

COLI 380M
Mountains and Forests: An Ethics of Dwelling
Spring 2008
T R 4:25-5:50 PM
Student Wing 323

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Office Hours: R 2:15-4:15
& by appointment

Nature loves to hide.
—Heraclitus¹

Each phase of nature, while not invisible, is yet not too distinct and obtrusive. It is there to be found when we look for it, but not demanding our attention. It is like a silent but sympathizing companion in whose company we retain most of the advantages of solitude, with whom we can walk and talk, or be silent, naturally, without the necessity of talking in a strain foreign to the place.

—Thoreau²

*The birds have vanished into deep skies.
A last cloud drifts away, all idleness.*

*Inexhaustible, this mountain and I
gaze at each other, it alone remaining.*
—Li Po³

Course Description:

At the outset of the 21st century, we are on the cusp of a major environmental crisis: global warming, peak oil, the rapid industrialization of the “Third World”, over population, global capitalism, genetically altered food, etc. Such a crisis demands a response, but it also begs the question of what kind of response. Is the solution simply one of legislation, re-legislation, sanctions, more government oversight and diplomacy, or does it necessitate a reevaluation of the way in which we relate to nature and a reconsideration of our place/role in the larger ecosystem?

This course will follow the second question as it moves toward an ethics of dwelling, with an emphasis on mountains and forests as sites for dwelling. Through a reading of literary and philosophical Ecocritical (broadly construed) writings, this course will raise the following questions: What is the relationship of humans to nature? Can we relate to nature? What would be the nature of that relationship? What is Nature vs. nature? What can nature teach us about ourselves and our ethics? What does it mean to dwell? What does dwelling have to do with ethics? Why mountains and forests? Etc. We will consider authors who ventured forth into the mountains and the forests in search of a different and perhaps more authentic way of dwelling on the earth.

¹ DK 123. *Philosophy Before Socrates*. Richard McKirahan. Hackett. Indianapolis, IN. 1994.

² November 8, 1858. P. 202. *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals*. Ed. Odell Shepard. Dover Publications. New York. 1961.

³ “Reverence-Pavilion Mountain, Sitting Alone” in *Mountain Home*. Pg. 86. Trans. David Hinton. New Directions. New York. 2005.

Requirements and Evaluative Criteria:

1. Two Short Papers: Each student will write two shorter papers (3-4 pages) over the semester that will address specific themes and authors from the course; I will assign a few topics for each paper and you may select to write on one of them. The papers must be in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, double-spaced and with standard MS Word margins and must include a works cited page. I will evaluate the papers based on the content and structure of the argument, the clarity and originality of the ideas and expression, the accuracy of the grammar, the relevance to the topic and level of passionate engagement with the topics.

Each paper will count for 20% of your final grade.

2. Final Paper or Project: Each student must either write a final paper of 5 pages or submit a creative project. The final paper will be an exploration of how selected themes and authors of this course are relevant to your particular discipline of study. It must be in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, double-spaced and with standard MS Word margins and include a works cited page; I will evaluate it based on the same criteria for the shorter papers.

The project will be of your design, but you must approve it with me by an assigned deadline, and it must demonstrate depth of work and relevance to the themes and/or authors of the course. Examples are: creative writing, music composition, photographic journal or creative work, painting or sculpture, an installation, a scientific experiment, a statistical analysis, etc. There are almost limitless possibilities, but whatever you select, it must include a statement of purpose, artistic statement, data or experiment report, etc.—i.e., something that explains and clarifies the project in itself and contextualizes it within this particular course. I will evaluate the project based on its relevance to course, the depth and significance of its content, its originality, its demonstration of the depth of time and thought that went into its creation, and I will evaluate the written component with the same criteria as the other written assignments.

The final paper/project will count for 40% of your final grade.

Plagiarism, as defined and outlined in the University Handbook, is strictly forbidden. I will report any instances of plagiarism to the proper administrative channels.

3. Journal: Throughout the semester, each student must keep a reading and reflection journal. The journal entry must include two entries per week: one entry that reflects on a specific passage/quote from the reading that week, and a second entry that reflects on your personal engagement with nature and/or the environment. For the reading reflection entry, you must transcribe the quote/passage (or if it is too long, then you must cite the page number) and discuss why you selected that quote, what you think is significant about it, how it is relevant to the text as a whole or the themes of the class, etc. For the nature reflection, you should reflect on your engagement with nature. You could describe a natural phenomenon (an animal, plant, sunset, stars, river, pond, etc.), reflect on an environmental issue and how you are helping to improve it, discuss your ethical approach to the environment or the ethics of your diet or food in general (factory farming, organic farming, vegetarianism, the treatment of animals, processed food, genetically altered food, cloning, etc.), recount one of your recent sojourns in nature (walking in the nature preserve, hiking, visiting a waterfall, fishing, hunting, farming, etc.)—in general, anything that demonstrates that you are actively reflecting on and engaging with your place in the larger environment.

You must date each entry, and you can either type the entry or write it by hand in a journal/notebook. If you hand-write, then you must write in legible print or cursive. Each entry should be approximately 150-250 words (250 words is one page, double spaced in 12 pt. Times New Roman font in MS Word). I will collect the journals unannounced on a few occasions throughout the semester; therefore, you must bring it with you to every class. If you forget your

journal on a day when I collect them, I will not accept it later; however, if you are absent on a collection day, then I will ask for it when you return to class.

The journal will count for 10% of your final grade.

4. Participation: Even though the format of this course will be more lectures, I do not intend to lecture for the entirety of each class period. My lectures will be more student-involved; i.e., I will frequently ask questions to you about the material, the topics, concepts, etc. Also, I hope that all of you will raise questions or put forth comments during each class period. I encourage as much exchange of ideas and as much discussion as is feasible in class of this size. That being said, your participation will be reflected in your final grade. Forms of participation are: 1) responding to my questions, 2) raising your own questions or comments, 3) responding to other students' comments and questions, 4) sending me e-mails with comments or questions about the course or things relevant to the course, and 5) visiting office hours.

Participation will count for 10% of your final grade.

5. Attendance: Each student is permitted two unexcused absences. Beyond those two, any further unexcused absences will negatively affect your final grade.

Classroom Policies:

1. I will not accept late work. If there is a true emergency preventing you from submitting your work on time, please contact me ASAP (preferably prior to the due-date) and we can discuss the possibility of an extension.
2. All cell phones must be switched off during the entire duration of the class.
3. There is no usage of laptops for any purpose during the class period—this includes note taking or e-reserve material. Bring a notebook or sheets of paper for notes (or write in the margins of the book), and print out the e-reserve readings ahead of time.
4. You must bring the readings with you to class and be prepared to respond thoughtfully to questions or comments.
5. I encourage lively discussion of the material, but it is essential that we respect each other's opportunity to express our questions, comments, concerns, thoughts, etc. Thus, if someone is speaking, be courteous to permit him/her to speak uninterrupted and undisturbed.

Required Texts:

Aristotle. excerpts from *Physics* and *Metaphysics* (on Blackboard)

Dillard, Annie. *Teaching a Stone to Talk*.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Nature*. (on Blackboard)

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. selected poems (on Blackboard)

Heidegger, Martin. *Basic Writings*.

Hölderlin, Friedrich. selected poems. (on Blackboard)

Leopold, Aldo. "Thinking Like a Mountain." (on Blackboard)

Mountain Home: Wilderness Poetry of Ancient China. Trans. David Hinton.

Rilke, Rainer Maria. selected poems. (on Blackboard)

Snyder, Gary. "The Etiquette of Freedom." (on Blackboard)

Tao Te Ching. Trans. David Hinton.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*.

Recommended Texts:

Thoreau, Henry David. *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals*.

Course Schedule:

1/29: Introduction

1/31: Aristotle

2/5: Emerson, *Nature* Ch. I-V

2/7: Emerson, *Nature* Ch. VI-VIII

2/12: Thoreau, *Walden*: "Economy"

2/14: Thoreau, *Walden*: "Where I Lived, and What I Lived for" and "Sounds"

2/19: Thoreau, *Walden*: "Solitude" and "The Ponds"

2/21: Thoreau, *Walden*: "Baker Farm" and "Higher Laws"

2/26: Thoreau, *Walden*: "House Warming" and "The Pond in Winter"

2/28: Thoreau, *Walden*: "Spring" and "Conclusion"

3/4: *Tao Te Ching*, Ch. 1-20

3/6: *Tao Te Ching*, Ch. 21-40

3/11: *Tao Te Ching*, Ch. 41-60

3/13: *Tao Te Ching*, Ch. 61-81

Essay I Due

3/18: *Mountain Home*, T'ao Ch'ien, Meng Hao-Jan

3/20: *Mountain Home*, Wang Wei, Li Po

4/1: *Mountain Home*, Tu Fu, Cold Mountain, Po Chu-i

4/3: Goethe, Hölderlin, Rilke: selected poems

4/8: Leopold, "Thinking Like a Mountain"

4/10: Snyder, "The Etiquette of Freedom"

4/15: Dillard, "Teaching a Stone to Talk"

Essay II Due

4/17: Dillard, "A Field of Silence"

4/22: Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking"

Proposal Due for Final Project

4/24: Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking"

4/29: Heidegger, "Question Concerning Technology"

5/1: No Class

5/6: Heidegger, "Question Concerning Technology"

5/8: Wrap-up. **Final Paper/Project Due**