

PHIL 3620 Philosophy of Nature

MW12 Mon, Wed 12:50 – 2:05pm

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What is nature? Of what is it composed: a single substance or an infinite number of indivisible atoms? How is it ordered? Is it a random moving self-transforming chaos or a well-ordered machine? An incomprehensible and endless flux or a cyclical harmonious multilayered system? Is God in and separate from nature? And humanity?

Key issues and debates concerning the idea that every being has a purpose (teleology) or is simply a randomly assembled machine (mechanism), that animals and non-living beings are “animated” and/or possess spirits or souls (animism).

We will also explore more recent understandings of nature such as Darwinian evolution, Gaia, ecological systems theory and phenomenology. Throughout we shall address how conceptions of nature relate to culture and understandings of human nature, politics, war, sex, gender, and economics and sustainability.

Roughly speaking, half of the class focuses on classical views such as Parmenides, Heraclitus, Aristotle, Lucretius, and Native American views, and half focuses on more contemporary figures and issues traversing philosophy, ecology, economics, and social theory.

Requirements: 4 page paper, quiz, midterm, 5 page paper, final exam