

James Pearson

Social Philosophy: The Philosopher's Role in Environmentalism Fall 2010

Course Description

Social philosophers address questions that arise when we think about ourselves in social and interpersonal contexts. Our relationship to the environment is a particularly urgent source of such questions, because debates about our habitat do not concern us solely as individuals, nor just as citizens of particular governments, but as humans invested in being able to live with each other. Is it possible to balance an environmentally conscious and socially just attitude with an economically practical one, while taking seriously both the political realities and the global consequences of our individual and social activities? Can conceptual analysis make a distinctive contribution to environmentalism?

In this course we will interrogate arguments that purport to describe the precise nature and extent of human responsibility towards our planet. Do we own our planet, and if so, what responsibility do we have towards our property? Should we be more accountable to our fellow humans than to non-human animals, plants, or locations? How has Western culture related the concepts of the natural, the good, and the beautiful? Do Western nations owe the developing world environmental damages? How can we determine which, if any, of our social policies are environmentally unethical? If some practice *is* environmentally unethical, what power and/or responsibility do we have as individuals to promote change within a local, national, or international arena? Does our interaction with the environment demand philosophical reflection that goes beyond the argumentative methods typically used by analytic philosophers?

Our course will be divided into five units. We will begin each unit by examining classical philosophical arguments before considering how they inform contemporary scholarship. By the end of this course, you will have developed an understanding of the applications that social philosophy has to the environmentalist movement, and, more generally, will have been introduced to the work of philosophical analysis. You will develop your discussion and oral presentation skills, and will write three papers in which you will create your own philosophical arguments to provide a clear and consistent defense of your opinions about the social aspects of environmental issues.

Course Requirements

Two Short Papers – 40%

You will complete two short papers (four double spaced pages, 12 point Times New Roman font with 1" margins) on topics that arise from class discussion. I will give you prompts for these papers the week before they are due. These papers will be graded blindly.

Term Paper – 40%

At the end of the course I shall expect your final, longer paper (nine double spaced pages, 12 point Times New Roman font with 1" margins) to be turned in. This paper will give you an opportunity to explore in detail a part of the course which has particularly interested you. You will be expected to book an appointment with me to discuss your plan for the final paper during the last week of class. You will also have a chance to turn in a draft of your paper.

Participation and Presentation – 20%

Merely attending class will not earn you a participation grade. To participate is to arrive at class punctually and to regularly contribute to collegiate discussion. I shall be closely monitoring your participation in class throughout the semester. Periodically, you will be asked to complete discussion self-evaluation sheets based on your performance in class, which I shall review at the end of the

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semester. You are also encouraged to use the online discussion board, available through Courseweb, to talk about the readings and classroom discussions with other students. Individual posts will not be graded, but your contribution to the forum will be taken into account when determining this component of your final grade.

At the start of the semester, each of you will also be expected to sign up, in pairs, for a presentation. You will arrange to meet outside of class, and will prepare a short, ten minute introduction to the article you present. You should highlight arguments and/or issues it raised that you found particularly interesting, confusing or challenging. You will then field questions about the article from the class. Each presenter will be expected to make significant contributions to the class discussion concerning the article which they present. After each presentation, the rest of the class will complete an evaluation sheet. Your presentation, informed by these peer evaluations, will be graded as part of this component.

Class Reading Schedule

Many of the readings for this class are in the required textbooks, and are indicated by acronym (“PAL” or “EP”) and page number. Additional readings will be made available online through Courseweb. You are expected to print your own copy of each assigned paper and bring it with you to class.

Required Texts

Cavell, Stanley, Cora Diamond, John McDowell, Ian Hacking, and Cary Wolfe. Philosophy and Animal Life. [PAL] NY: Columbia UP, 2008.

Zimmerman, Michael, J. Baird Callicot, Karen J. Warren, Irene J. Klaver and John Clark (Eds.). Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology. [EP] 4th ed. NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005.

Unit 1. Animal Rights

Week 1: Introduction

René Descartes. “Animals are Machines.” (Distributed in class)

Week 2: Extending Rights to Animals.

Peter Singer. “All Animals are Equal.” EP, pp.25-38.

Tom Regan. “Animal Rights, Human Wrongs.” EP, pp.39-52.

Week 3: The Argumentative Power of Film.

Screening in class of *The Cove* (Louie Psihoyos, 2009).

Week 4: A Limit to Argument?

Cora Diamond. “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy.” PAL, pp. 43-90.

Stanley Cavell. “Companionable Thinking.” PAL, pp. 91-126.

John McDowell. “Comment on Stanley Cavell’s ‘Companionable Thinking.’” PAL, pp. 127-138.

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Unit 2. Environmental Ethics and Social Justice

Week 5: The Nature of Social Justice.

John Rawls. Selections from *A Theory of Justice*. (Courseweb)

Robert Nozick. Selections from *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. (Courseweb)

Week 6: Social Justice for Nature. First Short Paper Due

Aldo Leopold. "The Land Ethic." EP, pp.102-113.

Holmes Rolston III. "Challenges in Environmental Ethics." EP, pp.82-101.

Week 7: Do Rich Societies Incur Environmental Responsibilities?

Peter Unger. Selections from *Living High and Letting Die*. (Courseweb)

Garrett Hardin. "Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor." (Courseweb)

Unit 3. Property Rights and Ownership

Week 8: The Nature of Ownership.

Thomas Hobbes. Selections from *Leviathan*. (Courseweb)

John Locke. Selections from *Second Treatise of Government*. (Courseweb)

Week 9: Do We Own Nature?: An Ecofeminist Critique.

Vandana Shiva. "The Impoverishment of the Environment: Women and Children Last." EP, pp.178-193.

Chris Cuomo. "Ethics and the Eco/feminist self." EP, pp. 194-207.

Unit 4. The Natural, The Good, and The Beautiful

Week 10: Natural Goodness. Second Short Paper Due

Aristotle. Selections from *Nicomachean Ethics*. (Courseweb)

Philippa Foot. Selections from *Natural Goodness*. (Courseweb)

Week 11: Natural Beauty.

Henry David Thoreau. "Walking." (Courseweb)

Jack Turner. "The Maze and Aura." (Courseweb)

David Frisby. "The flâneur in social theory." (Courseweb)

Unit 5. Environmental Possibilities and Political Realities

Week 12: Liberals and Libertarians.

Terry L. Anderson and Donald R. Leal. "Free Market Versus Political Environmentalism." EP, pp. 409-418.

Ernest Partridge. "With Liberty for Some: A Liberal Critique of Libertarian Environmental Policy." EP, pp.430-449.

Week 13: The Ecofascist Threat.

Charles Darwin. Selections from *The Descent of Man*. (Courseweb)

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J. Baird Callicott. "Holistic Environmental Ethics and the Problem of Ecofascism." EP, pp. 116-129.

Michael Zimmermann. "Ecofascism: An Enduring Temptation." EP, pp. 390-408.

Week 14: Socialists and Anarchists.

Murray Bookchin. "What is Social Ecology?" EP, pp.462-478.

David Watson. "Against the Megamachine: Empire and the Earth." EP, pp.479-495.