

Philosophical Perspectives on the Humanities: Nature and the Environment

Castle Rock Institute
Philosophy 341
Fall Semester, 2004

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Course Description:

This course will examine philosophical views with regard to questions central to environmental ethics. We will also examine the philosophical bases of such views. Some of the questions we will explore are the following:

What should the relationship of humans be to the environment, and to non-humans in their environment? Is an anthropocentric worldview immoral? Do animals have rights? Should individual members of overpopulated species be destroyed to protect an ecosystem? Is preservation of wilderness an "elitist" enterprise? Do natural environments have intrinsic value or only have value because certain environments are necessary for human well-being? Do, we, in the industrialized world, have a moral obligation to consume less? Must our individual goals and values change? Is capitalism and liberal individualism the underlying cause of environmental devastation? Should we view ourselves, then, not as individuals, but as Naess maintains as "knots in the biospherical net"?

Course Requirements:

1. Class participation and attendance (15%)
2. First exam (20%)
3. First essay (20%)
4. Second essay (20%)
5. Final exam (25%)

Required Readings:

W. T. Jones, Approaches to Ethics (selections)
Doris Lessing, "The Old Chief Mshlanga"
Plato, The Republic (selections)
James P. Sterba, Earth Ethics (EE)
Michael E. Zimmerman, Environmental Philosophy (selections)

Course Outline:

- August 30 Introduction to Castle Rock
- Sept. 8 Plato, selections from The Republic
 Selections from Aristotle
 Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis" (EE)
- Sept. 13 Selections from Kant
 Selections from John Stuart Mill
- Sept. 20 Singer, "All Animals are Equal" (EE)
 Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights" (EE)
 Dale Jamieson, "A Critique of Regan's Theory of Rights" (EE)
 Paxton George "Ethical Vegetarianism is Unfair to Women and Children"
 (EE)

First Exam, week of Sept. 20 (time to be announced)

September 25 -November 11 Australia/New Zealand

There will be three meetings during this time. The following material will be covered: (It will be announced later which material is to be covered at which meetings.)

Selections from Hume
 Leopold, "The Land Ethic: Conservation as a Moral Issue, Thinking Like a Mountain" (EE)
 Devall and Sessions, "Deep Ecology" (EE)
 Taylor, "Ethics of Respect for Nature" (EE)
 Handouts

First Essay due (date to be announced)

- Nov. 15 Selections from Marx
 Sagoff, "Do we Consume Too Much?" (EE)
- Nov. 22 Booth and Jacobs, "Ties that Bind: Native American Beliefs as a Foundation for Environmental Consciousness" (EE)
 Callicott, "African Biocommunitarianism and Australian Dreamtime" (EE)
 Po-Keung IP, "Taoism and the Foundation of Environmental Ethics" (EE)
 Lessing, "The Old Chief Mshlanga"

Second Essay due November 22

Nov. 29	Khell, "From Heroic To Holistic Ethics: The Ecofeminist Challenge" (EE) Warren, "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism" (EE)
Dec. 6	Watson, "Tora! Tora! Tora!" (EE) Foreman, "Earth First!" (EE) Heller, "Take Back the Earth" (EE) Hargrove, "Ecological Sabotage: Pranks or Terrorism?" (EE)
Dec. 11	Final Exam
Dec. 13	Final Dinner

Goals:

My approach to teaching is interdisciplinary in nature.

In the preface to his *Cyclopaedia* (1728), Ephraim Chambers described the organization of human knowledge as follows:

The distribution of the land of science, . . . is wholly arbitrary; and might be altered, perhaps not without advantage. Had not Alexander, Caesar, and Gengiskan lived, the division of the terraqueous globe had, doubtless been very different from what we now find it; and the case would have been the same with the world of learning, had no such person been born as Aristotle.

I agree with Chambers' view that the boundaries separating academic disciplines are the result of historical contingency, as I think are the boundaries between high and low culture, and even that between academic studies and the non-academic. My teaching and research, therefore, has tended to ignore or blur academic boundaries.

The goal of my teaching is to foster self-examination, and to enable you to competently scrutinize your own philosophical assumptions in all areas of thought and action. In this I am in the Socratic tradition. This is also in agreement with Vacal Havel's claim in *Living in Truth* that,

The main route by which society is inwardly enlarged, enriched and cultivated is that of coming to know itself in every greater depth, range and subtlety.

In order to accomplish this task, I will try to get you not only to think critically, but to try out perspectives beyond your habitual ones. I will suggest that in reading you should carry out an imaginative experiment in which you attempt to understand what it would be like to actually be the person whose work you are reading. How would it change how you live, how would it change how you look at the world?

Please note this syllabus is subject to change.

Essays are due at the beginning of class on the date assigned.

Late essays will have a one grade penalty.