

## PHI 840 Seminar in Value Theory SPRING SEMESTER 2013

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OVERVIEW: The seminar will situate one of the most important recent books in environmental ethics, Bryan Norton's *Sustainability: A Theory of Adaptive Ecosystem Management* within a larger philosophical tradition that includes idealist and pragmatist works in ethics and value theory. Broadly sketched, my interest is to explore how the concept of sustainability inherits a mode of argumentation that emerged during the "crisis of the enlightenment", the period beginning in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century when philosophers began to question the assumption that science and rationality were intrinsically linked to human betterment. That story begins in earnest with Hume and Kant, followed closely by Hegel. One might say that for a century or two, philosophy became obsessed with the crisis, which was only made worse by the emergence of the university, with its highly structured system of disciplines and departments. Where do philosophers fit in? We will walk into the movie midway through the second reel, where we will find several 19<sup>th</sup> century English-language philosophers reacting to Hegel and experimenting with new ways to understand philosophy's disciplinary contribution to the advancement of knowledge and the achievement of human betterment.

I'm teaching the course, so I get to decide which aspects of the story we want to focus on. I'm interested in environmental philosophy, so one of my core values drives me to construct a screenplay in which sustainability and environmental crisis play important roles. However, contrary to what you may have heard, I do have some pedagogical principles. One of them is that I never teach a philosophy seminar that neglects the history of philosophy. Another is that I always try to develop a reading list that is inclusive in the sense that it contains selections by women and/or members of non-white racial and ethnic groups. Here, I omit discussion of how I interpret these principles or why I have adopted them—that would be a seminar in its own right. Given the way that the history of philosophy has played out, it is rare that these two goals are deeply complementary. My third pedagogical principle is that I do try to develop courses that I think will be responsive to student interests and needs, though sometimes I guess badly. You can help me here by giving me feedback, and as of September 2012 it's not too late for you to shape the reading list.

As I see it, aside from genuinely and unquestionably being a seminar in value theory, which hits a tick-box for any grad student in philosophy, the seminar will be especially useful for students with an interest in pragmatism, Dewey and American philosophy circa 1920. It will also be useful students with an interest in development ethics, because it turns out that the debates we will be tracking through the 19<sup>th</sup> century bear directly on the way that people in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were conceptualizing development. It also turns out that Thomas Hill Greene was a "capabilities" theorist, though I'm not including any Sen or Nussbaum in this course, so you may be on your own for sussing out that theme. (And my view is that sustainability is pretty critical to the way that anyone should be thinking about

development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.) It should clearly be of central interest to anyone interested in environmental philosophy, though it would probably look a bit bizarre to many of my colleagues in environmental philosophy. Finally, parts of the seminar will, I hope, be relevant to people with an interest in participatory or deliberative democracy and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century origins of feminist thought. I would also be of interest to anyone focused on British ethical idealism, but I've never actually met such a person.

**COURSE METHODS:** This is essentially a classic "read and discuss" seminar. My teaching method in advanced seminars is to assign a primary reading of about 40 pages, with strongly suggested additional readings of perhaps an additional 40-60 pages each week. When possible I prefer to have students kick off the discussion of the primary reading by having one student do a brief (e.g. 10 minute) précis and propose some critical comments or questions for discussion. When things go well I am able to interject a few points as the discussion progresses. Generally, I find that my most useful contribution is to provide some additional context to the readings or to supplement them with discussion of key terms and concepts. Ideally I would do this with a brief presentation at the midpoint of the session, and discussion would continue. In addition to the "read and talk" component of the weekly meeting, I will meet independently with each student to develop and support a semester project.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:** 1. Participation: Students should attend and participate in at least 14 of 16 sessions. 2. Précis. Each student will present one oral précis of an assigned reading during the semester. I will assign a grade to this presentation on a 10 point scale. 3. Two Short Essays I will assign two essays to be written out of class on assigned materials. 4. Each student should design and complete a class project in consultation with the instructor. In most cases this will be a conventional term paper of between 15 and 30 pages in length. Students who wish to undertake a more applied project may do so, but this should be developed in consultation with the instructor. In either case, each student should prepare a proposal of approximately 2 pages with a few bibliography items.

**COURSE GRADES:** Items 1 through 3 are "pass/fail". Each must be completed by the respective due date in order to be eligible for a grade above 0.0. Papers (or projects) will be graded based on the 4.0; 3.5; 3.0; 2.5; 2.0 MSU scale. Students satisfactory complete items 1-3 will receive a course grade based on the paper grade.

**TEXTS:** I will eventually fill in this section of the syllabus with a list of texts, including both required texts, which will be assigned, and recommended texts. From a practical standpoint, I am well aware that it would be impossible for most people who are taking several courses and possibly teaching one, as well to read all this stuff. For the time being, you can get a picture of what we will be reading from the tentative reading calendar that follows immediately below. My current thinking on the three days at the end of the semester is as follows: Option 1: Fill in with some of Norton's chapters on both classic problems in environmental ethics (e.g. obligations to future generations) and then cashing the theory out in terms of policy and action in his closing chapters; Option 2: Include some secondary stuff on Dewey. My favorites are Gregory Pappas and Jennifer Welchman; Option 3: Include some of my own stuff on sustainability. Option 4: Face the fact that doing T.H. Greene in one week is a fool's errand and adjust the whole syllabus so that there is time for more detailed readings of Bradley, Greene and

Dewey. Option 5) Maybe I *should* include some Sen and Nussbaum in the course. Option 6) Have students present some of their own work. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive, though we probably can't do all of them. Here's another opportunity for feedback.

Partial Listing of Texts (8/22/12):

Norton, Bryan. *Sustainability: A Philosophy of Adaptive Ecosystem Management* Chicago: 2005, U. Chicago Press.

Royce, Josiah. *Lectures on Modern Idealism*. New Haven: 1919, Yale University Press N.B. Archive.com has a scanned version of the UCLA library's copy at <http://archive.org/details/lecturesonmodern00royciala>

#### READINGS

- 1/8 Immanuel Kant, Perpetual Peace; Bryan Norton, *Sustainability* pp 1-44 (Please come to class on the first day prepared to discuss these)
- 1/15 Josiah Royce, *Lectures on Modern Idealism* especially pp. 136-260.
- 1/22 F. H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, Essays 2, 3 & 4, pp. 58-159
- 1/29 F. H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, Essays 5 & 6, pp. 160-250
- 2/5 Thomas Hill Greene, *Prolegomena to Ethics* Sections 55-73; 115-245
- 2/12 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "History," "Self-Reliance," "Spiritual Laws" Henry David Thoreau, "Walking", "The Pond in Winter," "Life Without Principle"
- 2/17 Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," Emerson, selected political writings, James, The Moral Equivalent of War;
- 2/24 Jane Addams, *Newer Ideals of Peace*
- 3/5 SPRING BREAK
- 3/12 Norton, *Sustainability* Chapter 7 Environmental Values as Community Commitments pp. 232-303; Dewey, selections from *Human Nature and Conduct*
- 3/17 Norton, *Sustainability* Chapter 9 Environmental Values and Community Goals, pp. 356-402; Dewey, selections from *Human Nature and Conduct*
- 3/24 Norton, *Sustainability* Appendix: Justifying the Method pp. 519-578; Chapter 2, Language as Our Environment, pp. 47-87
- 4/2 Dewey and Tufts, selections from *Ethics*
- 4/9 TBD

4/16 TBD

4/23 TBD

4/30 EXAM WEEK