Sino-British-American Summer School of Philosophy

2019 SESSION

**Environmental Philosophy**

East China Normal University, Shanghai

1. July – 8 August

1.William Edelglass (Marlboro College & Barre Centre for Buddhist Studies, USA):

“Ethics, Place, Materiality, and Practice: An Intercultural Introduction to Environmental Thought”

2. Freya Mathews (Latrobe University, Australia):

“Towards a Philosophy of Ecological Civilization”

3. Colette Sciberras (Durham University, PhD and Postdoctoral Fellow):

“Buddhism and the Environment: A Course in Practical Philosophy”

4. Yang Xiao (Kenyon College, USA), Director:

“‘Thinking without a Banister’: Ecological Crisis as a Philosophical Crisis”

**COURSE DESCRIPTIONS and ReadingS**

1. **Ethics, Place, Materiality, and Practice:**

**An Intercultural Introduction to Environmental Thought**

William Edelglass

**Course Description:**

We live in a time of unravelling, when the living systems that have sustained us and those who have evolved with us are distressed.  Pollution overload, resource depletion, habitat loss, climate change, increased human population, all are contributing to the loss of our fellow species and challenging human societies and social relations.  What contribution can philosophy make in response to this unravelling?  How can philosophy help in a transition to a more resilient society?  This course—drawing on mainstream English-language environmental philosophy, 20th century French and German philosophy, and East Asian Buddhist thought—is an introduction to some of the ways in which philosophers have responded to ecological degradation and its costs.  It is a course in three related parts, each consisting of two lectures.  The first part explores some of the ways in which environmental philosophers have sought to respond to the unravelling by expanding conceptions of who, or what, is morally considerable, and the ways in which environmental degradation raises questions not just of ethics but also of justice.  The second part explores why environmental thinkers have often emphasized the importance of being rooted in place as a rich and sustainable way of life, as well as critics of this position, who instead emphasize the need to resist the lure of the local.  Finally, the last part addresses questions of materiality, drawing especially on Chinese and Japanese Buddhist reflections on the Buddha-nature of natural and insentient beings, and how rethinking materiality might support more resilient practices.

**Lecture Topics:**

**Lectures 1 and 2:** **Moral Considerability, Justice, and the Environment: An Introduction to Western Environmental Thought from Leopold to Levinas**

Much of the canon of English language environmental philosophy, from the late 1960s through the 1990s, was premised on the idea that how we think about nature and the environment is what has led to “the environmental crisis.”  In response, much environmental thought has been motivated by the idea that if we want to move to a more resilient society we need to change our thinking.  These two lectures will begin with some of the Western European ideas that have been critiqued by English language environmental philosophers, and introduce some of the main alternatives to these ideas.  And it will trace two movements in environmental thought and activism.  First, the move from ethics to justice.  And second, the move from metaphysical and ontological foundations for reconceptualizing moral considerability of natural beings to other, more applied areas of environmental philosophy.  They constitute an introduction, of sorts, to mainstream environmental thought in English.

**Lectures 3 and 4: From the Lure of the Local to Deterritorialization: The Meanings of Place in Environmental Thought**

In the last fifty years or so, many environmental thinkers have argued that because modernity disconnects so many of us from the sources of our food, water, energy, objects, entertainment, and much else, we fail to see the negative consequences of our own actions on places near and far.  In response, they argue, we need to become more rooted in our local places.  Influenced by the work of social geographers, many contemporary scholars in the environmental humanities embrace ideas of deterritorialization, that contemporary life, with its technologies and economic exchange, cannot be rooted in local places but necessarily extends beyond the local, and that this is an appropriate framework for responding to regional and global environmental challenges.  Both groups of thinkers share the idea that the right relation to place, with its characteristic images, conceptual frameworks, and practices, is necessary for a more resilient society.  The prominence of place in recent environmental thought is part of a larger “spatial turn,” a trend that emphasizes the importance of place and space for understanding in the humanities and social sciences.  With the spatial turn, places are regarded as material, but also cultural, historical, and social.  Thus, places are not static; they are processes that evolve with changing practices.  These two talks explore theories and practices of place, and why engaging with place is understood to be consequential for the quality of our lives and the flourishing of places and the diverse beings who inhabit them.

**Lectures 5 and 6: Materiality and Practice in a More-Than-Human World: Buddha-Nature from Zhanran to Dōgen to Joanna Macy**

The sixth T’ien T’ai patriarch, Zhanran, wrote: “In the great Assembly of the Lotus, all are present—without divisions.  Grass, trees, the soil on which these grow—all have the same kinds of atoms.  Some are barely in motion while others make haste along the Path, but they will all in time reach the precious land of Nirvāṇa…Who can really maintain that things inanimate lack buddhahood?”  In these two lectures, we will explore Zhanran's idea of the Buddha-nature of natural and non-sentient beings, and trace this idea through other Chinese and Japanese Buddhist thinkers, up through contemporary ecobuddhism.  And we will bring these ideas into conversation with the New Materialism, the contemporary philosophical movement in which matter is understood as animate, with agency, as opposed to inert and dumb.  Finally, we will explore the resources in this lineage for a practice that is appropriate for the Anthropocene, a contemporary set of green virtues, practices, and relations with others who inhabit the more-than-human world.

1. **Towards a Philosophy of Ecological Civilization**

**Freya Mathews**

**Course Description:**

Philosophers, social and political theorists and conservation scientists are amongst the legions of thinkers who have for more than thirty years been urging a more Earth-friendly, bio-inclusive orientation in the outlook of the modern West. But it is by now clear that this avalanche of environmental reasoning has not, by and large, availed. The crisis of nature, manifesting as degradation in a multitude of biospheric systems, has only intensified and accelerated until now the entire future of life on Earth is in doubt. Reason has made as strong a case as it can for a shift towards ecological consciousness, but it has become apparent that reason alone cannot mobilize the required level of change.

In this course the question of what *can* mobilize such a shift is tackled. It will be argued that the failure of reason to motivate change can be explained, at least in part, in historical materialist (but otherwise non-Marxist) terms. It is ultimately the *praxes* that prevail in a society – the modes of production and forms of social organization that attend them – that determine the forms of consciousness that characterize that society. If a society rests economically on some form of capitalism that is premised on the instrumentalization of nature then its members can never really ‘inhabit’ Earth-friendly, bio-inclusive values, no matter how appealing these may appear in the abstract. New values and forms of consciousness must be grounded in new forms of praxis if they are to take root. But what kinds of praxis could emanate in such values in the contemporary context of mass, industrialized societies? One answer to this question may be found in *biomimicry* - the design philosophy that takes natural systems and mechanisms as its models. However, biomimicry as it is currently understood in design circles needs to be philosophically deepened if it is not to turn out inadvertently to serve the instrumental ends entrenched both in the Western tradition and now, more widely, in the whole condition of modernity that has spread throughout the world. The underlying principles that give rise to the design dynamics of nature need to be discovered if we are to understand how to include ourselves in these dynamics and avoid creating a scenario of *sustainability without nature*. In search of such principles, we might turn to the Daoist tradition of China, particularly the principle of *wu wei*, or accommodation to the ends of others. If *wu wei* were taken as our guiding principle in designing our economy and its technological infrastructure, our society might well begin to shift towards a bio-inclusive consciousness.

However, this argument reveals an intractable circularity in our situation. As noted, we cannot expect our social and cultural consciousness to shift towards bio-inclusiveness unless there is a wholesale redesign of our economy and its technological infrastructure. But such an overhaul would itself require massive investment, and such investment could only occur if bio-inclusive values were already in place. This might be described as the Hard Problem of environmental reform. In the last section of the course we shall tackle this Hard Problem, and consider whether there might be other forces at work in society, as basic as economic ones, that help to determine consciousness, and whether these could be mobilized towards the creation of a new ecological form of civilization.

[This course is based on a collection of papers Freya Mathews is currently putting together for a book entitled *Essays on the Dao of Eco-civilization*.]

**Lecture Topics and Reading:**

**Lecture 1. The roots of civilization: China versus the West**

Francois Jullien, ‘Did Philosophers Have to Become Fixated on Truth?’, *Critical Inquiry*, 28, 4 (2002) 803-824

Freya Mathews, “Do the Deepest Roots of a Future Ecological Civilization Lie in Chinese Soil?” in John Makeham (ed), *Learning from the Other: Australian and Chinese Perspectives on Philosophy.* Papers from symposia held in 2014 and 2015, co-sponsored by the Australian Academy of the Humanities and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra, 2016, 15-27

**Lectures 2-3. Alternative metaphysical premises for civilization: scientific materialism versus panpsychism**

David Skrbina, *Panpsychism in the West*, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass., 2005

Freya Mathews, “Living Cosmos Panpsychism” in William Seager (ed), *Routledge Handbook on Panpsychism*, Routledge, New York, forthcoming 2019

Freya Mathews, “Panpsychism”, in Graham Oppy and Nicholas Trakakis (eds), *Inter-religious Philosophical Dialogues*, Routledge, 2017

Freya Mathews, “Post-materialism” in Stuart Walker and Jacques Giard (eds), *Handbook of Sustainable Design*, Berg Press, Oxford , 2013

**Lectures 4-5. Designing societies to serve the perspective of panpsychism: biomimicry and *Wu Wei***

Janine Benyus, *Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature*, Harper Perennial, New York, 2002 (first published by William Morrow, 1997)

Michael Braungart and William McDonough*, Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*, North Point Press, New York, 2002

Tim Flannery, *Sunlight and Seaweed*. Text, Melbourne, 2017

Henry Dicks, “From anthropomimetic to biomimetic cities - The place of humans in “cities like forests” ” *Architectural Philosophy* 3, 1, 2018: 91-106

Freya Mathews, “Towards a Deeper Philosophy of Biomimicry”, *Organization and Environment,* 24, 4, 2011, 364-387

Freya Mathews, “Can China Lead the World to an Ecological Civilization?”, *Journal of Nanjing Forestry University*, Issue 2, 2013 (in Chinese translation)

**Lecture 6. How can we achieve an ecological civilization? The problem of praxis as the ‘Hard Problem’ of environmental reform.**

Freya Mathews, “Biomimicry and the Problem of Praxis” *Environmental Values*, special issue on Biomimicry, forthcoming 2019

Freya Mathews, “We’ve had Forty Years of Environmental Ethics - and the World is Getting Worse”, 27 July, 2018.

<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/weve-had-forty-years-of-environmental-ethics---and-the-world-is-/10214334>

[Juan Francisco Salazar](https://theconversation.com/profiles/juan-francisco-salazar-111383), “Buen Vivir: South America’s rethinking of the future we want”, *The Conversation*, 24 July 2014

Ian Morris, *Foragers, Farmers, and Fossil Fuels : How Human Values Evolve*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2017

1. **Buddhism and the Environment: A Course in Practical Philosophy**

Colette Sciberras

**Course Description:**

The environmental crises tend to provoke intense feelings and emotions; from denial, to alarm and outrage, and also depression and a sense of hopelessness. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the frightening headlines we read regularly nowadays – more recent examples include the destruction of 80% of wildlife in the last century, and the immanent collapse of human civilisation. Whatever we think of the science and politics that underpin our environmental concerns, there can be no doubt that they are taking their toll on our mental as well as physical health.

What resources can Buddhism offer for such times? The first part of the course will focus on the knowledge of reality and the views that we are apt to form. Many traditions in Buddhism emphasise that ‘right view’ is detachment from all views, and therefore the question arises whether one can be a committed environmentalist, without falling into wrong view.

One’s views are intimately bound up with one’s faith or lack of it. If we believe that the world is doomed, we are likely to lose faith in ourselves and in our ability to affect significant change. We are likely to lose faith in politics and in humanity in general, leading precisely to that sense of despair and helplessness many of us are experiencing.

Buddhism can be a useful resource because it contains an understanding of faith that is independent of one’s beliefs. That is, it promises a method of maintaining a positive and loving attitude, even when the cause seems lost.  The second part of the course will focus on this understanding of faith and how it differs from a common and derogatory portrayal of religious faith as ‘belief without evidence.’

Finally, we will examine the philosophy behind the practice of meditation on the elements and the deification of these elements in Vajrayana Buddhism, in order to further explore the connection between matter and mind.

**Topics and Readings**

**Lecture 1. Buddhist core teachings and environmentalism: seeking value in nature**

Environmental philosophy cannot seem to get off the ground without a theory of intrinsic value in nature. However Buddhism sees all entities as interdependent and relational and thus cannot seem to account for such a conception of value that is independent of everything else. Moreover, the basic teachings of Buddhism seem to attribute negative subjective value to nature and its processes. The first lecture will outline the implications of suffering, impermanence, not-self, dependent origination and emptiness on the evaluation of nature. It will be argued that Buddhist environmentalism is premised not on any form of natural, or intrinsic value, but on the subjective experience and value of beings.

1. David Cummiskey, and Alex Hamilton. “Dependent Origination, Emptiness and the Value of Nature.” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 24, 2017.

2. Simon P. James, *Zen Buddhism and Environmental Ethics,*Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004

3. Colette Sciberras, “Does Nature Have Value in the Pāli Canon?” *Environmental Values* 22, 2013.

**Lecture 2. Buddhist theories of truth: Climate Change, futurology and the Middle Way**

Mahayana Buddhist philosophy negates the ultimate truth of any claim, and the seeds of this approach can be traced to the Pali canon. The claims of science, for example, are only conventionally true at best and yet despite this, many prominent Buddhists are deeply interested in science, and reject any Buddhist belief that runs counter.

That everything we say is empty, and ultimately not true, will not make future generations’ experience on Earth any less frightening, if our worst fears materialize. Still, the doctrine of emptiness causes us to critically evaluate our beliefs to make sure that they are scientific. Many of our emotional responses to climate change are based on unfounded beliefs, such as, for instance, about what is possible, what we are responsible for, and what we are capable of accomplishing. Buddhist logic and reasoning will be applied to these views.

1. Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007

**Lecture 3. Environmentalism without attachment to views**

Buddhist cosmology incorporates the older view of the universe as eternal and cyclic, a view which has its supporters within the scientific community. If the present environmental crises are situated within a deep view of space and time, one that extends beyond this planet, the situation appears less apocalyptic. The climate and extinction crises, horrifying as they appear, can be compared to the hell and hungry ghost realms of the Buddhist universe; they are not cataclysmic singularities but predictable effects of past causes.

This does not imply that the appropriate response is one of indifference, however. The teachings on the six realms are often accompanied by instructions on how to meditate on compassion and they also imply an ethic of non-harm. Moreover, these teachings are often interpreted as primarily psychological rather than ontological. One can therefore accept the truth of what is happening to the planet, without being overwhelmed by the enormity of it.

1. Elizabeth Kolbert. *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History.*London: Bloomsbury, 2014

2. Stephanie Kaza, ‘Buddhist Contributions to Climate Response,’ *Journal of Oriental Studies*, 2014

**Lecture 4. Buddhist teachings on faith**

The course now turns to the more positive aspects of the Buddhist teachings. Although we have questioned many of the beliefs and views of environmentalism, Buddhism does not only recommend a degree of scepticism, but also faith. This faith is not to be understood as mere belief, but as also involving affective and conative dimensions. This understanding of faith will be examined in detail and applied to environmental issues.

1. Gergely Hidas, “References to Faith in Dharani Literature” in *Faith in Buddhism: Symposium*edited by Imre Hamar and Takami Inoue, Institute for East Asian Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest 2016

2. Akihiro Oda, “The concept of faith in the *Discourse on the Awakening of Mahayana Faith*” in *Faith in Buddhism: Symposium*edited by Imre Hamar and Takami Inoue, Institute for East Asian Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest 2016

**Lecture 5. Faith in times of environmental crises – investing in matter and mind**

According to Andy Rotman, Buddhist faith is often depicted as currency on a moral market and serves as a link with the economic market and with material wealth. This idea is not exclusively Buddhist but can be found in other religions too. This lecture will examine the contentious claim that having faith can bring about physical improvements to the quality of one’s life, and suggest ways it may be applied to environmentalism.

1. Rotman, Andy. *Thus Have I Seen; Visualising Faith in Early Indian Buddhism.*New York: Oxford University Press, 2009

**Lecture 6. Buddhist environmentalism and intrinsic value: Deification of matter and the elements**

The concluding lecture will tie in with other courses by examining matter and mind as they are depicted in the Vajrayana Mandala, where each element is associated both with a disturbing emotion and with a form of enlightened wisdom. Following David Macauley’s analysis of environmental problems as result of modern humans’ disconnection from earth, water, fire and air, the practice of meditation on elements, and their deification in the Vajrayana will be examined for useful applications to environmental issues.

1. Macauley, David. *Elemental Philosophy: Earth, Air, Fire and Water as Environmental Ideas.*New York: SUNY Press, 2010

1. **“Thinking without a Banister”:**

**Ecological Crisis as a Philosophical Crisis**

Yang Xiao 萧阳

**Course Description:**

The phrase “thinking without a banister” comes from Hannah Arendt. She uses this metaphor to talk about the situation in which we do not have adequate concepts to think about (or understand) a radically new crisis: “As you go up and down the stairs you can always hold on to the banisters so that you don’t fall down, but we have lost this banister. That is the way I tell it to myself. And this is indeed what I try to do.” And this is what we will try to do in this course as well.

If we use the term “philosophy” in its broad sense so that it includes “thinking” or “understanding” (or 大知, 大通, to use Zhuangzi’s terms), then there is a corresponding crisis in philosophy concerning our ecological crisis: We do not understand it; we do not know how to think about it. Philosophy has lost its way in the world. We will be using the term “ecological crisis” (or “environmental crisis”) in such a way so that it includes “environmental issues” not only in its narrow sense (air pollution 雾霾, the loss of biodiversity, etc.), but also in its broad (planetary) sense (global climate change). This means that our philosophical crisis becomes truly unprecedented on a global scale. Philosophy has lost its way on Earth. It is unfortunate that very often, “environmental philosophy” has been studied and taught as “applied philosophy”, and “environmental ethics” as “applied ethics”. However, in this course, we will try to do “environmental philosophy” *as philosophy*, and try to do philosophy as thinking without a banister.

We will be arguing that there should be a two-way street between “environmentalism” and “philosophy” that travel in both directions: both need to be re-thought and re-conceptualized in light of the other. On one hand, we will try to re-think about environmentalism critically and philosophically. For example, we will argue that “the environment” (环境), “nature” (大自然), and “wilderness” (荒野) might not be adequate concepts, and as an experiment, we will try other alternative concepts, such as “world” (Umwelt, 人间世, 世界, 大千世界), “the sense of things” (物色), and “landscape” (山水). And, on the other hand, we also want to take the ecological challenge to philosophy seriously. As we shall see, the challenge should push us to embrace alternative concepts, which can help us overcome a series of false dichotomies or dualisms in philosophy, such as “culture” vs “nature”, “mind” vs “body”, “subject” vs “object”, “history” vs “prehistory”, “non-human animals” vs “human animals”, “philosophy” vs “religion”. As we shall see, this will also help us bridge the gaps among natural sciences, the humanities, and philosophy, as well as various sub-fields and traditions within philosophy (including the East-West divide and the analytic-continental divide). Perhaps more importantly, these alternative concepts might help us resist the temptation of becoming eco-fascists or eco-primitivists.

We will only be able to get a rough sense of what an “eco-philosophy” (or geo-philosophy) might be like. We will try to begin to imagine an eco-philosophy as a way of thinking that takes the following fact (or pre-analytic vision) as its starting point: “to be” means “to be in a world” (“being-in-the-world”) and “to be earth-bound”. In fact, one provocative definition of humanity we will entertain is the following: human beings are the part of the surface of the earth that have evolved and learned to speak and think (*logos*, 道), as well as to labor, to work, and to act (in Arendt’s sense of these three concepts). We hope that in this process “philosophy” might be re-born as an “art of creating concepts” again. And one of the ways to do it is to go back to philosophy’s non-philosophical roots in mimetic (or ritual 礼) culture and mythic (or 文) culture (in Bellah’s sense of these two concepts), which are conventionally called “religion” and “literature”. For example, we might gain a new appreciation of a genre in classical Chinese poetry, 咏物诗 (songs celebrating things).

Authors we read include Hannah Arendt, Robert Bellah, J. Baird Callicott, James Gibson, Cora Diamond, Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Iris Murdoch, Jakob von Uexkull, as well as thinkers from “non-Western” traditions (Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism).

**Lecture topics:**

Lectures 1-2. Ecological Challenge to Modern Moral Philosophy

Lectures 3-4. Two Kinds of Eco-Philosophy: Thin vs Thick Eco-Philosophy

Lecture 5. Global Climate Change and the Difficulty of Reality, including a Critique of “The Wandering Earth” (流浪地球)

Lecture 6. Global Climate Change as a Political Problem of the Second Globalization

**Suggested Readings:**

Hannah Arendt, “Introduction”, “Prologue”, Chapter 35 “World Alienation” and Chapter 36-40 (Earth Alienation), *The Human Condition* (The University of Chicago Press; 2nd edition, 1998)

Hannah Arendt, Chapter 5 “The Political Emancipation of the Bourgeoisie”, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (A Harvest Book, 1973)

Hannah Arendt, “The Conquest of Space and the Status of Man”, *Between Past and Future* (Penguin Books, 2006)

Robert Bellah, Preface and Chapters 1-2, *Religion in Human Evolution* (Harvard University Press, 2017)

J. Baird Callicott, *In Defence of the Land Ethic* (SUNY Press, 1989)

William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness”, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (Norton, 1995)

Cora Diamond, “Eating Meat and Eating People”, *The Realistic Spirit* (The MIT Press, 1995)

Cora Diamond, “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy”, *Philosophy and Animal Life* (Columbia University Press, 2008)

Cora Diamond, “The Problem of Impiety”, *Spirituality and the Good Life*, ed. David McPherson (Cambridge University Press, 2017)

Mark Elvin, *The Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China* (Yale University Press, 2006)

James Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Perception* (Psychology Press, 2014)

Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (Indiana University Press, 1995)

Husserl, “The Original Ark, the Earth, Does Not Move”, *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology* (Northwestern University Press, 2002)

Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, tr. By Donald Landes (Routledge, 2012)

Merleau-Ponty, *Nature: Course Notes from the College de France*, tr. Robert Vallier (Northwestern University Press, 2003)

Jason Moore, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (PM Press, 2016)

Iris Murdoch, “Vision and Choice in Morality”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, Vol. 30 (1956), pp. 14-58

Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin, *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene* (Pelican, 2018)

Raj Patel and Jason Moor, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things* (University of Californian Press, 2017)

Timothy Snyder, Introduction and Chapter 1, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (Tim Duggan Books, 2015)

Jakob von Uexkull, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans with A Theory of Meaning* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010)

Yang Xiao, “The Bildungsroman of the Heart: Thick Naturalism in Bellah’s *Religion in Human Evolution*”, *Confucianism, A Habit of the Heart: Bellah, Civil Religion*, *and East Asia*, ed. P. J. Ivanhoe and Sungmoon Kim (Routledge, 2016)

Yang Xiao, “‘Nature Doing It’ (*Xingzhi* 性之) and ‘Purpose-Free’ (*Wushi* 无事): Philosophy of Action and Ethics in the *Mencius*”, *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Mencius*, ed. Yang Xiao (Springer, 2019)