
CALL FOR PAPERS

A Workshop on the Environment and Vulnerability

April 8-9, 2016

Smith College, Northampton, MA
Neilson Browsing Room

Environmental issues are often discussed in terms of vulnerability, resilience, and human dependency on the environment. In the context of anthropogenic climate change, the need for states to embrace cooperative global action to save the planet is an urgent imperative. However, the focus of current vulnerability discourse in the environmental regime has largely been on geographic positioning and scientific inquiry.

This workshop will extend that perspective to encompass human vulnerability as a central component of the political description of harm and the basis for compelling both national and international responses. Humanity's complete dependence on the environment arises from our embodiment. But we are also dependent on political and legal structures that are themselves vulnerable to capture, manipulation, misunderstanding, and corruption. How can both individual human and systemic institutional vulnerabilities be integrated into a compelling narrative of environmental ethics? This workshop will consider the roles played by national and international legal frameworks, as well as by neoliberalism in shaping our approach to the environment. It will build on the insights of critical theories to assess the growing proliferation of market-based approaches to environmental problems, and examine how forces of globalization and technology can create a 'false' sense of invulnerability for industrial societies using the premises of adaptation (for non-industrial societies) and mitigation (for industrialized ones).

Globalization and other forms of neoliberal restructuring committed to expanding markets, increased production, and consumption facilitate human exploitation of environmental resources and minimize our response to environmental threats. Market-based approaches intensify the pressure to focus on short-term measures of success and increase the influence of powerful and nimble corporate actors that lie outside the reach of international law, and who often work to impede the creation of potential regulatory solutions.

Issues For Discussion May Include:

- How can we effectively discuss environmental vulnerability and resilience?
- How would that discussion differ from/relate to discussions of human vulnerability and resilience?
- What is the role of concepts like "risk management" and insurance in environmental discourse?
- In what ways do questions of (neo) colonization, debt relief, variable impact and distinctions drawn between conceptions of the Global South and Global North impede or advance progress in addressing environmental issues?
- How do we define "justice" when the issues relate to the environment?
- What has been the role of international and transnational business and corporate organizations operating within our neoliberal era in initiating, perpetuating, and responding to environmental crises?

Issues For Discussion May Include: (CONT.)

- What should be the role of these international and transnational organizations in building both human and societal resilience in the wake of threats like climate change, biodiversity loss and air pollution?
- What has been the role of legal and political entities operating within our neoliberal era in initiating, perpetuating, and responding to environmental crises? How should economic visions of “limitless growth” be understood within the context of a finite world?
- What should be the role of these legal and political entities in building both human and societal resilience in the wake of threats like climate change, biodiversity loss and air pollution?
- What forms of environmental and human resilience should be regulated and which should be left to the 'free market'?
- Can a focus on human vulnerability and the introduction of a “vulnerable subject” entitled to an appropriately responsive and responsible state help reshape our analysis of the changing nature of the relationship between human beings and the environment? Why or why not?
- Can we think of the environment as a political and legal vulnerable subject?
- What relationships does vulnerability bring into relief?
- How have discussions about environmental vulnerability and human vulnerability shifted over time?
- What forms of resilience are available for institutions to respond to new environmental realities?

The workshop is being convened by:

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Vulnerability and Resilience Background Reading at:

<http://web.gs.emory.edu/vulnerability>

Submissions Procedure:

Email a proposal of several paragraphs as a Word or PDF document by February 15, 2016 to Rachel Ezrol, rezrol@emory.edu.

Decisions will be made by February 28, 2016 and working paper drafts will be due March 2, 2016 so they can be duplicated and distributed prior to the Workshop.

Workshop Details:

The Workshop begins Friday at 4PM in the Neilson Browning Room at Smith College, followed by dinner. Panel presentations continue on Saturday from 9 AM to 5 PM; breakfast and lunch will be provided.