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PHIL 427E.01: Environmental Ethics

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Are the moral traditions that were developed to guide human relations also relevant to interspecies relations? If so, to what extent are they relevant? If not, is it because the theories are ultimately anthropocentric, as some critics argue? Or are they problematic for other reasons? If our traditions fail to justify the interspecies obligations we have gut feelings about, then what other moral visions can we appeal to? And, importantly, how is environmental philosophy—all this academic theorizing—relevant to our environmental crisis?

To start, we’ll talk about what it means for our environmental crisis to be a moral crisis. Then we’ll read essays by theorists who attempt to extend traditional moral principles to guide our behavior toward nature. We’ll also consider criticisms of these attempts. Deep ecologists, ecofeminists, and social ecologists try to articulate radically nontraditional ways of thinking about our moral relations to nature. We focus on that literature during the second half of the term. The last three days or so of class feature group presentations of local environmental issues. Guidelines are forthcoming. Presentations include the groups’ efforts to justify policy recommendations using class materials. This is when we test the theories against the “real world.”

The prerequisite for this course is Philosophy 200, Introductory Ethics, or an equivalent. This prerequisite will be strictly enforced.

Syllabus
8/28 Hello
30 Case studies; Fundamentals of Environmental Philosophy (FEP), chpts 1 & 2
9/4 FEP, Hill, p. 338
 6 “Elephant Crackup?” (x)
11 Misfits, film
13 Misfits, “The Old Way,” Elizabeth Marshall Thomas (x)
18 discussion of Misfits, Crackup, The Old Way
20 FEP, Norton, p. 326
25 FEP, Singer, p. 150; “Animals—Property or Persons?” Gary Francione (x)
27 FEP, Regan, p. 156
10/2 “Of Mice and Men,” Catherine MacKinnon (x)
 4 Respect for Nature, Paul Taylor
 9 NO Class
11 Respect
16 Respect
18 Respect
23 An Inconvenient Truth, film
25 discussion of Truth; “Mr Green,” Kolbert (x)
30 FEP, Naess, p. 402
11/1 FEP, Warren, p. 406
11/6 Warren; “The Last Drop,” Specter (x); “Environmental Racism,” Grossman (x)
8 Guest from Women’s Voices of the Earth, WVE
13 Ceremony, Silko
15 Ceremony
20 NO class
27 Ceremony
29 Presentations
12/4 Presentations
6 Presentations *
*If we do not need 3 days for presentations, we’ll spend an extra day on Ceremony

Books
Respect for Nature, Paul Taylor
Ceremony, Leslie Silko
The Fundamentals of Environmental Philosophy (FEP), edited by Frederick Kaufman
(x) Xeroxed and on reserve in the philosophy department library, L.A. 101

Requirements
4 short papers on assigned topics, 3-5 pages each 50%
Group presentation (guidelines on separate sheet) 25%
Comprehensive final exam 25%
Attendance and participation will be taken into consideration if it’s a close call when I calculate final grades.