SYLLABUS FOR
U270 – ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Department of Planning, Policy and Design
School of Social Ecology
University of California at Irvine

Winter 2010
Section 54530

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Class meeting: Tues. & Thurs. 12:30-1:50
Room: SSL - 105
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Hours: 11-noon, T, Th. and by appt.

Introduction

Conflicts over the management, use, allocation, and protection of natural resources and the environment often revolve around fundamental disagreements over values. These divergent values – defended, justified, espoused, and sometimes vigorously advocated by government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and individuals – comprise the subject of environmental ethics.

This course examines the bases for these values; the origins and consequences of ethical theories about how we should treat the environment; and, the behavior, practices, and policies these values urge us to adopt. We are not concerned with these values in the abstract, but with the practical consequences of ethical theories. It makes a difference whether one adopts a view of the world that says: “an action which increases pleasure for the greatest number of people is right,” as compared to an alternative view which states: “we should treat all living things as we wish to be treated.” While both are lofty, philosophical claims, they are also assertions whose implications affect decisions made by planners, policymakers, and the general public. It is these practical implications we are most interested in. Our objectives in this course are three-fold:

• To help you understand the critical debates in environmental ethics in the past, as well as in recent times, and their significance for environmental attitudes, practices, and decisions.
• To enable you to independently analyze and understand the historic and contemporary roles of environmental ethics in natural resources planning and policy – and to determine whether “better” decisions could result from more effective use of ethical reasoning in policy debates.
• To equip you to utilize environmental ethics – and to distill lessons from various scholars and practitioners of these ethics – in your own planning, policy, design-behavior and other forms of social, political, or other research or professional work.

Some definitions – a Road Map of Environmental Ethics

Ethics embraces theories of what people believe is right or good; what one ought to do when
confronted with choices about how to act; and, what decisions governments or other institutions should adopt when faced with problems whose consequences affect others. The terms of ethical discourse comprise a special vocabulary which philosophers call **moral axiology** – the study of the normative realm, or of what “should” be. This is sometimes distinguished from **epistemology**, the study of theories of knowledge, or of what we actually know to be true.

This distinction is important because there has long been debate between those who believe that what is morally true is logically deducible or inductively observable – the so-called **cognitive** tradition – as opposed to those who believe that values and morals are matters of opinion or preference (non-cognitivism). Logical positivists and some behavioral social scientists support the latter view, while the former is more characteristic of “classical” traditions of philosophy. Why should we care? For one thing, this debate raises questions about whether ethical theories can be true in the same sense that scientific theories can be. Another reason is because it prompts the question: can we derive “ought” from “is”? Some environmental ethical theories contend that what we should do as regards nature can be inferred from understanding science (e.g., “water pollution kills fish; thus, it’s wrong to pollute”). Others insist that what makes an action right must be inferred from a moral criterion (i.e., some standard of rightness which would apply to all similar situations – e.g., “do unto others as we would have others do unto us”).

What ethical theories have in common is a perennial preoccupation with questions of justice, fairness, goodness, righteousness, and virtue – and the conditions that promote these ends. These questions include: do animals have rights? Should we eat meat? Should we care about future generations and whether environmental conditions such as climate change will enable them to live as we do today? Are people “entitled” to a certain type of environment (i.e., a given amount and/or quality of air, water, land, or other resources?) Since time immemorial, philosophers have raised these questions, and they have suggested how certain social and political conditions (e.g., democracy, community, due process, altruism, freedom) may be required to bring about ethical ways of managing the environment. This course will explore these questions and issues.

### Readings


**Requirements**

To facilitate dialogue, and discussion, regular attendance is \textbf{expected}. Each class will be devoted to a single issue or topic and will feature a brief lecture, student presentations, and discussion. Readings, scheduled to coincide with a session's topic, should be read prior to class to ensure meaningful discussion. Furthermore, each student is responsible for three products:

- Class presentation with 1-2 page outline \dots 20%.

This should consist of an \textit{explication} \& \textit{critique} of an article or book chapter(s) assigned for a class session.

- Seminar participation \dots 10%
- 12-15 page essay on an issue in environmental ethics \dots 70%.

The essay is due 3/16/03 – it can be transmitted electronically, as a Word document. It should be double-spaced. Viable alternatives include a documentary film or creation of a website. Essay topics are limitless – you might, for instance, explore the ethical implications or aspects of:

- Poverty, development and the land ethic
- Protecting indigenous cultures
- Preserving wilderness
- Environmental restoration
- Ethnicity, race, gender and exposure to pollutants – i.e., environmental justice
- GMOs, cloning, and other genetic and/or biological innovations
- Resource allocation and property rights
- Protecting future generations – climate, resource depletion
- Globalization and the environment
- Sustainability and/or sustainable development
- Population growth and distribution
- Faith-inspired environmental change movements
- Moral standing of nature; rights of nature
- Land use and development
- Animal rights, vegetarianism/veganism

**Class Schedule**

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Read:</th>
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<tr>
<td>1/5-7</td>
<td>\textbf{Introduction – Can we know what’s environmentally ethical?}</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read: \textit{Pojman, Chapter 1}.</td>
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<td>1/12-14</td>
<td>\textbf{Pragmatism – Land Ethics}</td>
<td>\textit{A Sand County Almanac - all.}</td>
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<td>Presentations:</td>
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<td>1/19-21</td>
<td>\textbf{Anthropocentrism – Putting “Us” at the center}</td>
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<td>Read: \textit{Pojman, Chapter 5.}</td>
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Presentations:

Week of 1/26-28  **Animal rights**
Read: *Pojman, Chapters 2 and 4.*

Week of 2/2-4  **Moral Extensionism and Deep Ecology**
Read: *Pojman, chapter 3; Sessions, Parts One - Three.*

Week of 2/9-11  **Ecofeminism**
Read: *Mies and Shiva, entirety; Sessions, Part Four.*

Week of 2/16-18  **Social Ecology – Duties, Obligations, Environmental holism**
Read: *Pojman, Chapters 6; Camacho, Section I.*

Week of 2/23-25  **Ethical Practice and Paradox – Managing Resources**
Read: *Pojman, Chapters 7-10; Beatley, Parts I-III.*

Week of 3/2-4  **Practice and its Implications - Continued**
Read: *Pojman, Chapters 11-14; Beatley, Parts IV-V.*

Week of 3/9-11  **Environmental Justice - Conclusions**
Read: *Camacho, sections II, III, IV.*

**Other Resources**

**Books**


**Journals**

*Environmental Ethics*

*Ethics*

*Policy Sciences*

*Renewable Resource Journal*

*Review of Policy Research*

*Society and Natural Resources*

**Websites**

- Environmental Ethics, Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy
- Center for Environmental Philosophy - University of North Texas
- University of British Columbia
- The EnviroWeb
- The EcoNet
- The Environmental News Network
- The National Center for Biotechnology Education
- The Association of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics (AFSEEE)
- Forum on Religion and Ecology Education, Harvard University Environmental Information Center