Environmental Ethics

Course packet

Instructor: John Davenport
Fall 2007

Phlv 3109
Contents of the Course Packet

Environmental Studies Minor & Calder Center Info

Syllabus

Course Handouts

Main Course Readings (in addition to assigned books)
1. Mary Oliver, *New and Selected Poems* (Beacon Press)
3. Louis Pojman, Introduction to *Global Environmental Ethics*
4. Donella Meadows et al, selections from *Beyond the Limits* (1991)
5. Arne Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep” and “Ecosophy T” from Pojman, *Environmental Ethics*
   – Norman Myers, “Tropical Forests and Their Species: Going, Going...”
   – Robert Goodland, “The Case that the World has Reached its Limits”
11. Herman Daly, "Sustainable Growth: An Impossibility Theorm"

Supplements
13. Global Warming webpages and articles
14. How Money Compromises Scientific Research
Office Hours: Thursdays 1-4 PM and by appointment (most Wednesdays and Fridays I’m at RH).

Précis of the Seminar:
This course will focus on familiar themes in environmental ethics, beginning with philosophical discussions of value theory and the notion of human beings as stewards of an global ecosystem. In particular, we will ask whether environmental problems should best be evaluated from a biocentric perspective (focusing on the value of living beings and species), an ecocentric perspective (focusing on the relationship of species and ecosystems), or an anthropocentric perspective (focusing on the interests of future human generations). Around mid-semester, we will turn to the largest scale global environmental problems, such as:

- deforestation and the resulting loss of animal species
- the global warming debate
- soil erosion and desertification
- fresh water sources
- sustainable resource use and renewable energy
- the long-term effects of human population growth
- the cost/benefit analyses or other ways of making political decisions on the environment
- fair ways of holding different nation-states responsible for the global world environment

Our focus this semester will be on limits to the growth of resource use, and the implications for sustainable development (especially in the area of renewable energy resources). Unlike a regular seminar in philosophy, we will cover a wide range of issues and approach them from interdisciplinary perspectives. In particular, we will see how and why each of these problems involves not only philosophical but also scientific, political, and historical dimensions as well. Here are four themes that will recur in our discussions:

(1) Analysis of each of our main topics will raise basic ethical questions about the relation of human persons to the rest of their world and their status in the cosmos. Different religious faiths, as well as different ways of understanding individual rights and responsibility for the common good, may have different implications for our main topics. These implications may in turn reflect back on the acceptability of the ethical frameworks from which they derive. For example, unacceptable implications of utilitarian ethics for our responsibilities towards the environment may suggest that utilitarianism is problematic as a method of moral evaluation.

(2) Many particular debates concerning pollution and biodiversity depend on interpreting scientific data in responsible ways, which are often undermined by the influence of for-profit corporations
through their grant funding (in a fashion analogous to the influence of special interests in political fundraising). Students will be asked to assess for themselves how real the threats of various kinds of environmental catastrophes may be during the 21st century.

(3) Environmental issues provide a vital case study for reexamining basic questions about political justice, since they cannot be adequately resolved without rethinking our entire customary way of determining public policy on the basis of the short-term economic interests of separate nation-states. Our focus will be on environmental problems of a truly global scale, of crucial importance to the entire human race.

(4) During the course of the semester, we'll develop a basic understanding of how debates concerning responsibility for the environment and its potential degradation expanded during the 20th century. We'll look at the shift from anthropocentric approaches to animals and the environment towards more biocentric or deep-ecological views, and the radical suspicion of technology these sometimes involve. In economic analysis, we find a different development. Economists began in the mid-twentieth century to include pollution and other public costs or "externalities" in the assessment of industrial contributions to GNP. This approach stimulated a much broader set of initiatives to preserve the integrity of ecosystems, open spaces, and biodiversity. A range of groups with different sorts of political agendas and policy initiatives have fostered today's widespread public concern for the environment in general, including (e.g.):

- The 19th century wilderness movement founded by John Muir and developed in Aldo Leopold's "land ethic," which helped create public support for federal initiatives creating the national parks under President Theodore Roosevelt, and continues to be represented today by groups like the Sierra Club.
- The creation of the endangered species list and the debates over hunting of game;
- The development of 19th century "natural ecology" into the contemporary conception of the world ecosystem as an organic set of interrelations of mutual dependency;
- The anti-nuke movement in the 1970s, Greenpeace and the protection of oceans and lands from industrial pollution, and the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
- Initiatives to replace fossil fuels, why they have largely stalled, and the emergence of the new debates over deforestation and global warming.
- Changes in the debates about world population growth, its control through contraception and/or economic development, and the struggle between developed and developing nations.
- The beginning of radical ecofeminist theories that link degradation of the environment to the oppression of women.

Although our class discussion will be focused largely on the philosophical merits of different possible solutions to the main problems raised in environmental ethics, some attention to the historical points mentioned under (4) will help give students a sense of how these abstract debates have played out in real-world politics, and how the divisions and different styles of approach found within environmental ethics reflect a diverse and sometimes conflicting set of historical sources.

**Personal Reflection:** This seminar is designed to help each of us face the large set of troubling
questions concerning the environment that are likely to play a dominant role in public policy debates well into the next century. In particular I hope to challenge you not just to understand the issues, but to think about what your religious and ethical tradition(s) may have to say on these questions, and to reconsider political convictions on other matters in the light of the problem of responsibility for the environment. My aim is not to push a particular set of environmental policies or grind a political axe, but to explain the magnitude and structure of the problems, and to use these to help form the sense of responsibility for the common good that we want in an enlightened citizen. The set of issues our topic comprises provide a very fruitful arena for thinking about such basic questions as:

- whether our only political responsibilities as citizens are to obey the laws and defend our nation, or whether we have a responsibility to the global community;
- whether responsibility is only for one's individual actions or whether we have collective or group responsibilities;
- whether such group responsibilities might be only to the current generation, or how we can understand responsibility to future generations.

Texts: These texts are all required. The books are available in the bookstore and the course packet will be available through the instructor:

7. Course packet for all other readings, including news articles on different environmental policy issues, literature from and on different environmental groups, and perhaps websites. Students will pay for the course packet with a $20 money order (to save money vs Campus Coursepaks).

Requirements:

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<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 essay on readings</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 test on readings</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 oral report</td>
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<td>Class participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>1 policy/position paper</td>
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Class Participation: This grade depends on two factors:

- The quality of your questions and contributions in class, including your answers in class to assigned study questions for the day. Be an active contributor, not just a passive listener, and you'll get more out of this material! Philosophy should be fun. Someone who never talks the entire semester cannot score better than 50% on this component, which means losing 5% on your overall class score.

- Your attendance. If you are absent more than two classes, you will lose points. Four absences is likely to lower you a whole grade. No illness is excused without a doctor's note. No absence is excused for flights or travel made during class days, or family events other than a wedding or funeral (proof required). You will be responsible for any readings covered in a missed session.
**Test:** Your knowledge of the readings will be evaluated in one take-home test late in the semester (in lieu of a final exam). It will consist of multiple choice questions along with some short-answer questions and a short essay. Attending to class discussion will help a lot here, since test questions will emphasize the material we focus on during class.

**Oral Report:** Each student will sign up to do an oral report on one of the readings for the day to start class discussion. You should prepare a written report, perhaps 2-3 pages double-spaced, explaining the material, evaluating it (why do you agree or disagree), and raising further questions to be addressed. Take this seriously; it counts as much as a test. Don't be scared of speaking in class. We'll help you out if you stumble, and this isn't a test in public speaking. The key is to be organized and have thought through your questions on the reading.

**Essays:** The first essay, due before mid-semester, will be a comparison/contrast paper related to our readings, and you will be able to choose among a short list of assigned questions. For the second paper, I want each student to select and research a topic I approve related to current environmental policies and problems. For this you will most likely use reports from various environmental organizations. *I must approve the topic and the main sources you will use.*

**Webpage:** I hope to build a course webpage with two parts. One will include handouts and notes on readings, and email addresses of students. Written versions of some oral reports may be posted here as well. Another will feature links to some of the most interesting environmental sites on the net. I will ask for your submissions in building the second part. There may also be some links to help you with the policy/position paper.

**Other Policies**

**Computer Disks:** You should never plead that the computer ate your disk. Especially at this campus, you should always save any paper, at every stage of drafting, *on more than one disk!!* Backup is the most basic principle in using computers for college work. If your disk goes bad, I'll say, "where's your backup?"

**Honesty and Citation:** I take this very seriously; cheating is the one unforgivable sin. All your work for this class must be original, must be your own, and you must cite your sources, both when you quote text, and when you paraphrase. Examples of cheating:

1. Handing in work you did for another class without clearing it with me.
2. Copying another student's work on a test or paper, with or without their permission.
3. Handing in an essay downloaded from the internet, copied from an uncited website, or copied from an encyclopedia, book, or article without citation is plagiarism. This holds true even if the wording has been significantly changed. Please see the student handbook for more information on the University’s plagiarism policy

*If I judge that a student has cheated in any of these ways, or in any comparably serious fashion, that student will fail the entire course and it will go on his/her permanent record here. If there are any prior offenses on record, suspension is possible. A very minor infraction results in an F for the entire assignment, usually dropping your final grade by a whole letter. [NB: I have had to fail graduating seniors before....*please* don’t let this be you!]*
Secondary Sources: I will direct students to reliable websites on environmental issues; there are many unreliable sources on the internet. For philosophical issues, look first at the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (online from our library database pages). Never depend on the Encarta Encyclopedia, which is very unreliable. There are other much better online guides to Philosophy (see our department website at www.fordham.edu/philosophy for the link to a page listing some).

If you bring in ideas and quotes from secondary sources, but you must cite them either by footnotes or parenthetical references referring to a bibliography at the end of the paper. Even if you acknowledge an internet site, for example, you can't just lift large sections of its text wholesale: only take short quotations, clearly indicated as such in your paper.
—This includes paraphrases: even if you reword what the author said, cite the page number.
—It also includes websites: give the full URL of the page you cite. Note that webpages should never be the only source you cite in college essays.

Tentative Schedule

9/11: Introduction: The Endowment Model of Environmental Goods
[professor away at Oxford conference in Britain; makeup to be scheduled]
(1) Anthropocentric, ecocentric, and biocentric approaches to the environment.
(2) A short selection of nature poems by Mary Oliver (course packet)
(3) Pojman’s Introduction to Global Environmental Ethics (course packet).
(5) Sterba, Introduction to Earth Ethics

Part I: Ecocentric and Biocentric Approaches

9/18: Wilderness Conservation and the History of US Environmentalism
(1) Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, pp.1-52: "January - August"
(2) Leopold, “Sketches Here and There”: pp.95-115 (WI); pp.122-36 (AZ & NM)
(3) “Ecology, Wilderness, and Ethics,” DesJardins, Environmental Ethics ch.8

(2) “The Land Ethic,” DesJardins, Environmental Ethics ch.9 §1-5

10/2: The Biocentric Approach: Taylor and Rolston
(1) Paul Taylor, “The Ethics of Respect for Nature,” in Sterba #10
(2) “Biocentric Ethics and the Inherent Value of Life” DesJardins, Environmental Ethics ch.7
10/9: Rolston and Wilson on Species and Biodiversity
(1) Holmes Rolston III, “Diversity and Complex Values,” and “Intrinsic Natural Values,” from Conserving Natural Values, chs. 2 & 6 (course packet)
(2) Edward Wilson, The Future of Life, chapters 1 & 6

10/16: Animal Rights and Ecocentric Ethics: Finding a Balance?
(1) Peter Singer, "Down on the Factory Farm," in Sterba #3
(2) M.A. Warren, "The Rights of the Non-Human World," in Sterba #17
(3) Eliott Sober, “Philosophical Problems for Environmentalism,” in Foundations of Environmental Philosophy, ed. Kaufman (course packet)
(4) First paper due in class on 10/16

Part II: Anthropocentric Approaches

10/23: Ethical Frameworks for Evaluation of Environmental Issues: Sustainable Futures
(1) DesJardins, Environmental Ethics, ch. 4: Moral Theory and Duties to Future Generations
(2) DesJardins, Environmental Ethics, chs. 3.7-3.9 (pp.55-65) on Sustainable Economics
(3) Bryan Norton, “Environmental Problems and Future Generations,” in Sterba, Earth Ethics #12

10/30: Global Problems: Deforestation and the World’s Bioresources
(1) J.S. Rischard, High Noon, chs. 5-12 (course packet).

11/6: Global Problems: The Oceans

11/13: Global Problems: Population Growth and Limits to Economic Growth
(1) Bill McKibben, "A Special Moment in History," in Pojman (course packet)
(2) Robert Goodland, “The Case that the World has Reached its Limits,” from The Environmental Ethics and Policy Book, ch.6 (course packet).
(3) Herman Daly, "Sustainable Growth: An Impossibility Theorm" (course packet).

11/20: Sustainable Development
(2) Meadows, Randers, and Meadows, Beyond the Limits, a selection of graphs (course packet)
(3) Take-home test on readings due in class Nov. 20.

11/27: Global Problems: Ozone Depletion and Global Warming
(2) Christopher Flaven, "The Heat is On: The Greenhouse Effect," in Pojman (Eres)
(3) G.T. Miller, "Global Warming: How Serious in the Threat?" from Sterba #27
(4) International Convention on Climate Change, in Sterba #29
(5) The Carbon Cycle (last section of course packet on global warming)
12/4: The Debate about Causes and Effects of Global Warming
(2) News articles on global warming (see last section of course packet).
(3) Selections from Peter Tertzakian, *A Thousand Barrels a Second* (course packet)

12/11: Presentations of final papers
(1) Presentations on Clean Energy sources
(2) Presentations on Soil Erosion and Fresh Water problems
(3) Presentations on Topics in Value Theory

12/18: Final Class in lieu of exam: Presentations continued
ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS OVERVIEW

1. INTRINSIC VALUE

Are human persons the only beings with intrinsic value? – the anthropocentric position.

Or could intrinsic value or moral standing also be found in:

A. Conscious animals – the animal rights position
B. Unconscious animals, plants, landforms, ecosystems – the ecocentric position
C. Individual species and biodiversity of species in total – the biocentric position

2. UTILITARIAN AND NONUTILITARIAN APPROACHES

If the natural environment and its species have intrinsic value, should this be reflected in our thinking according to cost-benefit analysis along with other benefits and harms to human welfare, or reflected by other nonconsequentialist ethical principles?

Related global environmental problems:
(1) Treatment of animals in factory farming, the ethics of meat-eating and animal research;
(2) The loss of rainforests and other biologically rich habitats;
(3) Land pollution
(4) Damage to the oceans

3. DUTIES TO FUTURE HUMAN PERSONS

Are our only interhuman duties to other presently existing human persons, or do we also have a responsibility to the distant future?

Related global environmental problems:
(1) Global warming and the buildup of greenhouse gasses;
(2) Human population growth and the growth of natural resources use;
(3) Groundwater carrying capacity;
(4) Desertification and topsoil erosion, loss of arable land;
(5) Economic development of third-world nations and proportional responsibility;
(6) Our fragmented global political structures.