Philosophy 268: Ethics and the Environment

Instructor: Mark Sheldon (location) sheldon@northwestern.edu (office hours: 5:00 – 6:30 Wednesdays and by appointment) (Office: 847.491.8918)

Course Description: Ethical Analysis of a variety of issues such as humanity’s relationship to the environment, its understanding of and responsibility to nature, and its obligation to future generations. Specific issues such as pollution and population control, food production and distribution, energy production and distribution, species diversity, and the preservation of the wilderness will be addressed.

Course Objective: To develop insight into and appreciation for the way philosophical analysis and argument can contribute to clarifying the ethical issues involved in thinking about the environment.

Teaching Method: Lecture and Discussion

Evaluation Method: Two brief essays on assigned topics (each worth 30%), contribution to discussion (15%), and final take-home essay exam (25%).


Jan 3 Introductory comments

Jan 5 Introduction to Moral Theory

Jan 10 Spirituality
   Genesis 1-3
   Jewish Tradition, the Traditional Jew and the Environment (Freundel)
   The Judeo-Christian Stewardship Attitude to Nature (Dobel)
   Islamic Environmental Ethics, Law, and Society (Izzi Deen)
   Satyagraha for Conservation: A Hindu View (Dwivedi)
   The Buddhist Attitude Towards Nature (De Silva)
   Pagan Environmentalism: The Principle of Unity (Starhawk)

Jan 12 Animal Rights
   Rational Beings Alone Have Moral Worth (Kant)
   A Utilitarian Perspective (Singer)
   Radical Egalitarian Case (Regan)
   A Critique of Regan (Warren)
   Against Zoos (Jamieson)

Jan 17 No class because of Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Jan 19 Vegetarianism
   The World Food Supply: The Damage Done by Cattle Raising (Coffin)
   Vegetarianism and Treading Lightly on the Earth (Fox)
   [First Assignment]

Jan 24 More Food Ethics in Relation to the World Population
   The Tragedy of the Commons (Hardin)
Lifeboat Ethics (Hardin)
Population and Food (Murdoch and Oaten)

**Jan 26** *More on Population Issues*
- A Special Moment in History: The Challenge of Overpopulation (McKibben)
- The Unjust War Against Population (Kasun)

**Jan 31** *Value in Nature Itself*
- Naturalizing Values: Organisms and Species (Rolston)
- Nature (Mill)
- The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecological Movement (Naess)
- Deep Ecology (Devall and Sessions)

[**First Assignment Due**]

**Feb 2** *Ecological Ethics*
- Why Do Species Matter? (Russow)
- Reverence for Life (Schweitzer)
- Ecocentric Ethics: The Land Ethics (Leopold)
- The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic (Callicott)
- Should Trees Have Standing? (Stone)

**Feb 7** *Lecture on Species and Ecological Ethics (Daniel Tovar)*

**Feb 14** *Additional Discussion of Ecological Ethics*
[**Second Assignment**]

**Feb 16** *Pollution: Soil Air Water*
- You Are What you Breathe (French)
- We All Live In Bhopal (Bradford)
- People or Penguins: The Case for Optimal Pollution (Baxter)
- Is *Silent Spring* Behind Us? (Pimental)

**Feb 21** *Environmental Racism (Seth Meyer)*
- Overcoming Racism in Environmental Decision Making (Bullard)
- Just Garbage: The Problem of Environmental Racism (Wenz)
- Environmental Risks, Rights, and the Failure of Liberal Democracy (Westra)

**Feb 23** *Environmental Racism (Cont)*
- All our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life (Laduke)
- Indigenous Knowledge and Technology: Creating Environmental Justice in the Twenty-First Century (Robyn)

[**Second Assignment – due?**]

**Feb 28** *The New Green Capitalist Order (Tyler Zimmer)*
Sustainable Development (Rees)
What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know about Capitalism (Magdoff and Foster)
Is Sustainable Capitalism an Oxymoron? Schweickart

Mar 2  Climate Change and Energy Policy
Ethics and Global Climate Change (Gardiner)
The Denial Industry (Monbiot)
Sustainability and Technology (Wright and Pojman)
War and Climate Change (Sanders)

Mar 7  Our Obligation to Future Generations
[Take home final assigned]

Mar 14  Take home final due

Please do your own work. Suspected violations of the academic integrity guidelines will be reported to the dean’s office immediately.