

PHL 499/599

Philosophy of Nature: A Field Course

3 credit hours/Moore

Camping in a ponderosa pine forest at the edge of a Cascade Mountain lake, we will gather to study the philosophy of nature. What *is* nature? What is the relation of humans to the rest of the natural world? How are our concepts of nature shaped by the words and metaphors we use? What is the value of wild places? What can we learn from a close study of the natural world about right ways of acting in communities, both civic and biotic?

The course will draw on many ways of knowing – often philosophical analysis, but also creative writing, storytelling, music, close observation, scientific study, and “simply messing about in boats.” Please know that field courses are challenging. Readings and assignments are extensive, faculty expectations (and enthusiasm) are high, and an entire term of study is compressed into a limited period of time. Students can expect a week of deep and intense thinking, collaborating, reading, and *especially* writing.

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Cost. The cost of food, transportation, and campsite rental will be shared among the group members; an estimate of the total cost is \$95. Students will need to provide their own personal camping equipment (the OSU Outdoor Recreation Center may be able to help you). Kitchen supplies and small boats will be provided. Group members will share the responsibility of cooking and cleaning up.

Application. Admission to the course is by application. Please write a one-page letter of application to Kathleen Moore, Philosophy, OSU. The letter should include complete contact information (including summer address, phone, and email), an explanation of how this course serves your educational and/or life goals, and a brief description of the background that prepares you for this course, whatever it may be—course work, backcountry experience, writing experience, a passion for wild places... We're looking for 15 dedicated students from a variety of backgrounds. We'll do rolling admissions, so apply early, and after we receive your letter, we'll get back to you within a week.

Schedule. Before the class begins, students will read several essays and write an initial, introductory essay. The course will begin at 1 pm on Sunday, September 16, on the OSU campus, with course introductions. Early Monday morning, September 17, we will leave for the mountains. We'll cap and study all week (picnic tables-and-latrines is as fancy as it gets), with “expeditions and explorations’ led by visiting faculty. On Saturday morning, September 22, we will return to the OSU campus, where students will finish preparing their written projects. Sunday afternoon, September 23, we will convene for the final time for student presentations and a shared meal that will officially end the class. (Final polished and revised versions of written work will be due on September 30).

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Instructors. The course instructor, Kathleen Dean Moore, Ph.D., is professor of philosophy at Oregon State University and the author of *Riverwalking: Reflections on Moving Water* and *Holdfast: At Home in the Natural world*, winner of the 2000 Sigurd Olson Nature Writing Award. Her essays appear in *Audubon*, *Field and Stream*, *North American Review*, and many other journals. At OSU, she directs the Spring Creek Project for ideas, nature, and the written word. Other experts will join us for special sessions – a poet, a freshwater ecologist, a musician, and an expert on fish.

The course is sponsored by the Spring Creek Project for ideas, nature, and the written word.

To the students:

The wilds are a wonderful place to learn. At Lake Timpanogas, we will explore, establish class routines, and immerse ourselves in the place and our work. We will give our studies considerable effort while still preserving a certain amount of free time for personal exploration. In addition to the standard academic practices of reading, writing, and discussing, we will engage in original philosophical thought, creative writing, journal keeping, and meeting with guest experts.

One good reason for going to the woods is to leave behind many of the presuppositions, limitations, and boundaries that constrain academic life as we know it. This class is quite intentionally designed to subvert the distinctions between the humanities, the fine arts, and the sciences; to break down the differences between student and teacher and community member; to reduce the role of 'authorities' in philosophy; to expand the confines of 'philosophy, properly understood'; to make writing as much a part of our lives as thinking; and to bring together theory and practice. What we will preserve are the notions of quality and rigorous thought. There are many ways to come to know.

Incredible things happen when you get out in the woods with a small group. A community is created in which the dynamics are rich, complex, and an education in themselves. In addition, there is a private thread which is the individual before and after the course, and the individual away from the group at times, alone by the lake or under the stars. Finally, there is the reading and course work, ideas and questions interesting enough to lose sleep over.

John Muir said that he left the academic university in order to devote himself to what he thought was a great teacher, the university of the wilderness. This program attempts to provide the best of both.