Barnard College
Department of Political Science

The Politics of Nature

Dr. Alyssa Battistoni
Assistant Professor of Political Science
Office hours: Thursdays 2-4pm, or by appointment.
To schedule in advance: https://calendly.com/alyssabattistoni
Milstein 1115
abattistoni@barnard.edu

POLS BC3120
Fall 2023
Wednesdays 11am-12:50 pm
308 Diana Center

Course description

Nature and politics have often been counterposed in political thought: politics is understood to be a distinctly human activity, perhaps even the defining human activity, while nature describes the material world as it operates independently from human action; politics concerns the realm of decisions about how things will and ought to be, while nature names that which simply is and cannot be changed. What, then, does it mean to think about the politics of nature? We will begin by examining the ways that political thinkers have understood nature in general before moving into specifically ecological thought and ending by reflecting on the central challenges of nature and politics today. Themes addressed include the role of science in politics, the challenges of politics on a global or planetary scale, the political and moral status of nonhuman nature, and the relationship between nature and economics.

Student learning outcomes

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of different concepts of "nature" as commonly deployed in political theory and other traditions of thought
- Analyze and interpret the significance of these concepts for ethical, moral, and political positions
- Critically assess relevant theoretical frameworks and policy measures, including but not limited to those dealing with environmental issues.

- Clearly and persuasively express and defend ideas in writing and speech, with reference to both textual argument and original analysis
- Independently research and write a substantial and original research paper

Course requirements, expectations, and guidelines

Assignments and grading

Your grade in this course will be based on three main criteria: class participation, a short essay, and a research paper, as outlined below.

1. Class participation 20%
    a. Contributions to discussion 10%
    b. Leading discussion 5%
    c. Discussion questions 5%
2. Short essay (3-4 pages), due **November 1**: 20%
3. Research paper, 60%
    a. Topic proposal (2-3 paragraphs), due **September 27**: 5%
    b. Research update: annotated source list and outline (2-3 pages), due **October 11**: 10%
    c. Draft and writer's memo (1-2 pages): due **November 15**: 10%
    d. Peer feedback**, due November 29**: 5%
    e. Final draft (15-20 pages) and revision statement (1-2 pages): due **December 15**: 30%

Late work will be penalized by 1/3 of a grade for each day it is late, unless you have made arrangements with me in advance. I am willing to grant extensions, but you must request one more than 24 hours in advance of the deadline. The standard extension I will grant is 48 hours: in my experience, when deadlines extend too long, work piles up and becomes difficult to complete. If there are extenuating circumstances for which you require a longer extension, please speak to me.

Logistical but important: **please include your name both in the document and in the saved title** (e.g. Battistoni—Topic Proposal). It will make it much easier for me to keep track of your work!

Participation

In-class participation: Attendance, preparation, and conduct

Colloquia are reading-intensive courses for advanced students in the major. The average reading is 100-150 pages per week; some readings may be dense. I strongly recommend taking notes in some form, whether in the margins of the text or in a separate document.

The point of colloquia is to work through complicated ideas together and develop our own ideas in conversation. On the one hand, this means paying close attention to the texts in question: you should come to class having completed the assigned readings and should be prepared to discuss them. We will often look closely at particular passages in class, and you should be prepared to reference specific parts of the text in making your own arguments, so please bring a copy of the assigned reading with you.

This also means paying close attention to one another—whether helping one another to understand difficult arguments, considering the different possible interpretations of the same text, or debating the various political conclusions one might draw from it. As we will see, there is rarely one way to interpret a text. I expect everyone in section to listen to each other respectfully and engage thoughtfully with one another's ideas, even—especially—when you disagree. Your participation grade will be based off your demonstration of both of these elements: engagement with the texts and with your classmates, which means that it will reflect listening as well as speaking.

Because the success of a colloquium depends on participation, **attendance in class meetings is mandatory**. You can miss one class meeting for any reason without it affecting your participation grade. (If the COVID situation changes, I may revisit this policy.) If you need to miss more classes, please speak with me.

Discussion questions

Each week before class, please post three questions or points for discussion concerning the week's readings to CourseWorks. These are due by 8am the morning of class (Wednesday). They should be both substantive and substantial; they may raise questions about the assigned reading, critique an author's analysis, or raise an issue or theme that you found to be particularly interesting. Where relevant, they should include citations to the texts in question so we can all locate the passage or phrase in question. You are welcome to reference and engage texts from other weeks, but you should focus on the assigned readings for each week. I will use these questions to help structure our discussion. They will not be graded, but I expect them to show thought and care; if I am consistently concerned about the quality of your questions I may ask you to revise them. **You do not need to submit discussion questions the week that you are a discussion leader, and you may skip two additional weeks at your discretion.**

Leading discussion

Once in the course of the semester, you will be responsible for leading discussion **by giving a ~10 minute presentation about the week's readings and key themes**. Your presentation should address three things:

- Identify **one passage** from any of the assigned texts and write a short response (~350 words) undertaking a close reading of the passage and explaining why you chose it for us to focus on: what idea does it illustrate? How does it operate in the text more broadly? How does it connect to other readings from this week?
- Note **one point of agreement or overlap** amongst two or more texts, and **one point of disagreement or distinction.**
- Identify **2-3 substantive discussion questions** for the class to address

Please post your passage and response to Courseworks by 5pm the evening before class (i.e., 5pm Tuesday evening), so that other students can review it before class. In class, you will give a short (~10 min) presentation outlining the key themes you have identified (***not* summarizing the readings**) and sharing your discussion questions and passage. (I will generally begin class by giving an overview of the readings, their authors, and their context, so you can focus on substantive content.) I strongly recommend that you use PowerPoint or a similar presentation software so that

we can follow along; I will provide any necessary A/V equipment. We will spend a few minutes reading the passage closely so please come prepared to guide us through it.

Laptop policy

In my experience, laptops tend to inhibit our ability to engage with others in the same room, and often prove distracting both to their users and to others. Recent studies also suggests that the use of laptops to take notes has a negative impact on students' grades. While I have made course readings available via Canvas in the interest of accessibility, I strongly urge you to print out the readings or use a tablet rather than your laptop to access them in class, although the decision is ultimately up to you. (I am happy to print articles for you if you need help with printing!) However, I expect all students, whether using laptops or not, to be attentive and responsive in class, and to make eye contact with me and one another. Inconsiderate laptop use will affect your participation grade. Please do not use cell phones in class.

Academic Integrity and Generative AI

Learning is always a collective process, and recognizing what we have learned from others is a core academic practice, as reflected in Barnard's Honor Code (below). Plagiarism, use of others' work without appropriate citation, reuse of one's own material, and other forms of concealing the sources of one's ideas and work are serious academic offenses.

This includes the use of generative AI tools and large learning models like ChatGPT. As you are surely aware, these tools have been the subject of a great deal of academic discussion. Like many other faculty members, I am concerned about the potential effects of ChatGPT use on the development of students' reading, writing, and research abilities. Using ChatGPT to write papers and develop ideas, however, is a waste of both your time and mine: I am interested in what you have to say, not what ChatGPT aggregates from other people's thoughts, and I hope you are too. Frankly, there is no reason to take a class on the politics of nature if you are not interested in developing your own thinking, ideas, and arguments.

That said, organizing assignments and assessments entirely around the aim of blocking your use of ChatGPT or catching you in the act seems to me to be both undesirable and futile. I am here to help you learn, not to discipline you. You may use ChatGPT in early stages of research and compiling sources—although you should always cite it when you do so, and you should be aware that ChatGPT is prone to errors in its own right. You should not use it to generate the written material that you submit for your discussion questions, outlines, papers, or other material. If I do find that you have used ChatGPT to generate writing assignments submitted as your own work, I will treat it as the case of plagiarism that it is. Please do not hesitate to ask me questions if you are confused about what is permitted; we are all new to this and will try to figure it out together.

Short essay

There is one short essay for this course, designed to help you think through central course themes on a topic related to your final essay. We will discuss your short essay topic in a meeting about your research outline (see below). **This essay should be 3-4 pages, and should make a clear and original argument that is supported with textual evidence from the relevant material.** This

paper is intended to develop your skills as close readers, interpreters, and critics of texts; as such it should creatively interpret and engage with the assigned readings. It is also intended to help you ground your final research paper in course material. As such, you can use some material from your short essay in the final paper, though you should not reuse the *entire* paper.

Research paper

The major project of this course is a research paper, which you will develop over the course of the semester. You are free to choose a paper topic of personal interest that addresses the themes, ideas, and concepts addressed in the course. The paper does not have to synthesize all course material, but it should reflect an engagement with the subject matter and themes we have addressed throughout the course. The essays you produce should be both analytical and argumentative in nature, not simply descriptive or factual. While we will discuss how to build an argument over the course of the semester, getting from a topic to an argument requires steady work. With that in mind, you'll be responsible for a series of assignments along the way to help you set up your papers and craft your arguments, with the aim of helping you make steady progress throughout the semester. Each component should be submitted before the beginning of class on the due date.

a. ***Topic statement*, due September 27**: A 2-3 paragraph (~250-300 words) statement outlining the topic you plan to research, what interests you about it, what you already know, and what you would like to learn. Think through some of the questions you will need to answer in order to write an effective, informative, and analytical essay on this topic – you can list these in bullet points if you want—and spend a sentence or two describing the kinds of evidence and sources you anticipate using (e.g. histories, legal cases, scientific data).

   I realize that this assignment comes early in the course—your topic can change, but it will help to start thinking about it sooner than later.

b. ***Research outline*, due October 11:** A 2-3 page outline including your tentative thesis statement, description of the types of evidence you will use to support your argument, and a list of at least 10 sources, cited in Chicago style, with short annotations (1-2 sentence summaries of the source and why you think it will be useful for your paper). Your thesis should make an argument with which someone could disagree, and the rest of the outline should show how you will offer convincing support for it, both via textual evidence and original analysis. You should discuss your research outline with me in advance of writing your first draft; in this meeting we will also discuss the topic for your short paper. I also strongly recommend meeting with Jennie Correia, Barnard's research librarian for the social sciences: https://library.barnard.edu/profiles/jennie-correia

c. ***Draft and writer's memo,* due November 15**: No one does their best work in the first draft: good papers are revised papers. To begin the writing process early enough to revise your work, you will be responsible for **a draft of the first ~10 pages of your paper**, followed by an outline of the remaining sections. This draft does not need to be perfect, and it is obviously not expected to be complete, but it should be written as a paper rather than an extended outline (e.g. full paragraphs rather than bullet points; a clear introduction and thesis; etc.). I will provide comments on the draft and your plans for completion within one

week of receipt to help guide your revision and final draft. **You will also be responsible for reading another student's paper and giving peer feedback.**

Writer's memo: Along with your draft, you should submit a 1-2 page memo addressing the following issues:

- A short discussion of your writing process thus far: have you changed your mind about anything as you conducted research?
- One or two elements you see as strengths of the draft thus far
- One or two things you would like to improve
- Anything you are struggling with or would like particular feedback on

Peer feedback: Feedback from peers is another crucial part of the writing process. I will assign writing peers, and you will share your drafts with one another and provide comments. Your comments should be constructive and respectful. **Peer feedback is due two weeks after draft papers (November 29).**

d. ***Final draft*, due December 15**: Final draft of the paper (15-20 pages). You do not need to incorporate or accept all of my suggestions for revision, nor those of your peer reviewer—this is your paper, and your argument, and you may disagree with other people's feedback. It should reflect an engagement with those comments, however. To this end, your paper should be accompanied by a 1-2 page revision statement explaining how you revised your paper from the rough draft, why you made the changes you did, and whether and how you responded to comments. (If you chose not to adopt certain suggestions, you can say why.)

Office hours & communication

I will hold office hours weekly on Thursdays from 2-4 pm in my office at 1115 Milstein. We can also speak via Zoom during these times. If you want to secure a spot in advance, you can book a slot at https://calendly.com/alyssabattistoni, but you should also feel free to stop by without an appointment. If you are unavailable to meet during office hours, please email me to make an appointment. Meetings outside of normal office hours may be held on Zoom. **I strongly advise you to come to office hours!** We can discuss anything related to the course—a difficult passage from a text, an idea for a paper, questions about my comments on a draft, confusion about an assignment, concerns about your performance, something you found interesting in the reading that we didn't get to in class.

You can email me at any time at my Barnard email address (abattist@barnard.edu), and during the week, I will generally respond within twenty-four hours. (I may be slower to respond on weekends, so please try to avoid making urgent requests on Saturday evenings!) If you email me and don't hear back, please don't hesitate to follow up—I will appreciate the reminder. **If you have a substantive question** (e.g., "what does Latour mean by the modern constitution?"), please come talk to me in person. **If you have a logistical question, check the syllabus first**, and email me if you can't find the answer. I will contact you via your college email address, so please make sure to check it regularly or set up email forwarding if you use a different email account.

Other resources

The course assignments are designed to give you regular practice and feedback on your writing and speaking skills over the course of the semester, and I encourage you to speak with me if there are any particular aspects of these skills that you are struggling with or hoping to improve. However, Barnard also offers many other resources to support you in developing these skills:

- **Writing Fellows and Speaking Fellows** at the Erica Mann Jong '63 Writing Center: https://writing.barnard.edu/
- **Research support**: Jennie Correia serves as Research and Instruction Librarian for the Social Sciences, and is available for research consultations here: https://library.barnard.edu/profiles/jennie-correia

---

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.

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): (212) 854-4634, cards@barnard.edu, or learn more at barnard.edu/disabilityservices. CARDS is located in 101 Altschul Hall. More generally, please contact me to discuss any accommodations you may require.

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:

- http://barnard.edu/primarycare
- https://barnard.edu/about-counseling
- http://barnard.edu/wellwoman/about

Affordable Access to Course Texts & Materials Statement

All students deserve to be able to study and make use of course texts and materials regardless of cost. Barnard librarians have partnered with students, faculty, and staff to find ways to increase student access to textbooks. A number of cost-free or low-cost methods for accessing some types of course texts are detailed on the Barnard Library **Course Materials** guide **(https://library.barnard.edu/find-borrow/course-materials)**.

Undergraduate students who identify as first-generation and/or low-income students may check out items from the **FLI Partnership Libraries** in the Barnard Library **(https://library.barnard.edu/find-borrow/FLIpartnership)** and in Butler Library for an entire semester. Students may also consult with their professors, the Dean of Studies, and the Financial Aid Office about additional affordable alternatives for having access to course texts.

Readings

All course readings will be made available via CourseWorks.

Course schedule and reading list

Week 1 (September 6): Introduction

Part I: Nature in modern Western political thought

In the first section of the course we will consider dominant understandings of nature, and of the relationship between human beings and nonhuman nature, within "canonical" texts of modern western political thought as well as more recent works. We will concentrate in particular on two recurring ideas: the idea that growing control over nature is a sign of human progress, and a critical view which identifies alienation from or destruction of nature as a sign of decline.

Week 2 (September 13): Mastering nature

- Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis* (1626), excerpts; & "Outline of a Natural and Experimental History, adequate to serve as the basis and foundation of True Philosophy" (1620)
- Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now* (2018)*:* Chapters 5-8, 22
- The Breakthrough Institute, "Ecomodernist Manifesto" (2015)

Week 3 (September 20): Cast out of the garden? Critics of the Enlightenment

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts* (1750), all; *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (1755), excerpts
- Carolyn Merchant, "The Death of Nature," *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology* (1993 [1980])

Week 4 (September 27): Capitalism: owning nature

Research topic proposal due

- John Locke, *First Treatise on Government* (1689), Chapter IV: "Of Adam's Title to Sovereignty, by Donation, Gen. i. 28"; *Second Treatise on Government* (1689), Chapter 5: "Of Property"
- C.B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (1962): Chapter 5, "Locke: The Political Theory of Appropriation" (excerpts)
- Karl Marx, *Capital* Vol 1: Chapter 7 part 1, "The Labor Process"; Chapter 26, "The Secret of So-Called Primitive Accumulation"
- Rob Nichols, *Theft is Property! Dispossession and Critical Theory* (2019): Introduction, 1-13; Chapter 1. (Recommended: Chapter 2)

Week 5 (October 4): Alienation from nature

- Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (1844), "Estranged Labor"; *The German Ideology* (1846), excerpts: "First Premises of the Materialist Method"; "History: Fundamental Conditions"; "Private Property and Communism"
- Donald Lee, "On the Marxian View of the Relationship between Man and Nature." *Environmental Ethics* 2 (1980): 3–16.
- Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (1986): "Toward a Feminist Perspective on a New Society," 209-219.
- Simon Hailwood, *Alienation and Nature in Environmental Philosophy* (2015), Introduction

Part II: Politics of and about nature

In the second section of the course, we will consider political projects which explicitly identify nature as a distinct entity, object or issue: politics, in other words, which don't simply assume nature as a backdrop or resource for human life, but take nature to be a political issue in its own right. We will consider different ways of thinking about nature: as wilderness apart from humans; a relationship in which humans are enmeshed; as "the environment" under threat; and perhaps as something which no longer exists.

Week 6 (October 11): Wild nature

Research outline due; make an appointment to discuss your outline and short paper topic with me in office hours this week or next.

- Henry David Thoreau, "Walking" (or, "The Wild"), *The Atlantic Monthly* (1862) & "Slavery in Massachusetts" (1854)
- Dave Foreman, "Earth First Statement of Principles" (1980); *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching* (1989), Chapter 1: "Strategic Monkeywrenching"
- William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" *Environmental History* 1.1 (1996): 7–28

Week 7 (Oct 18): Relations to nature

- Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations* (1999): "White Earth: A Lifeway in the Forest," 115-139
- Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (2013): "Skywoman Falling," "The Council of Pecans," "The Gift of Strawberries," "Maple Nation," In the Footsteps of Nanabozho," "Epilogue: Returning the Gift"
- Aldo Leopold, *Sand County Almanac* (1949): "Thinking Like a Mountain," "The Land Ethic"
- Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle* (1971), Chapter 2: "The Ecosphere"

Week 8 (October 25): Nature strikes back? Discovering the "environment"

- Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (1962), Chapters 1-3, 6-8, 12, 15, 17
- United Church of Christ, Commission for Racial Justice, *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Report on the Racial and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites* (1987)
- Rob Nixon, "Slow Violence, Gender, and the Environmentalism of the Poor" in *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* Vols. 13.2 - 14.1 (2006-2007): 14-31
- Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (1992), Chapter 1: "On the Logic of Wealth Distribution and Risk Distribution"

Week 9 (November 1): What comes after the end of nature?

Short essay due

- Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993): Chapter 1, "Crisis"; Chapter 5, "Redistribution"
- Bill McKibben, "The End of Nature," *The New Yorker* (1989)
- Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35.2 (2009)
- Steven Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall: Environmental Philosophy after the End of Nature* (2015): Chapter 1, "Against Nature"

Part III: The politics of nature in the Anthropocene

In the third and final section of the course we will consider the politics of nature in the present moment, considering whether and how we should rethink foundational political concepts in light of the challenges we face.

Week 10 (November 8): Justice: what do we owe nature, and what nature do we owe?

- Joan Martinez-Alier, "The Ecological Debt," *Kurswechsel* 41 (2002): 1-16.
- Olúfémi O. Táíwò, *Reconsidering Reparations* (2021), Chapter 5, "What's Next: Why Reparations Require Climate Justice"
- Martha Nussbaum, *Justice for Animals* (2023), Introduction, Chapter 5
- David Schlosberg, "Ecological Justice for the Anthropocene," in *Political Animals and Animal Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, London: 2014): 75-89.

Week 11 (November 15): Should nonhuman nature have rights?
Paper draft and writer's memo due

- Christopher Stone, "Should Trees Have Standing? Towards Legal Rights for Natural Objects," *Southern California Law Review* 45 (1972): 450-501
- Susan Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* (2011), Chapter 2: "Universal Basic Rights for Animals," 19-49
- Raffi Youatt, "Personhood and the Rights of Nature: The New Subjects of Contemporary Earth Politics," *International Political Sociology* (2017) 11: 39–54
- 2008 Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, selections:
  - Title II, Chapter 2: Rights of the good way of living (Buen Vivir)
  - Title II, Chapter 6: Rights to freedom
  - Title II, Chapter 7: Rights of nature
- New Zealand Government, Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act 2017: Part II, Subparts 1-4

Week 12: November 22: No Class, Thanksgiving Break

Week 13 (November 29): States: (How) can nature be governed?
Peer feedback due

- Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* (1968):
- Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (1990), Chapters 1, 6.
- Geoff Mann and Joel Wainwright, "Climate Leviathan," *Antipode* (2012)
- Leanne Simpson, *As We Have Always Done,* "Introduction," and Chapter 1, "Nishinaabeg Brilliance," 1-27

Week 14 (December 6): Democracy: Can we bring nonhumans into democracy? Between natures, who decides?

- Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climactic Regime*, "Eighth Lecture: How to govern struggling (natural) territories?"
- Jedediah Purdy, *After Nature* (2015), Chapter 8: "What Kind of Democracy?"
- Robyn Eckersley, *The Green State: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty* (2004), Chapter 5: "From Liberal to Ecological Democracy"
- Thea Riofrancos, *Resource Radicals,* "Introduction," 1-16; Chapter 4: "The *Demos* in Dispute," 115-137.

Final papers due December 15