

**The Department of  
Environmental Studies**

●●● Porter School of  
the Environment and  
Earth Sciences



**The Raymond and Beverly Sackler  
Faculty of Exact Sciences**  
Tel Aviv University

**הפקולטה למדעים מדויקים  
ע"ש ריימונד ובברלי סאקלר**  
אוניברסיטת תל אביב

**החוג ללימודי הסביבה**

●●● בית הספר לסביבה  
ולמדעי כדור הארץ  
על שם פורטר

## **Environmentalism: Ethical and Cultural Perspectives**

**Instructor: Dr. Jeremy Benstein**

**Academic year:** 2023-24

**Semester:** Fall

**Course number:** 0920.6120.01

**Credit hours:** 2

**Class hours:** Mondays, 16:15– 17:45

**Room:** The Porter building, room 101

### **Lecturer information**

Office hours: by appointment

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### **Course description**

This is a humanities course designed to introduce students to varieties of environmental thought, in their philosophical and cultural contexts, and develop conceptual tools for analyzing contemporary issues. We will read and discuss some of the classic texts in environmentalism that have framed the debates over time, compare and contrast different approaches and schools of thought, explore the interaction of environmental, social and political issues, and strive to clarify our own values and life choices surrounding these questions. Where appropriate, we will also use video materials as part of class assignments.

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

### **Course assessment:**

Attendance is mandatory in all lectures.

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.

**Final Paper Due date:** 1 March 2024



## Course Plan:

### 1. 16 Oct, 2023 - Introduction

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?

*Class implementation:* rhetorical tug-of-war on some key positions

### 2. 23 Oct, 2023 - The 'Historic Roots' Debate

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)

*Class implementation:* Genesis text study

### 3. 30 Oct, 2023 - The Land Ethic

Aldo Leopold is recognized as the grandfather of modern environmental ethics, and his *Sand County Almanac* 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 – *In Defense*)

*Class implementation:* close reading and key word analysis

### 4. 6 Nov, 2023 - The Animal Rights Debate

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 will deepen the discussion begun in the previous two weeks about what it means to be human in the world. (Readings: Regan, Callicott – *Triangular Affair*, Singer, Midgely)

*Class implementation:* Opportunity for class presentations on selected animal rights issues (hunting, fur, experimentation, vegetarianism, etc.)

### 5. 13 Nov, 2023 - What's Deep about Deep Ecology?

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)

*Class implementation:* point-counterpoint



#### **6. 20 Nov, 2023 - A Closer Look at the Nature of Nature**

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 *Critique*, Schwartz).

*Class implementation:* brief case studies (rainforests, the Israeli Highway 6 example)

**NOTE** - **\*\*There is no class on Monday, 27 Nov.\*\***

#### **7. 4 Dec., 2023 - Consumerism – From Biosphere to Buy-o-sphere**

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)

*Class implementation:* presentation on the history and significance of advertising, the development of consumer culture, and new social alternatives

#### **8. 11 Dec, 2023 - The Commons – A Tragedy?**

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)

*Class implementation:* opportunity for class presentations on selected commons issues

#### **9. 18 Dec, 2023 – Technological Innovation: The Silver Bullet?**

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)

*Class implementation:* class debate on technological optimism

#### **10. 25 Dec, 2023 – Environmental Justice – Resources, Risks, Representation (ZOOM)**

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)).

*Class implementation:* opportunity for class presentations on selected EJ issues.



**11. 1 Jan, 2024 - Is Local Where It's At?**

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)

*Class implementation:* personal examples of local activism; opportunity for class presentations on selected global-local issues.

**12. 8 Jan, 2024 - Is Democracy Part of the Solution, or Part of the Problem?**

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)

*Class implementation:* Opportunity for class presentations on selected issues of public participation, and democratic decision making.

**13. 15 Jan, 2024 - Food: Working for Sustainability with a Knife and Fork (note day and time!)**

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, Lappé)

*Class implementation:* Opportunity for class presentations on selected food issues; closing class party with sustainable food.

**Course Bibliography:**

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### Plagiarism

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Plagiarism is the use of someone else's work, words, or ideas as if they were your own. Here are three reasons not to do it:

1. By far the deepest consequence to plagiarizing is the detriment to your intellectual and moral development: you won't learn anything, and your ethics will be corrupted.
2. Giving credit where it's due but adding your own reflection will get you higher grades than putting your name on someone else's work. In an academic context, it counts more to show your ideas in conversation than to try to present them as sui generis.
3. Finally, Tel Aviv University punishes academic dishonesty severely. The most common penalty is suspension from the university, but students caught plagiarizing are also subject to lowered or failing grades as well as the possibility of expulsion.