

# **Philosophy and the Environment**

PHL 235-202 | Arts & Letters 412, MW 1:00-2:30pm | WQ 2017  
DePaul University | Gil Morejón [gdmorejón@gmail.com]

## **Introduction**

This class will raise critical questions about the metaphysics of nature and the environment, the relationship between the environment and human beings in concrete forms of social organization, and the philosophical significance of concepts elaborated in contemporary environmental and bioscientific discourses.

While it could be argued that these questions should be taken seriously simply on their own terms, today they must be asked with a historically novel sense of urgency. This is true due to our growing awareness of the catastrophic ecological consequences of the dominant contemporary mode of social organization, namely global capitalism in its neoliberal form – consequences including the acidification of the oceans, the melting of the polar ice caps, and the dawn of the sixth great extinction event. This class will presuppose the real existence of global climate change as an ongoing crisis and as an anthropogenic phenomenon, and will explore this socioecological development primarily from the perspective of a critique of capitalist political economy.

Consequently this class will be at once historically informed, politically motivated, and philosophically critical. The texts we will read have been selected on the basis of their offering resources that are useful if not necessary for coming to an understanding of the global climate crisis that is robust metaphysically, historically, and politically. Our goal will be to understand the nature of the crisis along with its conditions and causes, to come to terms with its actually present and probable future consequences, and to reconsider what could count as adequate ethical and political praxis in light of this understanding.

The topics, themes, and concepts explored in this class will include the following:

- Ecology, the coproduction of humanity and nature, and world-making
- Nature as historically implicated in social relations and vice versa
- Capitalist modes of production and social organization
- Neoliberal environmentalist ideologies
- Crisis, catastrophism, and extinction
- Environmental racism and toxic ecologies
- Political practice, intergenerational ethics, and slow violence
- Scientific knowledge and ideological scientism

The class is reading and writing intensive. It is designed in accordance with the DePaul Philosophy Department's stated [learning outcomes](#).

## Schedule of Classes

The following schedule of readings and assignments is provisional and subject to change.

### Week 1

- January 2 Introduction and Syllabus  
January 4 Klein, *This Changes Everything*, introduction: 'One Way or Another, Everything Changes'

### Week 2

- January 9 Marx, *Capital*, chapters 7 and 16  
January 11 Marx, *Capital*, chapter 23 and 24, sections 1-2  
**Quiz 1**

### Week 3

- January 16 *School Closed: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day*  
January 17 **Reflection 1 due**  
January 18 Smith, 'The Ideology of Nature', sections I-II

### Week 4

- January 23 Smith, 'The Ideology of Nature', sections III-IV  
January 25 Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective'  
**Quiz 2**

### Week 5

- January 29 **Reflection 2 due**  
January 30 Klein, *This Changes Everything*, chapter 2: 'Hot Money: How Free Market Fundamentalism Helped Overheat the Planet'  
February 1 Klein, *This Changes Everything*, chapter 7: 'No Messiahs: The Green Billionaires Won't Save Us'

### Week 6

- February 6 Merchant, 'Ecofeminism', pgs. 193-208  
February 8 Merchant, 'Ecofeminism', pgs. 208-221  
**Quiz 3**

### Week 7

- February 12 **Reflection 3 due**  
February 13 Davis, 'Slum Ecology'  
February 15 Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, chapter 2: 'Value in the Web of Life'

Week 8

- February 20 Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, chapter 4: 'The Tendency of the Ecological Surplus to Fall'
- February 22 Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, chapter 5: 'The Capitalization of Nature, or, The Limits of Historical Nature'

**Quiz 4**

Week 9

- February 26 **Reflection 4 due**
- February 27 Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, chapter 7: 'Anthropocene or Capitalocene?: On the Nature and Origins of Our Ecological Crisis'
- March 1 Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, conclusion: 'The End of Cheap Nature?'

Week 10

- March 6 McBrien, 'Accumulating Extinction: Planetary Catastrophism in the Necrocene'
- March 8 Klein, *This Changes Everything*, Chapter 13: 'The Right to Regenerate'
- March 18 **Final Paper Due**

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**Texts**

These are the texts we will be reading during our course. The first two are required; they will be available in the bookstore, although you can purchase them elsewhere. The remainder will be available as PDFs on our course's D2L page; I have included their bibliographical information here.

*Required texts*

1. Klein, Naomi. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014.
2. Moore, Jason W. *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*. New York: Verso, 2015.

*PDF sources*

1. Davis, Mike. *Planet of Slums*. New York: Verso, 2006.
2. Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
3. Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*. Trans. Ben Fowkes. New York: Penguin Books, 1982.
4. McBrien, Justin. "Accumulating Extinction: Planetary Catastrophism in the Necrocene." In *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*. Ed. Jason W. Moore. Dexter: PM Press, 2016.

5. Merchant, Carolyn. *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World (Second Edition)*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
6. Smith, Neil. *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008.

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### **Assignments and Course Structure**

1. *Reflections* (40%). Four reflections, each worth ten points, are to be turned in throughout the quarter (see the schedule above for due dates). Each reflection should be between 300 and 500 words long, and is to be submitted to the appropriate Dropbox folder by midnight on the due date. Your reflection will respond to the text that we will read in the *next* class (i.e., the reflection due on February 12<sup>th</sup> should respond to Mike Davis' 'Slum Ecology'.) In each reflection, you should seek to do three things:
  - a. *Summarize a key theme or central point* made in the reading to be discussed in the following class. What is the author claiming? How is this claim argued for or justified?
  - b. *Connect this theme or point* to the broader concerns of the class as a whole. How does this claim relate to the question of affect? How does it relate to other approaches or claims made by other authors we have encountered?
  - c. *Critically respond to this point* by evaluating the arguments made in its justification, questioning its stated or implicit premises or presuppositions, elaborating the strengths and weaknesses of the conceptual framework it establishes or relies on, etc.
2. *Quizzes* (20%). Four quizzes, each worth five points, will be administered throughout the quarter at the beginning of classes (see the schedule above for dates). Each quiz will be in multiple-choice format and will be designed to ensure that you are keeping up with the readings.
3. *Final Paper* (30%). One final paper, worth thirty points, is to be turned in ten days after the last class (March 18<sup>th</sup>). It should be 5-7 pages long (between 1300 and 1800 words), in 12-point Times New Roman or comparable serif font, and submitted to the appropriate Dropbox folder by midnight on the due date. Several weeks before the deadline, I will provide you with a number of detailed prompts, of which you will choose one.
4. *Attendance and Participation* (10%). In order to receive full credit, you must come to each class having read the assigned materials and prepared to regularly participate in ongoing discussions, to whatever extent you are physically and mentally capable.

*Late papers and reflections will not be accepted. There is no extra credit.*

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### **Classroom Rules**

Please come to class on time. Bring the assigned readings with you, having read them carefully and prepared for discussion. Please have your phones set to silent for the duration of the session, and do

not text. Laptops can only be used for taking notes with my explicit permission. Always be respectful toward all your fellow classmates, attentive when they speak, and charitable in interpreting and responding to their stated positions.

The classroom is a complex space in which people of diverse ethnic backgrounds, economic situations, genders, sexualities, abilities, ages, beliefs, and dispositions all come together to learn collectively. Be mindful of the way in which you interact with others, and know that you are responsible for helping to maintain an atmosphere for learning which is respectful and welcoming. If you fail to adhere to these guidelines, I reserve the right to lower your participation grade.

### **Plagiarism and Academic Integrity**

The DePaul University Undergraduate Student Handbook says the following with regard to plagiarism:

“Plagiarism occurs when one uses words, ideas, or work products attributed to an identifiable source, without attributing the work to the source from which it was obtained, in a situation where there is a legitimate expectation of original authorship in order to obtain benefit, credit, or gain.

Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following:

1. The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else’s.
2. Copying of any source in whole or part without proper acknowledgement.
  - a. This includes using others’ work, and
  - b. The reuse or repurposing of any previously submitted version of one’s own workproduct or data into a ‘new’ product without requesting permission from the current instructor (also known as ‘self-plagiarism’).
3. Submitting as one’s own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment that has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency.
4. The paraphrasing of another’s work or ideas without proper acknowledgement.”

**There is a zero tolerance policy for plagiarism in this class. Any instance of plagiarism will result in an automatic failure for the course.** Plagiarism is intellectually dishonest, insulting to your peers and instructors, and detrimental to your own development as a thinker. If you are unsure about how to cite a work, I will be more than happy to provide you with assistance.

### **Student Resources**

DePaul University offers the following resources for students, which you may want to take advantage of in order to make the most of your experience here.

*DePaul Writing Center*

<http://condor.depaul.edu/~writing/>

Lincoln Park Office: 802 W Belden, McGaw Hall, Room 150

Phone: 773.325.4272

*Office of Students with Disabilities*

<http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/studentwithdisabilities/index.html>

Lincoln Park Office: 2250 N Sheffield, Room 307

Phone: 773.325.7290

*PLMS* (provides services for students diagnosed with learning disabilities or attention deficit disorders)

<http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/plus/index.asp>

Lincoln Park Office: 2320 N Kenmore, SAC, Room 220 Phone: 773.325.1677

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**Office Hours and Availability**

I hold regular office hours in the philosophy department, which is housed at 2352 N Clifton Ave on the Lincoln Park campus. I will announce my office hours in class. I can also always be reached via email, and we can set up an appointment if those times do not work for you. Finally, know that our discussions need not be strictly limited to the themes or material in our class.