



Full Syllabus



Course Title

Environmentalism: Ethical and Cultural Perspectives

Lecturer

Dr. Jeremy Benstein

Semester

Fall

Course requirements

Students will be expected to read the assigned literature critically, come prepared for active discussions, write several short responses to the readings, prepare a presentation of a contemporary environmental ethical issue of their choosing, and write a final paper on a topic agreed upon with the instructor.

Final grade components

35% for 3 short reading response assignments of your choosing (up to two pages).

15% for a short oral presentation of a contemporary environmental ethical challenge

50% for a final paper, topic to be agreed upon with the instructor.

Course schedule

Class no. / Date	Subject and Requirements (assignments, reading materials, tasks, etc.)
1 / 4 Nov	<p><i>Introduction</i> Ethics, values, philosophy, culture: What do these have to do with the environment? We will break the ice, and get to know one another through exploring two introductory questions: How can a values-based discourse hope to inform our search for solutions to environmental problems? What ethical challenges do issues of nature and environment present? <i>Class implementation:</i> rhetorical tug-of-war on some key positions</p>
2 / 11 Nov	<p><i>The 'Historic Roots' Debate</i> How did we get into this mess? We will explore Lynn White's controversial thesis of the role of Biblical values in Western culture, and contrast this with other approaches of the role and nature of religion regarding environmental values. Do we need to become pagans to be sustainable? (Readings: White, Dubos, optional: Quinn) <i>Class implementation:</i> Genesis text study</p>
3 / 18 Nov	<p><i>The Land Ethic</i> Aldo Leopold is recognized as the grandfather of modern environmental ethics, and his <i>Sand County Almanac</i> as one of its main cornerstones. We will analyze the claims of his classic essay, and explore the ways they have influenced ways of thinking for a half century. (Readings: Leopold, Callicott – <i>In Defense</i>) <i>Class implementation:</i> close reading and key word analysis</p>
4 / 25 Nov	<p><i>The Animal Rights Debate</i> Do animal rights and environmental values go together? Do animals even have "rights"? How do we best negotiate human needs and our treatment of animals? We</p>



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	<p>will deepen the discussion begun in the previous two weeks about what it means to be human in the world. (Readings: Regan, Callicott – <i>Triangular Affair</i>, Singer, Midgely) <i>Class implementation</i>: Opportunity for class presentations on selected animal rights issues (hunting, fur, experimentation, vegetarianism, etc.)</p>
5 / 9 Dec (note: no class on 2 Dec)	<p><i>What's Deep about Deep Ecology?</i> Deep ecology is one of the most distinctive and radical of environmental philosophical traditions. It has been praised as the only real environmental ethic, but also castigated as anti-humanist. We will explore the implications of bio- and eco-centrism, and formulate a social and ethical appreciation – and critique. (Readings: DeVall and Sessions, compare with Bookchin, Foreman & Bookchin) <i>Class implementation</i>: point-counterpoint</p>
6 / 16 Dec	<p><i>A Closer Look at the Nature of Nature</i> We will continue our critique of the deep ecology paradigm, looking analytically at the idea of wilderness from different points of view, the role of romantic values in general, and taking a broader look at the development of environmentalism as a philosophical frame and as a movement (Readings: Cronon, Guha <i>Critique</i>, Schwartz). <i>Class implementation</i>: brief case studies (rainforests, the Israeli Highway 6 example)</p>
7 / 23 Dec	<p><i>Consumerism – From Biosphere to Buy-o-sphere</i> Arguably one of the basic most intractable aspects of the social-environmental crisis, consumerism is both boon and bane. Arguably, free choice is at the core of our Western democratic society – but is it possible to have too much of a good thing? Is it possible to even define "overconsumption," and what are the ethical issues raised by confronting it? (Readings: Norton, Schor -choose among 3) <i>Class implementation</i>: presentation on the history and significance of advertising, the development of consumer culture, and new social alternatives</p>
8 / 30 Dec	<p><i>The Commons – A Tragedy?</i> Another fundamental conceptualization of the environmental crisis is the non- or mismanagement of the commons. Garrett Hardin, in of the most cited articles in the social sciences, claims this is a built-in tragedy. We will explore the under-appreciated significance of the commons in the economy and our lives, and discuss different approaches to the challenges it raises. (Readings: Hardin, Rowe, Monbiot, Mishori) <i>Class implementation</i>: opportunity for class presentations on selected commons issues</p>
9 / 6 Jan	<p><i>Environmental Justice – Resources, Risks, Representation</i> The environmental justice paradigm is of relatively recent vintage, but has transformed the face of environmentalism, its constituency and leading issues: how poverty, racism and the social gap have taken center stage. (Readings: Bullard, Haiman, Principles (2)). <i>Class implementation</i>: opportunity for class presentations on selected EJ issues.</p>
10 / 13 Jan	<p><i>Technological Innovation: The Silver Bullet?</i> Arguably, technology and its ills got us into this situation – maybe it can get us out? What is the role of technology, and technological innovation in crafting a sustainable society? Can we bypass all these messy values debates if we can only get the technical side "right" – clean and efficient enough? (Readings: Ellis, Foster, Joy, Kloor, Lomborg, McDonough, Simon) <i>Class implementation</i>: class debate on technological optimism</p>



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<p>11 / 20 Jan</p>	<p><i>Is Local Where It's At?</i> Parallel, or contra, to the global attempts to solve our big problems (such as the various rounds of climate talks), there is a movement that claims that our root problem is precisely our attempt to work top-down: we need first and foremost to take care of our places, to reconnect to the local, especially in this era of globalization. One version of this is bioregionalism, and it presents a deep challenge to all those who think that big problems require big solutions. (Readings: Berry, Dasmann, Sale) <i>Class implementation:</i> personal examples of local activism; opportunity for class presentations on selected global-local issues.</p>
<p>12 / 27 Jan</p>	<p><i>Is Democracy Part of the Solution, or Part of the Problem?</i> On the one hand, public participation in decision making processes, and deliberative democracy in general are flagship issues for the social environmental movement. On the other, perhaps the democratic system is not suited to taking the drastic measures needed to address current challenges to sustainability, and moreover, core democratic values of individualism and property rights may be at odds with "greener" views. (Readings: de Shalit, Sagoff) <i>Class implementation:</i> Opportunity for class presentations on selected issues of public participation, and democratic decision making.</p>
<p>13 / 29 Jan (note: additional make-up class, Wednesday, 10:00-12:00)</p>	<p><i>Food: Working for Sustainability with a Knife and Fork</i> The newest frontier of environmental activism is changing the way we eat. Organic, local, CSAs, slow food, low on the food chain – some of our most significant impacts on the environment come from the way we grow, process, prepare, consume, and dispose of our food – and these present a range of ethical and social challenges. Including course summation – where should we go from here? (Readings: Pollan,) <i>Class implementation:</i> Opportunity for class presentations on selected food issues; closing class party with sustainable food.</p>

Required course reading

~Adamson, J., M. M. Evans, et al., eds, The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics Poetics and Pedagogy. Tuscon, University of Arizona Press, 2002.

~Berry, Wendell, "The Work of Local Culture," 1988 Iowa Humanities Lecture, reprinted in his What Are People For, Counterpoint, 2010.

~Bookchin, Murray, "On Social Ecology," from Socialist Review, vol. 88, no.3, pp. 11-29, 1988.

~Bookchin, Murray, "Social Ecology Versus Deep Ecology," in The Environmental Ethics and Policy Book, pp. 228-238, 1994.

~Bullard, Robert, "Environmental Racism and the Environmental Justice Movement". Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots. R. Bullard, ed. Boston, South End Press, 1993.

~Callicott, J. Baird, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair," Environmental Ethics, vol.2, no. 4, Winter 1980, pp. 311-338.

~Callicott, J. Baird, In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy, SUNY Press, 1989.

~Cronon, William, "The Trouble With Wilderness, or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," from Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature, ed. W. Cronon, W.W. Norton, 1996, pp. 69-90.

~Dasmann, Raymond. "Future Primitive: Ecosystem People Versus Biosphere People." CoEvolution Quarterly 11: 26-31, 1976.



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- ~de-Shalit, Avner 'Is liberalism environment friendly?', Social Theory and Practice, Vol. 21, pp. 287-315, 1996.
- ~Devall, Bill and George Sessions, Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered. Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, Chapter 5, 1985.
- ~Dubos, Rene, "Franciscan Conservation vs. Benedictine Stewardship", from A God Within, Scribners, 1972.
- ~ Erle, Ellis, "Planet of No Return," Breakthrough Journal, Issue 3 (Fall 2011).
- ~Foreman, David and Murray Bookchin, in Defending the Earth, Steve Chase, ed., Boston: South End Press, 1991.
- ~Foster, John Bellamy, "Capitalism's Environmental Crisis—Is Technology the Answer?" Monthly Review, 2000, monthlyreview.org/2000/12/01/capitalisms-environmental-crisis-is-technology-the-answer.
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- ~Hardin, Garret "The Tragedy of the Commons", Science, December 1968, Volume 162, pp. 1243-1248.
- ~Joy, Bill, "Why the future doesn't need us", Wired, 2004. Accessed at: http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/8.04/joy_pr.html.
- ~ Kloor, Keith, "The Green Modernist Vision," 2012, <http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/collideascape/2012/04/17/the-green-modernist-vision/#.UmU-l1BmiM4>
- ~Leopold, Aldo, "The Land Ethic," from A Sand County Almanac, Oxford University Press, 1949, pp. 201-226.
- ~Lomborg, Bjorn, "A Roadmap for the Planet," <http://www.newsweek.com/2011/06/12/bjorn-lomborg-explains-how-to-save-the-planet.html>.
- ~McDonough, William and Michael Braungart, "The NEXT Industrial Revolution", The Atlantic Monthly; October 1998; Volume 282, No. 4; pages 82 - 92 .
- ~Midgley, Mary, "The Mixed Community," Animals and Why They Matter, 1996.
- ~Mishori, Daniel, "Conceptualizing the Commons: Reflections on the Rhetoric of Environmental Rights and Public Ownership," in Development and Conflict in the 21st Century , Otto F. von Feigenblatt, ed., JAPSS Press, 2010.
- ~Monbiot, George, "The Tragedy of Enclosure," Scientific American, January 1994.
- ~Naess, Arne. "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements: A Summary," in Nina Witoszek and Andrew Brennan, eds. Philosophical Dialogues, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999.
- ~Norton, Bryan, "The Cultural Approach to Conservation Biology," from Conservation for the Twenty-first Century, ed. David Western and Mary Pearl, Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 241-246.
- ~Pollan, Michael, In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto, Penguin, 2008.
- ~Pollan, Michael, "The Food Movement Rising," 2010, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/jun/10/food-movement-rising/?pagination=false>
- ~Quinn, Daniel, Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and the Spirit, Bantam/Turner, New York, 1992.
- ~Regan, Tom, "The Case for Animal Rights," in The Environmental Ethics and Policy Book, 1994, pp. 77-84.
- ~Rowe, Jonathan, "The Hidden Commons," YES! Magazine, Summer 2001.
- ~ Rowe, Jonathan, "The Demand for the Common Good," accessed at: <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/what-is-the-good-life/the-demand-for-the-common-good>
- ~Sagoff, Mark, "Can Environmentalists Be Liberals?," The Economy of the Earth, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 146-170.
- ~Sale, Kirkpatrick, Dwellers In the Land: The Bioregional Vision. San Francisco, Sierra Club Books, 1985.
- ~Schor, Juliet B., from The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure, 1991.
- ~ Schor, Juliet, "In Defense of Consumer Critique: Revisiting the Consumption Debates of the Twentieth Century", The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 2007; 611.
- ~Schor, Juliet, an interview by Douglas B. Holt, Journal of Consumer Culture 2005; 5; 5



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~Shutkin, William A., The Land That Could Be: Environmentalism and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2000.
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Optional course reading

Comments