Course Description

This seminar will provide an overview of the history of the environmental sciences from ancient times to Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*. We will explore ways in which naturalists and lay people came to know the environment and in what ways nature could mobilize social and moral authority. With a focus on the history of the European environmental problems from the ancient Greeks, Middle Ages, to colonial and Modern experiences, we will survey different ways of knowing nature. Where did the idea of nature as “designed” come from? How did natural historians and philosophers unveil nature’s secrets? What role did scientists play in the colonial experiences? How could Modern scholars imagine “improving” the face of the Earth? These broad questions will guide us in our readings of a series of primary sources, including great and not-so-great books by Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Pliny, St. Francis, Evelyn, Grew, Bacon, Linnaeus, Buffon, Jefferson, Rousseau, Malthus and Darwin, as well as largely forgotten texts by anonymous authors and colonial explorers.

Course Objectives

The objective of this course is to learn something about the entangled history of our relationships to the natural world from ancient times to the work of Charles Darwin.

Required Texts/Online Resources


Plato, *Critias*, Benjamin Jowett (trs.).

Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, John Bostock and H.T. Riley (trs.) 1855.

Katherine Wentworth Rinne (et.al.), *Aquae Urbis Romae: The Waters of the City of Rome*.


Theophrastus, *Enquiry into Plants*.

**Required Assignments**

A one page book review/synopsis posted on the class website before class for all the primary sources. A 12 page final paper engaging at least three primary sources discussed in class due Dec. 15. Late papers are not accepted.

**Other Course Requirements**

This is a zero-footprint "green" course. All papers must be submitted electronically.

**Grading**
Mandatory attendance
20 % Course participation
30 % Book reviews/synopsis
50 % Final paper

Statement on Academic Integrity
"As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website."

Session by Session Details:

Sept. 6. Tuesday: Introductory meeting
No readings

Sept. 8. Thursday: Ancient Environments: Hippocrates

Sept. 13 Tuesday: Ancient environments: Plato
Plato, *Critias*, entire

Sept. 15 Thursday: Ancient environments: Aristotle

Sept. 20 Tuesday: Ancient environments: Theophrastus

Sept. 22 Thursday: Ancient Environments: Pliny
Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, selections (geography)

Sept. 27 Tuesday: Ancient Environments: Pliny

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Sept. 29  Thursday: Ancient Environments: Pliny

Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, selections (animals and plants)

Rinne (et.al.), *The Waters of the City of Rome* (website)

Oct. 4   Tuesday: Medieval Environments: Introduction

The Bible, *Genesis*


Oct. 6   Thursday: Medieval Environments: St. Francis of Assisi


St. Francis of Assisi, “Sermon to the Birds” and “Canticle of the Sun”


Oct. 11 Tuesday: Medieval Environments: Natural History


Aberth, *An Environmental History of the Middle Ages*, Part 3.

Oct. 13 Thursday: New Environments: West India

Anonymous, *Histoire Naturelle Des Indes*, 16th century (late), entire

Oct. 18 Tuesday: Early Modern Environments: Forestry


Oct. 20 Thursday: Early Modern Environments: Bacon
Oct. 25  **Tuesday: Rare Library Visit**

The Fales Library and Special Collections, Bobst  
70 Washington Square South, 3rd Fl.

We will look at:  
- Pliny, *Naturalis historia*, (Rotterdam, 1668-69).  

Oct. 27  **Thursday: Early Modern Environments: Grew**


Nov. 1  **Tuesday: New Environments: New England**

Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, entire.

Nov. 3  **Thursday: New Environments: Buffon**

Buffon, *Natural History*, 1781, selections  

Nov. 8  **Tuesday: New Environments: Jefferson**


Nov. 10  **Thursday: Modern Environments: Linnaeus**

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 82-94.  
Carolum Linnaeus, *A system of vegetables, according to their classes*, 1783.

Nov. 15  **Tuesday: Romantic Environments: Rousseau**

Nov. 17 Thursday: Animal Rights
Anonymous [Taylor], *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes*, 1792.

Nov. 22 Tuesday: Modern Environments: Paley

Nov. 24 Thursday: Thanksgiving recess! No class.

Nov. 29 Tuesday: Modern Environments: Lamarck
Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, *Zoological Philosophy or Exposition: Of the considerations relevant to the natural history of animals; to the diversity of their organic structure and of the faculties which they derive from it; to the physical causes sustaining life in them and producing the movements which they carry out; finally, to those causes which produce feeling in some and intelligence in others endowed with it*, 1809, part I: chapter 5 and 7.

Dec. 1 Thursday: Modernity: Malthus

Dec. 6 Tuesday: Evolutionary Biology: Charles Darwin
Guest: Leah Vaughan Aronowsky

Dec. 8 Thursday: Evolutionary Biology: Charles Darwin
Browne, *Darwin's Origin of Species*, 57-117.

Dec. 13 Tuesday: Legislative day (no class)

Dec. 15 Thursday: Summary/Last day of Class

*Paper due!*