Week 1: Introduction to Environmental Philosophy

Lecture:

The first part of the week begins with a brief introduction to the course and a crash course in reading/writing like a philosopher. The second part of the week introduces students to the Principle of Rational Depletion in environmental ethics (also sometimes called the Tragedy of the Commons).

Watch: Businga Video:  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPzoQPQF8LM

Seminar:

Meet your TA, receive first research-group assignment, and form student research groups. (If you absolutely cannot attend in person, notify your TA in advance to be placed in a group).

Week 2: Aldo Leopold and the Land Ethic

Lecture:

This week in lecture, students will reconstruct and analyze two of Aldo Leopold's arguments for his famous Land Ethic. A background to Leopold and his thinking is provided by Michael P. Nelson's article. Leopold's arguments are to be extracted from the two assigned pieces of his writing.

Read:

- Leopold, A. (1933) "The conservation ethic."

Seminar:

Discuss first reflection essay assignment (Due Monday, January 28). Practice the skill of argument reconstruction and analysis.
Week 3: Social construction of the wilderness ideal

Lecture:

This week, students will consider whether the very idea of pristine wilderness is a recent social construction, and whether this would undermine the value often placed on wilderness in our culture. We will reconstruct and analyze arguments by William Cronon and Miles Alexander Powell, who argue that there is a "dark side" to the wilderness ideal.

Read:

- Cronon, W. (1996) "The trouble with wilderness, or, getting back to the wrong ideal."

- Powell, Miles A. (2015), "'Pestered with inhabitants': Aldo Leopold, William Vogt, and more trouble with wilderness."

Seminar:

Presentations of first group-assignment to seminar members: Effectively contacting your political leaders.

** First Reflection Essay Due Sunday January 27th before midnight***

Week 4: The tension between animal welfare and environmental ethics

Lecture:

This week, we consider whether ecosystem conservation is compatible with the promotion of animal welfare. Students will reconstruct Mark Sagoff’s arguments suggesting that these two objectives are incompatible.

Read:

- Sagoff, M. (1984), "Animal liberation and environmental ethics: bad marriage, quick divorce." (note that this is listed as Reading # 9 in your reading list.)

Seminar:

TA leads discussion of the conflict between animal welfare vs environmentalism.
Week 5: Ecological science and the (alleged) balance of nature

Lecture:

This week, we consider why the scientific discipline of ecology has largely rejected the "balance of nature" and the related idea that ecological communities are highly interconnected wholes. Students are expected to draw the relevant implications for Leopold's arguments for the Land Ethic.

Read:


Seminar:

Receive feedback on first reflection essay and discuss second reflection essay (due Friday, February 15).

Week 6: Deep ecology and the phenomenological turn in environmental ethics.

This week, we consider how so called "Deep Ecologists" rejected scientific ecology when it no longer served their ethical objectives, turning instead to the philosophical doctrine of phenomenology.

Read:

- L. Valera (2018), "From spontaneous experience to the cosmos: Arne Naess' phenomenology."

Seminar:

TA leads discussion of R. Guha (1989), "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness preservation: A Third World Critique."

** Second Reflection Essay Due Friday February 15 before midnight***
Week 7: Study week

No lectures or Seminars.

Week 8: Review and midterm exam (in class).

Lecture: Monday, February 25th will be a brief review session.

**Wednesday, February 27th Midterm exam**

Seminar:

Receive feedback on second reflection essay, organize into groups for second group project (on environmental whistle blowing), discuss third reflection essay (Due March 24).

Week 9: Climate change and the public consumption of science

Lecture:

This week, we consider debates over climate change from the perspective of the philosophy of science. First, we consider whether climate change science should be understood as a case of "post normal science," and what this might mean for our understanding of the debates. Then, we consider whether undue emphasis has been placed on the importance of scientific consensus in debates over climate change.

Read:


- D.R. Legates, (2013), "Learning and teaching climate science: the perils of consensus knowledge using agnotology."

Seminar:

Discuss third reflection essay assignment
Week 10: Climate change and the ideal of "value-free" science.

Lecture:

This week, students will consider whether it is possible or desirable for climate science to develop independently from our social and ethical values.

Read:

- H. Douglas (2009), "Rejecting the ideal of value-free science."
- G. Betz (2013), "In defence of the value-free ideal."

Seminar:

Present group projects on environmental whistle blowing

Week 11: The economic approaches to valuing nature and environmental decision-making.

Lecture:

This week, students are introduced to the ambitions and foundational assumptions of environmental economics. First, we consider the economists' method for placing a dollar value on so called "ecosystem services." Second, we explore the basic strategy of economic decision making known as cost-benefit analysis.

Read:


Seminar:

TA leads discussion on environmental economics

**Third Reflection Essays Due Sunday, March 24 before midnight**
Wee12: A foundational critique of environmental economics.

Lecture:

This week, students will critically examine the assumptions behind the economic approach to valuing nature and cost benefit analysis.

Read:

- D.M. Hausman & M.S. McPherson (1997), "Beware of economists bearing advice."
- D.M. Hausman & M.S. McPherson (2009), "Preference satisfaction and welfare economics."

Seminar:

Receive feedback on third reflection essay.

Week 13: Place-based environmental ethics and its importance for First Nations environmentalists

Lecture:

This week, we close the course by returning to the ethical question of whether (morally speaking) we ought to conserve nature. Students will critically analyze the "place based" approach to valuing nature, and consider its importance in some First Nations environmentalists.

Read:

- G. Coulthard (2010), "Place against empire: Understanding indigenous anti-colonialism."

Seminar:

Review in preparation for final exam.