

POLS 4843/5243 Environmental Political Theory

Prof. A. Biro

Winter 2014

Tues. 1:30-4:30, BAC 238

Contact

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#envpoltheory

Description/Overview

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.

Readings

There are no books for purchase in this course. All course readings are available via the course Acorn page.

The reading load is usually 3-4 articles (usually 50-80 pages total) per week. The readings are intended to provoke thought and discussion on a constellation of important (even urgent) issues that are fundamentally political – how we, collectively, ought to live in a

finite world. There is no single universally right answer to this question, and the authors we will read disagree with each other in many ways. None of the readings should be read as if they (only) present the “correct” answer. You should read them with a critical eye, judging them by what they contribute to our collective capacity to imagine and construct a sustainable world. In choosing the readings, I hope you will find some useful or even inspirational, while others you may find throw-across-the-room frustrating. It is a useful exercise, in the spirit of trying to reconcile the vexing problems of 21st century environmental sustainability with the ideals of democracy, to critically probe for weaknesses in the most inspiring readings, and to look for insights worth salvaging even in arguments that you find most frustrating.

Because this is a seminar class, it is *imperative* that you come to class having done the assigned readings for that week. Some of the readings are difficult and may require you to read them more than once. If you don’t understand (something in) the readings, that is fine; questions of clarification are often a good place to start discussion. Coming to class without having done the readings is discouraged.

Assignments and Grading

Reading journals (20% for undergraduates; 30% for graduates)

Students should come to class with a printed journal that discusses the readings for that week. Undergraduate students must submit a total of **six** journals; graduate students must submit **nine**. *Most* journals will be graded on a pass/fail basis. One journal of your choice will be letter-graded. Ideally, writing journals should help you prepare for class discussion and the final essay. The requirements for all journals are:

- 350-500 words, in full-sentence, paragraph form (not point form);
- mention all readings for that week;
- at least one-half devoted to critical engagement with (not summary of) the readings;
- handed in at the beginning of class in which those readings are discussed.

For *undergraduate* students: five x pass/fail (2% each) and one graded (10%).

For *graduate* students: eight x pass/fail (2.5% each) and one graded (10%).

Graded journals can be submitted any week *except* the week that you are doing a kickstarter presentation. (There are a total of 11 weeks with assigned readings.) Please clearly indicate on the journal that you want it to be graded.

Presentation: three-minute kickstarter (10%)

Each student will be required to give a three-minute presentation, focused on “kickstarting” the discussion for the week. These presentations should not summarize, but should use your limited time to generate productive class discussion: pose interesting questions, take a provocative position, etc. We will likely have multiple (maximum 3) presentations in any given class session. These are not group presentations, but students presenting on the same day are expected to coordinate so that their presentations do not overlap.

Final essay (40%)

This is a synthetic essay that will require you to critically engage with a broad range of readings from the course. In the first class, we will collectively decide whether the paper will be an “essay” due on the last day of classes, or a “take-home exam” due on the last day of the exam period. Essays should be about 4000 words. More details will be posted on the course Acorn page.

Participation (20%)

This is a seminar class, which means the responsibility for productive discussion rests with all members of the class (see “Course Policies and Procedures” for more details).

“Missing 10%” (undergraduates only)

The marking for the above assignments for undergraduates adds up to 90%. The final 10% is your choice of: a second graded journal (so seven journals total), OR a second kickstarter presentation, OR a longer (5000-word) final essay. You must choose your option no later than January 21.

Course Policies and Procedures

This course is a seminar. We are all responsible for ensuring that productive class discussion occurs. Students doing kickstarter presentations bear some extra responsibility in this regard, but *everyone* should come to class prepared to raise questions, make claims, and defend (or abandon) intellectual and political positions based on the readings.

I will do very little (if any) lecturing. The readings are chosen to provoke thinking about big, difficult questions, some of which are (I think) among the most important socio-political questions of the first half of the 21st century. If you do the readings, think about them, and listen to what your classmates have to say, we will have plenty to talk about.

Having a productive seminar discussion depends on having an environment conducive to the free exchange and rational, critical evaluation of ideas. The point of discussion here is not to “win” arguments or debates, but for us, individually and collectively, to learn. Sometimes this requires trying to convince people that something they think is wrong. It *always* requires listening in order to understand what others think and why. As with the course readings (see above), our operating assumption should be that nobody has all the answers, and that everybody has something to contribute. We should all (myself included) come to class with a combination of humility (nobody has “the answer”) and confidence (through collective discussion we can work our way to better answers). At the risk of stating the obvious, this also means that everyone in the classroom must be treated as deserving of respect, and that the focus of discussion should be on the ideas rather than the individuals who voice them.

Class Schedule

Jan 7 Introductions

(No required readings)

Jan 14 The Use and Abuse of Environmental Crisis

Paul Ehrlich & Anne Ehrlich, "Solving the Human Predicament" *International Journal of Environmental Studies* 69, 4 (2012)

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)

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

Erik Swyngedouw, "Apocalypse Forever? Post-political Populism and the Spectre of Climate Change" *Theory, Culture & Society* 27, 2/3

Jan 21 Foundations of Environmentalism

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* (Ballantine, 1949)

Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement" *Inquiry* 16 (1973)

Jan 28 Environmentalism and Liberalism

Michael Zimmerman, "A Strategic Direction for 21st Century Environmentalists: Free Market Environmentalism" *Strategies: Journal of Theory, Culture, and Politics* 13, 1 (2000)

Timothy W Luke, "Green Consumerism: Ecology and the Ruse of Recycling" in Luke, *Ecocritique* (U of Minnesota Press, 1997)

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

Feb 4 Undermining Foundations

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

Arturo Escobar, "After Nature: Steps to an Anti-essentialist Political Ecology" *Current Anthropology* 40, 1 (1999) [Note: "Comments" and "Reply" (pp16-27) are optional]

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

Feb 11 The Death and Afterlife (Afterlives) of Environmentalism

Michael Shelleberger & Ted Nordhaus, "The Death of Environmentalism"

Andrew Light, "The Death of Restoration?" in A. Thompson and J. Bendik-Keymer (ed.), *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change* (MIT Press, 2012)

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

Feb 18 Study Week – no classes

Feb 25 Citizenship and the State

Teena Gabrielson, "Green Citizenship: A Review and Critique" *Citizenship Studies* 12, 4 (2008)

Peter Cannavo, "Civic Virtue and Sacrifice in a Suburban Nation" in M. Maniates and J. Meyer (eds.), *The Environmental Politics of Sacrifice* (MIT Press, 2010)

Joel Wainwright & Geoff Mann, "Climate Leviathan" *Antipode* 45, 1

Mar 4 Consumption

Kate Soper, "Rethinking the Good Life: The Consumer as Citizen" *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 15, 3 (2004)

Gert Spaargaren and Arthur P.J. Mol, "Greening Global Consumption: Redefining Politics and Authority" *Global Environmental Change* 18, 3

Gavin Fridell, "The University and the Moral Imperative of Fair Trade Coffee" *Journal of Academic Ethics* 2 (2004)

James Carrier, "Protecting the Environment the Natural Way: Ethical Consumption and Commodity Fetishism" *Antipode* 42, 3 (2010)

Mar 11 Biodiversity

John Vandermeer, "The End of Conservation? Towards a New Paradigm of Biodiversity Conservation," unpublished ms.

Rafi Youatt, "Counting Species: Biopower and the Global Biodiversity Census" *Environmental Values* 17,3

Timothy W Luke, "The Nature Conservancy or the Nature Cemetery" in Luke, *Ecocritique* (U of Minnesota Press, 1997)

Mar 18 Climate Change as Problem

Stephen Gardiner, "A Perfect Moral Storm" in S. Vanderheiden (ed.), *Political Theory and Global Climate Change* (MIT Press, 2008)

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

Bradley Parks and J. Timmons Roberts, "Climate Change, Social Theory and Justice" *Theory, Culture & Society* 27, 2/3 (2010)

Kelly Levin, Benjamin Cashore, Steven Bernstein, Graeme Auld, "Overcoming the tragedy of super wicked problems: constraining our future selves to ameliorate global climate change" *Policy Science* 45 (2012)

Mar 25 Climate Change as Condition

Roy Scranton, "Learning How to Die in the Anthropocene" *New York Times* Nov 10, 2013

Rasmus Karlsson, "Modernity as a Runway" Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, 2013

Mike Hulme, "The conquering of climate: Discourses of fear and their dissolution" *The Geographical Journal* 174, 1 (2008)

Elaine Kelly, "Does Deconstruction Matter? Being 'at home' in the era of climate change" *Continuum* 27, 1 (2013)

Apr 1 Ways Forward

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)

William Chaloupka, "The Environmentalist 'What is to be Done?'" *Environmental Politics* 17, 2 (2008)

David Roberts, "Supply, Demand, and Activism: What Should the Climate Movement Do Next?" *Grist.org* Feb 22, 2013