

SYLLABUS: ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS (PHIL 257A)

St. Olaf College

Spring 2012

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Office Hours: Tues., 3-4:30 and Weds. 1-2:30, or by appointment

Introduction

Environmentalism, as a movement, an ideal, and a source of personal identity, has now figured prominently in the global political imagination for several decades. Concerns about pollution, animal welfare, carbon emissions, and the vanishing rainforests have become the focus of enormous energy and controversy, and a vast network of local and international institutions has developed with the purpose of managing environmental problems. For individuals, manifestations of environmental consciousness – canvas grocery bags, hybrid cars, or reusable aluminum water bottles – stand as badges for a larger political worldview. And yet, in spite of the great contemporary prominence of environmental values, there is very little careful reflection in our society about what, exactly it means to value the environment, what properly defines the scope of these values, and how they are properly to be balanced against other kinds of values.

In this course, we will think rigorously and systematically about the distinctive moral challenges that arise concerning the relationship of human beings to the natural environment. Although we will consider concrete policy cases in our discussions, our primary focus will be on the fundamental issues that shape our practical response to environmental problems. We will ask questions like the following: Is the environment valuable strictly in virtue of its contribution to the human good? Or is it valuable in some intrinsic sense that is unrelated to us? What is the moral status of non-human animals? Is nature something that ought to be restored? How can the burdens of environmental degradation be fairly distributed? Our primary aim as a class will not be to provide answers to these questions but, rather, to develop conceptual and analytical tools that allow us to approach them in a thoughtful, rigorous, and broad-minded way.

Although no prior background in philosophy is required, students will be expected to display a substantial capacity for analytical reasoning and critical thought.

This course fulfills a WRI requirement and will therefore aim to integrate the development of students' writing skills into the curriculum. Specifically, over the course of the semester we will work on: (a) writing effectively in a philosophical style and format, (b) writing as a means to philosophical inquiry, learning, and communication, and (c) improving written work through the process of draft and revision.

Links to St. Olaf's academic integrity policy and honor code can be found at the following links. You should make sure that you are familiar with both of these at the beginning of the semester:

<http://www.stolaf.edu/stulife/thebook/academic/integrity.html>

<http://www.stolaf.edu/stulife/thebook/academic/honor.html>

If you have a documented disability for which accommodations may be required in this class, please contact Connie Ford (ford@stolaf.edu) or Erin Larson (larsonee@stolaf.edu) in the Academic Support Center (507-786-3288 or Buntrock 108) as soon as possible to arrange accommodations. If you have already presented your documentation and/or arranged accommodations through Student Disability Services, you are required to provide me with your accommodation letter within the first two weeks of class. Accommodations will

only be provided after the letter is submitted to me and with sufficient lead-time for me to arrange testing or other accommodations.

The Disability Services link is:

<http://www.stolaf.edu/services/asc/sds.html>

Grading and Course Requirements

- Paper (approximately 7-8 pages/2100-2400 words) + revision: 30%
- Environmental Conversation Presentation: 10%
- Environmental Conversation Paper (approximately 5 pages/1500 words): 20%
- Take-Home Comprehensive Final Exam: 25%
- 8 short (at least 130 words) blog posts + Oral Participation: 15%

Texts

The only required text for the course is Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003. It is available for purchase in the bookstore.

All other readings will be made available on moodle.

Attendance, Late Assignments, and Deadline Extensions

Attendance: If you miss more than a few classes, I will mark you down in accord with the extent of your absences.

Late Assignments: Late papers and take-home exams will be marked down one fraction of a letter grade for each day that has passed beyond the deadline. Thus, an A- paper would become a B+ after one day, a B after two days, etc. Take-home exams will not be accepted more than one week after the due date.

Extensions: I always grant extensions, but only under the condition that the extension is requested at least one week in advance of the deadline. I normally grant no more than a week of extra time unless you have a special reason for needing more than that.

Preliminary Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Note: *This schedule is tentative and will be subject to adjustments over the course of the term.* All changes will be announced by email. Readings are available in the Light and Rolston text unless otherwise noted.

2/7: Course Introduction (no reading)

Introduction to Environmental Ethics: Is Nature Ethically Special?

2/9: - Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic" (p. 38)

- *Recommended* (not required): Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III, "Introduction: Ethics and Environmental Ethics" (p. 1)

Thinking About Value in the Natural World, Part I: Individualistic and Holistic Approaches

2/14: Peter Singer, "Not For Humans Only: The Place of Non-Humans in Environmental Issues" (p. 55)

2/15: Tom Regan, "Animal Rights: What's In a Name?" (p. 65)

2/21: Eric Katz, "Is There a Place For Animals in the Moral Consideration of Nature?" (p. 85)

2/23: Arne Naess, "The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects" (p. 262)

Thinking About Value in the Natural World, Part II: Anthropocentric vs. Intrinsic Value

- 2/28: John O'Neill, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value" (p. 131)
- 3/1: Holmes Rolston III, "Value in Nature and the Nature of Value" (p. 143)
- 3/6: J. Baird Callicott, "Non-anthropocentric Value Theory and Environmental Ethics" (moodle)
- 3/8: Bryan Norton, "Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism" (p. 163)

Wilderness Ideals and the Project of Restoration

- 3/13: John Muir, "Man's Place in the Universe" (moodle)
- 3/15: - Michael P. Nelson, "An Amalgamation of Wilderness Preservation Arguments" (p. 413)
- **1ST Draft of Paper Due**
- 3/20: SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS
- 3/22: SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS
- 3/27: J. Baird Callicott, "A Critique of, and an Alternative To, The Wilderness Idea" (p. 437)
- 3/29: Eric Katz, "The Big Lie: Human Restoration of Nature" (p. 390)
- 4/3: Ramachandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique" (moodle)

The Environment, Democracy, and Justice

- 4/5: Dale Jamieson, "Ethics, Public Policy, and Global Warming" (p. 371)
- 4/10: - Joan Martinez-Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor* (excerpts),
- **2ND Draft of Paper Due**
- 4/12: Greta Gaard and Lori Gruen, "Ecofeminism: Toward Global Justice and Planetary Health" (p. 276)
- 4/17: Troy Hartley, "Environmental Justice: An Environmental Civil Rights Value Acceptable to All World Views" (p. 478)
- 4/19: Andrew Light, "The Urban Blind Spot in Environmental Ethics" (moodle)
- 4/24: TBA

The Environmental Conversation (no reading)

- 4/26: **Environmental Conversation Presentations**
- 5/1: **Environmental Conversation Presentations**
- 5/3: **Environmental Conversation Presentations**

Christian Stewardship and Environmentalism

- 5/8: - Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, excerpts (moodle)
- 5/10: - Clare Palmer, "Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics" (moodle)
- **Environmental Conversation Paper Due**

5/15: Concluding discussion (no reading)

Take-Home Final Exams Due by 2 PM on May 19