

PHIL/ENV 2820

Professor Casey Haskins

Philosophy of the Environment

In a 21st century world that is our biological and spiritual home but that also faces unprecedented economic and environmental crises, an ancient question haunts human beings with increasing urgency: *What is our relationship to the rest of nature?* That's the central question of this course. If you've experienced the beauty of the outdoors even while you also love the comforts of being indoors, or worried about the rises in our planet's temperature or sea levels, or become perplexed at how many humans (including me, and maybe you) can love some nonhuman animals as if they were family while passively accepting the slaughter of other nonhumans who are no less capable of pleasure or pain, for food and other uses, this question becomes not just academic but personal. The aim of this course is to provide you with intellectual tools for answering it and developing your own philosophy of the environment.

Philosophy has always been about the examination of deep and controversial beliefs, and environmental philosophy is no exception. Nonetheless, my lectures will have a few basic premises which I hope won't be too controversial, namely: (1) Experiences like those just mentioned have "pre-philosophical" meaning, in that they can prod us to critically rethink the most basic mythic stories our species tells itself about what is real and what has value. (2) Human beings depend on the larger system of relationships among living things that constitutes nature to such a degree that these relationships are actually *part of who we are*. (3) The nonhuman parts of that system are *valuable* in ways that challenge our traditional notions of how all values are necessarily anthropocentric, or values exclusively "for us."

Equipped with these premises, together with readings from some of the most interesting and important philosophers and environmentalists of recent decades (plus a few films), we will critically consider how much truth there is in propositions like the following. Unlike 1-3 above, these propositions are subjects of continuing controversy today: (a) *The historical sources of human contributions to global warming, the increasing disappearance of wild species, and other environmental crises lie in older religious attitudes toward the natural world.* (b) *Modern attitudes about the rights of human beings to use or destroy other species have the same roots as patriarchal civilization's presumptions about the right of men to dominate women.* (A theme of "ecofeminism.") (c) *The standards of living enjoyed by affluent residents of modern "developed" societies are accurate barometers of what human beings need to be happy.* (d) *Modern science and the technologies it enables are largely to blame for the damage human beings have done to the natural world.* (e) *Capitalism and consumerism are largely to blame for our current environmental crisis, and its only realistic solution requires doing away with these practices.* (f) *The distinction between human interests and the interests of nonhuman species is based on false metaphysical assumptions about*

our species' "specialness" within the order of nature. (A theme of "ecocentric" environmental philosophies, as represented by the Deep Ecology movement.) (g) *When there is a conflict between alleviating human suffering and ensuring the survival of nonhuman species, alleviating human suffering should always have priority.* (A theme of "anthropocentric" environmental philosophies.) How many of (a)-(g) do you presently agree with, and why?

Texts

- Susan J. Armstrong and Richard Botzler, eds., *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence* (3rd ed.)*
- David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* *
- There will be additional required readings on Moodle. You should print out hard copies of all required readings so you can bring them to class and notate them.

Schedule of Readings and Discussion Topics

September

I. Opening Perspectives

1 Introduction to course. Environmental philosophy today as a political, metaphysical, and spiritual subject.

4 Armstrong & Botzler, *Environmental Ethics* (hereafter "A&B"), pp. 1-4; Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (hereafter "Abram"), Preface, pp. ix-xi.

8 Some phenomenological good news about our place in nature. Abram, ch 1, "The Ecology of Magic."

11 Continue discussing Abram, ch. 1. Plus two online articles about the eco-technological situation on Earth now: (1) The Anthropocene Debate: Are we in such an age now, and if so, is that a good or bad thing? <http://www.resilience.org/stories/2015-06-26/the-anthropocene-debate-why-is-such-a-useful-concept-starting-to-fall-apart> (2) Kardeshev's intergalactic scale of levels of civilization. How advanced is Earth's now? : <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/jul/22/opinion/oe-shermer22>

15 Our psychological links to the nonhuman world. Daniel B. Smith, "Is There An Ecological Unconscious?" from the *New York Times Magazine* 1/27/10 [<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/31/magazine/31ecopsych-t.html>] Recommended: Donella H. Meadows, excerpt from her book *Thinking In Systems* (Moodle; this is a good followup to the preceding article's discussion of the work of Gregory Bateson.) An application of systems thinking to the ecological role of wolves: <http://distractify.com/jason.mustian/how-wolves-change-rivers/>

18 Philosophical challenges of 21st century global sustainability .Tom Prugh, "Childhood's End" (from the 2015 Worldwatch Institute's *State of the World* report; on Moodle)
In-class screening: Richard Heinberg, "The Story of More" (TED talk) <http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/The-Story-of-More-Richard-Heinb>

22, 25 Intro to A&B, ch 9, "Ecofeminism"; Mara Mies and Vandana Shiva, introduction to *Ecofeminism* (A&B), [Recommended: Karen Warren, "Quilting Ecofeminist Philosophy" (A&B)]

II. Historical Contexts

29 Lynn T. White, "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis" (A&B);

October

2 Some Ecological Implications of Traditional Religious Ideas. J. Donald Hughes, "The Ancient Roots of our Ecological Crisis" (A&B); Pope Francis' Encyclical on protecting the environment:
http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

Recommended: Holmes Roston III, "Environmental Ethics: Some Challenges for Christians" (A&B); Lawrence Troster, "Created in the Image of God: Humanity and Divinity in the Age of Environmentalism" (A&B)

6 Rene Descartes, "Animals Are Machines" (A&B); Thich Nhat Hanh, "The Sun My Heart" (A&B)
Midterm exam study questions distributed.

III. Anthropocentrism vs. Ecocentrism: Metaphysics, Values and the Self

9, 13 William H. Murdy, "Anthropocentrism: A Modern Version" (A&B),. Recommended: Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic" (A&B)

16 Arne Naess, "Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World" ; Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, "A Wider Sense of Self" (excerpt from Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone, *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're In Without Going Crazy*; on Moodle)

23 In-class midterm exam

27, 30 Peter Singer, "Environmental Values" (A&B) [includes critique of deep ecology]; Peter Singer, "Equality for Animals?" (A&B) Recommended: James Sterba, "'Environmental Justice: Reconciling Anthropocentric and Nonanthropocentric Ethics" (Moodle)

November

IV. Nature, Beauty, and Phenomenology

3 Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, , ch. 2 "Philosophy on the Way to Ecology"
Extra credit paper topics distributed.

6, 10 Culturally varying experiences of time and space. Abram, ch. 6 , "Time, Space and the Eclipse of the Earth"

13, 17 Abrams, ch. 7, "The Forgetting and Remembering of the Air"

20 Abrams, "Coda: Turning Inside Out"

Information on final paper topics and final exam study questions distributed on Moodle.

IV. People and (other) Animals

24 Alastair Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases" (Moodle) . Recommended: Clip of an unusually thoughtful young philosopher of the human/animal relationship:
[youtube.com/watch?v=NX4O6smZrLE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NX4O6smZrLE)

In class film screening of portions of Shaun Monson's *Earthlings*

27 (no class; Thanksgiving break)

December

1 Peter Singer, "Equality for Animals?" (in A&B)

Brief presentations. During our final three meetings I'll ask each person in class to briefly explain their final paper subjects to the class.

V. Eco-politics and The Future

4 Richard Heinberg, Introduction and chapter 7 of *The End of Growth: Adapting to Our New Economic Reality* (Moodle)

8 Review.

18 final exam 12-2:30 (same room)

Related Links

- Articles on **reading and learning in the digital age** (1) "The Reading Brain in the Digital Age":<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/reading-paper-screens/> (2) "Why Digital Natives Prefer Reading in Print" http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/why-digital-natives-prefer-reading-in-print-yes-you-read-that-right/2015/02/22/8596ca86-b871-11e4-9423-f3d0a1ec335c_story.html (3) Cindi May, "A Learning Secret: Don't Take Notes with a Laptop" (Scientific American June 3, 2014) <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>
- International Association for Environmental Philosophy website <http://www.environmentalphilosophy.org/>
- Envirolink Network. Links to a wealth of environmentally related subjects. <http://www.envirolink.org/>
- Climate Debate Daily. A useful site for tracking a variety of arguments by environmentalists and other scientists, philosophers and others pertaining to global warming. <http://climatedebatedaily.com/>
- Space and Motion. Further articles and links related to deep ecology. <http://www.spaceandmotion.com/deep-ecology-movement-arne-naess.htm>
- The Energy Collective: <http://www.theenergycollective.com/>
- "Evolve" campaign (pro vegan, UK)—add to list of online resources on syll: <http://evolvecampaigns.org.uk/evolve/default.aspx>
- World Watch Institute. A major organization devoted to advancing knowledge about the environment. <http://www.worldwatch.org/> Its annual publication *State of the World* (see the "featured publications" column on right side of webpage) is, I think, the best single volume resource for annually updated facts and articles on environmental themes.
- David Suzuki foundation <http://www.davidsuzuki.org/>