

Tel Aviv University

Faculty of Exact Sciences

Porter School of the Environment and Earth Sciences

The Department of Environmental Studies

Course Title:

Bioethics From an Ecological Point of View

0910442501

(MA Seminar or an elective course)

Autumn Semester (A) – 2022

Porter Bld. Capsule Room

Mondays: 10.20-11.45

DRAFT

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Course requirements:

Attendance and participation in classes; reading papers, presenting and discussing in class; final paper

Final grade components: reading papers, participation in class; final paper (or seminar paper)

* The syllabus is subject to changes

Course structure:

The "Ecological Point of View"

Theory of controversies (Prof. Marcelo Dascal)

Professional ethics and "disciplinary science"

Bioethics (conventional / standard positions)

Case studies

Abstract

Purpose of the seminar:

The field of health and environment is often discussed only from the aspects of environmental risks. It has another aspect, which has been discussed since the seventies, and which has not been the focus of the research discussion; Aspects of bioethics, ecology and the environment.

Bioethics is the field that deals with ethical questions related to the biomedical sciences, including medicine, nursing, medical research and research in the life sciences, and more.

Bioethics often appears as a narrow professional ethics of these fields, but originally the field and the term itself appeared in the writings of Van Rensselaer Potter, who saw in Aldo Leopold and deep ecology the appropriate models for medical and professional ethics in the field of life sciences, and especially emphasized environmental aspects, which today are almost completely absent from the bioethical discourse.

Therefore, the course will review the beginnings of bioethics, the main ideas in the field today, the dilemmas that appear as a result of the relative neglect of environmental aspects (and the attitude towards nature in general) in bioethics, which the bioethicist Peter Whitehouse called the "eco-medical disconnection syndrome". For this reason, we will first examine Ecologism as an ideology and as an alternative to the dominant world view, and as a perspective from which we examine bioethics.

The course presumes (and reasons) that the commitment to truth should be a dominant ethical principle, and that there is no reason to assume dominance of the anthropocentric point of view in bioethics.

To demonstrate the relevance of environmental and natural considerations in bioethics, the course deals with a series of relevant medical and environmental dilemmas, with an emphasis on controversies and debates from the Israeli context, including water fluoridation, pharmacological and natural remedies, cannabis, and more.

Also, the seminar will focus on the relationship between the medical and scientific establishment and academia, and the ways in which this relationship is expressed, while examining current issues in the public debate.

Special emphasis will be given to the field of "public health", and to controversies related to the Corona regime.

Methodology: Theory of Controversies

A controversy is a type of argument that does not boil down to a given issue. When diving into a controversy, in order to try and resolve it, a deep chasm of factual, methodological, conceptual, and other disagreements is revealed. In the "controversy" there is a process of clashing between different worldviews (for example, public health doctors and "anti-

vaxxers"), which makes it possible to identify conceptual, ethical and other disguised assumptions.

According to Prof. Marcelo Dascal (1998a,b)(see also Sarel, 2016), controversies are intellectual "hotspots", which enable progress in science.

The fields of medicine and public health are full of controversies, and not only due to economic or other "interests". Controversies appear mainly due to differences in values or worldviews, which are in the background of arguments that also involve these or other interests.

The purpose of the seminar is to discuss diverse bioethical conflicts, with an emphasis on contemporary ones, to identify conflicts between worldviews, values, arguments and more. These conflicts will be analyzed and classified through the distinction between **controversies**, **discussions** and **disputes**, and through familiarization with basic concepts from the bioethic debate, with an emphasis on conflicts and disputes that took place in Israel, or that had a local-Israeli aspect. After a general introduction to the discussion of bioethics and professional ethics in general, the seminar will deal with the analysis of controversies in the field of public health, and will encourage group discussion of the students' works.

Bioethics:

Bioethics is the field that deals with ethical questions related to the biomedical sciences, including medicine, nursing, medical research and research in the life sciences, and more. Since the Corona, bioethical questions have become extremely important in public policy, especially in the context of coercive measures and enforcement of "public health" policies.

Bioethics often appears as a narrow professional ethics of medicine and related fields, but originally the field and the term itself appeared in the writings of the cancer researcher Van Rensselaer Potter (VR Potter, 1970), who saw in the ecologist Aldo Leopold and radical ecological positions (deep ecology) the appropriate models for medical and professional ethics in a scientific field life, and emphasized especially environmental and interdisciplinary and holistic aspects, which are now almost completely absent from the bioethic discussion, and neglect that the bioethicist Peter Whitehouse called the "eco-medical disconnection syndrome" (a pun on a medical/neurological syndrome in which the two parts of the brain do not communicate). The course demonstrates the relevance of environmental and nature considerations in bioethics through relevant medical and environmental dilemmas, with an emphasis on controversies and debates from the Israeli context.

The course will focus on questions of "public health" in the era of the Corona, and especially on the "rule of the experts", the process in which the structure of science and academia creates specializations whose holders are considered to be the only knowledgeable, and therefore the only qualified to make decisions in these areas, and the effects of this dynamic on the management of the Corona crisis. The course will examine the arena of decision-making on health issues, individual rights on health issues and areas of friction between them and public health. We will examine who are the main players in the arena, the power relations between them and what happens when there is a conflict between individuals, the collective and decision makers (and the interests that drive them).

The era of the Corona apparently governs the position of "science", as represented by the experts, and the alleged "opponents" of science: "opponents" of vaccines, "deniers" of Corona, and the like. The course will examine the hypothesis that academic/disciplinary science today is hostile to criticism, and enshrines professional hierarchies, in a way that creates a scientific "orthodoxy", which is not subject to the rules of criticism and therefore to the definitions of science according to Popper (openness to criticism; resistance to refutation attempts). The discussion of Corona and recent controversies will make it possible to state the concept "Science", as it is discussed in the philosophy of science, with the contemporary model, as it emerges from the academic, public and social reality in the Corona era.

The course/seminar will also present in short the concept of *ecological firmness* as a radical contemporary discourse, based on the tradition of deep ecology and ecocentric ethics. Based on the distinction between environmentalism and (ideological) ecologism (Dobson, 2009), this new concept is rooted in the ideas of "nature knows best" (Barry Commoner), also with respect to human and habitat health. This concept serves as a methodological tool, enabling discussions of alternative to the limitations of mainstream concepts of sustainability and sustainable development (and SDGs).

From such a perspective, a critical outlook evolves regarding current worldview, which seems to presume that humans knows best, based on science and technology, which could allegedly improve nature, including human nature (trans humanism), as could be seen in the framings and promises of medicine, biotechnology and genetics.

The ecological alternative is based on ecocentric bioethics, holistic, systemic, trans and multi-disciplinary frameworks, critical thinking, and on alternative learning and lifestyle including biohacking and eco-hacking (e.g., permaculture, TEK).

Ecological firmness is inseparable from bioethics, and therefore the course will examine key issues in bioethics, relevant to ecological radical theory and to contemporary emergence of medical technocracy of public health.

This seminar will therefore serve as a students' lab for critical and ecological thinking regarding current concepts of science, nature, health, and human nature in the post-corona era.

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Prolonged discussion on ecological firmness

For the past two years, policies allegedly based on “science” determines every aspect of life, in the individual, institutional, states and global levels. These policies are allegedly based on the disciplines of Medicine and especially on the sub-discipline of “public health”.

The brunch of ethics dealing with such topics is Bioethics, commonly understood as (narrow) medical ethics, though it was at first articulated as a broad holistic and systemic new outlook on Science focused on ecological survival, based on insights from both reductionists disciplines of hard science (different branches of biology, chemistry etc.), as well as the social sciences and the humanities (and especially Ethics), on the model of Rachel Carson, Aldo Leopold and Deep Ecology (Potter, 1970).

Corona masks serves as an excellent example, since they cause tremendous widespread environmental pollution. We learn that current policies fail to incorporate an environmental or global ecological outlook. This fact requires critical discussion of the premisses of Science, and the difficulty to promote environmental and ecologically minded policies, especially at the paradoxical meeting points of the environment and health.

Ecological Firmness is an experimental concept in “deep” ecological thinking. The original insights were published in Hebrew (2018), arguing for a new concept of Health, based on insights from Yoga & Tai Chi. It began to evolve during visit to the Philippines (Mindanao, 2019), combining field research in rural indigenous areas, firmness workshops and lectures.

There, while travelling with Prof. Rogelio Bayod, we made plans for an Ecological Bioethics & Firmness Labb as a joint research project, postponed due to Corona restrictions. The joint project was supposed to articulate the idea of ecological firmness, in order to help indigenous communities to protect their habitat from government’ plans to surrender their mineral-rich territory for open mines and destruction.

For two years (2020-2021) this seminar was given in Hebrew, focusing on Firmness as an embodied concept of ecological consciousness, in the spirit of Deep Ecology and VR Potter’s Bioethics.

The concept of Firmness will be introduced in the seminar, and is based on Biohacking research, of which participants will be able to experience for themselves.

"Biohacking" is an open-source alternative (with empowering individual hacking ethics), based on critical thinking, subjective self-experimentation, embodiment, and objective scientific knowledge and know-how, to ensure democratic communication and public-participation in science, medicine and health (Mishori, 2019). Eco-hacking is similar, with respect to our ability to live with and of the earth.

The seminar is based on the distinction between Environmentalism and Ecologism, as two different modes of framing Human-Nature relationship.

Ecological Firmness is a seminar (or an elective course) that strives to be practical, critically examining the ethical and rational aspects that influence environmental policy, and in particular the premises of this policy as reflected in the concepts and modes of action of science and health, as reflecting concepts of human nature. As an academic concept, it is

inherently critical of mainstream “disciplinary” science (science as structured by semi-autonomous disciplines, as manifested in Academia).

The seminar assumes a direct connection between the body, consciousness and place [Makom] [מקום] (public space, nature, the absolute — the location of one’s body). This connection is realized through involvement in the world, designed to improve the quality of society and the quality of the place, and therefore emphasis will be placed on practical aspects and socio-ecological involvement.

The connection between the body-of-consciousness and the environment, exists in environmental research only partially. Therefore, we will get to know approaches from deep ecology that deal with the idea of ecological consciousness and a sense of place. We will also deal with issues of biophilia, biological and ecological "hacking" (Eco / BioHacking), bioethics (according to VR Potter), and more. Special emphasis will be given to issues of public space, and the treatment of nature.

The seminar endorses open-source philosophy, and encourages student to contribute texts and ideas to the seminar.

Firmness

Firmness is the common root of martial arts and yoga. It enables the practitioner to be firm, have a proper posture, a straight back, and relaxation, enabling deep meditations and control of body and mind. The philosophy and method of learning and practice "Firmness" includes guidelines for standing, sitting and moving in a stable and effortless manner.

There is a connection between our personal and cultural habits of using the body, regarding it as a mindless machine, and the difficulty people find in sinking into deep meditations. Deep meditations enable the mind to learn to control their inner force and healing power (Chi, Prana, elan vital [Bergson, 1907]). The proliferation of chronic "affluence" diseases, environmental degradation and the multi-dimensional ecological crisis are other prominent examples of the errors of culture, science and medicine today. The source of some of these mistakes is the renunciation of the truth and reason in the body, of "Firmness" and of the lack of understanding of the meaning of this concession.

The most obvious expression of these errors is inefficient or utterly wrong breathing (should be first exhaling, then inhaling), the sitting on chairs (especially the use of a backrest), the wearing of high heels, the unnecessary use of shoes in general, the detachment from the natural clocks of sunrise and sunset (as well as natural light and frequencies of the sun), the changing of seasons, etc... These make people inflexible, causing back pain and other ills and inconveniences, and reduced resistance to diseases.

The book "Firmness: Meditations on First Philosophy and Environmental Ethics" (Graff Publishing, Hebrew, 2018) deals with these and other topics. Forthcoming a paper on ecological biohacking that expands on these ideas and concepts.