The Tradition of the Philosophers’ Camp

In 1858, 10 scholars left New England society for a sojourn in the Adirondacks. Seeking to immerse themselves in the natural environment, they hunted, rowed, fished and camped. One of the participants was Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote a poem to commemorate the excursion, dubbing participants “freemen of the forest laws;” they were free of societal and professional boundaries. Thus liberated, they fell naturally into a cross-disciplinary cadence that reflects the style of unity between self, other and world that has come to characterize the Philosophers’ Camp and mark its intellectual significance. These early camp philosophers represent a synthesis of the arts and sciences in thought and practice. Our revitalization of the Philosophers’ Camp draws on the traditions established during the original expedition; the setting is the same landscape that inspired Emerson and his friends. Our readings and conversations will be an opportunity to enter into the spirit of the original Philosophers’ Camp by engaging in shared inquiry and discovery.

Seminar discussion will be led by Marianne Patinelli-Dubay, an environmental philosopher with ESF’s Northern Forest Institute, and David Carl, a faculty member at St. John’s College and dean of the Graduate Institute.

Our program opens with an evening seminar devoted to T.S. Eliot’s Four Quartets. An undulating sense of impermanence and indifference extends gradually over the length of these poems in a way that anticipates the interior restlessness and uncertainty at the heart of our primary text, The Bhagavad Gita.

Our Saturday seminars will focus on the great Indian epic The Bhagavad Gita, one of the most revered and sacred texts of the Hindu and Vedic traditions. The Gita is an exploration of man in a time of war (a military as well as a personal and spiritual war), when the competing calls of family loyalty and social duty collide. It is a work of metaphysics, social theory, ethics and spiritual exploration.

In our final seminar we will consider Kamo No Chomei’s Hojoki, or The Ten-Foot Square Hut. The Hojoki is a reflection on a life of reclusion, written by a musician and poet who turned to a life of Buddhist meditation and reflection after his decision to withdraw from the world. It is a classic work of Japanese Buddhism, the ephemerality of life, and man’s relations to the world around him.

Schedule:

Friday, Sept. 30
Evening: cocktail hour and dinner followed by an opening seminar discussion of T.S. Eliot’s Four Quartets.

Saturday, Oct. 1
Morning: breakfast followed by seminar and discussion on The Bhagavad Gita as well as why Thoreau brought The Gita to Walden Pond.

A guided canoe trip across the remote Henderson Lake with lunch and seminar at the lean-to on the far shore.

Sunday, Oct. 2
Morning: breakfast followed by seminar and discussion of The Hojoki.
The Philosophers’ Camp: Grandly Simple
Friday, September 30, through Sunday, October 2
Historic Tahawus Club
Newcomb, N.Y.

The Tahawus Club clubhouse, built in 1872, was originally an inn on the Newcomb-North Hudson Road. It is located at the Lower Works, which was the unloading site for the McIntyre Iron Works, which operated between 1828 and 1856 at the Upper Works. We are happy to welcome you all to this private, tranquil and delightful place. The Club offers comfortable, well-appointed accommodations along with delicious, hearty meals.

The registration rate of $750 per participant includes accommodations, catered meals and receptions, advance reading materials, guided seminars and outdoor excursions, as well as time to enjoy unparalleled access to the largest protected wild landscape in the lower 48 states.

For addition information, visit www.esf.edu/nfi. To register, please contact Daphne Taylor at newcomb@esf.edu or call 518.582.4551

ESF’s Northern Forest Institute (NFI) is an interdisciplinary educational outreach program at the ESF Newcomb Campus. NFI is dedicated to providing enrichment opportunities for government and non-government personnel at agencies and institutions with an environmental impact, college students, primary and secondary students, and the general public.

NFI’s program in Environmental Philosophy, led by Dr. Marianne Patinelli-Dubay, supports and facilitates rich conversations across a range of disciplines. The program’s educational initiatives bridge humanities content with field experience to help participants understand the impacts of the relationship between scientific research and the policy it advances.