU Classes before this week's class. Note that you are required to submit three out of the five reflections.

## Week 13: From Nature to Natures: The Posthuman Turn and Anthropological Thought

May 6

© Wohlleben, P. (2016). *The Hidden Life of Trees*. Greystone Books, pp. 6-13, 169-179, 241-245.

Moore, J. W. (2015). *Capitalism in the web of life*. Verso Books, pp. 33-41.

Haraway, D. J. (2003). *The companion species manifesto: Dogs, people, and significant otherness*. Prickly Paradigm Press, pp. 15-25.

Tsing, A. L. (2012). Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species. *Environmental Humanities*, 1(1), 141-154.

© Archambault, J. S. (2016). Taking love seriously in human-plant relations in Mozambique: Toward an anthropology of affective encounters. *Cultural anthropology*, 31(2), 244-271.

**\*Reflection #5\*** Based on your reading of Moore, Haraway, and Tsing, what are some of the ways in which they conceive of nature for social sciences? What is your take? Address these questions in an essay of approximately four pages. Submit to NYU Classes before this week's class. Note that you are required to submit three out of the five reflections.

## Part IV: An Unnatural Ending

### Week 14

May 13

Shapiro, J. (2001). *Mao's war against nature: Politics and the environment in revolutionary China*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 67-93.

## Written Assignments At-A-Glance

Assignment		Due by	Total Points Possible	
Case Reports <i>Choose 2 out of 3</i>	#1	2:45 pm Feb 18	50	100
	#2	2:45 pm Feb 25	50	
	#3	2:45 pm Mar 4	50	
Empirical Summary <i>Choose 1 out of 2</i>	#1	2:45 pm Mar 11	50	50
	#2	2:45 pm Mar 18	50	
Mid-term		Mar 25	300	300
Reflections <i>Choose 3 out of 5</i>	#1	2:45 pm Apr 8	100	300
	#2	2:45 pm Apr 15	100	
	#3	2:45 pm Apr 22	100	
	#4	2:45 pm Apr 29	100	
	#5	2:45 pm May 6	100	
Final Research Proposal	Outline	11:55 pm Apr 1	50	250
	Presentation	Varies	50	
	Peer Comments	11:55 pm May 17	50	
	Final Submission	11:55 pm May 24	100	