CALL FOR PAPERS:
Environmental Humanities and the Challenge of Multidisciplinarity


University of Cyprus, Nicosia
July 2 – 6, 2012

THEME OF THE WORKSHOP

Environmental issues are typically framed within public discourse as problems that require empirical information and technological solutions. This paradigm holds not only scientific but also philosophical assumptions, most importantly that the real world is the one described by natural science, the world of scientific realism. In this worldview, all other disciplines (such as ethics, the qualitative social sciences, and politics and policy) are assimilated as “tools in the toolbox” used to solve the problems previously defined by Western science. The intensity of current environmental crises—especially global climate destabilization—energizes this focus on practical problem-solving and on technological and policy solutions within existing institutional, economic, and political frameworks. However, this approach fails to recognize that the humanistic disciplines, including philosophy, literature, and the arts, both construct and express knowledge of nature that exceeds the bounds of problem-solving and the ontology of scientific realism. Further, claims about nature that appeal to the authority of Western science, though masked as objective, are frequently deployed to undergird ideological constructions about race, class, gender, and nation; the authority to make claims about nature is inseparable from political power.

Underlying this default position of the natural sciences is the unexamined assumption that environmental problems are encountered independently of any context, values, history, or disciplinary biases. Humanities scholars in the emerging fields of ecocriticism, environmental art, environmental philosophy, and related areas of inquiry vigorously challenge this assumption, arguing that our environmental problems are inescapably ethical, historical, and political. The very definitions of environmental problems at any given moment are a function of human ideas and negotiations that have a particular cultural location and history and that reflect specific concepts of ethical responsibility and justice. Consequently, the methods of the natural sciences, although necessary for meeting our environmental challenges, cannot replace the interpretive, critical, and artistic methods of the humanities. The emergence of the “environmental humanities,” as a multidisciplinary site of convergence within academic scholarship, responds to this need.

This workshop will engage with the emerging disciplines of the environmental humanities to pose a series of questions, including:

- How are the methods and epistemology of the humanities distinct from those of the empirical sciences?
• What would a genuinely interdisciplinary approach to questions of the environment look like, and how can this be negotiated within current institutional limitations?
• What impact can the humanities have on public discourse and political will in specific areas, such as environmental justice and climate change?

PROPOSAL SUBMISSIONS

Please submit two-page abstracts by email in Word format to the workshop organizers by 15 March 2012. Each presenter will have 20 minutes and is asked to present rather than read a paper. Abstracts of accepted presentations will be circulated to the participants in advance of the conference.

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Final versions of the papers (not to exceed 3,000 words, or 10 double-spaced pages, including notes) will be reviewed by the workshop organizers for possible publication in the conference proceedings.

THE CONFERENCE

This workshop is planned under the auspices of the 13th International Conference of the International Society for the Study of European Ideas, on the theme “The Ethical Challenge of Multidisciplinarity: Reconciling ‘The Three Narratives’—Art, Science, and Philosophy.” For more information, visit ISSEI’s website at http://issei2012.haifa.ac.il/

THE VENUE

The workshop will be held at the University of Cyprus - Main Campus, Kallipoleos Avenue 75, Nicosia 2100 Cyprus.

WORKSHOP ORGANIZERS

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