

Natural Resources 3320
Introduction to Ethics and the Environment

Fall Semester 2016 (4 credit hours)
Tues. and Thurs., 10:10-11:00
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A. OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

This course is an introduction to ethics, epistemology, aesthetics, and political philosophy as these subjects relate to the environment. The first half of the course will cover *normative ethics* and theoretical approaches to ethics such as consequentialism and deontology. We will examine in some detail the arguments for “right” and “wrong” in a variety of moral contexts, including the types of moral thought experiments for which philosophers are famous—or infamous, depending on your point of view. (Would it be ethical to throw a person off a lifeboat to save five others? Or is this an absurd question given the low probability of ever being in such a situation?)

While formal ethical theorizing is undoubtedly important for thinking clearly about ethical issues, some philosophers have argued that modern moral theory is limited in its usefulness or applicability to real-life moral contexts. Michael Stocker refers to the “schizophrenia” of modern moral theories, and we will try to understand his complaint about academic ethics as it is ordinarily practiced in the analytic, Anglo-American philosophical tradition. This is our focus in the first half of the semester.

After fall break we will then consider virtue ethics as an alternative to modern moral theorizing and investigate the implications of virtue ethics and human happiness for our treatment of the environment. Should we jettison our possessions and all live like Thoreau? Or is Michael Pollan’s anthropocentric garden ethic a better example of environmentally sound living?

Furthermore, as Pollan suggests, normative ethics also carries with it political significance. Joseph Sax for example says that our government-run National Parks should make us “better people” and argues that non-motorized recreation is environmentally virtuous. We will consider Mill’s argument in “On Liberty” that the only justification for interfering with peoples’ freedom is to prevent harm, and we will evaluate Sax’s thesis in light of Mill’s “harm principle.” What is the appropriate role of government in affecting and/or changing people’s environmental attitudes and behaviors? Can environmentalists be liberals?

Finally, the course concludes with an example of applied ethics in the form of Elizabeth Telfer’s article on the pleasures of eating and drinking. Telfer questions whether we have any obligations to feed the hungry, if we have obligations to animals not to eat them, and whether we are justified at all in devoting so much of our human energy to the enjoyment of food and to other aesthetic pleasures. What are humans here on this planet to do? What does it all mean? What is a good life? These are some of the questions that will occupy us this semester.

One of the course objectives is to foster in students what Bertrand Russell once referred to as “articulate hesitation.” In *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, Russell wrote:

Here, as usually in philosophy, the first difficulty is to see that the problem is difficult. If you say to a person untrained in philosophy, “How do you know I have two eyes?” he or she will reply, “What a silly question! I can see you have.” It is not to be supposed that, when our inquiry is finished, we shall have arrived at anything radically different from this un-philosophical position. What will have happened will be that we shall have come to see a complicated structure where we thought everything was simple, that we shall have become aware of the penumbra of uncertainty surrounding the situations which inspire no doubt, that we shall find doubt more frequently justified than we supposed, and that even the most plausible premises will have shown themselves capable of yielding implausible conclusions. The net result is to substitute articulate hesitation for inarticulate certainty.

B. EXAMS, PAPERS, AND PARTICIPATION

(1) Exams. We will have a take-home mid-term exam that will be handed out on Thursday October 13. The mid-term exam is due in class on Tuesday, October 18. A final exam will be given during the regular exam period; this year the Registrar will publish the final exam schedule on September 13, 2016 at see <http://registrar.sas.cornell.edu/Sched/exams.html>. Students requiring a make-up final exam must speak to the instructor by 9/30/2016.

(2) Short Paper. Students will write one required short paper (approx. 1500-2000 words) due on November 29, 2016. There will be grade penalties for late papers: 1/3 letter grade off per each day late, no paper accepted after six days late. You are required to submit one hard copy of your paper and also to upload your papers electronically using Turnitin on Blackboard.

(3) Weekly outlines. Students are required to submit typed outlines with notes on selected readings each week, for example on each chapter of Kagan’s *Normative Ethics* as assigned. These outlines will be collected in discussion sections and returned to you the following week with your T.A.’s comments, and they will contribute to your overall discussion participation grade.

(4) Attendance and discussion participation. Lecture attendance may be taken as needed. Weekly discussion section attendance is required. Please bring the appropriate week’s reading(s) to section each week.

(5) Short in-class writing exercises may be assigned as well. These are designed to help you develop the writing skills you will need to do well on the essay exams.

C. GRADING

(1) Mid-term exam: 25%

(2) Short paper: 25%

(3) Final exam: 25%

(4) Attendance, section discussion participation, and reading outlines: 25%

You must receive passing grades in each of these four grading categories to pass the course. This is a four-credit course and may be taken on an S/U basis.

D. COURSE MATERIALS

Required Books to Buy:

Kagan, Shelly. *Normative Ethics*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998.

Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty and Other Essays*. Ed. John Gray. NY: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Pollan, Michael. *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education*. NY: Grove Press, 1991.

Sax, Joseph. *Mountains Without Handrails: Reflections on Our National Parks*. Ann Arbor: Univ. Michigan Press, 1980.

Required Article Readings:

All required article-length readings will be available through Blackboard under "Library Reserves." You are expected to print out and bring a copy of each required reading to discussion section as assigned. Some optional suggested readings are available on Blackboard as well.

Required Films to View (Rent or Buy):

The Truman Show, directed by Peter Weir (Paramount, 1998), currently available to rent for \$3.99 from amazon.com (instant play): http://www.amazon.com/The-Truman-Show/dp/B005DNPKSQ/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1345576969&sr=8-1&keywords=truman+show+instant

Groundhog Day, directed by Harold Ramis (Columbia Pictures, 1993), currently available to rent for \$3.99 from amazon.com (instant play): http://www.amazon.com/Groundhog-Day/dp/B000SP1SH6/ref=sr_1_1?s=instant-video&ie=UTF8&qid=1345577389&sr=1-1&keywords=groundhog+day

I will try to have at least one DVD copy of each film on reserve at Mann Library if you wish to view these films for free.

Suggested, optional books to buy:

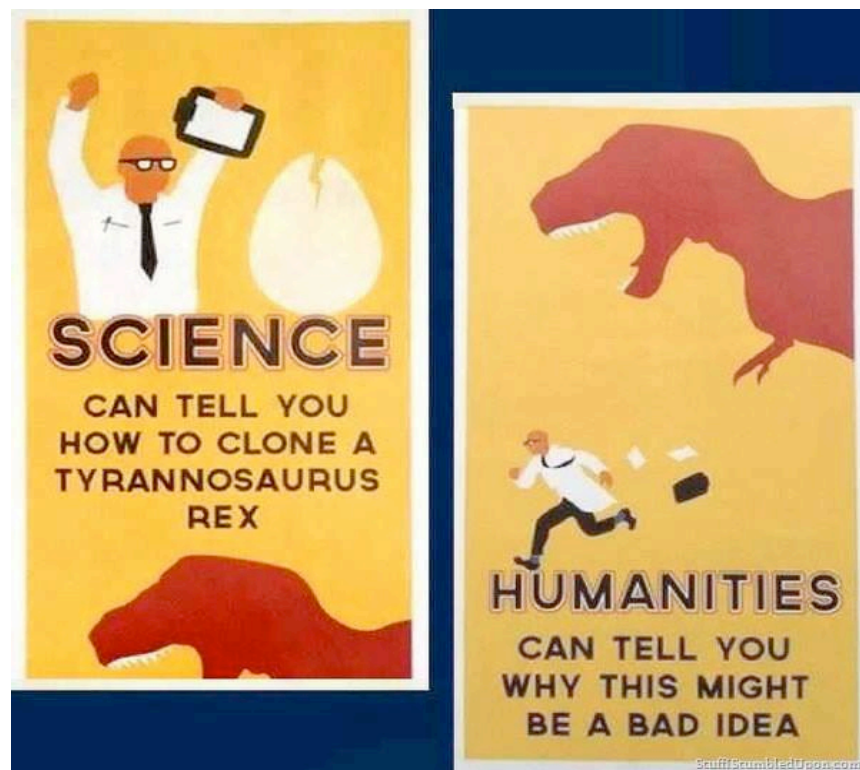
Seech, Zachary. *Writing Philosophy Papers*, 5th ed. Wadsworth. Several copies of this book will be on course reserve at the Mann Library circulation desk.

E. CELL PHONES AND LAPTOPS

Reluctantly, I have decided to implement a “no laptops, no cell phones” policy during lectures. In the past several years students’ use of laptops during lectures has become increasingly disruptive, and so you will not be able to use laptops for note-taking purposes in class.

F. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to be familiar with University regulations regarding plagiarism and other violations of the academic integrity code: see <http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/Academic/AIC.html>. For example, when writing papers you may consult with other students and help each other refine ideas, style, grammar, etc., but the basic ideas and writing of your paper must be your own. Remember that academic integrity is fundamental to the entire university enterprise, and penalties for violating academic integrity can be severe.



G. SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Introduction: What Is Philosophy?

Week One: Preliminaries

August 23 – Aug. 26

Required reading: Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics*, Chap. 1, “Introduction”

Required film viewing: *The Truman Show*, available through Amazon.com instant play or Mann reserve desk. Please view before Tuesday’s class on August 30.

Suggested/optional reading (i.e., additional bibliography, not required, helpful for deeper background context): Stanley Cavell, “The Thought of Movies” (Blackboard)

Week Two: Introduction

August 29 – Sept. 2

Readings: Elliot Sober, “Philosophical Problems for Environmentalism” (Blackboard)

Richard Watson, “The Identity Crisis in Environmental Philosophy” (Blackboard)

Suggested/optional bibliography: Thomas Nagel, *What Does It All Mean? A Very Short Introduction to Philosophy* (Oxford U. Pr., 1987)

Discussion sections will begin this week.

Part One: Normative Ethics

Week Three: The Good: Consequentialism / Hedonism / Interests

Sept. 5 – 9

Required readings: Kagan, *Normative Ethics*, Chap. 2, “The Good”

J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chap. 2, “What Utilitarianism Is,” pp. 136-158 in *On Liberty and Other Essays* (required textbook)

Harley Cahen, “Against the Moral Considerability of Ecosystems” (Blackboard)

Suggested/optional bibliography: James Griffin, *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement and Moral Importance* (Oxford U. Pr., 1986)

Gary Varner, *In Nature’s Interests? Interests, Animal Rights, and Environmental Ethics* (Oxford U. Pr., 1998)

Week Four: Doing Harm: Allowing Harm / Deontology / Double Effect

Sept. 12 – 16

Required readings: Kagan, *Normative Ethics*, Chap. 3 “Doing Harm”

Philippa Foot, “The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect” (Blackboard)

Judith Jarvis Thomson, “Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem” (Blackboard)

Ursula LeGuin, “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas” (Blackboard)

Suggested/optional bibliography: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*

Joel Feinberg, *Harm: The Moral Limits of the Criminal Law* (Oxford U. Pr., 4 vols)

Marion Hourdequin, “Doing, Allowing, and Precaution” (Blackboard)

Week Five: Other Constraints: Lying / Bullshit / Means / Ends

Sept. 19 – 23

Required readings: Kagan, *Normative Ethics*, Chap. 4 “Other Constraints”

Immanuel Kant, “On a Supposed Right to Lie From Benevolent Motives” (Blackboard)

Allen Wood, “Relativism” (Blackboard)

Harry Frankfurt, “On Bullshit” (Blackboard)

Raymond Bonner, “Crying Wolf About Elephants” (Blackboard)

Suggested/optional bibliography: Sissela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* (Vintage Books, 2nd ed., 1999)

Week Six: Further Factors: Charity / Rights / Supererogation

Sept. 26 – Sept. 30

Required readings: Kagan, *Normative Ethics*, Chap. 5 “Further Factors”

Peter Singer, “The Life You Can Save,” (Blackboard)

Susan Wolf, “Moral Saints,” (Blackboard)

Thomas Nagel, “The Fragmentation of Value” (Blackboard)

Suggested/optional bibliography: David Heyd, “Supererogation,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/supererogation/> .

Week Seven: The Limits of Ethical Theory

Oct. 3 – 7

Required readings: Iris Murdoch, “The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts” (Blackboard)

Michael Stocker, “The Schizophrenia of Modern Moral Theories,” (Blackboard)

Kagan, *Normative Ethics*, Chaps. 6-7, “Teleological Foundations” and “Deontological Foundations”

Suggested/optional bibliography: Stanley Rosen, *The Limits of Analysis* (Basic Books, 1980)
Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Harvard U. Pr., 1986)

Fall Break Oct 8 – 11 PLEASE WATCH *GROUNDHOG DAY* OVER FALL BREAK

Mid-term exam will be handed out on Thursday October 13 (take-home); exam essays are due the following Tuesday, October 18

Part Two: Perfectionism, Wisdom, and The Virtues

Week Eight: How Should I Live? Virtue and Happiness in *Groundhog Day*

Oct. 12 – 14 (shortened week following Fall Break)

Required film viewing: *Groundhog Day* (Mann Library circulation desk reserve or amazon.com instant play).

Required reading: Kupfer, Joseph H. “Virtue and Happiness in *Groundhog Day*,” pp. 35-60 in *Visions of Virtue in Popular Film* (Blackboard)

Suggested/optional bibliography: Iris Murdoch, “The Idea of Perfection” (Blackboard)

Week Nine: Consumption and Virtue in Thoreau's *Walden*

Oct. 17 – 21

Required readings: Louis Pojman, "Virtue Based Ethical Systems," including excerpts from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Blackboard)

Mark Sagoff, "Do We Consume Too Much?" (Blackboard)

Thoreau, *Walden*, "Economy" and "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For" (Blackboard and/or online at <http://thoreau.eserver.org/walden00.html>)

Suggested/optional bibliography: Michael Meyer, "Introduction," *Walden* (Blackboard)

Anthony Cunningham, "Reading for Life," Chap. 3 of *The Heart of What Matters: The Role for Literature in Moral Philosophy* (Blackboard)

Philip Cafaro, *Thoreau's Living Ethics: Walden and the Pursuit of Virtue* (University of Georgia Pr., 2006)

John Kekes, *Moral Wisdom and Good Lives* (Cornell U. Pr., 1997)

Week Ten: The Significance of Vision: Toward an Aesthetic Ethic

Oct. 24 – 28

Required readings: Philippa Foot, "Virtues and Vices" (Blackboard)

Stanley Hauerwas, "The Significance of Vision: Toward an Aesthetic Ethic" (Blackboard)

Thomas Hurka, "The Well-Rounded Life" (Blackboard)

Suggested/optional bibliography: Anil Gomes, "Iris Murdoch on Art, Ethics, And Attention" (Blackboard)

Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism* (Oxford U. Pr., 1996)

Richard Miller, "Three Versions of Objectivity: Aesthetic, Moral, and Scientific" (Blackboard)

Part Three: Environment: Ethics and Tensions

Week Eleven: Humans in Nature—Hands On or Hands Off?

Oct. 31 – Nov. 4

Required reading: Michael Pollan, *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education* (required textbook)

Suggested/optional bibliography: Neil Evernden, *The Social Creation of Nature* (Johns Hopkins U. Pr., 1992)

Week Twelve: John Stuart Mill, Individualism and Liberty

Nov. 7 – 11

Required readings: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (required textbook)

Gertrude Himmelfarb, "Editor's Introduction" to *On Liberty*, Penguin edition (Blackboard)

Cary Coglianese, "Implications of Liberal Neutrality for Environmental Policy" (Blackboard)

Suggested/optional bibliography: Matthew Cahn, *Environmental Deceptions* (SUNY Pr., 1994)

George Sher, *Beyond Neutrality: Perfectionism and Politics* (Cambridge U. Pr., 1997)

Required paper assignment: Contrast and compare Mill's *On Liberty* and Sax's *Mountains Without Handrails*, due Tuesday November 29. Specific guidelines will be handed out in lecture. Begin working on this paper by taking notes on Mill during Week Twelve. See also Zachary Seech on contrast-and-compare papers for guidance on this assignment.

Week Thirteen: Joseph Sax, Mountains Without Handrails

Nov. 14 – 18

Required reading: Joseph Sax, *Mountains Without Handrails* (required textbook)

Mark Sagoff, “Can Environmentalists be Liberals?” (Blackboard)

Andrew Vincent, “Liberalism and the Environment” (Blackboard)

Week Fourteen: Thanksgiving Week

Nov. 21 – 23 (shortened) one class

Required reading: Elizabeth Telfer, "The Pleasures of Eating and Drinking" (Blackboard)

Suggested/optional bibliography: Elizabeth Telfer, *Food for Thought: Philosophy and Food* (Routledge, 1996)

Thanksgiving Break Nov. 23 – 27

Part Four: Conclusion

Short paper on Mill and Sax is due on Tuesday, November 29 in lecture

Week Fifteen: Conclusion

Nov. 30 – Dec. 4

Required readings: Eugene Hargrove, "An Ontological Argument for Environmental Ethics."

Chapter 6, pp. 165-205 in *Foundations of Environmental Ethics* (Denton, TX: Environmental Ethics Books, 1989).

Mark Sagoff, “The Distribution and Allocation of Resources” (Blackboard)

Reread Elliot Sober, “Philosophical Problems for Environmentalism” (Blackboard)

Suggested/optional bibliography:

Robert Kirkman, *Skeptical Environmentalism: The Limits of Philosophy and Science* (Indiana U. Pr., 2002)

Anthony Weston, *Toward Better Problems: New Perspectives on Abortion, Animal Rights, the Environment, and Justice* (Temple U. Pr., 1992)

Final Exam: The final exam date will be published on September 13, 2016 at

<http://registrar.sas.cornell.edu/Sched/exams.html> . Students requiring a make-up final exam must speak to the instructor by 9/30/2016.