Philosophy 2070, Philosophy of the Environment - W24

This course critically examines 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. Human progress and development supposedly threaten the
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 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? Does an economic framework overlook important ethical and aesthetic
reasons for valuing nature?

Grading will be based on a series of short writing assignments, participation in seminar and class, and midterm and final exams.