

Philosophy 247 -- Environmental Ethics
Professor McLaughlin
Mon. 11 - 11:50 Wed. 11 -- 12:50

Recently some environmental problems have become systemic, involving the whole biosphere. These problems, being systemic in scope, pose novel questions: What is “the” system which encompasses the biosphere? What are its important elements and how do they interact? Why are these problems arising now? Where are we within this system?

In this course, we will look at perspectives within environmental philosophy which analyze environmental problems from a systemic perspective. In particular, we will examine approaches which focus on industrialism, patriarchy, anthropocentrism, and religion. Each of these analyses points to particular dimensions of society needing transformation and each includes views about how consciousness should change.

However we understand the system, we need to conceive ourselves as part of it. We are both produced and are producers of the systems within which we live. Human consciousness, in particular, is a crucial element in determining humanity’s relations with the rest of nature. One emphasis in this course will be becoming aware of the role that structures of consciousness have in the generation and resolution of environmental problems. To do this, part of this course will involve self-reflection on the nature and structure of human consciousness. Students will be given specific techniques, such as contemplation and journal keeping, which will help in clarifying the idea of consciousness and its structures. Toward the end, each student will also be asked to explore experientially some of the transformative practices advocated by some of the perspectives we will have examined.

Syllabus -- Philosophy 247 -- Environmental Ethics

We begin by examining the world system model developed by the Meadows as an attempt to understand the systemic dimensions of environmental problems. Using this perspective as a base, we will then look at some of the social dynamics not included in their model. We will also examine the differing ecological impacts of (over)developed nations and developing nations. Then we will survey other analyses of the roots of environmental problems. These analyses argue for certain transformations of consciousness to resolve environmental problems. Finally, we will examine a variety of practices associated with each of these approaches.

Each session of the course will begin with a brief period of contemplation designed to clarify the idea of structures of consciousness. You are expected to keep a journal to record and explore your reactions to the readings, in-class and out-of-class exercises, and whatever else seems appropriate. Your journal should reflect a deepening understanding of environmental problems and the role of consciousness in their production and resolution. There will also be a number of short essays assigned throughout the semester. A short paper is due at the end of each of the first four parts of the course. These papers will each count for 10% of your final grade. The paper for the fifth part will take you more time, require some independent reading, and will count for 20% of your final grade. Class participation and your journal will each count for 20% of your final grade.

Texts: Meadows, et. al., Beyond the Limits and various handouts.

Each “part” listed below will last two to three weeks, depending on discussions and class interests. **Your journal should be handed in along with your papers at the end of each part of the course.**

Part 1 -- The dynamics of complex, nonlinear systems.

Growth, exponential growth, population, economic systems, interconnections between subsystems.

Readings from Meadows, Beyond the Limits (Chs. 1 -- 6) and handout on the differing ecological impacts of industrialized and developing countries.

Paper: explain the World3 model, describing its elements, their interactions, and nonlinear change.

Part 2 -- Alternative analyses of “the” problem.

Industrialism, patriarchy, religion, anthropocentrism.

Readings: handouts: McLaughlin, “Nature as Resource”

Warren, “The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism”

White, “Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis”

Capra, “Deep Ecology: a New Paradigm”

Paper: Compare and contrast two analyses of “the” problem.

Part 3 -- The role of consciousness

Consciousness and structures of consciousness; consumerism and affluenza

Readings: handouts: Bahro, from Avoiding Social & Ecological Disaster

Mander on television from In the Absence of the Sacred

Wilbur, "An Integral Theory of Consciousness"

Paper: What is a "structure" of consciousness? How is this notion exemplified in Mander or Wilbur?

Part 4 -- Environmental Ethics: What counts?

The practice of "invitation" -- offering an "invitation" to another being or some part of the world and see what comes of it.

Readings: handout: Cheney and Weston, "Environmental Ethics as Environmental Etiquette"

Paper: Explain the distinction between an epistemology-based environmental ethic and an ethics-based environmental philosophy. Explain how the notion of etiquette is fundamental to the latter.

Part 5 -- Transformative practices

Sustainable systems and spiritual practices --

Readings: Meadows, Ch. 8 & 9

Final paper and class report: The point of this project is for you to experience through a particular practice the possibilities of changing consciousness. This will require that you adopt and conscientiously carry out some particular practice for a period of time and see what happens. I want to give you as much latitude as you want in selecting a practice, so the following are only suggestions. There are other possible practices, some of which are related to major religious traditions. Please talk to me if there are other practices you want to explore. Each of the practices is based on a particular reading. I have copies of each which I will loan out to you. Once you pick a practice, follow it for at least two weeks, record your reactions in your journal, and report to the class on your experiences. Some of these practices lend themselves to being done in groups. If some of you want to work together, please talk to me about it.

Paper: Write on your experience and research on the topic you chose. Be sure to include your reflections on the class reactions to your report.

Ecological perception -- attending, perceiving relations, perceptual flexibility, re-perceiving depth, the imaginal self. (Based on Laura Sewall's "The skill of Ecological Perception" in Rosak, et. al. Ecopsychology.)

Consumerism -- a "walk in the mall" and tracing the ecological footprint of a consumer item. The book Stuff by John Ryan and Alan Durning can be helpful.

Ecofeminism -- Seeing the sacred in urban life. (Irene Javors "Goddess in the Metropolis" in Reweaving the World (ed. by Diamond))

Mother
an Ecofeminist”

Or becoming aware of yourself as an integral part of humanity and Earth (Based on Julia Scofield Russell “The Evolution of in Reweaving)

Breath,
Macy,

Deep Ecology -- Meditations: Web of Life, Gaia, Loving Kindness, Death, The Great Ball of Merit, Learning to See Each Other (Joanna “Taking Heart” in her World as Lover, World as Self.)

Lee

Indigenous peoples -- A Native American woman gives ways of becoming more open to Tribal practices within the modern technological world. (Carol Sanchez, “Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral,” Ecofeminism and the Sacred (ed. by Adams))

Buddhism -- working with animals (see Mobi Ho, “Animal Dharma” in Dharma Gaia (ed. by Badiner)) **or** developing mindfulness in everyday activities (Thich Nhat Hanh, “Look Deep and Smile” in Buddhism and Ecology.)

Or you might wish to work within another religious tradition. If so, see me to discuss Christian, Jewish, Taoist, or Islamic sources.

Part 6 -- The idea of the sacred and wholeness.
Bateson handout.