

Instructor: Dr. Ted Toadvine ([toadvine@uoregon.edu](mailto:toadvine@uoregon.edu))  
Office Hours: TR 10:30 - 12:00, and by appointment, PLC 329  
Phone: 346-5554 (office)

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The concept of nature has undergone dramatic revision and critique during the last century under the influence of paradigm shifts in the sciences (e.g., evolution, quantum mechanics, systems theory), changing visions of the human relationship with the environment, and increasing attention to the concept's ideological deployments. Nevertheless, "philosophy of nature" is rarely recognized today as a distinct area of philosophical investigation. Our course redresses this "invisibility" of nature by tracing the fate of the concept in recent thought, considering the methods and motivations for a specifically philosophical engagement with nature, and evaluating this concept's resources for renewal in the wake of contemporary critiques. Our investigation proceeds in three stages, starting with a review of twentieth-century contributions to the metaphysics of nature including Bergsonism, positivism, pragmatist naturalism, process philosophy, cybernetics, living systems theory, and post-structuralism. Key themes emerging from these accounts include the place of life, mind, and meaning within nature; the evolution and creativity of natural systems; the relation between scientific and philosophical accounts of nature; and the expansion of the concept of nature beyond the limits of traditional materialism. Our second stage examines the contribution of phenomenological investigations of nature, addressing the significance of the transcendental perspective, the historical character of the concept, and phenomenological descriptions of nature's withdrawal, horizontality, sensibility, and ontological dimensions. The phenomenological treatment of nature poses the problems of how to reflect on nature from a position located within it, of the historical character of all inquiry into nature, and of the relationship between the lived experience of nature and its scientific description. Lastly, we consider contemporary critiques of the concept of nature from the perspective of its ideological and political function. Here, we will assess the significance of the fact that access to and description of nature is always culturally mediated and evaluate the role that the concept of nature has played at the heart of political discourse. Our guiding question: is the concept of nature exhausted or does it hold in reserve the potential for fruitful philosophical work today?

### **TEXTS**

Selections from the following texts will be made available through Blackboard:

- Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*
- Moritz Schlick, *The Philosophy of Nature*
- John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*
- John Dewey, *Art as Experience*
- Alfred N. Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*
- Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature*
- Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*
- Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*
- Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*
- Max Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*
- Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*
- Martin Heidegger, "Origin of the Work of Art"
- Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology"
- Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*
- Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*
- Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Intertwining—The Chiasm"
- Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis*
- Leonard Lawlor, "Becoming and Auto-Affection (Part II): Who are we?"
- David Wood, "What is Ecophenomenology?"
- William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*
- Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*
- Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*
- Kate Soper, "Nature/‘nature’"
- Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*
- Bruno Latour, *The Politics of Nature*

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. participation/attendance	10%
2. protocol	10%
3. term paper prospectus & annotated bibliography	20%
4. final term paper, ~12 pages	60%

**1. Participation/attendance:** You are expected to participate actively in this course, which includes attending every class, reading all assigned material prior to class, and participating productively and professionally in class discussions. Missing **three** classes *for any reason* will result in a full grade reduction. An additional full grade reduction will be made for each additional missed class after the third. Three late arrivals for class will count as one absence. The quality and quantity of your participation in the class discussion will be evaluated in assigning 10% of your final grade.

**2. Weekly course protocols:** Each participant will sign up to take special responsibility for one week of the course. During this week, you will be especially well-prepared to answer questions about the readings and introduce topics for class discussion. At the beginning of the following Tuesday class, you will read a short (two page) summary of the previous week's discussions. Your summary will be copied and distributed to the class to create an ongoing record of our progress. Your leadership in discussion and protocol for your week will be the basis for 10% of your final course grade.

**3. Term paper prospectus:** You will submit in the 8th week a prospectus of your final paper with two components: (1) a 2-3 page detailed description of the topic and outline of your proposed argument; and (2) an annotated bibliography of at least five primary or peer-reviewed secondary texts that you intend to consult (in addition to texts assigned for the course). Each annotation should be around one double-spaced page and include a summary of the book or article as well as an indication of its relevance for your project. Your prospectus must receive my approval in order for your final term paper to be accepted. The prospectus will be worth 20% of your final course grade.

**4. Final Term Paper:** Final papers should explore in detail a specific independently-chosen topic or theme related to the course and must include (a) examination of at least five scholarly sources in addition to course texts, and (b) the development of your own original position or critical response. Term papers should be around 12 double-spaced pages and must be stapled, proof-read, and use a standard system of citation (e.g., APA or Chicago). Papers are due on the date scheduled for the final exam, and extensions will be granted only in the case of genuine, documented emergencies. Late papers will lose one letter grade for each calendar day that they are late. Your term paper will count for 60% of your final course grade.

## POLICIES

**Incompletes and extensions** will be given only in the event of documented emergencies.

**Retaining copies of all coursework:** Please retain copies of all work submitted and the original copy of all work returned to you during the term until the final course grade has been posted. In the event of any question concerning whether grades have been accurately recorded, it is your responsibility to provide these copies as documentation.

**Computers and other electronic equipment:** Use of electronic equipment, including cell phones, pagers, MP3 players, AND LAPTOP COMPUTERS is prohibited during this class. Exceptions to the prohibition of laptops may be requested from the instructor and will be granted only for legitimate academic reasons. Use of laptops for academic reasons will be monitored throughout the term, and failure to restrict their use to this function will result in the revocation of any laptop privileges.

**Academic Honesty:** Please review and familiarize yourself with the provisions of the Code of Student Conduct regarding academic honesty. You can find a summary in each term's Schedule of Classes or by the Office of Student Life's Duck Guide: [http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/duck\\_guide/duckguide.htm](http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/duck_guide/duckguide.htm). Violations of academic honesty will be met with disciplinary action (the usual punishment is an "F" for the course). Definitions and examples of plagiarism, fabrication, and cheating are posted on Blackboard.

**Inclement Weather:** It is generally expected that class will meet unless the University is officially closed for inclement weather. If it becomes necessary to cancel class while the University remains open, this will be announced on Blackboard and through the Blackboard email system.

**Individual Differences:** If you experience difficulty in this course for any reason, please don't hesitate to consult with me. If you have a disability that may prevent you from fully demonstrating your abilities, you should contact me personally as soon as possible so we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure your full participation and facilitate your education process. The university offers a wide range of services to support you in your efforts to meet the course requirements, including the following:

- **Academic Learning Services (ALS):** ALS provides numerous resources (including courses, workshops, and tutoring) to help UO students succeed. They work with a diverse student body with a wide range of needs. If you are unsure which resources would work best, they are happy to answer questions and share suggestions. Web: <http://als.uoregon.edu> – Phone: 541-346-3226.

- **University Counseling and Testing Center (UCTC):** The UCTC provides comprehensive mental health care and testing services to the University of Oregon campus. The primary mission of the UCTC is to provide quality clinical/therapeutic services, psychological testing and assessment, psychoeducational workshops and outreach as well as emergency services. Web: <http://www.uoregon.edu/~counsel/> – Phone: 541-346-3227

- **Disability Services (DS):** DS coordinates services, provides advocacy and support to students with documented physical, learning, and psychological disabilities and provides assistance to the general campus community in responding appropriately to requests for accommodations based on disability. Web: <http://ds.uoregon.edu/> – Phone: 541-346-1155 TTY: 541-346-1083

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE (any changes to these assignments will be announced in class)

Week 1: 1/5, 1/7	<b>Introduction to the Course</b>  <b>I. The Metaphysics of Nature</b> <i>Elan vital</i>	Bergson, <i>Creative Evolution</i> , 1-97
Week 2: 1/12, 1/14	<i>Bergsonism and positivism</i>	Bergson, <i>Creative Evolution</i> , 98-185 Schlick, <i>The Philosophy of Nature</i> , 1-29, 71-87
Week 3: 1/19, 1/21	<i>The emergence of experience</i>	Dewey, <i>Experience and Nature</i> , 203-242 Dewey, <i>Art as Experience</i> , 3-19 Whitehead, <i>Modes of Thought</i> , 173-232
Week 4: 1/26, 1/28	<i>Cybernetics, autopoiesis, and expression</i>	Bateson, <i>Mind and Nature</i> , 1-128 Maturana and Varela, <i>Autopoiesis and Cognition</i> , 73-123 Grosz, <i>Chaos, Territory, Art</i> , 1-62
Week 5: 2/2, 2/4	<b>II. The Phenomenology of Nature</b> <i>Lifeworld and spirit</i>	Husserl, <i>The Crisis</i> , 21-59, 68-73, 121-147 Scheler, <i>The Human Place in the Cosmos</i> , 5-66
Week 6: 2/9, 2/11	<i>phusis and earth</i>	Heidegger, <i>Introduction to Metaphysics</i> , 1-54 Heidegger, "Origin of the Work of Art" Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology"
Week 7: 2/16, 2/18	<i>Gestalts, perception, and flesh</i>	Merleau-Ponty, <i>The Structure of Behavior</i> , 93-184 Merleau-Ponty, <i>Phenomenology of Perception</i> , 299-345 Merleau-Ponty, "The Intertwining—The Chiasm"
Week 8: 2/25 {class cancelled on 2/23}	<i>Phenomenology and/or naturalism</i>  <b>Term Paper Prospectus due, 2/25</b>	Hadot, <i>The Veil of Isis</i> , 7-28, 300-319 Lawlor, "Becoming and Auto-Affection (Part II)" Wood, "What is Ecophenomenology?"
Week 9: 3/2, 3/4	<b>III. The Politics of Nature</b> <i>Natureculture</i>	Cronon, <i>Uncommon Ground</i> , 23-56, 69-90 Latour, <i>We Have Never Been Modern</i> , 1-12 Morton, <i>Ecology Without Nature</i> , 140-205 Soper, "Nature/‘nature’"
Week 10: 3/9, 3/11	<i>Nature and democracy</i>	Serres, <i>The Natural Contract</i> , 1-124 Latour, <i>The Politics of Nature</i> , 1-52
Tuesday, 3/16, 5 pm.	<b>Term Papers Due</b> Philosophy office, 3rd floor of PLC	