

## Nature and Society: Decentering Humans

ANSO 251-01

CRN 21178

Spring 2022

Tuesday and Thursday 11:00-12:15 Central Time



Professor Hadi Khoshnevis  
Department of Anthropology and Sociology  
Class: ROBT 041

Course link: <https://rhodes.zoom.us/j/93075310374>

Virtual office hours Monday and Wednesday 10:30-12:00 and by appointment  
<https://rhodes.zoom.us/j/2573168865>



The Cycle of Cooperation  
Credit: Ricardo Levins Morales

[T]here is reason, after all, that some people wish to colonize the moon, and others dance before it as an ancient friend.”

*James Baldwin*

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Due to the pandemic and according to the college’s plan, we will start the semester online. Hopefully, in February we will have in-person sessions. Because of these contingencies, we will need to remain understanding and flexible. Any changes will be discussed in class and concluded collectively.

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### Course Description

European Enlightenment emerged as a reaction to Europe’s Dark Ages, a long era in which religion and power condemned and invalidated human reasoning and scientific explanations. The outcome of this process of “enlightenment” was the centering of humans, their autonomy and worldly progress, and the separation of humans from non-humans. Because of this separation, humans were elevated above nature, and nature was regarded solely as a resource to be controlled and exploited. This destructive human-nature dichotomy did not remain confined to what was human and what was deemed as nonhuman. It created categories of sub-humans, which included non-Europeans, non-Christian people, women, and anybody who did not fit was perceived as “normal.” In this course, we explore this history and its consequences in the past, present, and for our future. To do so, we will draw on critical approaches to science, political ecology, environmental justice, ecofeminism, indigenous wisdom, and critical race theory. These perspectives prepare us to deconstruct the abovementioned dichotomy. They equip us with analytical perspectives which enable us to imagine a wholistic and inclusionary and overlapping relationship between ‘humans’ and ‘nonhumans.’ To achieve this goal, first we work to de-center humans and then, bring them back to assume their responsibility.

Note: The literature on the topic of our course is very vast. It was a hard and deliberate process for me to choose the themes and the readings. If any of you is interested to read more about any topic, please let me know. I can provide extra resources to you.



### Course Objectives

This course is designed to familiarize students with different dimensions of human-nonhuman-nature interactions. Students will investigate these interactions from different critical and historical perspectives. A multidimensional approach to human-nonhuman interactions does not study nature, humans, and nonhumans as separate, monolithic, or apolitical entities. In this course, students will learn that our understanding, relationship, and exchanges with nature, other humans, and nonhumans are deeply political, starkly varied, and inherently power-laden. By focusing on the role of humans in environmental destruction (some more than others), we will explore these power dynamics from a historical and critical perspective and highlight the urgency of informed action and reconstruction of a more comprehensive and sustainable human-non-human relationship.



### What are we doing in this class and why? (borrowed, with modifications from Laura Briggs):

There are many things we could do in our class. We can engage in a rigorous critique of how essays and books are put together—form and content, evidence and argument—in hopes of understanding better how to write good essays and books. We can read closely. We can examine arguments or turns of phrase that seem particularly smart and wonderful or investigate those that we particularly disagree with. We can look at books or articles for what they offer for our own research, teaching, activism, or ethical engagement. And we could add many other things.

Rather than use one or another of these approaches or choices, this class will be organized by those that a higher-level course in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology needs. We will start each class by going over your questions (see the assignment section), and we will orient our subsequent discussion around those questions. Through these elaborations, we will go past the mere discussion of the texts. We will engage in an analytical evaluation of the pieces, assess the implications of their arguments, and explore their possible applications. The goal of this class is to build intellectual fellowship through posing honest questions and reflections. It's also my hope that the class will be fun, hopefully occasionally exciting, in the way an elephant (not a typo) idea or a particularly provocative conversation can be stirring. A wish that cannot be fulfilled without your engagement with the material and class discussions.

Academia has trained us to think of learning as a competitive affair. One scholar is right, another wrong; students compete against each other for the highest grade. In truth, though, all fruitful learning and thinking take place in the context of intellectual communities. Institutions of higher education such as ours afford us the privilege and pleasure of reading together and learning from each other. Our job in this class is to create an intellectual community, however small, one in which we all are enriched by each other's understandings, questions, and comments. This imposes on each of us the responsibility of reading carefully, speaking up our insights and questions, and listening respectfully to each other (which is not to say always agreeing).



## **Roadmap**

The literature on the relationship between humans, non-human animals, and nature is vast. Take the topic of pollution, for instance. In this course, we briefly cover toxic waste, plastic in oceans, and space trash. That leaves out many other forms of contamination and pollution, such as light pollution and sound pollution. Our lack of knowledge about these other forms of pollution explains why in 1994, residents of LA called 911 during a blackout. They were asking about a large eerie silver cloud above the city. This “sinister” cloud was the Milky Way that they had never seen before. Urban light also impacts the navigation capabilities of migratory birds, insects, and many other animals. This one example and its many aspects reveal how much we do not know and need to learn. This class is the beginning. The course is designed to provide you with the sociological mindset as a tool with which you can continue exploring and searching for solutions.

We will start the class with the European Enlightenment, its meaning, and its consequences. We will learn that the European Enlightenment created a hierarchy of certain humans over other humans, nature, and animals. We will focus on the famous sentence, “I think, therefore, I am,” to discuss how proximity to nature, in European definition, meant lack of “civilization,” and hence, “proper” thinking and being. Then we move to disaster capitalism to study the connections between ideas of civilization, progress, and exploitation, from Native American exile to boarding schools and pro-animal campaigns that are hurting Native populations to patenting human cells and hijacking universal survival through means of patenting and ownership. This module, then, takes us to how we have polluted the world. We are all familiar with the image of a relatively thin polar bear standing on a melting sheet of ice. Here we reach the middle of the semester. On March 8th, we will have a check-in session to review the semester and provide feedback to each other.

In the second half of the semester, we will investigate the history of the relationship between humans and animals. We will read about our perceived and materialized hierarchies within animals: from those we love, to those we are fine to consume and those we hate.

The last module will focus on demystifying human superiority. Thus far, we have learned about how selfish ideas of utilitarian thinking and superiority have elevated certain humans over everything else. We are at a juncture where we cannot stay on the sidelines and watch. Now it is time to work on a more insightful and comprehensive understanding of our location in the world. Our last module will blur the boundaries between humans and non-humans and nature. That aims at de-centering humans. But we cannot just leave the center of the scene. We must assume our responsibility and act on it. How can we do that? We will explore some answers to this question by looking at our patterns of “conspicuous consumption” and sociology of stuff. Our last reading, by the queer feminist, anti-racist activist Aurora Levins Morales will also provide us with an inclusive perspective that acknowledges the differences without submitting to the destructive ideas of hierarchy and superiority. Again, this course is just a beginning. It is designed to be a wake-up call.



### How to Succeed in This Course (borrowed, with modifications from David Rubin):

1. *Do the readings in advance.* To successfully complete this course, you must carefully read each assigned text and come to class prepared.
2. *As you do the readings, take notes, highlight the text, and write your short reflections* on the margins and your notepad. Try to summarize each idea or claim that seems important to you. If you pause on an argument or sentence, even for a single moment, probably it wants to talk to you! Go on with it! After each piece, try to write a fast summary of it. Ask yourself what the piece was about, what the argument was, and how the author presented the argument, and what you think about it.
3. Some readings are as short as two pages and some are up to thirty pages. Some days we have videos or news articles and sometimes we have academic papers. Please pay attention to the materials and plan accordingly.
4. *Be playful and enjoy the process of exploration, engagement, and learning.*
4. *Think ahead!* Try to finish your work and submit your assignments before the deadline (for the rubric, see the assignment section). Things happen. As a general rule, I do not accept late assignments.
5. *Suggested weekly work schedule:* you can expect to spend between five to six hours a week working on readings and assignments. This is not a lot! Just in one day, you have 24 hours!
6. *Attend student office hours* to review course material, clarify assignments, and review graded assignments. This will be especially helpful if you wish to improve the grades you are receiving.



### Requirements: General instructions

This class is a reading, writing, and discussion class. Please do not expect long lectures, if any at all. Students are expected to i) closely and critically read the literature assigned for each week, ii) actively participate in class discussion.

Each assignment that you produce needs to have a (1) title page and (2) reference page. The title page should include the title of the course, the title and the number of your essay, your name, date, and word count. For all your essays, choose a title that reflects and summarizes your arguments or reflections in the essay.

Submissions all need to be Microsoft Word and via Canvas. I will not accept files in any other format or via email. Do not share Google docs with me. For referencing and citation style, use the ASA style. For a quick guide, click [HERE](#).

Have a naming protocol for your files. For instance, First and names\_Nature and Society\_Essay 2.

Please take these instructions seriously. Spend a few minutes to make sure that you have attended to these details.



### Analytical summary notes and discussion questions (20\*3:60 points)

We have a total of 28 sessions. Students are required to (1) produce 20 summary notes of the reading(s) with some direct quotes from the text with proper citation, and (2) write two analytical discussion questions or points. These essays start from January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

Read the text and take notes as you read. If questions, comments, or thoughts come to your mind as you do the reading, take note of them. Once you are done with reading the material, produce a 300-word summary of the readings. In these summaries, you have to briefly explain what the readings were about, what they argued, and what they suggested. To do so, you are expected to have some clear references to specific parts of the text with proper citation. End your summary notes with two questions for class discussion. These questions do not have to be in the form of a question. They can be particular and specific comments about the text for class discussion. They even can be a question about a part of the text that you did not understand (include that part).

You need to upload these notes on Canvas before 9:00 am Central Time on the day of our class. As you come to class, please have the submission open in front of you. I may ask you to share your thoughts and discussion questions with the class or go over them with other students in the breakout rooms. You can start writing your summary notes and questions after our second session.

### **Participation (10 points)**

Not only participation in this class is welcomed but also required. Every session, I will take clear and extensive notes on your participation. Contributing to class discussions should be analytical, rather than general and broad. This is our class and our space. Claim it. The topic of our class needs urgent attention and action. Do not be a bystander.

### **Creative project (25 points)**

This component of the requirements is creative. For this assignment, you need to create a poster, diorama, handcraft, drawing, music video, poem, etc. It can be digital or material. Regardless, your production needs to be accompanied by a 1000-word essay in which you reflect on your production. Our plans for displaying these projects remain contingent on the pandemic. If we come back to campus and it is safe, we may be able to display your creative work on campus in an exhibition.

To do this project, I encourage you to see what aspect of our relationship with humans, animals, or nature bothers, concerns or inspires you. Try to choose your theme early in the semester. An early decision will give you ample time to develop and hone your ideas.

Project outline: Craft a paragraph and explain what your creative project is, why you have chosen it, and how you plan to execute it. The deadline for this outline is Tuesday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022. Please upload your Microsoft word document on Canvas with a paper name and title page.

The deadline for the final project is April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022, before our class time.

For examples from last year (a fully online semester), click [HERE](#).

### **Final reflection (5 points)**

In your final reflection essay, write about what has moved you during our semester and what you are willing to do for it. Explain why that issue mattered to you and how it has impacted you. This essay should be 500 words long, and as usual, follow the writing protocols.



### **Why these assignments?**

A combination of low- and high-stake assignments increases your chances of success. Additionally, based on a scaffolding approach, small continuous assignments help students to develop insight, rigor, and skills as our semester unfolds. A step-by-step approach. Additionally, I do not believe in a one-dimensional learning experience in which we just gain academic knowledge. I believe that learning should be a comprehensive experience that enriches us in several domains. Each of the steps we take in this class and with our classmates should help us revisit and revise ourselves, our thoughts, and our responsibilities.

In case you need help with academic writing, in addition to my comments and guidelines, you can benefit from our Writing Center. To learn more about this great resource, please click [HERE](#).



### Assignments and deadlines

Assignment	Number	Points	Due date
Summary notes	20	60	Throughout the semester.
Participation		10	Throughout the semester.
Creative project	1	25	April 17 <sup>th</sup> , 2022
Final Reflection	1	5	April 27 <sup>th</sup> , 2022



### Office Hours

I will be holding virtual student hours on Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:30-12:00. Although I will be present in the zoom meeting room during these hours, you are *required* to email me in advance to book an appointment. Meetings should not go past 15 minutes. The reason behind requiring a prior notice via email and the 15-minute restriction is to make sure that I can meet with you and have enough time to see other students. If these hours do not work for you, you can always email me to arrange a meeting outside these times.

If you are on campus, the weather permits, and it is safe, we can have outside office hours on campus.

### Attendance

Class attendance is required. I have designed this course so that in-class experiences—such as lectures, discussions, and presentations—add to the overall learning experience. Since in-class experiences are critical to your understanding of course material, excessive absences can be grounds for failure of a course, despite submitting all assignments. After three absences, each class missed will result in the lowering of your final grade by a step (e.g., B to B-). More than five absences may result in a failing grade for the course.

### Late Work Policy

Late papers and assignments will not be accepted, except in the case of very extenuating circumstances. Permission to turn in an assignment late must be obtained from the instructor before the assignment due date. Such late submissions can carry a grade penalty.

### Emailing Etiquette

I will not answer emails that do not have proper subject lines, content, and appropriate greetings. That means that, for instance, an email that is only an attachment will not get opened at all. Make sure to include (1) a relevant and meaningful subject line (e.g., Inquiry regarding essay number X), (2) proper greetings, (3) an explanation about the inquiry, (4) your full name and your class at the end of the email.

I will do my best to answer your emails as soon as I can. I may not check my emails after 6:00 pm and over the weekends.



### **About our Zoom sessions**

Download the app onto your laptop, phone, or any other device you plan to use in class. It can be helpful to download it to a few devices. *Do not forget to sign in with your Rhodes Zoom account.* Otherwise, you will not be able to access some of the functions that we will be using in our class.

At <https://rhodes.zoom.us/> go to your profile tab and add a picture and change your name. Use the first and last name with your preferred pronouns. I will be “Hadi Khoshnevis/he.”

Plan to arrive a couple of minutes early to check your audio and video. If you expect your internet connection to be unreliable, you can dial in on your phone for audio. The meeting request will give you several phone numbers to dial in. Once in, I will have everyone on mute. You can always unmute yourself if you want to speak to the class.

Please consider having your video on. It can be hard to teach if all I see is just your names on the screen. But feel free to turn it off if you don’t want to share your video or because your internet connection is not solid.

If you have a question, the best way to share it with the class is to unmute yourself. You can also use the “raise your hand feature” in the participants’ window, or if your video is on, physically raise your hand.

These zoom meetings are *only* for students who have registered in our class. To protect our safe space and privacy, please use a headphone. Such a simple measure can help all of us to be more comfortable to share our opinions, especially when it comes to controversial, personal, or sensitive issues.

For class attendance, I will use the Zoom function that produces a list of participants and their activity.

According to the college’s policy, after we come back in person in February, our Zoom link can *only* be used for COVID-related cases.



### **Expectations and Accommodations**



Individuals with disabilities of any kind who require accommodations are responsible for making such needs known to the instructor as early as possible. Every effort will be made to accommodate students in a timely manner. Individuals who request accommodations must be registered with the Office of Student Disability Services (Click [HERE](#)). If you cannot provide documentation, you can still talk to me early in the semester so I can provide the necessary accommodations.

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is defined as “literary theft” and consists of the unattributed quotation of the exact words of a published text or the unattributed borrowing of original ideas by paraphrasing from a published text. On written papers for which the student employs information gathered from books, articles, web sites, or oral sources, each direct quotation, as well as ideas and facts that are not generally known to the public at large, or the form, structure, or style of a secondary source must be attributed to its author by means of the appropriate citation procedure. Only widely known facts and first-hand thoughts and observations original to the student do not require citations. Plagiarism also consists of passing off as one’s own segments or the total of another person’s work.

### **Diversity Statement**

I am dedicated and committed to providing all students with equal opportunities to learn, participate, and succeed regardless of their financial background, race, ethnicity, national origin, ancestry, sex, gender, religion, medical condition, veteran status, marital status, age, and ability. If you have concerns, please advise me at the earliest possible time. You can always reach me via email or see me in person.

### **Title IX & Mandatory Reporting**

As your professor, I am deeply invested in the well-being of all of my students. I am here to help and support you with your academic life. In case you come to me with concerns that are not directly related to our course, I will do my best to help. It is important for you to know that all faculty members are mandated to report any incidents of harassment, discrimination, and violence. Hence, I cannot keep information involving any form of harassment or discrimination based on a protected characteristic confidential.



### **Course schedule**

This syllabus is subject to change. All changes will be made upon agreement with the class.

### **Thursday, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

- Introduction and syllabus.

### **The European "Enlightenment" and hierarchies**



**Tuesday, January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

- Calhoun, Craig, Joseph Gerties, James Moody, Steven Pfaff, and Indermohan Virk. 2012. *Classical Sociological Theory*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell. Introduction (11-17).

**Thursday, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

- Kalof, Linda. 2007. Looking at Animals in Human History. London: Reaktion Books. Pages 97-99.

**Tuesday, January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

- No reading.  
Class discussion: Tools of (dis)orientation

**Thursday, January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

- Trafford, Emily. 2015. "Hitting the Trail: Live Displays of Native American, Filipino, and Japanese People at the Portland World's Fair." *Oregon Historical Society* 116(2):158-195.

**Tuesday, February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022**

- Kalof, Linda. 2007. Looking at Animals in Human History. London: Reaktion Books. Pages 145-160.

**Humans against humans: from progress to disaster capitalism**

**Thursday, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022**

- Douglass, Ron. 2013. Unseen Tears: The Native American Boarding School Experience in Western New York. Click [HERE](#).
- PBS. 2016. Unspoken: America's Native American Boarding Schools. Click [HERE](#).

**Tuesday, February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

- Hubbard, Tasha. 2014. "Buffalo Genocide in Nineteenth Century North America: 'Kill, Skin, and Sell.'" In *Colonial Genocide in North America*, edited by Andrew Woolford, Jeff Benvenuto, and Alexander Laban Hinton, 292-305. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Duke University Press.

**Thursday, February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

- Angry Inuk. Click [HERE](#).
- Harris, Julia Amy, and Shoshana Walter. 2017. "They thought they were going to rehab. They ended up in chicken plants." *Reveal* (October 4, 2017). Click [HERE](#).

**Tuesday, February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

- Washington, Harriet. 2011. "Deadly Monopolies: Medical Ethicist Harriet Washington on How Firms are Taking Over Life Itself." *Democracy Now* (October 31, 2011). Click [HERE](#).
- Hotez, Peter. "A Vaccine for the World: U.S. Scientists Develop Low-Cost Shot to Inoculate Global South." Interview with *Democracy Now* (January 3, 2022). Click [HERE](#).

**Thursday, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

- Documentary: Life and Debt. Click [HERE](#).

**Tuesday, February 22, 2022**

- Robbins, Paul. 2012. *Political Ecologies: A Critical Introduction*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley and Sons. Chapter 1: “Political versus Apolitical Ecologies,” pages 11-24.

### Humans and pollution

#### Thursday, February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022

- Washington, Harriet A. 2019. *A Terrible Thing to Waste: Environmental Racism and Its Assault on the American Mind*. New York, NY: Little, Brown Spark. Chapter 3: Poisoned World: The Racial Gradient of Environmental Neurotoxins (112-158).

#### Tuesday, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022

- Moore, Charles. 2020. “The First Trash Vortex.” In *The Ocean Reader: History, Culture, and Politics*, edited by Paul Roorda, 486–493. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

#### Thursday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022

- David, Leonard. 2021. Space Junk Removal Is Not Going Smoothly. *Scientific American* (April 14, 2021). Click [HERE](#).
- Space Debris and Human Spacecraft. NASA (March 26, 2021). Click [HERE](#).

#### Tuesday, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022

- No reading. Checking in session.

### The loved and the repugnant: pet, exotic, food

#### Thursday, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022

- Irvine, Leslie and Laurent Cilia. 2017. “More-than-human families: Pets, people, and practices in multispecies households.” *Sociology Campus* 11:e12468.

### Spring recess

#### Tuesday, March 22, 2020

- Nath, Jemál. 2010. “Gendered fare? A qualitative investigation of alternative food masculinities.” *Journal of Sociology* 47(3): 261-278.

#### Thursday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022

- Collard, Rosemary-Claire. 2020. *Animal Traffic: Lively Capital in the Global Exotic Pet Trade*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Introduction (1-31).

#### Tuesday, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022

- Documentary. Peter Nelson. 2019. *The Pollinators*. Click [HERE](#).
- Meeting Dr. Jonathan G. Lundgren.

### De-centering humans: taking responsibility

#### Thursday, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022

- Noske, Barbara. 1997. *Beyond Boundaries: Humans and Animals*. Montreal: Black Rose Books. Human-Animal Discontinuities (126-160).

**Tuesday, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

- Charles, Siebert. 2006. “An Elephant Crackup?” *The New York Times* (October 8, 2006). Click [HERE](#).
- Mansuy, Isabelle. 2020. *Early Trauma Influences Metabolism Across Generations*. Click [HERE](#).

**Thursday, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

- Lingis, Alphonso. 2011. Outside. *Social Text* 106: 37-42.

**Tuesday, April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

- Gross, Daniel. 2009. “No rest of the Wealthy.” *The New York Times* (July 1, 2009). Click [HERE](#).
- Bruder, Jessica. *Nomadland: Surviving America in the Twenty-First Century*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company. Chapter One: Squeeze Inn (3-28), Chapter Five: Amazon Town (95-114).

**Easter recess.**

**Tuesday, April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

- McKinnon, James. 2010. A 10 percent world. *The Walrus* September 12. Click [HERE](#).
- Lovatt, Steven. 2021. “The Earth could hear itself think: how birdsong became the sound of lockdown.” *Guardian* (February 28, 2021). Click [HERE](#).

**Thursday, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022**

- Creative project presentation

**Tuesday, April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

- Creative project presentation

**Thursday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

- Morales, Aurora Levins. 2019. *Medicine Stories: Essays for Radicals*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Ecology is everything (3-9).
- Wrapping up and evaluations

