

# PPD 270 – Ethics and Public Policy – Focus on the Environment

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

## Spring Quarter 2012 Section 54500

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### *Introduction*

Conflicts over the outcomes of policy processes, as well as over the processes leading to public policies themselves, frequently revolve around fundamental disagreements over values. These divergent values – defended, justified, espoused, and vigorously advocated by government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and individuals – comprise the subject of ethics and public policy.

This course examines the bases for these values; the origins and consequences of ethical theories as applied to public policy; and the behavior and practices these values urge us to adopt. We are not concerned with values in the *abstract*, but with their *practical consequences*. 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 a view which states: “we should treat all people (or, all living things) as we wish to be treated.” While both are lofty claims, they are also assertions whose implications affect decisions made by policymakers, interest groups, and the general public.

As a means of providing both practical focus – and to better apply what we learn to the world of policy – we will concentrate a good portion of the course on environmental decisions; specifically, policies pertaining to the management, use, allocation, and protection of natural resources and the environment. Our objectives in this course are three-fold:

- To help you understand the critical debates in ethics and public policy – including environmental policy – in the past, as well as in recent times, and their significance for public and decision-maker attitudes and decisions.
- To enable you to independently analyze and understand the historic and contemporary roles of ethics in public policy, including environmental policy – and to decide whether “better” decisions could result from more effective use of ethical reasoning in policy debates. And,

- To equip you to utilize environmental ethics and ethical analysis more generally – and to distill lessons from scholars and practitioners of these ethics – in your own research and professional work.

### *Course Overview – a Road Map for Understanding the Ethics of Public Policy*

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. Social scientists and policy analysts have continued to “carry the torch” on these issues. This course will explore these questions and issues.

### *Readings – for purchase*

Beatley, Timothy. 1994. *Ethical Land Use: Principles of Policy and Planning*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bluhm, William T. and Robert A. Heineman. 2007. *Ethics and Public Policy – Methods and Cases*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall.

Bellah, Robert N, et. al. 1996. *Habits of the Heart – Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Camacho, David E. (ed.) 1998. *Environmental Injustices, Political Struggle: Race, Class, and the Environment*. Durham: Duke University Press.

***Other readings – on EEE homepage***

Fowler, Robert Booth. 1995. *The Greening of Protestant Thought*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Leopold, Aldo. 1970/orig. 1949. *A Sand County Almanac: With Essays on Conservation from Round River*. New York: Oxford University Press.

***Requirements:***

To facilitate dialogue, and discussion, regular attendance is **expected**. Each class will be devoted to a focused and specific issue or topic and will feature a brief lecture followed by 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 the following products:

- You will be divided into “subsets.” On alternate dates, as noted below, each subset is responsible for a brief, **electronically submitted** (2-3) page paper that draws upon the reading and discussion, and addresses a specific question for that specific date. Each student is responsible for 2 papers, each worth 25% of the final grade. Total % . . . . . 50%
- Class participation: students are expected to actively participate in discussions by asking questions as well as raising salient issues. Thus, participation is expected . . . . .10%.
- Students will also be responsible for a final essay, 12-15 double-spaced pages in length that tackles a specific problem in public policy, not limited to environmental policy, and prescribes what you contend is an ethical solution. While you may bring in outside material, everything you need can be found in the readings and other class material. It should be turned-in electronically, as a Word document . . . . .40%.

The essay is due 6/13/12 – Essay topics are limitless – you might, for instance, explore the ethical implications or aspects of: poverty, protecting indigenous cultures, race, gender, environmental justice, future generations, population growth, land use and development, technology, economic globalization and trade, sustainability, faith and religion in politics, the rights of nature, animal rights – and countless others.

***Class Schedule***

Week #1: 4/3-5      **Introduction – Policy ethics and philosophy: knowing what’s ethical**  
Read: *Bluhm and Heinemann, chapters 1 and 3; Bellah, chapters 1-2.*

Week #2: 4/10-12      **Policy ethics and political culture – socialization and values**  
Read: *Bluhm and Heinemann, chapter 2; Bellah, chaps. 3-6.*

Writing assignment: Group A: Drawing on the reading and class discussion, can we really know what's ethical with regards to public policy? How do social factors affect what we know or think we know? (2-3 pages)? **(DUE – April 12<sup>th</sup>)**

Week #3: 4/17-19      **Policy ethics and political engagement – acting ethically**  
Read: *Bluhm and Heineman, chapter 5; Bellah, chapters 7-8.*

Writing assignment: Group B: Drawing on the reading and class discussion, what are the most effective means of becoming involved in the policy process if we truly wish to achieve our ethical goals – does it make any difference how we get involved? (2-3 pages)? **(DUE – April 19<sup>th</sup>)**

Week #4: 4/24-26      **Policy ethics and faith – beliefs and their impact**  
Read: *Bluhm and Heineman, chapter 4; Bellah, chapter 9. SKIM: Fowler, chapters 4, 9.*

Writing assignment: Group C: Drawing on the reading and class discussion, do religious values and attitudes have any legitimate role in shaping public policy ethics? How can we reconcile differences in faith when debating this role (2-3 pages)? **(DUE – April 26<sup>th</sup>)**

Week #5: 5/1-3      **Environmental problems as ethical template: the land ethic**  
Read: *Beatley, chapters 1-2; Bluhm and Heineman, chapter 10. SKIM: Leopold, Part IV.*

Week #6: 5/8-10      **Pragmatism and anthropocentrism as environmental ethic**  
Read: *Beatley, chapters 3; 5-8; Camacho, section I.*

Writing assignment: Group A: Drawing on the reading and class discussion, is protecting the environment for humans' sake a convincing argument? Will it lead to protection of the interests of other species and of the environment? Why or why not? (2-3 pages)? **(DUE – May 10<sup>th</sup>)**

Week #7: 5/15-17      **Gender, race, and class factors in environmental justice**  
Read: *Camacho, Sections II-III – through p. 164.*

Writing assignment: Group B: Drawing on the reading and class discussion, can we design an environmentally just means of averting ethical discrimination on the basis of race, class, and gender? If so, why haven't we yet done so? (2-3 pages)? **(DUE – May 17<sup>th</sup>)**

Week #8: 5/22-24      **Moral “extensionism” – species rights and species wrongs**  
Read: *Beatley, chapters 4, 10-11; Camacho, pp. 194-224.*

Writing assignment: Group C: Drawing on the reading and class discussion, should we make any ethical distinction between the way on which we treat human interests in regards to the environment from the way we treat other species – whether flora or fauna? Why or why not? (2-3 pages)? **(DUE – May 24<sup>th</sup>)**

Week #9: 5/29-31      **Ethical practice and ethical paradoxes – the challenge of change**  
Read: *Bluhm, chapter 9; Beatley, chapters 12-14.*

Week #10: 6/5-7

**Toward ethical consensus– nature, people, community**

Read: *Camacho, pp. 165-193; Bellab, chapter 11.*

***Course Policies:***

**DROPS:** Must be submitted by 5PM of week 2 using WebReg system. No exceptions after week 2.

**ADDS:** Must be submitted by 5PM of week 3 using WebReg system. No exceptions after week 3.

**CHANGE:** Must be submitted by 5PM of week 2 using WebReg system. From week 3 through 6, you must use the Student Access system to submit a request for a grade option change. No exceptions will be considered after week 6.

***Students with Disabilities:***

If you anticipate needing any type of an academic accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please discuss this with me during the first week of class AND please register with the Disability Services Center (<http://www.disability.uci.edu/>). In order for you to receive any type of academic accommodation, I will need formal notification from the Disability Services Center during the first two weeks of the quarter of the type of academic accommodations to which your disability entitles you.