“Contrarian agrarian” challenges assumptions about eating sustainably

Do “food miles” tell an accurate story about the impact of our daily food choices? Is “eating locally” always the most responsible thing to do? Is being a “locavore” even possible for more than just a small portion of Earth’s inhabitants? Is organically farmed food always superior to conventional produce? Is it possible to eat meat and still be “green”? And what about genetically modified foods and farm-raised fish? Most importantly, how can we feed the Earth’s rapidly growing population in a way that is just and sustainable?

Historian James E. McWilliams, 2010-11 Kritikos Professor, believes there is a middle ground in the debate over local vs. global and organic vs. conventional. In his talk, “Thinking Beyond the Food Movement: Four Big Ideas About Food and Sustainability,” McWilliams will critically examine some of the assumptions we have about sustainable agriculture and suggest a general outline for how we might feed 9 billion people a sustainable diet—with minimal agricultural expansion—by 2050.

McWilliams’s Eugene lecture will be at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 26th, in 282 Lillis Hall at the UO; his Portland lecture will be on April 27th at 5:30 p.m. at the UO in Portland, White Stag Block, 70 N.W. Couch St.

Kathleen Dean Moore: preserving a world that is safe for the laughter of children

What do we owe the future? That is a question essayist and philosopher Kathleen Dean Moore recently found herself pondering as she read to her two-year-old granddaughter Zoey about owls. As Moore reports, “Zoey found [the owls] so completely hilarious that she plopped on her back in helpless laughter. I said to myself, ‘That’s it. It’s over. Nothing more to decide. I will devote every ounce of my strength as a writer to preserving a world that is safe for the laughter of children.’” In that moment, Moore’s writing life took what she describes as “an abrupt turn”—one that resulted in a volume of essays, co-edited with Michael P. Nelson, titled Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril (2010).

Moore will be on campus on Monday, May 9, 2011 as the final speaker in the OHC’s 2010-11 “Sustenance” series to give a talk titled “Ethics and Climate Change: What Do We Owe the Future?” based on this new collection of essays. The volume, an extended argument for wiser stewardship of the Earth, gathers testimony from one hundred of the world’s moral leaders about our obligations to future generations. Action on climate change is a moral...
Legal historian examines human rights in 21st century

Noted legal and constitutional historian William Forbath will present the OHC’s 2010-11 O’Fallon Lecture in Law and American Culture on Thursday, April 7th. Forbath’s talk, “Human Rights: The Socialism of the 21st Century?” will take place at 7:30 p.m. in 175 Knight Law Center, and is free and open to the public. In his lecture, Forbath will examine various social and economic rights movements and related legal and political developments during the past several decades in South Africa, Colombia, and Brazil. What is the story of their rise? What are their strengths and weaknesses? How do they work as vehicles of distributive justice? He will conclude with reflections on related movements in Western Europe and the U.S. Forbath argues that the “legal-constitutional turn in social democratic thought was inescapable, and in some important ways, also normatively attractive; and it supplies some serviceable bases for a robust social democratic politics.”

William E. Forbath is the Lloyd M. Bentsen Chair in Law at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of several books and more than 100 articles, book chapters, and essays on legal and constitutional history and theory. His scholarly work appears in Yale Law Journal, Harvard Law Review, Stanford Law Review, Law and Social Inquiry, and the Journal of American History. His journalism appears at Politico.com, and in American Prospect and The Nation.

For more information, or for disability accommodations, contact ohc@uoregon.edu or (541) 346-3934.

McWilliams continued from front page

McWilliams, an intentional provocateur, deliberately challenges popular wisdom, myth, and misinformation in an effort to get us to examine our assumptions about what truly makes for the most sustainable food choices. The concept of “food miles” is alluring because it is easy to grasp and to calculate, but McWilliams argues that it provides an oversimplified and incomplete picture of the true cost of food production and consumption.

McWilliams, the author of four books on food and agriculture, is a professor of environmental and agricultural history at Texas State University, San Marcos. His most recent book is Just Food: Where Locavores Get It Wrong and How We Can Truly Eat Responsibly (2009). His articles and reviews have appeared in The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, Slate.com, and the Christian Science Monitor. In 2001 he won the Walter Muir Whitehill Prize in Early American History awarded by the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, and in 2009 he won the Hiett Prize in the Humanities from the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture. McWilliams currently blogs at The Atlantic and at Freakonomics.com. He lives in Austin, Texas, where he frequents the local farmers’ market.

The lectures are free and open to the public. The Eugene lecture will be followed by a book sale and signing. Live web stream on 4/26 at ohc.uoregon.edu. For information or disability accommodations, contact ohc@uoregon.edu or (541) 346-3934.

Moore continued from front page

imperative, Moore argues, not simply a scientific or economic issue. “Taking whatever we want to support our profligate lives and leaving a ransacked and dangerously unstable planet for the future is not worthy of us as moral beings,” Moore says. “We are called by reasons of compassion, justice, and personal integrity to honor our obligations to leave a planet as rich in possibility as our own. We must act for the sake of the children and the beautiful abundance of life on Earth. We must act to avoid the greatest violation of human rights the world has ever seen. And even if we despair of success, we must act for the sake of personal integrity, refusing to allow our lives to become instruments of destruction, and reclaiming the right to live in ways that embody our deepest values.”

Kathleen Dean Moore is best known for her award-winning books about wet, wild places—Riverwalking; Holdfast; The Pine Island Paradox; and Wild Comfort. She is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Oregon State University in Corvallis.

The lecture will take place on May 9 at 7:30 p.m. in 282 Lillis Hall. It is free and open to the public and will be followed by a book sale and signing. For more information or for disability accommodations, contact ohc@uoregon.edu or (541) 346-3934.

“Yes, for the survival of humankind.
Yes, for the sake of the children.
Yes, for the sake of the Earth itself.
Yes, for the sake of all forms of life on the planet.
Yes, to honor our duties of gratitude and reciprocity.
Yes, for the full expression of human virtue.
Yes, because all flourishing is mutual.
Yes, for the stewardship of God’s creation.
Yes, because compassion requires it.
Yes, because justice demands it.
Yes, because the world is beautiful.
Yes, because we love the world.
Yes, to honor and celebrate the Earth and Earth systems.
Yes, because our moral integrity requires us to do what is right.

“Do we have a moral obligation to take action to protect the future of a planet in peril?” This is the question that authors, poets, scientists, professors, environmental activists, and religious leaders seek to answer in Moral Ground. The fourteen chapter headings read both like a litany and a call to action:
A noun and a verb. Does this theme strike a chord? Please get in touch to tell us about related events, discuss co-sponsorship, or give us good ideas.

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Upcoming WIPs

We continue our series of work-in-progress talks by OHC faculty and graduate research fellows on their current or recent work on Fridays at noon in the Humanities Center Conference Room, 159 PLC. Brown-bag lunches are welcome.

April 8—David Wacks, Romance Languages: “Double Diaspora in Sephardic Literature 1200-1700”

April 22—Marian Smith, Music: “Hidden Balanchine: George Balanchine and Opera”

May 13—Daniel Wojcik, English and Folklore: “The Art of The Outsiders? Vernacular Traditions, Trauma, and Therapeutic Creativity”

All faculty and graduate students are encouraged to attend. The conference room seats twenty-seven; early arrival is recommended.

On March 18, 2011, David Wacks, Romance Languages, and 2010-11 OHC Moll Research Fellow, participated in the Day in the Life of the Digital Humanities, a project looking at a day in the work life of people involved in humanities computing. To check out his post go to: http://ra.tapor.ualberta.ca/~dayofdh2011/davidwacks/

Anne’s Diary, Mauricio’s Dance

Please join us March 30 at 7:30 p.m. in 282 Lillis Hall for the Singer Family Lecture—an intimate evening with Mauricio Wainrot, internationally acclaimed choreographer and Director of Ballet Contemporáneo del Teatro San Martin of Buenos Aires. Wainrot’s award-winning ballet, The Diary of Anne Frank, explores the intolerance, absolutism, and violence of one of the worst fascist regimes in history. In a conversation with Barbara Altmann, director of the Oregon Humanities Center, Wainrot will discuss his motivation and methods for the ballet as well as his personal connection to the Holocaust and his own experience with fascism as an Argentinean and as a Jew.

This event is free and open to the public, and is co-sponsored by the Harold Schnitzer Family Program in Judaic Studies and the Oregon Humanities Center’s Endowment for Public Outreach in the Arts, Sciences, and Humanities. For disability accommodations, or for more information, please call (541) 346-5288.

The Eugene Ballet will perform The Diary of Anne Frank April 2-3, 2011 at the Hult Center. Contact: Eugene Ballet, eugeneballet.org or (541) 485-3992. Tickets: Hult Center Box Office, (541) 682-5000.