POLITICAL THEORIES OF THE ENVIRONMENT
Lent Term 2023

Course Description
What is nature, and what remains of nature today? What is the relationship between humans and the environment? Why should we care? In response to such questions, this course will introduce ideas of the good life and strategies for political action in the era of climate change. Specifically, we will

(1) Reconsider conventional political concepts (such as agency, democracy, humanity, and sovereignty) in light of both the environmental crisis and theories of material agency;
(2) Examine connections between sexism, racism, historical inequalities, and environmental destruction;
(3) Reimagine sustainable forms of living-together on earth that acknowledge shared agency between human beings, nonhuman organisms, and inorganic materialities.

The course combines readings in political theory, environmental humanities, eco-feminism, and media studies. It also includes various artworks in the discussions.

Instructor
Dr. Franziska Strack

[Email]

Office Hours: [Day, Time, Location]
I will also be available to speak after each class. If neither option works for you, please send me an e-mail and we will decide on another time to meet.

Organization
Seminars: Friday, 5–7 PM. [Location]

Accommodation: If you require additional accommodation, please contact me.

Assessment
Preparation and Active Participation (10%): You are asked to prepare the mandatory readings prior to each session and actively partake in the discussions. Active participation includes critically analyzing texts, making comparisons between them, and engaging with your classmates’ comments in a respectful manner.

Responses (30%): Each week, you will pick a quote which, in your opinion, captures a core aspect of one of the texts. You then formulate a short response (in form of a question, discussion, critique, …) that explains I) why the aspect caught your attention, and II) why you think it is important to talk about it in the context of our course. The response should not be longer than one page and be sent to me before noon on the day of the session.

Final Essay (60%): At the end of the term, you will write an essay of about 3,000 words about a topic of your own choosing that relates to the course topic. Please meet with me if you would like to develop a topic together. The essay is due on [Date] March 2023.
SESSIONS

Session 1) Earth, Ecology, and the Elements

Mandatory Readings


Further Readings


Session 2) Theories of Nature

Mandatory Readings


Further Readings

Session 3) Earth, Land, and Stones

Mandatory Readings

- Smithson, Robert. 1996. “A Sedimentation of the Mind” (pp. 100–13), “The Spiral Jetty” (pp. 143–53), and “Earth” (pp. 177–87). *The Collected Writings*, University of California Press.

Further Readings


Session 4) Air and Atmosphere

Mandatory Readings


Further Reading


Session 5) Water

Mandatory Readings


Further Readings

Session 6) Fire and Fossil Fuels

Mandatory Readings


Further Readings


Session 7) Of Metals, Futures, and the Cosmos

Mandatory Readings


Further Readings