

Contemplation and Political Change (SIS 315)

Spring 2012
Tuesdays 11:45-2:20

Professor Paul Wapner
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Office Hours: Mondays 1:15-3:15; Tuesdays 3:30-4:30; and by appointment

Course Description and Objectives

Environmental problems represent the most profound challenges humanity has ever faced. Climate change, loss of biological diversity, fresh water scarcity and toxic contamination threaten not simply the quality but the very viability of life on earth. How can we respond meaningfully and effectively to such issues? How can we engage political structures, and situate ourselves psychologically, ethically and spiritually in terms of the severe dangers they involve?

This course takes as its point of departure the view that environmental issues are not simply menacing dilemmas but also opportunities. They offer the chance to rebuild the external structures of global collective life, and develop the internal dimensions of our personal lives. In the first instance, they call into question current governmental, economic and cultural systems; in the second, they invite us to explore underdeveloped parts of ourselves that are being called upon at this unique eco-historical moment. The course invites students to reflect upon and develop strategies for engaging the environmental problematique in ways that explore both internal and external dimensions of political change. It does so through close readings of influential texts, essays that call upon students to integrate personal experience with categories of political analysis, lobbying government officials, engaging the media, and experiential practice with techniques aimed at enhancing self-knowledge and changing political structures.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course students will possess sound understanding of particular environmental issues, personal knowledge of the challenges and promises of environmental political engagement, social science techniques for analyzing power relations, and personal contemplative practices for developing one's political, psychological and spiritual capacities to confront environmental dilemmas.

While the course focuses substantively on environmental issues, at a higher level of abstraction it offers the chance for students to learn theoretical, analytical and practical methods for engaging any political challenge. By focusing on both internal and external dimensions of change, it provides ways of personally working with political dilemmas of all kinds.

Academic Integrity

American University requires all students to abide by its Academic Integrity Code. By registering for this course, you acknowledge your awareness of the Code, and you reiterate

your pledge to uphold it. The Code can be found at:

<http://www.american.edu/provost/registrar/regulations/reg80.cfm>

Requirements

- Class Participation (15%): Students are expected to complete weekly readings before each session, and participate actively and in an informed manner in class discussions.
- Group Project/Research Paper (50%): Students work in groups to understand a given environmental dilemma and practice political change. Students will submit parts of the paper throughout the semester, and a final version at the end of the semester. Students will present their projects on the final day of classes. (See end of syllabus for more information.)
- Lobbying (5%): As part of their project, students will lobby their congressional representatives on their given research issue. Non-US citizens will accompany their US classmates.
- Letters to Editor (5%): As part of their project, students will write and submit two letters to the editor of relevant newspapers. (This can include *The Eagle*.)
- Journal (10%): Students are required to keep a daily journal in which they will respond to prompts provided through *The Book of Awakening*. They need to write, at a minimum, three entries each week.)
- Quizzes (15%): A number of times during the semester students will complete short quizzes to demonstrate their grasp of reading assignments.

PLEASE NOTE: For reasons of justice, all papers must be submitted by the due date. Late papers will be penalized a half letter grade per day.

Readings

Readings will be drawn from books and articles. The following books have been ordered from the American University bookstore for purchase. Additional readings are available through e-reserves.

- Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Boston: Beacon Press 2006.
- Paul Wapner, *Living through the End of Nature: The Future of American Environmentalism*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2010.
- Stephanie Kaza, *Mindfully Green: A Personal and Spiritual Guide to Whole Earth Thinking*, Boston: Shambhala 2008.
- Mark Nepo, *The Book of Awakening*, San Francisco: Canari 2011.
- Moleskine Journal (ruled or unruled)

Classroom Dynamics

Computers are unwelcome in class. (If you need a computer for taking notes, please see me.) Please refrain from texting or checking cell phone messages during class.

Course Outline

WEEK ONE (1/17): Introduction

WEEK TWO (1/24): Commitment

- Tracy Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, New York: Random House, 2009, pp. 3-44. Reserve
- Parker Palmer, *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011, pp. 175-193. Reserve
- Timothy DeChristopher, "Tim's Story," *Peaceful Uprising*, (<http://www.peacefuluprising.org/tim-dechristopher/tims-story>)
 - "Tim DeChristopher Spoken Word" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PY4JbVVzebg&feature=related>)
 - "Tim DeChristopher speaks after Verdict" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cae5Pr7CHgk&feature=related>)
- Alex Foster, "Interview with Channel 18, Cape Cod," <http://vimeo.com/34865300>

WEEK THREE (1/31): The Challenge (*Identify Research Topic*)

- Thomas Friedman, *Hot, Flat and Crowded*, pp. 63-109. Reserve
- Arthur Koestler, "The Yogi and the Commissar," from, *The Yogi and the Commissar and Other Essays*, pp. 3-14. Reserve
- David Duncan, "Man of Two Minds," *Sierra*, September 2000, (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1525/is_5_85/ai_64426308/)

WEEK FOUR (2/7): Structural Change (*Project Teams Formation*) (Quiz I)

- Annie Leonard, "The Story of Stuff," (<http://www.storyofstuff.org/movies-all/story-of-stuff/>)
- Aric McBay, Lierre Keith and Derrick Jensen, *Deep Green Resistance*, New York: Seven Stories Press 2011, pp. 11-59; 193-238. Reserve
- Vanda Scaravelli, *Awakening the Spine*, London: Labyrinth Printing, 1991, pp. 8-13; 31-42. Reserve

WEEK FIVE (2/14): Lifestyle Change (*Carry and collect all trash from Saturday through Tuesday; bring to class*) (*Problem Statement Due*)

- Colin Beavan, *No Impact Man*, New York: Picadour 2009 (entire), OR "No Impact Man" (movie)
- Kurt Hoelting, *The Circumference of Home: One Man's Yearlong Quest for a Radically Local Life*, New York: De Capo, 2010., pp. xi-xx. Reserve

- Elizabeth Kolbert, "Green Like Me," *New Yorker*, August 31, 2009 at: http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2009/08/31/090831crat_atlarge_kolbert.

WEEK SIX (2/21): Interior Change I (*Political Analysis Due*) (Quiz II)

- Frankl, pp. 3-96
- Michael Lee, "The Edge," *Yoga Journal*, March/April 1995, p. 104-105. Reserve

WEEK SEVEN (2/28): Interior Change II (*meet in SIS Founders Room*)

- Frankl, pp. 97-154.
- Mike Tidwell, "A Climate Activist Prepares for the Worst," *Washington Post*, (Outlook Section), February 25, 2011, (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/25/AR2011022503176.html>)
- Mitchell Ratner, "Learning to Trust the Present Moment," *The Mindfulness Bell*, Summer 2002.
- Ram Dass, *Grist for the Mill*, Santa Cruz, CA: Unity Press, 1976, pp. 50-57; 135-151. Reserve

WEEK EIGHT (3/6): Projects (*Letter to the Editor I Due*) (*Political Engagement Due*)

- Ram Dass, *Journey of Awakening*, New York: Bantam, 1985, pp. 1-25. Reserve

(SPRING BREAK: March 11-18)

WEEK NINE (3/20): Living through the End of Nature I

- Wapner, pp. 1-106.

WEEK TEN (3/27): Living through the End of Nature II (Quiz III)

- Wapner, pp. 107-219.

WEEK ELEVEN (4/3): Green Principles (*Lobbying Day: Meet on Capitol Hill*)

- Stephanie Kaza, *Mindfully Green*, pp. ix-49.
- Leslie Thiele, *Indra's Net and the Midas Touch*, pp. 21-56. Reserve
- Jack Kornfield, *A Path with Heart*, New York: Bantam Books 1993, pp. 56-64, 71-82. Reserve

WEEK TWELVE (4/10): Green Path (*Letter to the Editor II Due*)

- Stephanie Kaza, *Mindfully Green*, pp. 53-100.
- Julia Butterfly, "The Legacy of Luna," in Bill McKibben, ed., *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*, New York: Library of America, pp. 907-918. Reserve
- David Abram, "Returning to our Animal Senses," *Wild Earth*, pp. 209-215. Reserve

WEEK THIRTEEN (4/17): Green Practice (Your Efforts Due) (Quiz IV)

- Stephanie Kaza, *Mindfully Green*, pp. 101-152.
- Paul Wapner, "Buddhism and Environmental Politics," Public Broadcasting Service: The Buddha (movie), at: <http://www.pbs.org/thebuddha/blog/2010/Mar/10/buddhism-and-environmental-politics-paul-wapner/>
- Paul Wapner, "The Case for Contemplative Environmental Studies," unpublished manuscript.

WEEK FOURTEEN (4/24): Toward a Whole Environmental Politics (Presentations)

- Michael Pollan, "Why Bother," *New York Times Magazine*, April 20, 2008, <http://michaelpollan.com/articles-archive/why-bother/>

FINAL PAPERS DUE: 5/8

Phases of Project and Sections for Final Paper

1. **Problem Statement** (2 pages)
2. **Political Analysis:** What are the main causes of the issue? How does power operate in constructing and responding to the challenge? (5 pages)
3. **Political Engagement:** What is to be done (even if you cannot advance such change)? This is your proposal for the kinds of activities you will undertake. State the goal of your efforts (what change do you hope to bring about), and outline your strategies. Also, explain why you are choosing these strategies (3-5 pages)
 - a. External structural change (what do you hope to change and which strategies will you employ?)
 - b. Lifestyle alteration (commit to changing practices for a circumscribed amount of time: e.g., 1-2 weeks.)
 - c. Interior outlook and experience (how will you systematically reflect on the success of your efforts knowing that you will not solve the problem)
4. **Your efforts:** What did you do during the semester? How do your actions fit into your understanding of political change? (2 pages for each level of engagement)
5. **Conclusion:** How does political change work? What did you learn during the semester with regard to your project? (7-10 pages) (Each student will write this section.)

Please provide parenthetical citations, including page numbers, and a works cited list at the end of each document. Also, provide a title, and write with sub-headings.

Students will have the opportunity to revise their papers throughout the semester in preparation for their final submission.