

New Jersey Institute of Technology
Program in Science, Technology and Society

STS 360-102

ETHICS AND THE ENVIRONMENT
Spring 2001

M-W 1-2:20

Prof. David Rothenberg, tel. 596-3289
Office: Cullimore 318, hours Monday 2:30-5
e-mail: terranova@highlands.com

This course is an examination of contemporary environmental problems from the philosophical perspective. Do we have a moral obligation to the natural world? If so, is it to individual living things or to nature as a whole? How do moral positions influence environmental policy and activism? Are traditional theories within moral philosophy of any help in these problems, or must we develop a radically new conception of the relationship between humanity and nature? What are the different ways we can perceive and value the natural surrounding world?

Why should we preserve natural diversity? Should we increase it artificially? How has our attitude toward nature developed as part of the suburbanization and commodification of our culture? Can business help solve our problems, or is it the problem? What kind of role to activists play in making us aware of the situation? How do we listen to them, how do we join up, and how do we make a difference? What is the connection between the built environment and the way we conceive the environment? Can our society really live in any way closer to nature than we do now – or is nature just an idea that we made up, which we change whenever we need to? We'll see.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Louis Pojman, *Global Environmental Ethics*, Mayfield Press, 2000.
Jack Turner, *The Abstract Wild*, University of Arizona Press, 1996
John McPhee, *Encounters with the Archdruid*, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1971
Anthony Weston, *Back to Earth* Temple University Press, 1996
Robert Yaro, *The Third Regional Plan for the New York Area* (Island Press, 1996)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

One five page paper on an assigned topic. One substantial research paper, ten to fifteen pages, on the topic of your choice approved by me. Midterm exam. Final exam. Class participation in discussion, presentation, and debate. Final grade is a fair combination of the above.

COURSE SCHEDULE

- Jan. 22 Pojman, ch. 1. Ch. 2. Introduction to Ethics and the Environment.
- Jan. 24 The environmentalist as persona. McPhee, part 1
- Jan. 29 Ethical relativism.
- Jan. 31 The aesthetic value of nature. McPhee, part 2. Pojman, ch. 8.
- Feb. 5 The Land Ethic, Pojman, ch. 9.
- Feb. 7 McPhee, part 3. An individual vs. the system.
- Feb. 12 Pojman, ch. 5. Types of ethical theory.
- Feb. 14 Pojman, ch. 16. The importance of wilderness. **First paper due.**
- Feb. 19 The limits of conservation: The abstract wild. Turner.
- Feb. 21 Turner
- Feb. 26 Turner
- Feb. 28 Deep ecology. Pojman, ch. 10.
- Mar. 5 The tragedy of the commons. Pojman, ch. 4
- Mar. 7 **Midterm exam**
- Mar. 12-16 *Spring Break*
- Mar. 19 Contact with the more-than-human world. Weston
- Mar. 21 Weston.
- Mar. 26 Weston. **Plan for final paper due.**
- Mar. 28 **Guest Speaker**
- Apr. 2 no class
- Apr. 4 Pojman, ch. 11. Population.
- Apr. 9 Yaro
- Apr. 11 Yaro
- Apr. 16 Sustainable Society. Pojman, ch. 18.
- Apr. 18 no class
- Apr. 23 **Guest Speaker**
- Apr. 25 no class
- Apr. 30 Pojman, ch. 17. Economics and environmental indicators.
- May 2 field trip to the wilds...

FINAL EXAM DATE TO BE ANNOUNCED

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REVISED 2nd HALF COURSE SCHEDULE

- Mar. 12-16 *Spring Break*
Mar. 19 Arne Naess film
Mar. 21 The tragedy of the commons. Pojman, ch. 4
Mar. 26 Contact with the more-than-human world. Weston
Mar. 28 Weston.
Apr. 2 Weston. **Final paper assigned.**
Apr. 4 Pojman, ch. 11. Population. Yaro
Apr. 9 Yaro
Apr. 11 Yaro
Apr. 16 Sustainable Society. Pojman, ch. 18.
Apr. 18 Film
Apr. 23 **Guest Speaker**
Apr. 25 Film
Apr. 30 Pojman, ch. 17. Economics and environmental indicators.
May 2 Field Trip! **Final paper due.**

FINAL EXAM DATE TO BE ANNOUNCED

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FIRST PAPER

Is Wilderness Manageable?

David Brower believes that we all need wilderness, that if you just go out there and see it you'll know why we need it as a ready antidote to the perils of civilization.

Jack Turner thinks the wild is sacred but unmanageable, essential yet impossible to contain as a foil to our existing culture.

And is wilderness to be saved for utilitarian reasons, or because of principles of intrinsic value? Or—should it be saved at all?

You should argue your own position on this question, by navigating a way through all these conflicting views.

Paper should be typed, double-spaced, about five pages in length, primarily your own thoughts, and not quotations from others. Make an appointment with me if you wish to discuss the issue further.

DUE: Monday, Feb. 26, 2001

NO EXTENSIONS

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MIDTERM EXAM

Mar. 7, 2001

Please write clear, well-organized responses to **all five** of the following questions. You will have two hours for the exam, twenty four minutes per question. Please write legibly and coherently. Think before you start scratching the paper with the pen. Rely on arguments, not just opinions. *Please follow instructions carefully.*

I. Why would Jack Turner not be satisfied with Aldo Leopold's land ethic? What would he say is missing from it, and why is this missing thing important?

II. Why does there seem to be so much agreement between David Brower and Charles Fraser, the developer of Hilton Head Island?

III. Please give me a principle-based argument in favor of drilling for oil in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

IV. Please give me a utilitarian argument against drilling for oil in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

V. Why would no one suggest building a dam in the Grand Canyon today, even though many in the 1950s thought one or two more dams might be a good idea?

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SUGGESTED PAPER TOPICS
(but feel free to propose your own)

All paper topics must discuss an ethical or philosophical issue involving an environmental issue.

1. Yaro and Hiss's book *A Region at Risk* discusses a regional vision for the whole New York Metropolitan area, one that suggests that people change the way we live, work, shop, and relate to our environment. But they have no power to implement this vision. How do you get people to change their minds?
2. Anthony Weston suggests that we would treat nature better if we spent more time in direct contact with more-than-human intelligences that are living and breathing around us. Is this really true? Prove it.
3. George Bush says the United States will not comply with the Kyoto global climate change treaty, because doing so will harm the U.S. economy while giving unfair advantage to economies in developing nations who do not have to comply with the same stringent restrictions of CO₂ emissions. What are the ethical issues involved here?
4. So much of our reading has been about wilderness, while most of us here in New Jersey don't live too close to the wilderness or give the wilderness much thought at all. What kind of environmental ethics might be more appropriate to traffic-bound, busy suburbanites or inner city dwellers? Defend your choice.