

## Philosophy 246: Environmental Ethics (Environmental Science 281)

Colorado College  
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Fall 2008, Block 2

### Course description

A majority of Americans describe themselves as environmentalists, but there is less agreement about what it *means* to be an environmentalist. Most understand it to mean some kind of concern for nature, but few explicitly articulate what kind of concern they mean, or what kind of reasons are supposed to prompt this concern. This course will focus on exploring and evaluating the meaning and rationale for this concern, under the guidance of contemporary ethical (and meta-ethical) theory.

The course begins by motivating the need to understand environmental concern in light of ethical theory, rather than *simply* in light of common sense “intuitions.” We survey changing literary and esthetic attitudes toward nature over the centuries, and discuss the role of philosophic theory itself in creating and spreading many of those attitudes. We discuss the conflicts that are bound to arise among various environmental concerns without the aid of theory. Only then do we begin to uncover the numerous ethical frameworks philosophers have adopted to systematize and undergird their visions of environmental concern.

Surveying the variety of ethical theories now available, we will find that classical (utilitarian and deontological) theories have together been challenged by the environmentalist’s of positing value in non-human agents and states of affairs. In order to oppose the nemesis of “anthropocentrism,” the view that human beings are the locus of moral value, environmental ethical theory has to stretch its understanding of value to include that of the flourishing of all forms of life and of the ecosystem more generally. We will examine these theories of “intrinsic” value, and inquire into whether the flourishing of other species or of the ecosystem can in fact generate moral obligations for human beings. Finally, we will examine anthropocentric theories themselves, to see if they can—or should—countenance a concern for the environment sufficient to ground contemporary environmentalist policy.

### Course goals

By the end of the semester, I hope that you will

1. Be motivated to approach ethical and political controversies—both environmental and otherwise—from the perspective of philosophical theory.
2. Learn to distinguish your pre-theoretical evaluations of environmental policy from considered judgments about them.
3. Be able to develop and evaluate a concrete environmental policy proposal from the perspective of philosophical theory.
4. Improve your analytic and argumentative skills.

### Texts

- Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III, eds., *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*
- Course pack available from CC Bookstore.

(Note that because this course is cross-listed as Environmental Science 281, so half of the available copies of each of these will be found in that section in the bookstore.)

### Lecture and reading schedule

*Week 1*

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Monday, September 29, 2008

#### ***Views of nature in literature***

- Selections from William Wordsworth, *Prelude*
- Selections from Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*
- Selections from Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*
- Selections from Henry David Thoreau, *Maine Woods*
- Selections from Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* (ALL HANDOUTS IN CLASS)

Tuesday, September 30, 2008

**The development of modern environmentalism**

- William Cronan, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting back to the Wrong Nature" (part 1, pp. 7-17) (COURSE PACK pp. 1-6))
- *Optional*: Ronald Rees, "The Scenery Cult: Changing Landscape Tastes over Three Centuries" (COURSE PACK pp. 14-17)
- David Pepper, selections from "Modern Roots of Ecocentrism" (COURSE PACK pp. 19-46)

Wednesday, October 1, 2008

**Conflicting intuitions about the environment**

- William Cronan, "The Trouble with Wilderness" (part 2, pp. 17-25) (COURSE PACK pp. 6-10)
  - *The Economist*, "Out of the Wilderness,"  
[http://www.economist.com/world/unitedstates/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=11707142](http://www.economist.com/world/unitedstates/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11707142)
  - *The Undercurrent*, "The Environmentalist Attack on Outdoorsmanship,"  
<http://the-undercurrent.com/paper/the-environmentalist-attack-on-outdoorsmanship/>
- Ramachandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique,"  
<http://www.eci.ox.ac.uk/~dliverma/articles/Guha%20on%20radical%20environmentalism.pdf>
- Eric Katz, "Is there a Place for Animals in the Moral Consideration of Nature" (part 1, LR pp. 85-90)

Thursday, October 2, 2008

**Methodology of environmental ethics**

- Richard Sylvan, "Is there a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?" (LR pp. 47-52)
- Mathew Humphrey, "Intuition, Reason, and Environmental Argument" (part 1, pp. 45-60) (COURSE PACK PP. 47-55)

Friday, October 3, 2008

**FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE**

**Fundamental positions on environmental ethics**

- Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III, "Introduction: Ethics and Environmental Ethics" (LR pp. 1-11)
- Clare Palmer, "An Overview of Environmental Ethics" (LR pp. 15-34)

Week 2

Monday, October 6, 2008

**Utilitarian (hedonic consequence-based) animal liberation ethics**

- Brief excerpts from Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill (COURSE PACK pp. 63-67)
- Peter Singer, "Not for Humans Only: The Pace of Nonhumans in Environmental Issues" (LR pp. 55-63)

Tuesday, October 7, 2008

**Rights-based animal liberation ethics**

- Tom Regan, "Animal Rights: What's in a Name?" and extract from *The Case for Animal Rights* (pp. 65-73)
- Diana Hsieh, Critique: "Animal Wrongs" (COURSE PACK pp. 69-76 )

Wednesday, October 8, 2008

**Teleological biocentric ethics**

- Paul Taylor, "The Ethics of Respect for Nature" (LR pp. 74-84)
- John O'Neill, Critique: "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value" (LR pp. 131-40)

Thursday, October 9, 2008

**Teleological ecocentric ethics**

- Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic" (LR pp. 38-46)
- Holmes Rolston III, "Value in Nature and the Nature of Value" (LR pp. 143-52)
- *Optional*: Eric Katz, "Is There a Place for Animals in the Moral Consideration of Nature?" (part 2, pp. 90-93)
- Harley Cahen, Critique: "Against the Moral Considerability of Ecosystems" (LR pp. 114-23)

Friday, October 10, 2008

**READING/WRITING DAY: SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE**

*Week 3*

Monday, October 13, 2008

***Teleological anthropocentric ethics***

- Harry Binswanger, "Life-based Teleology and the Foundations of Ethics" (COURSE PACK pp. 113-22)
- Tara Smith, "Principled Egoism: The Only Way to Live" (COURSE PACK pp. 123-36)

Tuesday, October 14, 2008

***Holistic self-realization ecocentric ethics: "Deep ecology"***

- Warwick Fox, "Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy for Our Time?" (LR pp. 252-8)
- Arne Naess, "The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects" (LR pp. 262-73)
- Mathew Humphrey, Critique: "Intuition, Reason, and Environmental Argument" (part 2, pp. 60-72) (COURSE PACK pp. 55-61)

Wednesday, October 15, 2008

***Deontological (rational act-based) environmental ethics***

- Brief excerpts from Immanuel Kant (COURSE PACK, pp. 79-82)
- Onora O'Neill, "Environmental Values, Anthropocentrism, and Speciesism" (COURSE PACK, pp. 83-90)
- Allen Wood, "Kant on Duties regarding Nonrational Nature" (COURSE PACK, pp. 91-100)

Thursday, October 16, 2008

**EXAM**

Friday, October 17, 2008

***Environmental virtue (agent-based) ethics***

- Bernard Williams, "Must a Concern for the Environment be Centered on Human Beings?" (COURSE PACK pp. 137-41)
- Thomas Hill, Jr., "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments" (COURSE PACK pp. 143-49)
- Holmes Ralston III, Critique: "Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole" (COURSE PACK pp. 151-59)

*Week 4*

Monday, October 20, 2008

***Pragmatist anthropocentric ethics***

- Bryan G. Norton, "Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism" (LR pp. 163-73)
- Eugene Hargrove, Critique: "Weak Anthropocentric Intrinsic Value" (LR pp. 175-87)

Tuesday, October 21, 2008

***Pragmatist pluralistic ethics***

- John Dewey, "Reconstruction in Moral Conceptions" (COURSE PACK pp 161-7)
- Antony Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics" (LR pp. 307-17)
- J. Baird Callicott, Critique: "The Case against Moral Pluralism" (pp. 203-16)

Wednesday, October 22, 2008

**READING/WRITING DAY: THIRD PAPER DUE**