Philosophy 320  Ethics of Sustainability

Spring 2011

Professor Philip Cafaro  
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Office hours: Tuesday & Thursday 4:00-5:00 and by appointment

Course Description:

This course explores ethical and conceptual issues regarding the creation of ecologically sustainable societies. What, exactly, should we seek to sustain, and why? What would a genuinely sustainable society look like?

We will compare anthropocentric and biocentric conceptions of sustainability; ask whether economic growth facilitates or undermines sustainability; and investigate sustainable land management practices, sustainable businesses, sustainable lifestyles, and consumption and population issues.

We will also consider the relationship between justice and sustainability. Is sustainability required as a matter of justice? Conversely, is sustainability the necessary foundation for maintaining just and flourishing societies? Do the claims of justice and sustainability ever conflict and if so, how should we adjudicate these conflicts?

Course Format and Requirements:

Class meetings will be primarily discussion format, with occasional lectures. I will regularly assign different students or groups of students to lead class discussion. In all cases, you should read the assignments before coming to class, bring the readings to class, and come prepared to ask questions and discuss the issues.

Course Grading:

Grades will be based on three five-page papers, each worth one quarter of your final grade, and on class attendance and participation (one-quarter). Cheating or plagiarism will not be tolerated, and may result in failing the course and suspension from the university.

Required Texts:


James Speth, The Bridge at the End of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability. Yale University Press.

Herman Daly, Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development. Beacon Press.

You should purchase these required texts now, before they disappear from the bookstore. We will also be reading other materials I have placed on library electronic reserve (marked “ER” on the syllabus) and from the Internet (marked “I” on the syllabus).
**Class readings:**

**Introduction & General Definitions of Sustainability**

**First week**

Tuesday, January 18  
--no readings, handing out syllabus & previewing class--

Thursday, January 20  
(http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/37/a37r007.htm)

(http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-02.htm)

**Second week**

Tuesday, January 25  
William Baxter, “People or Penguins?” (ER)

* Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic” (ER)

Thursday, January 27  
**Students run class – Cafaro out of town**

* Holmes Rolston, “Justifying Sustainable Development” (ER)

**Global Climate Change**

**Third week**

Tuesday, February 1  
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, “Fourth Assessment Report: Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report: Summary for Policymakers” (I) (24 pages; find at www.ipcc.ch). Note: feel free to read the full synthesis report (~120 pages) for a fuller discussion. But I’m only requiring the summary


Thursday, February 3  
“Bjorn Lomborg Discusses Global Warming” (I) (in four short parts)  
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrXbufrih0w&feature=related)

* Bjorn Lomborg, “Our Priorities for Saving the World” (video) (I)  
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dtbn9zBfjSs)

**Fourth week**

Tuesday, February 8  
* Moral Ground*, sections 5-8

Thursday, February 10  
**Guest Speaker: Brian Dunbar, Sustainable Building**

* Steve Lerner, *Eco-Pioneers*, chapters 1 (Pliny Fisk) and 13 (William McDonough)

**Fifth week**

Tuesday, February 15  
**Guest Speaker: Dan Bihn, Sustainable Energy Use**

* Moral Ground*, Peter Singer, “A Fair Deal,” and sections 11-14
Thursday, February 17 1st Paper Due

* Pacala & Socolow, “Solving the Climate Problem” (ER)

* Carbon Mitigation Initiative, “Stabilization Wedges: A Concept and Game” (I)
  (www.princeton.edu/~cmi/resources/stabwedge.htm)

Sixth week

Tuesday, February 22 Guest Speaker: George Wallace, Water Use and Sustainable Ranching

* Eco-Pioneers, chapters 17 (Jack Turnell) and 19 (Ron Rosmann)

Thursday, February 24 Philip Cafaro, “Beyond Business as Usual: Alternative Wedges to Avoid Catastrophic Climate Change and Create Sustainable Societies” (ER)

Careers in Sustainability

Seventh week

Tuesday, March 1 Eco-Pioneers, Introduction and chapters 2-6

Thursday, March 3 Eco-Pioneers, chapters 7-12

Eighth week

Tuesday, March 8 Eco-Pioneers, chapters14-16, 18, 20-21

Thursday, March 10 Eco-Pioneers, chapters 22-25 and Conclusion

Week 8 ½

Tuesday, March 15 & Thursday, March 17 Spring Break -- Have a good one!

Population

Note: papers for the next 3 weeks marked with an * are draft essays, not to be circulated beyond this class, to appear in a forthcoming anthology on population and the environment, to be published by University of Georgia Press. They were emailed to the class; if you did not receive them, contact me.

Ninth week

Tuesday, March 22 Bartlett, “Reflections on Sustainability and Population Growth” *

* Engelman, “Trusting Women to End Population Growth” *

* Campbell, “Silence on Population” (ER)

Thursday, March 24 Ryerson, “How Do We Solve the Population Problem?” *

* Watson, “The Laws of Ecology and Human Population Growth” *

* Kolankiewicz, “Overpopulation vs. Biodiversity” *
Tenth week

Tuesday, March 29  
Field Trip: CSU Engines & Energy Conversions Lab, 430 N. College Avenue, regular meeting time (check out their website: www.eecl.colostate.edu/)

* Mills, “Nulliparity and a Cruel Hoax Revisited” *

* Palmer, “Beyond Futility” *

Thursday, March 31  
2nd Paper Due

* Cafaro, “A Right to Procreate, Important But Limited (notes toward an essay on the topic)” *

Eleventh week

Tuesday, April 5  
Cafaro & Staples, “The Environmental Argument for Reducing Immigration into the U.S.” (ER)

* Foreman, “Retreat on Population Stabilization” (ER)

Thursday, April 7  
Staples, “For a Species Right to Exist” *

Economic Alternatives

Twelfth week

Tuesday, April 12  
Regular class meeting

* Speth, The Bridge at the End of the World, introduction and part one

Field Trip: New Belgium Brewery, 500 Linden Avenue, 4 – 5 p.m. Sign up with me beforehand (check out their website: www.newbelgium.com)

Thursday, April 14  
Speth, Bridge, part two, chapters 4-6

* Bhutanese Gross National Happiness Index (www.grossnationalhappiness.com)

Thirteenth week

Tuesday, April 19  
Speth, Bridge, part two, chapters 7-9

Thursday, April 21  
Gambrel & Cafaro, “The Virtue of Simplicity”

* Worldwatch Institute, “Transforming Cultures from Consumerism to Sustainability”

Fourteenth week

Tuesday, April 26  
Field Trip: Birding with Nick Komar, meet at Lee Martinez Park parking lot, 600 North Sherwood Street, 7:30-9:00 a.m. Bring binoculars if you have them!

Regular class meeting, at Lee Martinez Park, 9:30-10:30

* Speth, Bridge, part three

Thursday, April 28  
Daly, Beyond Growth, introduction and parts I - II
Fifteenth week

Tuesday, May 3       Daly, *Beyond Growth*, parts III - V
Thursday, May 5      Daly, *Beyond Growth*, part VII

Note: for those of you who are interested in further exploring ecological economics, there are many resources. A good comprehensive introduction is Herman Daly and John Cobb, *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (1994). Daly and Joshua Farley just put out a second edition of their textbook, *Ecological Economics: Principles and Applications* (2010). Relatedly, several prominent mainstream economists recently came out with a report on alternative measures of economic progress, for the French government; see the website for the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/en/index.htm).

Finals week

Wednesday, May 11    **3rd Paper Due**       Wednesday, by 5 p.m. in philosophy department office  
                                    Second floor, Eddy Hall