

Politics 237
Environmental Political Theory
Spring 2005

MWF 10-10.50
Room: AJLC 201

Prof. Harlan Wilson
Office: Rice 209

Course Objectives

This course, formerly known as "Green Political Theory," discusses theories about humans, politics, and non-human "nature" and their relationships. The course involves reading of a series of texts, all of which are controversial. Through reading the texts, you should gain a deeper understanding of the theoretical roots of current arguments about environmental politics and policy through the discourses in which politics and policy are debated. You can expect that your own perspectives on the politics of nature and the environment, whatever they are, will be challenged; and you may find that your own thinking will develop in unpredictable ways.

The key assumption that underlies this course, and much (though not all) of the reading in it, is that environmental problems are as much political as they are scientific, economic, moral, and aesthetic. Their politicalness doesn't only consist in the fact that environmental problems pose serious policy choices. Rather, our ideas about the natural environment are in some sense *inseparable* from our conceptions about politics and the ways in which we act (or don't act) politically. Studying and engaging with political theories is an excellent way to think about this deeper sense of politics and also about "the environment" and how they connect with each other. Because ideas are contested, critical thinking is essential to the course.

One objective of the course is to explore certain political theories of the past to see whether they exhibit some assumptions about politics and "nature" that still matter. Another is to discuss some of the current controversies in environmental political theory and how they apply to environmental politics. Still another is to encourage you to work out your own approach to the controversies we will be following---for as you will see the writers and texts we will study disagree sharply over fundamental issues, and these disagreements are likely to persist, unresolved, in political debates in the "real world" as well as in the academy. So, if you go on to work in some area of environmental politics or environmental studies you may find the ideas you encounter in this course useful. And yet, environmental political theories may be seen as intrinsically interesting too, inasmuch as the natural environment is bound up with the human condition and politics, and reflection on these matters is an inherently worthwhile activity.

A more complete account of the purposes of this course, and of the questions and controversies to be discussed, can be found at the back of this syllabus.

Course Requirements

Reading: The reading and discussion of texts are central to this course; texts constitute the core of the course. The following books have been ordered at the Oberlin bookstore, though you may buy them elsewhere if you wish. Most are primary source materials, with the exception of the Dryzek

book The Politics of the Earth.

Books ordered for purchase:

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| Dryzek, John | <u>The Politics of the Earth</u> (Oxford, 1997) |
| Dryzek and Schlosberg, eds. | <u>Debating the Earth</u> (Oxford, 1998) |
| Malthus, Thomas | <u>An Essay on the Principle of Population</u> (Norton) |
| Schlosberg, David | <u>Environmental Justice and the New Pluralism</u> (Oxford, 2002) |
| Dobson, Andrew | <u>Citizenship and the Environment</u> (2004) |
| Kovel, Joel | <u>The Enemy of Nature</u> (Fernwood or Zed, 2002) |
| Bookchin, Murray | <u>Remaking Society</u> (South End Press, 1997) |
| Cronon, William, ed. | <u>Uncommon Ground</u> (Norton, 1996) |

Selections will be read from several other books and articles. All course readings, including the books listed above, should be on reserve in Mudd. Readings that are not in the list of books required for purchase have been put on electronic reserve (ERES). With the exception of the Dryzek and Schlosberg anthology Debating the Earth, books ordered for purchase are not on ERES. Because the bookstore was unable to obtain sufficient copies from the publisher of the Dryzek and Schlosberg reader, which will be drawn upon throughout the course, this title has therefore been placed on ERES (electronic reserve). However, if you are able to obtain a copy, it will be to your advantage.

Please notify the instructor at once if you discover that required readings are unavailable.

You are expected to keep up with the readings to the best of your ability and to be able to participate in Friday discussions after having read the appropriate texts.

- Reading Responses: Studying political theory requires active reading, listening, thinking, and conversation. To facilitate discussion and communication, you are asked to write SIX e-mail responses to the instructor. (No attachments please!) Write a couple of paragraphs on your reactions to the readings, and/or raise questions arising from the readings. They should be roughly current with the current class schedule (e.g. not turned in many weeks after the topic has been discussed). The instructor will review them, use them in preparing lectures and discussions if received early enough, and try to respond to your questions and reactions. Reading responses are useful to the instructor because they give some indication of how individuals in the class are thinking about the readings.

Reading responses needn't be long or overly formal, though they shouldn't be perfunctory. There's no template; write with regard to whatever you find interesting and valuable, and use this assignment for your own purposes. You might want to use the reading responses to test out ideas in an informal manner, ask questions about matters you don't completely grasp, share your excitement about or aversion to a text or simply let the instructor know what you are thinking about a problem or issue in the reading. If, after putting forth effort, you don't understand course material, please let the instructor know about it so you can get some help! Also, it does not violate the honor code in this course to talk over the course material or even problems you are having in writing papers. Finally, you can use reading responses to express concerns about the course and suggest improvements. And you can write them jointly with a classmate, collaboratively or in the form of a dialogue, if you like.

Class Attendance: Classes meet Mondays and Wednesdays from 10.00 to 10.50 a.m. On Fridays the class will be divided into two sections, with one section meeting at 10.00 to 10.50 am and the other between 11.00 and 11.50 am. Regular attendance is required: students who miss more than three (3) classes without cause (i.e. notifying the instructor in advance with justification) will have their final grades lowered. Punctuality is a collective good, even if the 10.00 meeting time may be individually inconvenient. (See Hardin's "The Tragedy of the Commons" for a discussion of the logic involved).

Office Hours: You are expected to meet with the instructor individually at least once during the first half of the semester to discuss how the course is going for you. You may, or may not, choose to do this in conjunction with a paper assignment. Office hours will be Tuesdays and Fridays 1.30 to 3.30, and by appointment.

Writing Assignments: Two short (6-10) papers will be assigned during the semester. The first paper will be due before spring break, and the second one at the end of the term. Your writing in this course will consist of essays focusing on specific texts and assessing critically their arguments and perspectives. More specific information on paper assignments will appear later. There will also be a take-home final exam, giving you the opportunity to pull together the disparate threads of the course.

Due dates are as follows:

First paper: Wednesday, March 16

Second paper: Monday, May 16

Take-home final examination due: Wednesday, May 18

Grades: Course grades will be based on your two papers and final exam (each 25%), as well as on your reading responses (15%) and class participation (10%).

Honor Code: Academic honesty is essential to mutual trust, without which intellectual life can't flourish. You are expected to know the Oberlin honor code and comply with it, according to the guidelines accompanying each assignment. Specifically, you are welcome to discuss the substance of your paper with other students or HW; but plagiarism, or allowing someone else to write any part of your paper or exam, violate the honor code.

Schedule of Assignments and Classes

Note: The instructor will be away at a conference during the third week of March. Therefore, class meetings that would have been scheduled for Wednesday, March 16 and Friday, March 18 will not be held. One of the class meetings will be made up, tentatively on Sunday, April 24, time and place to be determined.

Environmental Political Theory: Introduction

Mon Feb 7 Introductory and organizational meeting

Wed Feb 9 Syllabus (this document), all

Dryzek, John, The Politics of the Earth, ch. 1 (pp. 3-20)

Malthusian Arguments: Nature and Human Survival

- Fri 2-11 Malthus, Thomas, An Essay on Population, P. Appleman ed. (Norton), pp. 15-75
- Mon 2-14 Malthus, continued, pp. 76-134
- Wed 2-16 Dryzek, ch. 2 (pp. 23-44)
Hobbes, Thomas, Leviathan, Part I, chs. 13-18
- Fri 2-18 Hardin, Garrett, "The Tragedy of the Commons," in Dryzek and Schlosberg, eds., Debating the Earth, pp. 23-34

Nature and Liberal Rights

- Mon 2-21 Locke, John, Second Treatise of Civil Government, chs. II, V, VIII, IX
- Wed 2-23 Eckersley, R., "Liberal Democracy and the Rights of Nature," in F. Mathews ed., Ecology and Democracy, pp. 169-198
Ophuls, W., and A.S. Boyan, "The American Political Economy II: The Non-Politics of Laissez-Faire," in Dryzek and Schlosberg, eds., pp. 187-202

Prometheanism/Cornucopia

- Fri 2-25 Dryzek, ch. 3 (pp. 45-60)
Rand, Ayn, "The Anti-Industrial Revolution," in The New Left: The Anti-Industrial Revolution, pp. 127-151
Simon, Julian, and Herman Kahn, "Introduction to The Resourceful Earth", in Dryzek and Schlosberg, eds., pp. 41-65
Easterbrook, Gregg, "The Ecorealist Manifesto," in Dryzek and Schlosberg, eds., pp. 66-69

Markets and the Environment: Friend or Foe?

- Mon 2-28 Dryzek, chs. 4 and 6 (pp. 61-83, 102-119)
Schultze, Charles, The Public Use of Private Interests, pp. 1-27, 84-90
- Wed 3-2 Anderson, T., and D. Leal, "Free Market Environmentalism," in Dryzek and Schlosberg, eds., pp. 207-223
Mitchell, W., and R. Simmons, "Political Pursuit of Private Gain," in Dryzek and Schlosberg, eds., pp. 224-236
- Fri 3-4 Goodin, Robert, "Selling Environmental Indulgences," in Dryzek and

Schlosberg, eds., pp. 237-254
Sagoff, Mark, "The Allocation and Distribution of Resources," in Dryzek
and Schlosberg, eds., pp. 131-146
Torgerson, Doug, "Limits of the Administrative Mind," in Dryzek and
Schlosberg, eds., p. 110-127

Environmental Justice

- Mon 3-7 Wenz, Peter, Environmental Ethics Today, ch. 1-2 (pp. 5-36)
Dobson, Andrew, Justice and the Environment, Introduction; pp 3-30, 240-262
- Wed 3-9 Warren, Karen, "Environmental Justice," Environmental Ethics 21/2, Summer
1999, pp. 151-161
First National People of Color, "Principles of Environmental Justice," in
Dryzek and Schlosberg, eds., pp. 469-470
Celene Krauss, "Women of Color on the Front Line," in Dryzek and Schlosberg,
eds., pp. 493-503
Schlosberg, David, Environmental Justice and the New Pluralism,
Introduction (pp. 1-19)
- Fri 3-11 Schlosberg, pp. 20-68
- Mon 3-14 Schlosberg, pp. 69-119
Plumwood, Val, "Inequality, Ecojustice, and Rationality," in Dryzek and
Schlosberg, eds., pp. 559-583
- Wed 3-16 FIRST PAPER DUE
[No class meeting]
- Fri 3-18 Dryzek, ch. 5 (pp. 84-101)
Dobson, Citizenship and the Environment, introduction and pp. 1-82 (or as
much as you can manage)
[No class meeting]

Environmental Democracy

- Mon 3-21 Dobson, Citizenship and the Environment, pp. 83-140
- Wed 3-23 Dobson, pp. 141-173, 208-211
- Fri 3-25 Dryzek, John, "Political and Ecological Communication," in Dryzek and
Schlosberg, eds., pp. 584-597
Torgerson, Doug, The Promise of Green Politics, pp. 129-168

SPRING BREAK

Radical Ecology---Themes and Approaches

- Mon 4-4 Dryzek, chs. 9-10 (pp. 155-193)
- Wed 4-6 Rousseau, "Discourse on Inequality," ("Second Discourse"), all

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Ecological Marxism and Critical Theory

- Fri 4-8 Marx and Engels, "The Communist Manifesto, in R. Tucker, ed., The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd ed., pp. 469-500
Joel Kovel, The Enemy of Nature, pp. 1-27
- Mon 4-11 Kovel, pp. 28-86
[Recommended: O'Connor, James, "Capitalism, Nature, Socialism: A Theoretical Introduction," in Dryzek and Schlosberg, eds., pp. 438-457]
- Wed 4-13 Kovel, pp. 89-146
- Fri 4-15 Kovel, pp. 206-254
Dobson, Andrew, "Critical Theory and Green Politics," in A. Dobson and P. Lucardie, eds., The Politics of Nature, pp. 190-209

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Eco-Anarchism ("social ecology")

- Mon 4-18 Bookchin, Murray, Remaking Society, pp. 7-73
- Wed 4-20 Bookchin, pp. 127-204
- Fri 4-22 Bookchin, further discussion

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Deep Ecology

- Sun 4-24 Naess, Arne, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement," in Dryzek and Schlosberg, eds., pp. 353-357 (also in Drengson and Inoue, eds., The Deep Ecology Movement, pp. 3-9)
Eckersley, Robyn, "Ecocentrism Explained and Defended", in Dryzek and Schlosberg, eds., pp. 374-397
Dodge, Jim, "Living by Life: Some Bioregional Theory and Practice" in Dryzek and Schlosberg, eds., pp. 365-373
- Mon 4-25 Naess and Sessions, "Platform Principles of the Deep Ecology

Movement,” in Drengson and Inoue, eds., ch. 5 (pp. 49-53)
Drengson, “Shifting Paradigms: From Technocrat to Planetary Person,” in
Drengson and Inoue, eds., ch. 8 (p. 74-100)
McLaughlin, A., “For a Radical Ecocentrism,” in Drengson and Inoue, eds., ch.
19 (pp. 257-280)

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Ecofeminism

- Wed 4-27 Warren, “Introduction,” in Warren, ed., Ecological Feminist Philosophies, pp. ix-xxvi
Warren, “The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism,” in Warren, ed., pp. 19-41
King, Y., “Toward an Ecological Feminism and a Feminist Ecology, in Dryzek and Schlosberg, eds., pp. 429-437
- Fri 4-29 Lahar, Stephanie, “Ecofeminist Theory and Grassroots Politics,” in Warren, ed., pp. 1-18
Warren, K., and Jim Cheney, “Ecological Feminism and Ecosystem Ecology,” in Warren, ed., pp. 244-262
- Mon 5-2 Shiva, Vandana, “Development, Ecology and Women,” in Dryzek and Schlosberg, eds., pp. 290-298
Salleh, Ariel, Ecofeminism as Politics, pp. 35-68

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Postmodern Nature and Politics

- Wed 5-4 Chaloupka, William, and R. McG. Cawley, "The Great Wild Hope", in J. Bennett and W. Chaloupka, eds., In the Nature of Things, pp. 3-23
Cronon, William, “Introduction: In Search of Nature,” in Cronon, ed., Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature, pp. 23-56
Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” in Cronon, ed., pp. 69-90
- Fri 5-6 Ellis, J., “On the Search for a Root Cause: Essentialist Tendencies in Environmental Discourse,” in Cronon ed., p. 256-268
Proctor, James D., “Whose Nature? The Contested Moral Terrain of Ancient Forests,” in Cronon ed., pp. 269-297
Soule, Michael, “The Social Siege of Nature,” in M. Soule and G. Lease, eds., Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction, ch. 9 (pp. 137-170)

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Theory and Practice

- Mon 5-9 Dryzek, ch. 11 (pp. 197-201)
 Wapner, P., "Politics beyond the State", in Dryzek and Schlosberg, eds.,
 pp. 509-533
 Brecher, J., and T. Costello, "The Lilliput Strategy," in Dryzek and Schlosberg,
 eds., pp. 534-538
 Shellenberger and Nordhaus, "The Death of Environmentalism." Online at:
 <http://www.thebreakthrough.org/images/Death.of.Environmentalism.pdf>
- Wed 5-11 Dobson, "Strategies for Green Change," Dryzek and Schlosberg, eds., pp.
 539-555
 Schlosberg, Environmental Justice, pp. 183-194
 Torgerson, Doug, The Promise of Green Politics, pp. 83-103
- Fri 5-13 Concluding session
 Take-home final examination distributed

Et Cetera

- Mon 5-16 SECOND PAPER DUE
- Wed 5-18 25th anniversary of Mt. St. Helens eruption
 TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAMINATION DUE, 9.00 p.m.

What Is Environmental Political Theory About, Anyhow?

Most political theories contain assumptions about human relationships with nonhuman “nature.” Conversely, most environmental discourses contain assumptions about politics. In this course, we read a literature in which these assumptions are both explicit and contested.

Is that worth doing?

Political theories generally consist of reflections on broad themes of politics, usually connected to an analysis, interpretation, and diagnosis of contemporary political life. Environmental political theories are reflections about the social and political dimensions of environmental issues and the environmental implications of political discourses and practices. A main objective of this course is to facilitate your ability to participate in discussions and debates about the social and political dimensions of environmental issues as well as the environmental implications of political discourses. In other words, you can get to the bottom of current debates about the environment and take apart the underlying assumptions.

The “environment,” and discourse about the environment, are quite recent, while “nature,” and concepts of nature, are very old. Politics and political theory are also very old. Nevertheless, older texts often contain assumptions about humans and nature that can reveal both possible sources of environmental problems and possible solutions. Also, images of order and disorder in politics can be extended to notions of order and disorder in nature, or in human interactions with nature. (Both of these can be found in Hardin’s essay “The Tragedy of the Commons.”) You will find many other examples of how political theories can help you understand environmental issues more broadly and deeply.

Although political theory is very old, much of the literature of environmental, or “green”, political theory, like the environmental movement, has only flourished since the 1970's. Much of the assigned reading in the course has only recently been published, so you will be learning about, and entering into, contemporary debates that are unresolved. For example, are nature, the environment, and environmental issues such as wilderness, really “social constructions,” or do they have some sort of objective reality independent of culture and society? (Are these the only alternatives?) Some

other contested issues are listed below.

It may help to think of political theory as about “deep politics”, as contrasted with political policy and party politics (“surface politics”). Political theorists typically aim at understanding and clarification and diagnosis (in other words, what kind of problem is the environment, anyway?). Often, theorists challenge conventional “common sense” and what is called “realism” [which is often the ‘common sense’ of parochial experience].

Most political theorists not only diagnostic, but seek to make a difference in the practical world. Political theorists often make political suggestions and proposals for change, based on their diagnoses of the way things are. In the end, most theorists aim at understanding because they see something wrong with the world and they want to change it, or at least change the way people think about it. That is a main reason why they bother to write. And for many theorists, the relation between theory and practice is itself problematic.

Nevertheless, in reading the texts, try not to be too impatient to get to a “bottom line” of recommendations about what we must do to save the environment. Try to understand the way the writer/text understands what kind of problem ‘the environment’ is, and how that understanding is applied to diagnosing contemporary environmental problems, rather than focusing exclusively on proposals for ‘solutions’. It’s best not to think of most theories as blueprints, but rather as attempts to stretch and challenge the understanding.

Political theory, even Western political theory, is very diverse. What counts as ‘theory’ is contested. Moreover, ALL of the reading in this course has been controversial, and much of it still is. Many different discourses, voices, perspectives, assumptions, experiences compete with each other and with established points of view. It is probably better to think of reading political “theories” than political “theory,” because there is no one ‘correct’ theory (or if there is, people don’t agree about it). And be prepared to have your own ideas challenged by some of the readings.

All courses make assumptions, and this one is no exception. The instructor will assume that there are environmental problems (e.g. they are not just constructions of self-interest, class, language, etc); and that these problems and proposed solutions, including technological choices, are inherently political (along with their other dimensions, e.g. biological, economic, ethical). You are free to disagree with these assumptions, as indeed some of the reading does; but the assumptions do influence the choice of readings and the way the course is taught. That still leaves lots of room for controversy.

Along these lines, it may help to say something about approaches that this course *doesn't* emphasize, though you will find elements of all of them included in the readings. (1) It isn't a course in the history of environmental ideas, though there are some historical aspects. (2) It isn't mainly about environmental policy, though some policy controversies will be discussed in the context of political theories. (3) Although moral issues do arise in the readings, it isn't a course in environmental ethics, insofar as the emphasis is not on individual moral choices but rather on understanding political and public dimensions of environmental problems. (4) Finally, it isn't about utopias, though there are utopian ideas in some texts; rather, this course features many theoretical perspectives: some utopian and radical, others pragmatic and conservative.

If you are reading political theory for the first time, try not to mystify it and allow yourself to be intimidated! No one in this course is an impostor. If you feel intimidated by the material to the point that you are having trouble working with it, seek advice! It is true that some political theory can be quite abstract (but then, so is much of environmental science and economic theory, not to mention humanistic studies like philosophy and literary theory). Remember that abstractions are shorthand for descriptions and recommendations about the world as theorists see it. And all of us use abstractions. When we do so critically, we are, in a sense, theorizing! To paraphrase the Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci: we are all theorists, even if not all of us perform the social functions of theorists! Theory is an 'all-too-human' activity.

Finally, reading environmental political theories is that, indirectly, can help empower you to act. Though you won't find many blueprints for action in the course, by working out what kind of problems 'the environment' poses and by thinking about how change works, you can develop your perspectives on these issues, and that can help you negotiate your way through political issues and conflicts. People who know what they think and why they think it, and what their allies and adversaries think and why *they* think as they do, often are more empowered to act than those who don't know these things.

Environmental Political Theory: Controversies

Here are some examples of controversies that come up in the literature you will be reading. You should be able to add questions and issues of your own as you go along.

1. How should the relation between nature and human nature be understood? Are humans best thought of as outside "nature" or as part of nature? How does an answer to this question bear upon environmental politics and policy?
2. Is there one overall environmental problem or crisis that needs to be systematically addressed, or are there only discrete problems which can be addressed piecemeal and in terms of tradeoffs with other desired goods?
3. To what degree is personal experience of 'the environment' or 'nature' an appropriate starting place for thinking about environmental matters? How much does, or should, one's social location or position be a basis for evaluating ideas or theories about the environment?
4. To what extent can technology, or technologies, such as environmental design, be relied upon to bring about environmental improvement? Is there such a thing as "technology," or are there only technologies, anyhow?
5. Are environmental problems (such as population) rooted in human psychology or even biology, or in social and political structures and beliefs?
6. Is environmental degradation associated with too much human freedom, or too little? What is freedom, anyhow? Is green politics compatible with human liberty (however you define the latter)?

7. Same questions as in #6, but about justice. What are some possible competing theories about what “environmental justice” is and what it entails?

8. Is the idea of environmental “sustainability” a politically neutral concept, or does it entail a certain idea of politics?

9. Is the so-called domination or conquest of nature related to domination and conquest within human societies? Or, does the domination of nature encourage less domination and aggression in society and politics? Specifically, is there any relation between human practices in the environment and attitudes/practices about gender (or race or class); is environmental deterioration a function of male (or white or ruling-class) domination, and if so, what is to be done about it?

10. Would a “green society” or “green polity” have to be one with hierarchical rule, or could (must) it have democratic arrangements? If you had to achieve environmental sustainability through non-democratic, authoritarian politics, would you advocate that?

11. Is environmental action best carried out on the local level, with small sustainable communities, or do global environmental problems require a global response?

12. Is it plausible or helpful to think of economies, or polities, or ecosystems, as “naturally” or automatically self-regulating (i.e. they work according to negative feedback mechanisms that correct their own “errors”)? Or, are they self-destroying in important ways (i.e. positive feedback mechanisms where errors become magnified)? Political and policy implications?

13. How much authority do, and should, natural science and scientists have regarding the definitions and proposed solutions to environmental problems? Is natural science the source of solutions to environmental problems, or the source of the problems? Is the “Enlightenment project” a source of environmental problems, green solutions, or both?

14. Is “nature” an objective reality or a social construction? If it is a social (and linguistic) construction as some postmodernists contend, then does that mean that environmental problems are also only socially and linguistically constructed? Are statements such as “nature knows best” disguised authority claims?

15. How should we think in terms of the relations between theory and practice? How can recommendations of green theories become actualized? What are some alternative ways of thinking about this (besides the obvious one, individual consciousness-raising)? Are there guarantees that one’s ideas for change will become successful in the world? If not, what incentive is there to keep working for change?

16. The anarchist Emma Goldman is said to have remarked that she didn’t want to be a part of any revolution where she couldn’t dance. A lot of talk about environmental crisis is sober, even tragic. A lot of talk about politics is also very serious stuff. Is there room for dancing and laughter in environmental politics?

