

**NEH Summer Institute:
Re-Thinking the Land Ethic: Sustainability and the Humanities
June-July 2022, Flagstaff, Arizona**

**Outline for
Week One (of Four): History, Science, and Meaning,
Three Days of Lecture & Conversation
with Dr. Julianne Warren**

(Slides and much more available by request: theunfallensilent@gmail.com)

Sustainability in Whole: How can people and land thrive together in perpetuity?

General Definition of Sustainability:

Latin: *sus*—under, close to, up to, towards + *tenēre*—to hold, keep

--adjective, “sustainable,” capable of being borne or endured; supportable or bearable (ca. 1611 i.e., “abideable”); upheld or defended; maintainable (ca. 1845, as in a court of law or intellectually); or maintained at a certain rate or level (ca. 1965, as in economic income or a population)

-- noun, “sustainability” (ca. 1972, as applied to quantities of something and/or the management of something)

1. Something or someone is upholding
2. Something or someone is being upheld
3. Duration of time extending from past and/or present to the future

General Questions for Sustainability:

1. *Dependencies: Who supports whom or what and for how long?*
2. *Boundaries: What is nature? What is human? (What is both or neither?)*
3. *Desires: Who wants what when and where and why?*
5. *Ignorance: How do we know what we know and what don't we know?*
4. *Arrangements: How are beliefs, knowledge, power, and value applied?*

Utopian Stories:

Complexity: mental spaces for considering interrelationships

Continuity: cultural legacy of stories about humans and nature

Authenticity: emerge out of and return to real places

Five Historical Stories

1. Plato's "Mother Earth" (360 BCE, Athens)
2. Ovid's "Great River" (8 CE, Rome)

3. Francis Bacon's "New Atlantis" (1624/1627, London)
4. Gifford Pinchot's "American Fable" (1908, Washington)
5. Aldo Leopold's "Big Forest" (1909, USFD-3 AZ/NM)

Three Happening Stories

Story 6: The Real New World—Eaarth

Story 7: Between Two Real Worlds

Story 8: An Ethical Stance

Ground-truthing: Stories of the Future

Story 9: Other Ends: Land Health

Story 10: Open Space

Untold Stories: A Different Kind of Utopia?

Corollary Questions for Sustainability:

1. Can we have luxury?
2. What happens when things change (including growth)?
3. Are the means and the ends the same? (novelty?)
4. What do people possess?
5. About what are we enthusiastic?

6. How do we recognize what's wrong?
7. How do we live with grief?
8. How do we extend moral value?

9. What and whom do we love?
10. Where is beauty?
11. What do we do with creativity?

Abstract:

Using a Western legacy of utopias as complex mental geographies to think within, we will interrogate notions of sustainability through the lens of Aldo Leopold's ecological-ethical evolving concept of land health. We also will consider reasonable hopes for futures of humankind-ecosphere reciprocal flourishing, asking: 1) What has sustainability meant over time? 2) How do those meanings seem to align or not align with workings of real geographies, with what consequences? 3) What does sustainability help us to understand about what we want and can have for the future?

First, we will envision sustainability before "sustainability," through some ancient works side-by-side with Part I of Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (SCA) as a means of cultural critique and projection. Secondly, we will look at present reality in relation to different notions of sustainability--as in "sustainable" forestry, agriculture, and societies--through lenses including

a "fable" by USFS head Gifford Pinchot, Norman Borlaug's "Green Revolution," Wes Jackson's "perennial polyculture," and the "Brundtland Report" alongside part II of SCA. Thirdly, as standing amid ruins, we will consider dreaming up fresh ideas for durable civilizations, drawing on Part III of SCA, the "Earth Charter" and much more.

Enlarging on comparisons of various mental (i.e. utopian) and real geographies, we will consider 1) Dependencies: Who supports whom or what and for how long? 2) Boundaries: What is not human? What is human? (Or both, or neither?) 3) Desires: Who wants what when and where and why? 4) Ignorance: How do we know what we know and what we don't know? 5) Arrangements: How are beliefs, knowledge, power, and value applied? These questions spin off a host of more specific corollaries (e.g., Can we have luxury? What happens when things change?), which we also will consider.