

PHIL*2070 PHILOSOPHY OF THE ENVIRONMENT [0.50]

Instructor: S. Linqvist

Brief Course Synopsis:

This course will critically examine popular beliefs about the environment and humanity's relationship to it. We begin with the foundations of modern environmentalism. This movement was grounded on an image of Mother Nature as an interconnected whole whose components hang together in delicate balance. Industrial progress and economic development supposedly threaten this balance of Nature. We will consider whether this picture withstands philosophical and scientific scrutiny. The second part of the course investigates recent debates over climate change. Often, people or governments who are reluctant to take action to prevent climate change are disparaged as irresponsible or unscientific. What do these accusations say about public perceptions of science and policy? How accurate is the public understanding of climate change? Does it matter? The third part of the course will investigate economic approaches to environmental decision making. For example, is it possible to quantify the value of biodiversity or the cost of pollution in economic terms? Or, does an economic framework overlook important ethical and aesthetic reasons for valuing nature?

This course encourages students to identify and question their assumptions about environmentalism and of their own relationship to this movement. Evaluation is based on regular reflection assignments, two exams, a term paper, and several tutorial assignments.