

Scarcity: Economy and Nature

BC HIST 3177

Professor Wennerlind
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Milstein 806

Spring 2020

Wed. 12:10-2:00

Seminar

Brief Course Description:

Current patterns of economic growth are no longer environmentally sustainable. Global industrialization and the associated transference of carbon from the ground to the air are leading to a rapid exhaustion of resources and a warming of the planet. These changes have triggered a set of dangerous climactic transformations that are likely to cause massive ecological disruptions and disturbances of food production systems. These changes, in turn, might have a profound impact on poverty, migration, and geopolitics. To better understand how we have arrived at the present predicament, this seminar explores the history of how social and economic theorists have conceptualized the interaction between the economy and nature. The focus will be on the concept of scarcity as a way of understanding the relationship between economic growth and environmental sustainability. The course begins in the Renaissance and traces the evolution of the nature/economy nexus to the present.

Learning Objectives:

Students will gain a facility to think critically and historically about the relationship between capitalism and nature, exploring the proposition that humanity has entered a new era: the *Anthropocene* or perhaps the *Capitalocene*. By examining the history of how major philosophers, political theorists, and economists have theorized the dialectic between society and nature, students will acquire the capacity to think outside contemporary models of infinite economic growth and perhaps form their own ideas about how future economic systems might restore sustainable forms of economic improvement.

Assignments:

The seminar will be organized around discussions and short-response papers (6x2-page papers). Students will also write one longer essay (8 pages) on an historical theme of their choice and one shorter essay (5 pages) on the future of nature and the economy. Participation (25%), historical paper (25%), future paper (25%), and short response papers (25%),

Readings: Books marked with * should be purchased at Book Culture. The rest of the readings are available through Canvas/Courseworks.

Use of Electronics: Students are not permitted to use laptops or cellphones during class sessions.

Honor Code: The honor code will be strictly enforced. Plagiarism in any form will be penalized with an F on the assignment and an F in the course.

The Barnard Honor Code (Approved by the student body in 1912 and updated in 2016, the Code states):

We, the students of Barnard College, resolve to uphold the honor of the College by engaging with integrity in all of our academic pursuits. We affirm that academic integrity is the honorable creation and presentation of our own work. We acknowledge that it is our responsibility to seek clarification of proper forms of collaboration and use of academic resources in all assignments or exams. We consider academic integrity to include the proper use and care for all print, electronic, or other academic resources. We will respect the rights of others to engage in pursuit of learning in order to uphold our commitment to honor. We pledge to do all that is in our power to create a spirit of honesty and honor for its own sake.

Wellness Statement:

It is important for undergraduates to recognize and identify the different pressures, burdens, and stressors you may be facing, whether personal, emotional, physical, financial, mental, or academic. We as a community urge you to make yourself--your own health, sanity, and wellness--your priority throughout this term and your career here. Sleep, exercise, and eating well can all be a part of a healthy regimen to cope with stress. Resources exist to support you in several sectors of your life, and we encourage you to make use of them. Should you have any questions about navigating these resources, please visit these sites:

- <http://barnard.edu/primarycare>
- <http://barnard.edu/counseling>
- <http://barnard.edu/wellwoman/about>
- [Stressbusters Support Network](#)

ODS Statement:

If you are a student with a documented disability and require academic accommodations, you must visit the Office of Disability Services (ODS) for assistance. Students requesting eligible accommodations in their courses will need to first meet with an ODS staff member for an intake meeting. Once registered, students are required to visit ODS each semester to set up new accommodations and learn how to notify faculty. Accommodations are not retroactive, so it is best to register with ODS early each semester to access your accommodations. If you are registered with ODS, please see me to schedule a meeting outside of class in which you can bring me your faculty notification letter and we can discuss your accommodations for this course. Students are not eligible to use their accommodations in this course until they have met with me. ODS is located in Milbank Hall, Room 008.

Center for Accessibility Resources & Disability Services (CARDS) Statement If you believe you may encounter barriers to the academic environment due to a documented disability or emerging health challenges, please feel free to contact me and/or the Center for Accessibility Resources & Disability Services (CARDS). Any student with approved academic accommodations is encouraged to contact me during office hours or via email. If you have questions regarding registering a disability or receiving accommodations for the semester, please contact CARDS at (212) 854- 4634, cards@barnard.edu, or learn more at barnard.edu/disabilityservices. CARDS is located in 101 Altschul Hall.

Topics and Readings:

Week 1 (January 21): Introduction

David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth* (2019)

Week 2 (January 29): A History of Scarcity

Nicholas Xenos, *Scarcity and Modernity* (1989)

Week 3 (February 5): The Neolithic Revolution

*James Scott, *Against the Grain* (2017)

Marshall Sahlins, "The Original Affluent Society," in *Stone Age Economics* (1972)

Week 4 (February 12): Early Modern Ideas of Nature and Economy

Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (1983), Chapter 1

Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis* (2006), Part II-V

Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government* (2000), Part I

Week 5 (February 19): Insatiable Appetites

*David Wootton, *Power, Pleasure, and Profit* (2018)

Week 6 (February 26): The Death of Nature

*Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature* (1976), Chapters 1, 5, 7

Paul Slack, *The Invention of Improvement* (2015), Chapter 5

Week 7 (March 4): Industrial Revolution

Paul Burkett, *Marx and Nature* (2014), Part II

Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital* (2016), Chapters 14-16

E. A. Wrigley, *Energy and the English Industrial Revolution* (2010), Part I

Week 8 (March 11): Carbon Democracy

Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy* (2011)

(March 13) First Paper Due

Week 9 (March 25): The Anthropocene

McNeil and Engelke, *The Great Accelerations* (2013)

F. Albritton Jonsson, "Growth in the Anthropocene," in *Scarcity in the Modern World* (2019)

Week 10 (April 1): The Capitalocene

*Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life* (2015), Part I-II

Jason Moore, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?* (2016), Chapters 6-7

Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene* (2017), Chapter 9-11

Week 11 (April 8): Remaking Scarcity

Costas Panayotakis, *Remaking Scarcity* (2011)

Week 12 (April 15): Abundance

Dugger and Peach, *Economic Abundance* (2009), Part I-II
Diamandis and Kotler, *Abundance* (2012), Part I, V
*Juliet Schor, *True Wealth* (2011), Chapters 4-5

Week 13 (April 22): Sufficiency

Skidelsky and Skidelsky, *How Much is Enough?* (2012), Chapters 4-7
Diane Coyle, *The Economics of Enough* (2011), Chapters 1-5, 9
Dana Simmons, *Vital Minimum* (2015), Chapters 1, 2, 5, 7

Week 14 (April 29): Future Options

Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (2004), Pages 1-145.
Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics* (2017), Chapters 1-2, 13
Wendy Harcourt and Ingrid Nelson, *Practicing Feminist Political Ecologies*, Chapters 1, 2, 7, 8

Week 15 (May 7): Final Paper Due