

# The Human Worlds of Field, Forest, and Fresh Water (Phenomenology Outdoors)

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In the European middle ages, philosophy was an undertaking of the Church, and it was influenced by the churches and monasteries to which were attached the first Christian academies. This gave rise to a body of work concerned with the relation of man and world to God, and on the human side, with knowledge.

For the Enlightenment, philosophy was an indoor meditation. Rooms, halls, laboratories, and chambers were the places of its occurrence, and it gave rise to the insular works of epistemology and philosophy of mind, and confused conceptions of the relation of men to each other (in the halls of government). The analyses of rationalism and empiricism left the world itself in ruins.

Having inherited this disenchanted world and a cynical theory of knowledge, post-Enlightenment philosophy gradually undertook to re-enchant the world with its natural wonder. Ironically, as more and more people began to doubt God's existence, more and more people had eyes on the world in all its grandeur. This democratization of knowledge eventually produced enough diversity in methods of learning and knowing that the materialistic and mechanistic methods gave rise to organic methods, and anthropocentrism gave rise to a new-found appreciation of the human-in-context. This first occurred philosophically in phenomenology. Phenomenology and its attendant attitudes represent the *restoration of human thought to membership in the life of the world*. It is an integral method, seeking to reunite objective and subjective.

In America, the phenomenological approach (without the name) found expression out-of-doors, producing philosophical meditations on the outdoors itself, and on man's relation to this world, the one disclosed by biology, geology, and astronomy and which modern industry and technology had defaced. The ancient, even original, questions of man's relation to God and of the nature of a man's mind and his relation to his fellow men faded in importance but remained subtexts for man knowing himself in a world. Such outdoor philosophy is a philosophy best expressed by people working in a definite, loveable landscape and working with universal essences.

Though not a course in wilderness or environmental writing, this course it will surprise you with its love of the Creation, the world in which humans live, where they find much of the Beautiful, and where they are given to make beautiful, even living, Things. We will follow a few strands of this post-enlightenment reaction, examining American literature that speaks of the place of man and his works in the natural world: his farms and gardens, his love of rivers and ponds, his homey buildings and the way they sit on the land, and his enjoyment of tamed spaces, which nonetheless point to the Transcendent. A primary question to guide our inquiry will be, "How does man act in his given condition properly to be part of and to shape the world to which he belongs?"

## Reading

1. (Preface: Romantic poetry; Impressionist landscapes; Heidegger "Building, Dwelling, Thinking")
2. Henry David Thoreau - *Walden* (excerpts)
3. Harland Hubbard - *Payne Hollow*
4. Norman Maclean - *A River Runs Through It*
5. Wendell Berry - essays, poems, short stories.
6. Annie Dillard - *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (excerpts)
7. Christopher Alexander - *The Timeless Way of Building* (excerpts)
8. Erazim Kohak - *The Embers and the Stars* (complete)

**Writing** assignments will begin as guided experiences in appreciative observation of phenomena and be developed into philosophical meditations on the essences encountered in the experience. 6-10 phenomenologies will be submitted for assessment.