

Ideas of Nature

(Peter Taylor, building on Raymond Williams, 10/95, revised 3/99)

		nature = actual physical, material (incl. living) world	“nature” = idea about nature	
			read literally (right way for us to behave or for society to be ordered; <i>or</i> we can expect problems if we deviate; <i>or</i> we better be careful if we choose to deviate)	interpreted (invoking external authority is a way to avoid debating social issues head on) •tells us about favored social order & actions <i>plus</i>
	untouched by human activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •provides/d potential "natural resources" •decreasing -> very little left now 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •natural resources determine social/ econ. possibilities •"tells us about how things work without human influence impinging" 	•suppresses history of human laboring and differentiation*
including human activity	humans buffeted by non-human forces, e.g., in past or prehistoric times, or w/ extreme events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •much human-made transformation through history and even in prehistory •very little unambiguous evidence about pre-historic human social arrangements 	"where society's influence has not mitigated such forces we can learn about what's natural, incl. human nature"	•discounts history of human laboring and differentiation* * & the role of States
	humans dominating, e.g., in industrialized societies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •ever intensifying transformations of non-human realm and of human biology •very little unambiguous evidence about behavioral or social universals 	"biology/ human nature constrains/ predisposes behavior in the full range of social/ economic activities"	•the emphasis on behavioral universals & humans as a species discounts differences and on-going differentiation among social groups & societies*