

POLS 4843/ 5343 – Winter 2010

Environmental Political Theory

Prof. A. Biro

Office Hours: Monday 1-3, or by appointment
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Course Meetings: Monday 8:30 – 11:30; BAC 235

PLEASE NOTE: THIS SYLLABUS IS CORRECT AS OF THE START OF CLASSES. ANY CHANGES, AS WELL AS MORE DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS FOR ASSIGNMENTS, ARE POSTED ON THE COURSE ACORN PAGE.

Course Description

Calendar description: "This course examines whether or how the values of justice, democracy, and ecological sustainability can be mutually compatible. Competing visions of "the good life," strategies for political change, and conceptions of "nature," are examined in light of contemporary environmental crises."

Political theorizing begins with the question: how should human beings live together? The tradition of Western political theory thus has generally had little to say about how human beings ought to live with the non-human world, and how non-human nature, and our relations with it, affects human communities. At the same time, environmentalism, which seeks to represent the non-human world in political discussions, has generally avoided the reflective questions of political and social theory, preferring a more pragmatic, action-oriented approach, sometimes without regard to how particular actions might affect how we humans live together.

Does an imminent ecological catastrophe justify sacrificing democratic values? Does it justify sacrificing other considerations of justice? How should such questions even be debated or decided? In part, "environmental political theory" involves bringing nature or the non-human – that which is constitutively outside of the human community - into the domain of political theory. This "bringing nature back in" forces us to reconsider some of political theory's central concepts - territory, identity, citizenship, justice, and so on – often in productive new ways. At the same time, environmental political theory involves bringing political theory to bear on environmental issues. This similarly unsettles some of our assumptions about environmentalism, sustainability, and even "nature" itself. The aim of this deconstruction and reconstruction of political-environmental concepts is to give us some of the tools to build a way of living together that is both ecologically sustainable and politically just.

Course Format

This class will be conducted as a seminar, which means that I will do very little formal lecturing. I will not come to class with a prepared agenda for discussion, but rather will solicit topics or questions for discussion at the beginning of each class. Thus, for the class to work, *it is imperative that you attend class regularly (and on time), having done the*

readings, and having thought about some of the issues that they raise. While this is a political philosophy course, one of the concerns of the course (and environmental political theory more generally) is to make connections between abstract philosophizing and more empirical or pragmatic political concerns. Some of the readings are quite abstract, while others are more concrete. Similarly, in class discussions we will try to strike a balance between more abstract philosophical positions, and what those positions mean in the “real world.” Some of the issues raised, as well as the readings themselves, may be quite contentious, so it is important that all class participants remain respectful while expressing their opinions and judgements.

You will likely find some of the readings for this course to be difficult or dense. Preparing adequately for class will require more than just skimming the readings the night before. While I don’t expect that you will come to class always having fully understood the readings, I do expect that you will at least have grappled with them, and are able to articulate what it is (if anything) that you don’t understand.

Course Readings

We will be reading three books in this course. All three are available for purchase at the Campus Bookstore:

- Steven Vanderheiden, *Atmospheric Justice* (Oxford UP, 2008)
- Andrew Dobson, *Citizenship and the Environment* (Oxford UP, 2003)
- Peter Cannavo, *The Working Landscape* (MIT Press, 2007)

In addition, we will be reading a number of individual articles. Most of these are available online (via the course Acorn page). A few are not available electronically; these are collected in a **coursepack, also available at the Bookstore**

Grading and Assignments

This course aims for each individual student to develop a set of conceptual tools and approaches to environmental problems, partly through the writing of reflective papers, and partly through collaborative and collective discussion. Seminar discussions are thus a key place where the course will be “realized.” Rather than a single capstone-type experience, such as a final exam or a term paper, this course relies on a series of smaller assignments throughout the term, each intimately connected with the assigned readings.

The assignments include four short papers (approximately 1200-1500 words for undergraduates, 1800-2000 words for graduate students), one short seminar presentation (topics will be selected on Jan.18), and regular attendance and constructive participation in class discussions. The seminar presentation and each paper are worth 15% of your final mark; class participation is worth 25% of your final mark. More information about the assignments (including class participation) is available on the course Acorn page.

Just before the reading week break (shortly after the class on Feb 15) I will give you a mid-term report on your class participation. This is not a formal grade, but will give you an indication of the sort of class participation grade that you are on track to get.

Essay assignments:

Paper #	Topic	Due date
1	Justice	Thurs. Feb. 18
2	Citizenship	Thurs. Mar. 4
3	Preservation	Thurs. Mar. 25
4	Future prospects	Fri. Apr. 16

Late papers will be penalized 2% per weekday late.

Course Schedule

All readings below are required. Other than the books, and the articles noted as “(in coursepack)”, all the readings can be accessed via the course Acorn page: either the reading is posted there directly, or it is available on the web, and there is a link from the Acorn page.

Jan 11 – Introduction to the Course

Jan 18 – Environmental Political Theory: What and Why

Ruth Grant, “Political Theory, Political Science, and Politics” *Political Theory* 30, 4 (August 2002)

Robyn Eckersley, “Green Politics: A Practice in Search of a Theory?” *Alternatives* 15, 4 (1988) (in coursepack)

Paul Wapner, “The Importance of Critical Environmental Studies in the New Environmentalism” *Global Environmental Politics* 8, 1 (2008)

Joel Kassiola, “Afterword: The Surprising Value of Despair and the Aftermath of September 11” in Kassiola (ed), *Explorations in Environmental Political Theory* (M. E. Sharpe, 2003)

Jan 25 – Foundations of Environmental Thought

Henry Thoreau, *Walden Pond* (1854) chapters: 1 (para. 1-15), 2, 5, 9 (para 1-4), 11, 18

Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic” in Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (1948)

Feb 1 – Technology, Science and Power

Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology”

William Leiss, “Modern Science, Enlightenment, and the Domination of Nature: No Exit?” *Fast Capitalism* 2, 2 (2007)

Arturo Escobar, “Whose Knowledge, Whose Nature? Biodiversity, Conservation, and the Political Ecology of Social Movements” *Journal of Political Ecology* 5 (1998)

Feb 8 – Climate Change and Justice (I)

Steven Vanderheiden, *Atmospheric Justice*, to end of ch.4

Feb 15 – Climate Change and Justice (II) [1st paper due Feb. 18]

Steven Vanderheiden, *Atmospheric Justice*, ch.5 to end

Paul Baer et al, “Greenhouse Development Rights: A Proposal for a Fair Global Climate Treaty” *Ethics Place & Environment* 12, 3 (2009)

Feb 22 - Study week – no class

Mar 1 – Environmental/ Ecological Citizenship [2nd paper due Mar. 4]

Andrew Dobson, *Citizenship and the Environment* (entire)

Mar 8 – Undermining Foundations

William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature”
in Cronon ed., *Uncommon Ground* (W. W. Norton, 1995)

Anthony Weston, “Is It Too Late?” in Weston ed., *Invitation to Environmental
Philosophy* (Oxford UP, 1999)

Teena Gabrielson, “The End of New Beginnings: Nature and the American Dream in *The
Sopranos, Weeds, and Lost*” *Theory & Event* 12, 2 (2009)

Mar 15 Preservation, Place, and Landscape (I)

Peter Cannavo, *The Working Landscape*, to end of ch.4

Mar 22 Preservation, Place, and Landscape (II) [3rd paper due Mar. 25]

Peter Cannavo, *The Working Landscape*, ch.5 to end

Mar 29 Environmentalism Without “Nature”?

Donald Worster, “Disturbing Nature” in Worster, *Nature’s Economy* (Cambridge UP,
1994) (in coursepack)

Steven Vogel, “Environmental Philosophy After the End of Nature” *Environmental
Ethics* 24 (2002) (in coursepack)

Catriona Sandilands, “The Good-natured feminist: Ecofeminism and democracy” in R.
Keil et al eds., *Political Ecology* (Routledge, 1998) (in coursepack)

Apr 5 Rethinking “Environmentalism”

Douglas Torgerson, “Farewell to the Green Movement? Political Action and the Green
Public Sphere” *Environmental Politics* 9, 4 (2000)

Michael Maniates, “Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?” in T.
Princen et al eds., *Confronting Consumption* (MIT Press, 2002)

Ingolfur Bluhdorn, “Sustaining the Unsustainable: Symbolic Politics and the Politics of
Simulation” *Environmental Politics*, 16, 2 (2007)

Apr 12 Where to from here? [4th paper due Apr. 16]

John Barry “Towards a Concrete Utopian Model of Green Political Economy: From
Economic Growth and Ecological Modernisation to Economic Security” *Post-
Autistics Economics Review* 36, 4 (2006)

Giovanna Di Chiro "Living Environmentalisms: Coalition Politics, Social Reproduction,
and Environmental Justice" *Environmental Politics* 17, 2 (2008)

Allen Thompson, “Radical Hope for Living Well in a Warmer World.” *Journal of
Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 23, 1-2 (2010)