

GEOGRAPHY 203

NATURE AND CULTURE: SOCIAL THEORY, SOCIAL PRACTICE, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Nathan F. Sayre

Fall 2016

Wednesdays 9:00-12:00, 401 McCone Hall

Nature and Culture are big and slippery concepts: so taken-for-granted in everyday practice, so elusive when put to work in social science, and potentially so dangerous when wedded to statecraft. Are they useful abstractions, or empty ones? How do they relate or compare to other big abstractions such as capital, the state, science, knowledge, action, and the environment?

Recent decades have witnessed an explosion of popular and scholarly interest in the environment, from global climate models to eco-philosophies, ethnographic case studies to global environmental histories, as well as the proposed declaration of a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene. Scattered across the natural and social sciences and the humanities, this body of work is as varied as the histories and geographies it attempts to comprehend. At its best, it points towards powerful inter- or post-disciplinary ways to understand and address enormously serious problems. At its worst it may reinforce, obscure, or legitimate the status quo.

This seminar begins from several premises: that society and environment are internally related, not dualistically opposed; that the physical sciences are necessary but not sufficient to understand “environmental” issues; and that politics and economics strongly determine both the environment and our understanding thereof. We will read a handful of classic works and devote the bulk of the semester to more recent monographs and articles in geography, political ecology, anthropology, environmental history, and science and technology studies.

Course Requirements

Seminar participation (20% of final grade): Students are expected to attend seminar every week and participate *constructively* in discussion—see the “Principles for Seminar Discussions” below. All readings for the week—including your peers’ exegetical papers—should be completed *before* the start of seminar.

Exegetical papers (20%): Beginning in Week 3, two or three students will be expected to write short exegetical papers about one or more of each week’s readings; every student will write two such papers during the semester. In *3 pages or less*, the papers should present an exegesis—that is, “a critical explanation or interpretation.” The point is *not* to review or recite the whole content of the readings. Rather, you should clarify or interpret

key passages or issues, identify problems or questions, or relate and compare ideas across readings, *while making an argument of your own*. Papers should be posted to the course website (log in at bcourses.berkeley.edu) by **noon the day before seminar**, and all students are expected to read the week's papers before seminar.

Leading discussion (20%): The students who write exegetical papers will be expected to lead discussion during the first part of seminar each week. Seminar leaders should take joint responsibility and prepare together, aiming to *catalyze discussion and foster the critical exchange of ideas*. Please limit any opening presentation(s) to a total of 10 minutes **maximum**, and remember that the other students will already have read your exegetical papers.

Seminar paper(s) (40%): Every student is expected to write a total of 20-24 pages (double-spaced, not including bibliographies) of seminar paper(s) during the semester. I recommend that this be done as two papers of roughly equal length, the first turned in no later than **October 21st** and the second no later than **December 12th**. Other configurations are acceptable with prior approval (e.g., papers of unequal length, one long paper, or three or four shorter papers). Like the exegetical papers, seminar papers should *engage critically* with course readings and issues and *develop an argument*. You may use an exegetical paper as a rough draft/jumping off point from which to develop a seminar paper. Please communicate with me about your plans for the paper(s) *no later than October 14th*.

How to Reach Me

Email is best: nsayre@berkeley.edu. My office is 599 McCone, phone 510-664-4072. Office hours are Tuesdays 1:00-2:00 and Wednesdays 2:00-3:00 or by appointment.

Readings and Books

Most weeks we will read one book and one article, or selections from two books. The following books are available at the ASUC Bookstore. All other readings will be posted to the course website in pdf.

- Mark Carey, *In the Shadow of Melting Glaciers: Climate Change and Andean Society*. Oxford University Press (paperback)
- Judith Carney, *Black Rice: the African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*. Harvard University Press (paperback)
- Diana Davis, *The Arid Lands: History, Power, Knowledge*. MIT Press (hardback)
- John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*. Monthly Review Press (paperback)
- Jess Gilbert, *Planning Democracy: Agrarian Intellectuals and the Intended New Deal*. Yale University Press (hardback)

Rebecca Lave, *Fields and Streams: Stream Restoration, Neoliberalism, and the Future of Environmental Science*. University of Georgia Press (paperback)
Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*. Verso (paperback)
Paul Nadasdy, *Hunters and Bureaucrats: Power, Knowledge, and Aboriginal-State Relations in the Southwest Yukon*. University of British Columbia Press (paperback)
Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*. Beacon Press (paperback)
Christopher Sneddon, *Concrete Revolution: Large Dams, Cold War Geopolitics, and the US Bureau of Reclamation*. University of Chicago Press (hardback)
Miriam Wells, *Strawberry Fields: Politics, Class, and Work in California Agriculture*. Cornell University Press (paperback)

PLEASE NOTE that Matthew Booker's *Down by the Bay* is NOT required for this course after all.

Other books that you may wish to acquire include the following:

Alfred Crosby. *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*
Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men* (aka Second Discourse)—I recommend the Masters' translation from Bedford/St. Martin's Press
Neil Smith. *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*
Richard White. *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos*

Useful reference volumes include:

Tom Perreault, Gavin Bridge, and James McCarthy, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*
Noel Castree, David Demeritt, Diana Liverman, and Bruce Rhoads, eds. *A Companion to Environmental Geography* (Wiley-Blackwell)—a paperback edition is supposed to be published in early October

All of the books listed above will be on reserve in the Earth Sciences and Maps Library in the ground floor of McCone Hall.

PRINCIPLES FOR SEMINAR DISCUSSIONS

(plagiarized from Michael Watts)

The following guidelines are intended to facilitate seminar discussions. We are a small group and this will mean that we all have to contribute and participate to make discussions work. There will not necessarily be presentations but conversations require that we all speak up, air our views, and help us (all) figure things out and move our projects and interests forward. These comments may seem over the top, but I have found them useful (even in small group settings such as ours). Some of them may sound obvious, but from past experience it is still important to make them explicit.

1. READINGS. At least for the first part of each seminar session the discussions should revolve around the week's readings rather than simply the topic. There is a strong tendency in seminars, to turn every seminar into a general "bull session" in which participation need not be informed by the reading material in the course. The injunction to discuss the readings does not mean, of course, that other material is excluded from the discussion, but it does mean that the issues raised and problems analyzed should focus on around the actual texts assigned for the week.

2. LISTEN. In a good seminar, interventions by different participants are linked one to another. A given point is followed up and the discussion therefore has some continuity. In many seminar discussions, however, each intervention is unconnected to what has been said before. Participants are more concerned with figuring out what brilliant comment they can make rather than listening to each other and reflecting on what is actually being said. In general, therefore, participants should add to what has just been said rather than launch a new train of thought, unless a particular line of discussion has reached some sort of closure.

3. TYPES OF INTERVENTIONS. Not every seminar intervention has to be an earthshattering comment or brilliant insight. One of the reasons why some students feel intimidated in seminars is that it seems that the stakes are so high, that the only legitimate comment is one that reveals complete mastery of the material. There are several general rules about comments that should facilitate broader participation:

- a. No intervention should be regarded as "naive" or "stupid" as long as it reflects an attempt at seriously engaging the material. It is often the case that what seems at first glance to be a simple or superficial question turns out to be among the most intractable.
- b. It is as appropriate to ask for clarification of readings or previous comments as it is to make a substantive point on the subject matter.
- c. If the pace of the seminar discussion seems too fast to get a word in edgewise it is legitimate to ask for a brief pause to slow things down. It is fine for there actually to be moments of silence in a discussion!

4. BREVITY. Everyone has been in seminars in which someone consistently gives long, overblown speeches. Sometimes these speeches may make some substantively interesting points, but frequently they meander without focus or direction. It is important to keep interventions short and to the point. One can always add elaborations if they are needed. This is not an absolute prohibition on long statements, but it does suggest that longer statements are generally too long.

5. EQUITY. While acknowledging that different personalities and different prior exposures to the material will necessarily lead to different levels of active participation in

the seminar discussion, it should be our collective self-conscious goal to have as equitable participation as possible. This means that the chair of the discussion has the right to curtail the speeches by people who have dominated the discussion, if this seems necessary.

6. SPONTANEITY vs. ORDER. One of the traps of trying to have guidelines, rules, etc. in a discussion is that it can squelch the spontaneous flow of debate and interchange in a seminar. Sustained debate, sharpening of differences, etc., is desirable and it is important that the chair not prevent such debate from developing.

7. ARGUMENTS, COMPETITIVENESS, CONSENSUS. A perennial problem in seminars revolves around styles of discussion. I think that it is important in seminar discussions to try to sharpen differences, to understand where the real disagreements lie, and to accomplish this it is generally necessary that participants “argue” with each other, in the sense of voicing disagreements and not always seeking consensus. On the other hand, there is no reason why argument, even heated argument, need be marked by aggressiveness or contentiousness.

Schedule

Week 2 (31 August): What is Nature?

- Raymond Williams. 1980. Ideas of Nature. Pp. 67-85 in *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays*
- Neil Smith. 1984. The Ideology of Nature. Pp. 1-31 in *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*
- William Cronon. 1996. The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature. *Environmental History* 1: 7-28
- Morgan M. Robertson. 2006. The Nature that capital can see: science, state, and market in the commodification of ecosystem services. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24: 367-387

Week 3 (7 September): The State of Nature and the Market

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau. 1755. *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men* (aka Second Discourse)
- Karl Polanyi. 1944. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of our Time*, chs. 3-10 (pp. 35-135)

Week 4 (14 September): Materialism

- John Bellamy Foster. *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*
- Donald Worster. "The Education of a Scientist." Pp. 130-144 in *Nature's Ecology: A History of Ecological Ideas*, 2nd edition

Week 5 (21 September): Capital, the State, and Uneven Development

- Neil Smith. 1984. Chapters 2 & 3. Pp. 32-96 in *Uneven Development*
- Henri Lefebvre. 2009 [1979]. The State in the Modern World. Pp. 95-123 in *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*, edited by Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden
- Pierre Bourdieu. 1994. Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field. *Sociological Theory* 12: 1-18
- Pierre Bourdieu. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, pp. 159-197

Week 6 (28 September): The Anthropocene?

- Jason Moore. 2015. *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*, pp. 1-87, 169-192, 221-305
- Erle C. Ellis. 2015. Ecology in an anthropogenic biosphere. *Ecological Monographs* 85: 287-331
- Will Steffen et al. 2015. The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: the Great Acceleration. *The Anthropocene Review* 2: 81-98

Week 7 (5 October): The “New” World

- Judith Carney. 2001. *Black Rice: the African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*
- Alfred Crosby. 1986. Chapters 1 (Prologue) and 11 (Explanations). Pp. 1-7, 269-293 in *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*

Week 8 (12 October): Degrading Land?

- Diana Davis. 2016. *The Arid Lands: History, Power, Knowledge*
- Lynn Huntsinger. 2016. The Tragedy of the Common Narrative: Re-telling Degradation in the American West. Pp. 293-323 in *The End of Desertification? Disputing Environmental Change in the Drylands*, edited by Roy H. Behnke and Michael Mortimore

Week 9 (19 October): A Beneficent State?

- Jess Gilbert, *Planning Democracy: Agrarian Intellectuals and the Intended New Deal*
- Thomas Robertson. 2012. Total War and the Total Environment: Fairfield Osborn, William Vogt, and the Birth of Global Ecology. *Environmental History* 17: 336-364

Week 10 (26 October): Climate Change and Society

- Mark Carey. 2010. *In the Shadow of Melting Glaciers: Climate Change and Andean Society*
- Leigh Johnson. 2010. The Fearful symmetry of Arctic climate change: accumulation by degradation. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28: 828-847

Week 11 (2 November): Water and Power

- Christopher Sneddon. 2015. *Concrete Revolution: Large Dams, Cold War Geopolitics, and the US Bureau of Reclamation*
- Jeffrey M. Banister and Stacie G. Widdifield. 2014. The Debut of ‘modern water’ in early 20th century Mexico City: the Xochimilco potable waterworks. *Journal of Historical Geography* 46: 36-52

Week 12 (9 November): Industrial Agriculture in California

- Miriam Wells. 1996. *Strawberry Fields: Politics, Class, and Work in California Agriculture*, pp. 1-179, 278-310
- Adam Romero. 2016. “From Oil Well to Farm”: Industrial Waste, Shell Oil, and the Petrochemical Turn (1927-1947). *Agricultural History* 90: 70-93

Week 13 (16 November): Indigenous Peoples and the State

Paul Nadasdy. 2003. *Hunters and Bureaucrats: Power, Knowledge, and Aboriginal-State Relations in the Southwest Yukon*, pp. 1-146

Richard White. 1983. *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos*, pp. 212-314

Week 14 (30 November): Neoliberalism and Environmental Science

Rebecca Lave. 2012. *Fields and Streams: Stream Restoration, Neoliberalism, and the Future of Environmental Science*

Donna Haraway. 1988. Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies* 14: 575-599