



201810-XLS-SOCI/PSCI-247 Environmental Social Science I

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Syllabus



Environmental News

Post news stories relevant to the week's readings. Always comment on your news and relate it to themes or other readings that we have discussed in the course.



Weekly questions



Participation Grades



Essay



Essay format



Citation Style (ASA)



Avoiding Plagiarism



Announcements

1 - Nature: Natural "Man"? -- September 5-7

Required Reading:

- Cronon, William. 1983. "Seasons of Want and Plenty." Pp. 34-53 in *Changes in the Land*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Concepts: nature, wilderness, natural 'man', adapting to vs transforming natural cycles, projecting cultural constructs upon nature, carrying capacity, the local, environmental adaptation → social organization: division of labour, social equality, diversity /homogeneity, consumption vs accumulation, steady-state economy, population growth /stability

Questions:

- Is there a natural relationship between humans and the environment?
- Are we estranged from nature?
- When humans alter nature, is it no longer nature?
- Should we try to get "back to nature"? If so, how close could we come to that ideal?
- Do we project our cultural ideals on to nature? If so, what are those cultural ideals?



Recommended Reading:

- Fletcher, Robert. 2015. "Nature Is a Nice Place to Save but I Wouldn't Want to Live There: Environmental Education and the Ecotourist Gaze." *Environmental Education Research* 21(3):338-50. doi: 10.1080/13504622.2014.993930.



Nature Quiz

This quiz is tailored for those who grew up in southern Canada or the northern US. It measures a particular type of knowledge of and relation to nature. You will not be graded on this quiz.



Climate Change Workbook

This is a tool to help you learn the basics in the debates about climate change. You will not be graded on your first attempt.

2 - Nature: Cultures of Nature - September 12-14

Required Reading:

- Wilson, Alexander. 1992. "Nature at Home: A Social Ecology of Postwar Landscape Design." in *The Culture of Nature*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Concepts: culture of nature, modernism, pastoralism, ecological restoration, suburbanization, economies of scale, Green Revolution technologies, commodification of nature images, alienation from nature, gender and nature

Questions:

- Is pastoralism a better culture of nature than modernism? If so, why?
- Are we alienated from nature?
- Is North American culture anti-nature?

Recommended Reading:

3 - Nature: Anthropocene and the End of Nature? - September 19-21

Required Reading:

- Steffen, Will, Paul J. Crutzen and John R. McNeill. 2007. "The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?". *Ambio* 36(8):614-21.

Concepts: Anthropocene, holocene, end of nature, nature vs "the environment", climate change, CO2 concentrations, GHGs, geoengineering, terraforming

Questions:

- Has nature become a human artefact? Is it an extension of the built environment?

- Can we control nature at the planetary scale? How does this idea affect our cultural conception of nature?
- Does environmentalism involve saving the human environment (for humans) or saving the natural environment? How much of non-human nature would we be willing to sacrifice to save the human environment?

Recommended Reading:

4 - Scarcity Paradigm: Population and Food - September 25-28

Required Reading:

- Harper, Charles L. 2004. "Population, Environment and Food." in Environment and Society Human Perspectives on Environmental Issues. Upper Saddle River, N.J: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Concepts: demographic transition, neo-Malthusianism, scarcity paradigm, agricultural resources, technological substitution, agricultural systems: green revolution, gene revolution, unintended consequences of technological solutions

Questions:

- Is there a global "carrying capacity" for humans in the way that there is for other animals?
- What, if any, resources place absolute limits on food production: soil, fresh water, fossil fuels?
- Will the population level off at around 9 billion by mid-century as many demographers predict?
- Can the world feed 9 billion people equitably and reliably by 2050?

Recommended Reading:

Brown, Lester Russell. 2009. "Population Pressure: Land and Water." in Plan B 4.0 Mobilizing to Save Civilization. New York: W. W. Norton.

5 - Other Species: Ecocentric and Anthropocentric Perspectives - October 3-5

Required Reading:

- Challenger, Melanie. 2011. "Beginnings: Natural History Museum, London." in On Extinction: How We Became Estranged from Nature. London: Granta.
- Brannen, Peter. 2017. "Earth Is Not in the Midst of a Sixth Mass Extinction " The Atlantic, June 13. Retrieved August 8, 2017(<https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/06/the-ends-of-the-world/529545/>).

Concepts: biodiversity loss, extinction, the balance of nature, mass extinction, habitat loss, monoculture, companion species, ecocentric: inter-species justice, anthropocentric: ecosystem services

Questions:

- Extinction is part of natural evolution: why should we care if we are causing other species to go extinct?

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- Are other species means to human ends or are they ends-in-themselves?
- Do we have a right to replace wild species with species that we have made either through domestication or genetic engineering?
- Does this process of eliminating wild populations and replacing them with our companion animals deepen our estrangement from nature?

Recommended Reading:

- Duraiappah, Anantha Kumar , Shahid Naeem and et. al. 2005. "Ecosystems and Human Well-Being: Biodiversity Synthesis." in Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005. Washington: World Resources Institute.

6 - Social-Structural Thinking: Risks of Modern Systems - October 10

Required Reading:

- Rosa, Eugene A., Ortwin Renn and Aaron M. McCright. 2014. "Reflexive Modernization Theory and Risk: The Work of Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens." in *The Risk Society Revisited: Social Theory and Governance*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Concepts: risk society, modernization: market, rational state, science /technology, civil society, unintended consequences (negative side effects), reflexive modernization, ecological modernization, globalization of risks, incalculability of risks, unequal distribution of risks, globalization /cosmopolitanism, system-level complexity, organized irresponsibility

Questions:

- Can we rationally and effectively respond to the risks of the 21st century within the modernization paradigm (i.e. does ecological modernization work)?
- Is 21st century modernity still rational? Are we still in control of our systems and their effects?
- Beck relies on civil society ("sub politics") to counter the irrationalities of science/ technology, the market and the administrative state. What happens when civil society responses to risk themselves become irrational -- as exemplified by contemporary right-wing populism and climate change denial?

Recommended Reading:

6.1 - Social-Structural Thinking: Nuclear Technologies - October 12

Required Reading:

- Funabashi, Harutoshi. 2012. "Why the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster Is a Man-Made Calamity." *International Journal of Japanese Sociology* 21(1):65-75. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-6781.2012.01161.x.
- McCurry, Justin. 2017. "Fukushima Nuclear Reactor Radiation at Highest Level since 2011 Meltdown " *The Guardian*, February 3. Retrieved August 7, 2017(<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/feb/03/fukushima-daiichi-radiation-levels-highest-since-2011-meltdown>).

Concepts: technological substitution, clean energy, risk, system-level complexity, engineering interacting natural /social /technological systems, risk assessment, accountability, civil society

Questions:

- Is nuclear power a good technological solution to the climate change crisis? In other words do the risks of climate change outweigh the risks of nuclear power? Is there a rational, scientific way of assessing the competing risks?
- In what ways does the Fukushima nuclear disaster illustrate Beck's risk society thesis?

Recommended Reading:

7 - Social-Structural Thinking: Agricultural Technologies - October 16 - 19

Required Reading:

- Kerr, Rachel Bezner. 2012. "Lessons from the Old Green Revolution for the New: Social, Environmental and Nutritional Issues for Agricultural Change in Africa." *Progress in Development Studies* 12(2-3):213-29. doi: 10.1177/146499341101200308.

Concepts: Green revolution, gene revolution, monoculture, pest resistance, herbicide tolerance, eutrophication, agribusiness, food security

Questions:

- What were the unintended ecological consequences of the green revolution?
- How can the social structural realities of class, gender and economic power complicate the outcomes of technological solutions (like Green revolution technologies)?

Recommended Reading:

- Harper, Charles L. 2004. "Population, Environment and Food." in *Environment and Society Human Perspectives on Environmental Issues*. Upper Saddle River, N.J: Pearson Prentice Hall.

8 - Social-Structural Thinking: Transport Technologies - October 24 - 26

Required Reading:

- Cohen, Maurie J. 2006. "A Social Problems Framework for the Critical Appraisal of Automobility and Sustainable Systems Innovation." *Mobilities* 1(1):23-38. doi: 10.1080/17450100500489106.
- Walker, Ian and Gustav Bösehans. 2016. "Electric Cars Won't Save Our Cities." *The Guardian*, January 3. Retrieved August 7, 2017(<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2016/jan/08/electric-cars-wont-save-our-cities-transport-self-driving-robots>).

Concepts: automobility, walkability, urban density vs suburban sprawl, mixed use, the built environment as structural consumption, life-cycle analysis, individualism /privatization

Questions:

- How does the built environment shape the consumption of material resources and the

production of GHGs?

- Can the re-engineering of cars significantly reduce GHGs?
- How can cities encourage a "modal shift" from private cars to public transport to biking to walking?

Recommended Reading:

9 - Individualistic Thinking: Inverted Quarantine - October 31 - November 2

Required Reading:

- Szasz, Andrew. 2006. "Inverted Quarantine: A Kind of "Green" Consuming That Fosters Political Anesthesia." Paper presented at the Sustainable Consumption and Society Conference, June 2-3, 2006, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

Concepts: individualistic action vs collective action, consumer vs citizen, green consumerism, sociological imagination, prisoners' dilemma (individual rationality producing collective irrationality), market solutions, social class and environmentalism, neoliberalism

Questions:

- In what ways can individualistic responses to risk increase societal risks?
- Can green consumerism solve environmental problems?
- What are the global class implications of consumer responses to environmental risks?
- In what ways does neoliberalism promote inverted quarantine?

Recommended Reading:

10 - Capitalism and Consumption - November 7 - 9

Required Reading:

- Lintott, John. 2007. "Sustainable Consumption and Sustainable Welfare." in Sustainable Consumption, Ecology and Fair Trade, edited by E. Zaccā. London: Routledge.

Concepts: human welfare satisfaction vs material consumption, commodified consumption, consumer sovereignty, positional goods, structural overconsumption, privatized consumer vs public citizen, compensatory consumption, free time

Questions:

- Do we consume too much for our own good? If so, then why do we consume too much?
- Do we consume too much for the good of the living world?
- Is it possible to reduce overconsumption within the framework of a capitalist economy? Is it possible to reduce overconsumption within the framework of neoliberal capitalism?
- What is the connection between free time, human welfare and decreased material consumption?

Recommended Reading:

- Kaplan, Jeffrey. 2008. "The Gospel of Consumption." Orion 27(3):38.
- Boulanger, Paul-Marie. 2007. "What's Wrong with Consumption for Sustainable Development:

Overconsumption, Underconsumption, Misconsumption?" in Sustainable Consumption, Ecology and Fair Trade, edited by E. Zaccai. London: Routledge.

- Assadourian, Erik. 2012. "The Path to Degrowth in Overdeveloped Countries." in State of the World 2012: Moving toward Sustainable Prosperity : A Worldwatch Institute Report on Progress toward a Sustainable Society, edited by E. Assadourian, L. Starke, M. Renner and Worldwatch Institute. Washington, DC: Island Press.

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11 - Capitalism and Overproduction - November 14 - 16

Required Reading:

- Cooper, Tim. 2005. "Slower Consumption: Reflections on Product Life Spans and the "Throwaway Society"." *Journal of Industrial Ecology* 9(1-2):51-67. doi: 10.1162/1088198054084671.
- Wieser, Harald. 2016. "Beyond Planned Obsolescence: Product Lifespans and the Challenges to a Circular Economy." *Gaia* 25(3):156-60. doi: 10.14512/gaia.25.3.5.

Concepts: planned obsolescence, logic of capital: overproduction /market expansion /creation of "need", life-cycle analysis, externalities, industrial ecology: waste=food, cradle to cradle, extended producer liability, circular economy, internalizing externalities, full-cost accounting, ecological modernization: a reformed market

Questions:

- Can the circular economy harness the power of profit to reduce overproduction /overconsumption? Is there such a thing as a market solution to these problems?
- Is a growth-based system (capitalism) compatible with a finite planet?
- Is it possible to commodify and internalize all of the costs of a complete product life-cycle? In other words, is it possible to rely on the market to solve environmental problems?
- What additional (state) regulatory framework would be needed to make a circular economy work?

Recommended Reading:

- Hawken, Paul. 1993. "Parking Lots and Potato Heads." in *The Ecology of Commerce*. New York: Harper Collins.

12 - TBA November 21 - 23

13 - Reflexive Modernization and Anti-Reflexivity - November 28 - 30

Required Reading:

- Dunlap, Riley E. /Aaron M. McCright. 2012. "Organized Climate Change Denial." in *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, edited by R. B. N. John S. Dryzek, and David Schlosberg. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



Concepts: Modernization /reflexive modernization /anti-reflexivity; climate change denial; denial machine; front groups; astroturf; systems-level irrationality: corporate, state, civil society; neoliberal ideology

Questions:

- How and why has the market overwhelmed the influence of the other institutions of the modernization project: the administrative state, science /technology, and civil society?
- Has the denial machine succeeded in fatally paralyzing the global response to climate change?
- Are our current societal systems fundamentally irrational and therefore incapable of successfully responding to the environmental challenges of the 21st century?

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