

FROM DELIGHT TO WISDOM:  
THIRTY YEARS OF TEACHING  
ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AT CORNELL

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Hitzhusen, Karl E. Johnson, and James R. Skillen

*Abstract*

In this paper, the authors retrace the philosophy and method of Natural Resources 407, "Religion, Ethics, and the Environment," which has been continuously taught at Cornell University by the lead author since 1974. The works of Iris Murdoch, Stanley Hauerwas, Reinhold Niebuhr, Joseph Sax, and Thomas Merton are discussed, culminating in an aesthetic vision of environmental ethics as "praise for all things." The course aims more to foster a general moral maturity rather than to instill any particular set of environmental behaviors in students, and the authors believe that such an aim makes a lasting contribution to environmental ethics.

*Keywords:* environmental ethics, environmental education, environmental philosophy, Iris Murdoch

*Introduction*

In the fall of 1974 Richard A. Baer, Jr. came to Cornell University from Earlham College in Indiana to start an environmental ethics program in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. The program was housed in the Department of Natural Resources, and during its early years was funded by the Lilly Endowment, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and several other foundations. The core undergraduate course in the program, designed for juniors and seniors but also open to graduate students, has been Natural Resources 407: *Religion, Ethics, and the Environment* (NR407).

Richard Baer retired in August 2004, and it is time to look back over these thirty years and ask: What have we accomplished? "We," because from the very beginning, this has been a collaborative effort with some incredibly talented teaching assistants, mostly graduate students of Baer's, but also including the occasional visitor or Ithaca resident, sometimes with Ph.D. in hand, whom Baer was able to persuade to give a helping hand. Since 1974, close to twenty-five

individuals have been involved in teaching the course, including the co-authors of this article.

Granting that there are severe limits to what normally can be achieved in a college level environmental ethics course, courses such as NR 407 nonetheless can play an important role in a student's overall journey to maturity, and even may at times provide a crucial element in their ethical formation. Several fundamental points have been critical to our approach, which notably is not mainly about preparing students to do further study in ethics in a philosophy graduate program or in a theological seminary, but rather about what is effective, appropriate, challenging, and fulfilling for students who will likely take only one ethics course during their college/graduate school years.

From the very beginning, our goal has been not to focus on giving students specific answers to particular problems in environmental ethics—e.g., the ethics of white-tailed deer management, whether or not wolves should have been re-introduced to Yellowstone National Park, tradeoffs between concern for individual animals and for ecosystems—but rather to help students learn how to think about ethical issues, in particular to learn what kind of understanding is necessary even to begin to think clearly about such matters. To be sure, we have looked at a range of specific policy issues, occasionally in considerable detail. But the main focus of the course has been more theoretical than applied. An examination of the syllabus of *Religion, Ethics, and the Environment* makes clear what we mean by this approach.<sup>1</sup>

### *The Influence of Iris Murdoch*

Our thinking and practice with regards to how to do ethics has drawn heavily on the work of British novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch.<sup>2</sup> Murdoch argues that the fundamental questions to address in ethics concern who we are and what the world is like, and that once we gain clarity on these fundamental questions many moral dilemmas resolve themselves rather quickly. Thus we spend a good deal of time in the course discussing issues like the meaning of nature, the nature of animals and human beings, what constitutes knowledge, whether or not moral claims can rightly be considered knowledge claims (closely related to the issue of moral relativism), and

whether there is such a thing as the public interest as something other than the summing of private interests.

This approach is in marked contrast to more traditional approaches to ethics that focus more narrowly on what ethical theories such as utilitarianism or Kantian deontology have to say about ethical dilemmas, or on ethical teaching that is loosely based on existentialist philosophy. A generation ago, "situation ethics" enjoyed a brief heyday as a popular means of teaching ethics. Ethicists who favored situation ethics or dilemma-based scenarios in their teaching of the subject emphasized personal choice, individual moral freedom, and the idea of a rationally autonomous self that was free to select a "personal" approach to ethics in various moral dilemmas/situations. This approach to teaching ethics soon fell out of favor, but not before spawning problematic approaches like "values clarification."<sup>3</sup> Although this approach ostensibly guards against indoctrinating students in a particular value system, in many ways it merely accomplishes moral indoctrination in a different meta-ethical system, and an apparently relativistic one at that! The important point to note is that the near-exclusive emphasis on the autonomous self and on free choice in such relativistic approaches is dramatically different from the perspective of Murdoch and of traditional modes of religious and casuistical thinking.

Murdoch, for example, argues that we probably are far less free when it comes to making moral decisions than most people think. This point really is quite obvious the moment we begin to reflect on the combination of genetic endowment, self-interest, peer pressure, social conditioning, and all the other realities that shape our identity. She believes that to focus too exclusively on particular decisions tends only to mire us more deeply in our self-preoccupation, and that what we need is to be "unselfed" through our encounter with great art and literature, music, nature, and perhaps quintessentially through the experience of falling deeply in love with another human being.<sup>4</sup>

Murdoch claims that we live out much of our lives under the spell of our illusions and fantasies, especially our neurotic preoccupation with ourselves. "When clear vision has been achieved," she writes, "self is a correspondingly smaller and less interesting object" (Murdoch 1970: 66).<sup>5</sup> With respect to both ethics and the academic life, she holds that perhaps the greatest virtue is humility, which is not a putting down of self but instead a deep and abiding respect for the way the world really is. Seeing the world clearly, however, is no

simple task, for our constant self-preoccupation always threatens to prejudice and distort our thinking.

Nearly all of the great naturalists in our own American tradition understood this point, as did the great Taoist sages such as Chuang Tzu. For example, treating nature rightly is not just a matter of rules and ideas (although correct scientific understanding is absolutely essential), but rather a matter of discovering the incredible beauty, mystery, diversity, and wonder of this reality we call nature. It is a matter of the heart as well as of the head.

*The Teaching of Religion and Ethics in a Secular Setting*

With Murdoch setting the stage for an open inquiry into our vision of reality and what it means to be human, students begin to grapple with ethics at a deeper level. It is at this point in the semester that we introduce some of the foundational insights of Christianity, and to a lesser extent of Judaism. For the questions that Murdoch raises are ones that theologians wrestle with as well, and indeed religion provides the framework in terms of which many Americans do ethics.

Although Murdoch was not a theist, her position is similar to that of many religious traditions in her view that an understanding of the nature of reality precedes and grounds the doing of ethics. Actually, the same is true of virtually all ethical traditions, whether religious or secular,<sup>6</sup> although theologians are perhaps more likely than secular philosophers to acknowledge this fact. What we judge to be the nature of reality overall is dispositive for how we construe moral reality. “Knowledge informs the moral quality of the world,” she writes. “The selfish self-interestedly casual or callous man *sees* a different world from that which the careful scrupulous benevolent man sees” (Murdoch 1992: 177, *emph. original*). In common with many theological traditions, Murdoch argues that human freedom is dependent both on a clear vision of reality and on the humility born of knowing that we are not the center of things. “Freedom is knowing and understanding and respecting things quite other than ourselves,” she insists. “Virtue is in this sense to be construed as knowledge, and connects us so with reality” (Murdoch 1998: 284).

Stanley Hauerwas summarizes Murdoch’s understanding of freedom in these words: “Contrary to Sartre, freedom is not in the self but in the other. Without love, without recognition and respect for

the other, freedom is but an illusion of our neurotic self-preoccupation” (Hauerwas 1981: 41). What pulls us out of the cocoon of self-preoccupation and makes it possible to live generously and justly is not just right thinking but falling in love—with art, music, literature, people, animals, nature, or, on a more transcendent level, with the Good, the Tao, or with God. “Love,” as Hauerwas reads Murdoch, “is any relationship through which we are called from our own self-involvement to appreciate the self-reality that transcends us. That is why it may be a profound moral experience to take self-forgetful pleasure in the sheer alien pointless independent existence of animals, birds, stones, and trees” (Hauerwas 1981: 39).<sup>7</sup>

This point is illustrated further when students read sections from Reinhold Niebuhr’s *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. Understood theologically within the Christian tradition, our self-absorption begins with our own fear and anxiety. As we confront our fear, we either fall into sin or we open ourselves to God’s grace. In sin we seek to control our lives and the world around, in grace we begin to accept life as a gift and a promise. In other words, in grace God draws us out of our self-absorption and fear.<sup>8</sup>

We have long faced the issue in our course of how best to explain such theological concepts as grace to an audience of undergraduates that typically includes many “non-believers.” We have found that students can sometimes be led to a better understanding of grace, for example, through the use of parallel or analogous concepts from nature writers and other sources. A saying that has been attributed to Nathaniel Hawthorne serves well to suggest the psychological dynamics of grace: “Love is like a butterfly: If you pursue it, it flies away. But if you sit quietly, it may alight upon you.” Theologically, God’s grace is not at our beck and call, but we can open ourselves to its possibility.

These larger frames of reference for the course (vision, unselfing, falling in love) then take specific shape as we employ guiding examples from religious traditions (especially Christianity and Judaism) and show how these influence our understanding of our natural environment. When we see the world rightly, we recognize life as the gift that it is, which in turn opens up new perspectives on particular moral issues.

Hauerwas and Murdoch label such a perspective an “aesthetic vision” of ethics. In contrast to such an aesthetic vision approach, moral issues like land preservation and pollution control are too often packaged almost entirely as technical concerns. As Joseph Sax sug-

gests in his book *Mountains Without Handrails*, society's concern for preservation is fundamentally moral, but we often argue exclusively in terms of ecological impact statements and hide our moral views behind scientific claims (Sax 1980: 14-15, 59, 103-104). In truth we want to preserve wilderness because we think doing so is a morally better path than letting utilitarian use hold sway, but we argue the case mainly in terms of the science of ecology, not on the basis of a higher moral ground. Politically we assume that moral views can make for undue controversy, so we "stick to the facts," but both sides then endlessly throw conflicting facts at each other as the real moral ground at issue goes unnamed. If we want to be more honest about who we are and what we want (and what we believe is a good way to live), we may need to become more comfortable with responsible moral language. We ignore the need to integrate the motivation of our hearts and our minds to our own confusion.

*On Teaching Ethics: some practical lessons learned*

There are a few practical lessons we've found indispensable in helping to revive students' engagement with moral claims. For example, in various class sessions we facilitate a kind of Socratic dialogue on terms like "nature," "value," "fact," and "religion." A consistent pattern that emerges is that students tend to say they can "know" facts, but can't really "know" whether particular value claims are true or false. Yet when they honestly examine their views in respectful dialogue, they find, for instance, that while they may not "know" that  $E = mc^2$ , they do "know" that what Hitler did to Jews, Polish Christians, gypsies, and gays was wrong.

Such dialogues allow us to look at the nature of fact claims versus value claims, and also to criticise the relativism that most students profess. As in any ethics course in any college or university today, a large percentage of our students claim to be moral relativists, even though few hold to relativism consistently. As a course in normative ethics, NR 407 examines the nature of moral judgments from an epistemological standpoint. Specifically, such meta-ethical study helps students understand why moral relativism is an incoherent position to hold.

When helping students wrestle with the issue of moral relativism, we have found it helpful to discuss the epistemological status of scientific claims.<sup>9</sup> In doing this we provide students (mainly from the

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell) with a basic introduction to the philosophy of science. It is important for students to understand that scientific claims are not as absolute as they tend to think but are part of a tradition with its own assumptions, initiation rites, operating procedures, etc. Knowledge in science, as in other human practices, is what might be called justifiable belief or warrantable assertion. Once students begin to understand that scientific claims are not as absolute as they once thought, it is easier for them to be open to moral truth claims. They come to understand that factual claims and moral claims are not as radically different from each other as most of them have been led to believe, even though available and acceptable means for justifying scientific claims and moral claims typically differ substantially.

We also tell stories, both in lectures and in discussion sections, including stories from personal experience, that tend to help draw the students into more personal dialogue.<sup>10</sup> Sometimes we draw upon rabbinic literature, using it as an example of moral commentary and teaching from a Jewish perspective. On occasion, Baer tells the story of a former student who scolded him in seminar by saying, “You use your mind just like a weapon!” This humbling/self-deprecating anecdote allows us to expand upon a theme of how violent our language is in the academy—how we admire “incisive critiques,” “sharp minds,” and “hard facts.” We become overly dependent on such control-based modes of knowing and living and tend to ignore the need to balance such an approach with softer modes of knowing such as empathy, love, intuition, and wisdom. Baer and teaching assistants alike will sometimes share stories of when we’ve come to a moment of realization or growth in our lives—a transformative “Aha!” moment. Also, we frequently use poetry to get at ideas that are hard to voice persuasively by rational argument alone. Examples would be the Taoist poems “The Woodcarver” and “The Useless Tree,” from Thomas Merton’s *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (Merton 1965: 110-111, 35-36). As Robert Frost once remarked, a poem “begins in delight, and ends in wisdom” (Frost 1949: vi).

Towards the end of the course we devote a few lectures to themes such as playfulness, like a gift, and praise for all things (see Baer 1979). We find that these are interesting and strong ideas that in the end suggest that humans are able to join in what Thomas Merton refers to as “the cosmic dance.” We make ethics an invitation to a way of life that is joyful and fulfilling in itself rather than simply a series

of obligations or duties, or, even worse, endless rules and regulations that we must follow in order to avoid killing ourselves and our children. In theological terms, one could say that gospel precedes law, the indicative the imperative. The celebration of the world around us in all of its rich complexity and mystery is not unrelated to the right treatment of nature.

Little evidence exists, that taking the average college ethics course leads to students actually living more moral lives, and at the end of the semester we would be hard pressed to give quantitative evidence that taking NR407 has resulted in better behavior by most of our students. It seems to us that over the past thirty years, much of environmental education and occasionally environmental ethics as an academic discipline has aimed at a reductive list of desired environmental behaviors or even environmental advocacy as its end.<sup>11</sup> Yet part of the reason that improved environmental behavior is hard to demonstrate over the course of students' and citizens' lives is that "environmental behavior" is not a fixed entity. Nor do we believe that environmental ethics *necessarily* entails the endorsement of any particular *foundational summum bonum*—e.g., the belief in the intrinsic value of nature, in Aldo Leopold's land ethic, or in anti-anthropocentrism—in apparent contrast to some environmental philosophers.<sup>12</sup>

We believe that environmental ethics ultimately must follow from a larger ethical vision rather than from the narrowly analytic frameworks of utilitarian or Kantian ethics. And so rather than aiming to induce particular environmental behaviors or beliefs as the primary goal, we aim in NR407 to nurture a capacity for moral thinking and moral vision that can then empower any number of positive environmental actions. The course is pragmatic, then, in the sense that we believe honest people of good will who differ in their foundational commitments may still converge upon shared ethical and political objectives that are good for the environment.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, we have ample anecdotal evidence that this course has made at least some difference for students in their living as well as in their thinking. In anonymous evaluations students commonly claim that no other course has made them "think like this," and students often rank NR407 as one of the most important courses they've ever taken.<sup>14</sup> Occasionally we receive letters from past students telling us how NR407 has impacted their lives for the better. Their responses reflect, we believe, the fact that this course does not simply convey

new information to the students; rather it awakens ideas that the students already hold fiercely and passionately, stretches them to think beyond their assumptions, and provides space for respectful debate about larger questions.

### *Conclusion*

All of us, professor and teaching assistants, share the view that students have responded so positively to the course not mainly because it has been well taught but because the approach and the content deeply engage students as total persons, not just as disembodied minds. Most of the students have found it difficult to remain disengaged observers; rather they encountered ideas and a kind of teaching that addressed them as total persons, constantly challenging them to live differently and not just to think differently.

For thirty years, Richard Baer has concluded his semester's final lecture with the following quotation from Thomas Merton. In *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Merton writes this:

What is serious to men is often trivial in the eyes of God. What in God might appear to us as "play" is perhaps what he himself takes most seriously. At any rate the Lord plays and diverts himself in the garden of his creation, and if we could let go of our own obsession with what we think is the meaning of it all, we might be able to hear His call and follow Him in His mysterious, cosmic dance. We do not have to go very far to catch echoes of that game, and of that dancing. When we are alone on a starlit night; when by chance we see the migrating birds in autumn descending on a grove of junipers to rest and eat; when we see children in a moment when they are really children; when we know love in our own hearts; or when, like the Japanese poet Bashō we hear an old frog land in a quiet pond with a solitary splash—at such times the awakening, the turning inside out of all values, the "newness," the emptiness and purity of vision that make themselves evident, provide a glimpse of the cosmic dance.

For the world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness. The silence of the spheres is the music of a wedding feast. The more we persist in misunderstanding the phenomena of life, the more we analyze them out into strange finalities and complex purposes of our own, the more we involve ourselves in sadness, absurdity, and despair. But it does not matter much, because no despair of ours can alter the reality of things, or stain the joy of the cosmic dance which is always there. Indeed, we are in the midst of it, and it is in the midst of us, for it beats in our very blood, whether we want it to or not.

Yet the fact remains that we are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds, and join in the general dance (Merton 1961: 296-297).

Our initial conclusion to this paper included the following sentence: “*Religion, Ethics, and the Environment* is a course that has asked students the question, ‘How should I live?’ Students today (as always) crave an answer to that most important of human questions—and we have aimed to provide, if not the answer, at least a sensitive discussion of the question.”

On the final editing, however, we found this conclusion not quite right, for countless students over the past 30 years have told us that, even though we have left them with more questions than they had when they began the course, they nonetheless found answers—at least tentative, beginning answers—to some of their deepest questions. To be sure, they did not always arrive at the same answer, but we helped them understand that this outcome did not in itself entail the conclusion that all answers to moral questions are inevitably relative.

Plato writes in the *Republic*: “For we are discussing here no trivial subject but how one ought to live.” Had he been able to eavesdrop on our classes and discussions in Religion, Ethics, and the Environment, it is our conviction that he would not have been altogether displeased.

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## NOTES

1. Baer’s most recent syllabus is included here as an appendix, and a similar version taught by Tantillo in 1996 is available on the ISEE syllabus project web site, currently at <http://appliedphilosophy.mtsu.edu/ISEE/JimTantillo/TantilloReligionEthicsEnvironment.htm>.

2. See, for example, Murdoch 1970. Our reading of Murdoch in turn has been deeply influenced by Stanley Hauerwas. See especially “The Significance of Vision: Toward an Aesthetic Ethic,” chapter 2 in Hauerwas 1981: 30-47.

3. See Baer 1977, 1980, 1982.

4. Hauerwas writes (1981: 39, n. 30): “Like so many of Miss Murdoch’s themes this understanding of love is derived from Simone Weil.” See, for example, Weil’s work *La pesanteur et la grace* [*Gravity and Grace*] (1952).

5. For discussion, see Hauerwas 1981: 34.

6. See "Ethics of Inarticulacy," in Taylor 1989: 53-90.
7. Hauerwas 1981: 39. See Murdoch 1970: 85-85.
8. Niebuhr 1955. Students read Vol. I, pp. 178-207 and 228-240, and Vol. II, pp. 98-126.
9. Barbour 1966, although dated, has been particularly useful. See, especially, chapter 6, pp. 137-174, "The Methods of Science."
10. See Coles 1989.
11. See generally the essays in Marietta and Embree 1995, for discussion of this point.
12. Cf. John O'Neill's claim: "To hold an environmental ethic is to hold that non-human beings and states of affairs in the natural world have intrinsic value" (O'Neill 1992: 119).
13. See also Norton 1991.
14. Here are just a few of hundreds of similar comments from thirty years of students:

"As a student somewhat disenchanted with the university, I would not regret my decision to attend Cornell based on this course alone."

"I would consider this the best class I have had in my career at Cornell simply because it has caused me to think and to engage more than any other class I have taken."

"Natural Resources 407 is probably the most important course I will take in college, because it has allowed me to form a basic world view from which I will conduct the rest of my education and future career."

"You have empowered more people than you know with this course and I thank you for your service."

"Without a doubt, it is the class that I have found the most valuable in my four years at Cornell."

"I was totally unprepared for the radically different kind of learning that was found in this class. . . . [It] asks more of its students. It says, there is more to the human experience than a sum of simple, separable and discrete parts."

"This course is inherently valuable. . . . It is one of those key experiences in a student's career that will greatly affect the way they continue to live once they have left the course and the university."

"Although frustrating at times, [NR 407] will prove to be incredibly rewarding in the future."

"I wished that schools would tape the mantra 'life is a gift' on top of every blackboard, because I believe acceptance of that fact goes a long way toward making us better people."

"The material in this class isn't just for a grade, but for a lifetime of application and that is why I value this class so much."

"I come away from this course with some answers, some tools towards finding new answers, and a lot of questions."

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*Appendix: Religion, Ethics, and the Environment (Natural Resources 407)*

Fall Semester 2003 (4 credit hours)	Richard Baer, Professor
Tues. & Thurs. 10:10-11:00 (with	Greg Hitzhusen,
discussion to be arranged)	Teaching Assistant
Caldwell 100	Rob Young, Teaching Assistant

## SYNOPSIS OF COURSE

Although offered in the Department of Natural Resources as part of a Program in Agricultural and Environmental Ethics, this course is rooted in the humanities, especially philosophy, ethics, and religion. No formal education in these disciplines is presupposed, although students with such background will be able to work on assigned papers at a more advanced level.

Natural Resources 407 is reasonably theoretical in nature. In fourteen weeks of classes, we shall not offer fourteen solutions to fourteen environmental problems. Thus, in the short term the course is not necessarily altogether “useful.” Instead, we shall look at who we are in relation to nature: why we are so compulsive in our patterns of consumption and in our need to control nature and each other; why we are so addicted to recognition, achievement, and success; why we tend to see nature in such extreme terms—either as simply a resource to be exploited as efficiently as possible for human benefit or else as sacrosanct, divine, and degraded through human contact. The course presupposes that at the deepest level the environmental and agricultural problems we currently face are crises of culture and will not be solved simply through technical fixes, even though our best science and technology will be required to maintain a healthy environment. Paradoxically, former students tell me that over the long run Natural Resources 407 has turned out to be one of the most practical and useful courses they have taken at Cornell!

After briefly reflecting on our need to control the world about us, we will explore the meaning of terms like *nature*, *wilderness*, and *garden*. We will examine the view that “nature knows best” and the antipathy that many environmentalists have towards human intervention in nature.

We shall reflect on what it means to say that we *know* something—in science, in religion, in philosophy, and in ethics. What is knowledge? What is a fact? What is a value? What is objectivity, and how important is it? What are some of the similarities and differences between knowledge in science and knowledge in ethics, philosophy, or religion? We shall also explore the questions of whether there are significant differences in how women and men typically approach moral issues.

After fall break we will raise questions about the importance of truth-telling in relation to forming sound environmental policy. We shall examine how the media functions in our democratic society and ask whether they are fulfilling their responsibility to keep the public accurately informed of what is happening environmentally. We will then focus on how the way we see and understand the world affects our particular ethical judgments, and we shall look at some of the differences between an ethics of virtue or character and ethics as moral rules and principles. After that we will take two weeks to look at how Christianity (and to a lesser extent Judaism) might shed light on current environmental problems. Our focus will be on the Biblical concepts of sin and salvation as reflected in Deuteronomy, Galatians, and in the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr.

The last section of the course will examine tensions between liberal political theory and attempts to resolve various environmental problems. Week 13 will focus on conflicts between an approach to animal rights/welfare issues that focuses on the well-being of individual animals and one that is concerned with the well-being of entire species and ecosystems. Finally, we shall look at the role of the state in forming environmental policy and shall ask whether classical liberalism (liberalism in the sense that both Republicans and Democrats are liberals) provides an adequate framework for solving such difficult environmental problems as wilderness preservation, responsibility to future generations, and our treatment of animals, issues which have a great deal to do with particular visions of the good life and the good society. And if it does not, what alternatives are available to us?

Natural Resources 407 pays close attention to secular ethical and philosophical analysis, but it also examines how religious traditions, notably Christianity and Judaism, shed light on current environmental problems. As a part of our basic theoretical analysis, we shall

mention particular environmental problems, but we shall only occasionally discuss detailed solutions to these problems. For instance, when we reflect on questions of distributive justice and responsibility to future generations, we shall likely refer to land use, conservation, population growth, disposal of toxic wastes, energy use, consumption of nonrenewable resources, and global warming, but not in a highly detailed manner.

### ASSIGNED BOOKS AND ARTICLES

*You are expected to purchase the following books and course packets*

#### BOOKS:

- (1) Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.
- (2) Michael Pollan, *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education*, New York: Dell Publishing, 1991.
- (3) Joseph Sax, *Mountains Without Handrails*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1980.

#### COURSE PACKETS:

- (1) Stephen Budiansky, *Nature's Keepers: The New Science of Nature Management*, New York: The Free Press, 1995. Available in Campus Store as Course Packet 1.
- (2) Selected journal articles, etc. Available in Campus Store as Course Packet 2.

*You are required to bring appropriate books and/or article reprints to each weekly discussion section.*

*Note:* A number of copies of Reinhold Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, volumes I and II, have also been ordered. This book is a classic, a solid addition to your permanent library, and I encourage you to buy a copy if you can afford it.

## SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

- \*\* Required readings
- \* Suggested further readings
- (no asterisk) Additional bibliography

*Note:* Some lectures will attempt to clarify reading assignments and present background material for them. Others will deal with separate themes. In discussion sections you will have the opportunity to discuss and raise questions about both readings and lectures. For those of you who have not read a great deal in religion, ethics, and philosophy, some of the reading assignments may be a bit difficult, and you may need to go through them more than once. The reading assignments are considerably longer during the first part of the semester than at the end of the semester. We have found that this works well for most students, for among other things, it gives you more time late in the semester to work on your term paper and to prepare for the final exam.

## I. INTRODUCTION

**Week 1 (August 28-29): Introduction**

- \*\* Richard A. Baer, Jr., "Our Need to Control: Implications for Environmental Education," *The American Biology Teacher*, November 1976, pp. 473-76, 490.
- \*\* Thomas Merton, "The Woodcarver" and "The Useless Tree," in *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, 1965, pp. 110-111, 35-36.
- \* Thomas Merton, "Rain and the Rhinoceros," in *Raids on the Unspeakable*, 1960, pp. 9-23.

## II. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

**Week 2 (September 1-5): Why Have National Parks?**

- \*\* Joseph L. Sax, *Mountains Without Handrails: Reflections on the National Parks*, 1980, pp. 1-113.
- \* John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, 1973.
- Ian Barbour, *Technology, Environment, and Human Values*, 1980, pp. 1-106.
- Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 3rd ed., 1982.
- Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.

### **Week 3 (September 8-12): The Garden: What Does It Tell Us about the Meaning of Nature?**

\*\* Michael Pollan, *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education*, New York, NY: Dell Publishing, 1991, chapters 1-4, 6, 9, and 10. If you have the time, I urge you to read the entire book. Chapter 5 is delightful, one of my favorite chapters, but I am not assigning it, since it is not altogether relevant to the course. Some of you may also be intrigued by chapter 11.

\* Gordon D. Kaufman, "A Problem for Theology: the Concept of Nature," *Harvard Theological Review*, 65 (1972), pp. 337-366. This is a very difficult but valuable article on the various meanings of the term "nature" and on the relationship of human beings to nature. Bill Devall, "The Deep Ecology Movement," *Natural Resources Journal*, Vol. 20 (April, 1980), pp. 299-322.

Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, 1985.

### **Week 4 (September 15-19): The "Nature Knows Best" Myth: Should Humans Keep Hands off Nature?**

\*\* Stephen Budiansky, *Nature's Keepers: The New Science of Nature Management*, New York: The Free Press, 1995, pp. 1-155, 245-250. I would also urge you to skim (or, if you have time, read) pages 159-242.

Alston Chase, *Playing God in Yellowstone: the Destruction of America's First National Park*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986.

Martin W. Lewis, *Green Delusions*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.

Rik Scarce, *Eco-Warriors: Understanding the Radical Environmental Movement*, Chicago: The Noble Press, Inc., 1990.

Christopher Manes, *Green: Radical Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization*, Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1990.

Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

## III. WHAT IS SCIENCE?

### **Week 5 (September 22-26): The Methods of Science**

\*\* Ian G. Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion*, pp. 137-185. For those of you who have had little or no background in philosophy, this will be difficult material. The assignment is short, but you may need to read it two or three times to really understand it. The material is a

bit dated, but it remains, in my judgment, one of the best short discussions of what it means to know something in science.

\* Bill Joy, "Why the Future Doesn't Need Us," *Wired*, April 2000, pp. 238-262.

\* Ian G. Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion*, pp. 207-270.

\* Ian G. Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Vol. I, 1990.

\* Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, 1966.

Ronald N. Giere, *Understanding Scientific Reasoning*, New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1979.

Holmes Rolston, III, *Science and Religion: A Critical Survey*, 1987.

Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 1962.

Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. enlarged, 1970.

William Leiss, *The Domination of Nature*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1974.

Carl G. Hempel, *Philosophy of Natural Science*, 1966.

David L. Hull, *Philosophy of Biological Science*, 1974.

Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Philip Kitcher, *Abusing Science: The Case Against Creationism*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1982.

#### IV. WHAT IS ETHICS?

#### **Week 6 (September 29—October 3): Are Moral Judgments Matters of Knowledge?**

\*\* Lilly Marlene-Russo, "Ethical Theory and the Moral Status of Animals," *Hastings Center Report*, May-June 1990, pp. 4-8.

\*\* Allen Wood, "Relativism," unpublished manuscript, revised 1993.

Prof. Wood taught philosophy at Cornell for many years but now is at Stanford. This piece may be somewhat difficult for those of you who have had no formal background in ethics, but it is one of the best short discussions of relativism I have seen.

\* Mary Midgley, *Can't We Make Moral Judgments?*, pp. vii-x, 3-110.

Midgley's style rambles a bit, but overall I find her work solid and one of the better discussions of what really is at stake in our hesitation to make moral judgments and the commitment of many people today to moral relativism and subjectivism. It is a book well worth reading and reading carefully.

\* Wayne C. Booth, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, 1974, pp.

ix-xvii, 1-40, 86-139 (Introduction plus chapters 1 and 3). Booth is not easy reading, but his ideas are important for understanding the nature of moral judgments. Note the excellent bibliography on pp. 213-218. For many years this was an assigned reading in NR 407.

William K. Frankena, *Ethics*, 1963.

Bernard Williams, *Morality*, 1972.

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 1971.

Stephen Toulmin, *Reason in Ethics*, 1970.

Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950.

### **Week 7 (October 6-10): The Limitations of Rationalism in Ethics**

\*\* E.F. Schumacher, "On Philosophical Maps," in *A Guide for the Perplexed*, New York: Harper and Row, 1977, pp. 1-6.

\*\* John H. Snow, "Fear of Death and the Need to Accumulate," in *Ecology: Crisis and New Vision*, ed., Richard E. Sherrell, 1971, pp. 45-58. *Note: This piece is on electronic reserve in Mann Library. Please download the article and bring a copy with you to discussion section.*

Paul W. Taylor, "The Ethics of Respect for Nature," *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Fall 1981), pp. 197-218. Taylor's piece is an excellent example of the (hyper)rationalism Curtin and Gilligan have in mind in their respective pieces.

Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Nel Noddings, *Caring: a Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

Val Plumwood, "Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism," *Hypatia* Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 3-27.

Karen Warren, "The Promise and Power of Ecofeminism," *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Summer 1990 pp. 125-146.

NOTE: FALL BREAK IS OCTOBER 11-14.

### **Week 8 (October 15-17): Is It Possible to Make Sound Environmental Policy in a Democratic Society without High Standards of Truth-telling?**

\*\* Raymond Bonner, "Crying Wolf: How the International Wildlife Community Got Stampeded into Banning Ivory," *The New York Times Magazine*, February 7, 1993, pp. 16-19, 30, 52-53.

\*\* Aaron Wildavsky, *But is it True?: A Citizen's Guide to Environmental Health and Safety Issues*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995, Chapter 14, "Detecting Errors in Environmental and Safety Issues" (pp. 410-426), and "Conclusion: Rejecting the Precautionary Principle" (pp. 427-447).

\*If you want to be well-informed about important environmental issues it is essential that you read as widely as possible. If you normally get your news from the major TV networks and, say, the New York Times, Time magazine, etc., I would recommend that you occasionally read the Review and Outlook section of The Wall Street Journal. Hearing various points of view on public policy issues is essential if you want to be well-educated and able to make rational decisions about how we ought to relate to nature.

Ronald Bailey, *Eco-Scam: The False Prophets of Ecological Apocalypse*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

Sisela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choices in Public and Private Life*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

Theodore D. Goldfarb, ed., *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Environmental Issues*, 6th ed., Guilford, CT: The Dushkin Publishing Group, Inc., 1995.

*Mid-term exam* will be held in class on Tuesday, October 21. It will consist of one short essay (25 minutes) and six mini-essays (4 minutes each) and will cover the material through week eight. We will schedule two or three optional review sessions before the exam.

### **Week 9 (October 20-24): Second Week on Truth-telling**

\*\* Bjorn Lomborg, *The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 3-33.

*Note: This piece is available at Mann Library on electronic reserve. Bring your copy to section.*

\*\* Arthur Waldron, "The Twisted Academy: How Academics Get Other Cultures Wrong," *The American Enterprise*, (Vol. 13, No. 6 (September 2002)), pp. 38-40.

## V. ETHICS AND WORLDVIEW

### **Week 10 (October 27-31: Seeing the World as It Is; The Role of Character in Ethics**

*Note:* Week 9 represents a major turning point in the course. So far we have looked at a range of issues having to do with how we view

nature and man's place in nature. We have briefly talked about what it means to know something, and particularly about some of the differences between moral and scientific claims. Now we will begin to think about who we are as human beings and about how our understanding of ourselves and of the world we live in affects our treatment of nature. Rather than a superficial survey of various religious and philosophical views on the nature of human beings and on how humans may find the good life, we will focus on just a few authors and documents from a single tradition. Stanley Hauerwas is one of the more original contemporary Christian ethicists, Reinhold Niebuhr is generally recognized as one of the most influential 20th century American theologians, and the book of Galatians from the New Testament has profoundly influenced Western culture for close to 2,000 years.

My past experience in teaching Hauerwas, Niebuhr, and Galatians suggests that the views which some of you may hold towards religious and theological concepts (towards terms like sin, righteousness, grace, reconciliation, salvation, etc.) may make it difficult for you to understand and appreciate these materials. But these writers deal with powerful ideas, so even when you disagree with them, try your best to read these pieces sympathetically. Don't be surprised if you have to read them several times to understand what the authors are saying.

\*\* Stanley Hauerwas, "The Significance of Vision: Toward an Aesthetic Ethic," pp. 30-47 in *Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection*, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981 (first published in 1974).

\*\* Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, pp. 9-35 ("A Story-Formed Community: Reflections on *Watership Down*"), and pp. 129-135, 145-152 ("Character, Narrative, and Growth in the Christian Life").

\*\* Harvey Cox, "Playboy's Doctrine of Male," in *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol. XXI, No. 6 (April 17, 1961).

\* Bernard E. Meland, *Higher Education and the Human Spirit*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953, pp. 61-78 ("The Appreciative Consciousness").

### **Week 11 (November 3-7): A Christian View of Human Nature: Sin**

\*\* Richard A. Baer, Jr., "Agricultural Ethics at State Universities: Why No Input from The Theologians?", *Agriculture and Human Values*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Fall 1985), pp. 41-46. This is a somewhat defensive

piece. It makes the point that there are no good reasons why religious texts should be excluded from the marketplace of ideas in state colleges and universities simply because they are religious.

\*\* Reinhold Niebuhr, "Man as Sinner" and "Sin as Sensuality," pp. 178-207 and 228-240 in *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1955, Vol. I. *Note: We were unable to include this entire assignment in the course packet because of copyright limitations, so we have placed pages 178-207 on electronic reserve in Mann Library. Be sure to read the entire assignment and to bring a copy of pages 178-207 to class in addition to the material in your course packet.*

\*\* Stanley Hauerwas, "Our Sinful Character," pp. 46-49 in *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983.

\*\* Robert Coles, "On Sin," pp. 99-101 in *Harvard Diary: Reflections on the Sacred and the Secular*, New York: Crossroads, 1988.

Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 1957, pp. 201-213.

William P. Alston, "Religion," *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 7, pp. 140-145.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, trans. by Simon Bartholomew, 1965. Read section entitled "The Spiritual Power of Matter," pp. 59-71.

Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *Reader in Comparative Religion. An Anthropological Approach*, ed. William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt, 3rd ed., 1972, pp. 167-178.

Josef Pieper, *Leisure: the Basis of Culture*, 1952.

D. Elton Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 1957. A straightforward, easily read examination of some of the classical philosophical problems raised by religious belief.

Jürgen Moltmann, *Man: Christian Anthropology in the Conflicts of the Present*, "What is Man?" pp. 1-21.

## **Week 12 (November 10-14): A Christian View of Human Nature: Salvation**

\*\* Reinhold Niebuhr, "Wisdom, Grace, and Power," pp. 98-126 in Vol. II of *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*.

\*\* St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians, chapters 1-6.

\*\* Richard Baer, "Comments on Galatians," 1990, unpublished notes for class use.

\*\* Deuteronomy 26:1-9, 6:20-25, Joshua 24:1-3, Deuteronomy 5:6.

*A note on reading Galatians:* Most of you who have not read much in the Bible will likely find Galatians puzzling and in many ways almost unintelligible. Nonetheless it is an extremely important document in terms of understanding the early development of Christianity and its later impact on Western culture. In lecture I shall present some background material on Galatians and will emphasize some of the things you should look for as you read this epistle. In my “Comments on Galatians” I have tried to pull together a bit of background material and commentary that should make your reading of the letter easier. You may want to read Galatians first, then these notes, then reread Galatians. The Bornkamm and Buttrick references below will also give you valuable interpretive material on Paul and on Galatians.

\* G. Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts*, 1962.

Günther Bornkamm, *Paul*, trans. by D.M.G. Stalker, 1971.

George Arthur Buttrick, ed. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. X, “The Epistle to the Galatians,” Introduction and Exegesis by Raymond T. Stamm, Exegesis by Oscar Fisher Blackwelder, pp. 427-593.

NOTE: AN OUTLINE OF YOUR TERM PAPER IS DUE ON OR BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF CLASS ON TUESDAY NOVEMBER 11. IF YOU WISH TO HAND IN A ROUGH DRAFT OF YOUR PAPER AT THAT TIME WE WILL GIVE YOU FEEDBACK ON IT BEFORE THANKSGIVING BREAK. THE COMPLETED PAPER IS DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS ON TUESDAY DECEMBER 2.

## VI. ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY IN A PLURALISTIC, DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

### **Week 13 (November 17-21): Animal Rights/Welfare and Liberal Political Theory; Tensions between Concern for Individual Animals and Concern for Species and Ecosystems**

*Note:* In reading Singer and Regan, I want you to pay particular attention to the assumptions about humans, animals, and nature that each author makes—assumptions that form the basis of their arguments. Make sure you are able to articulate these assumptions and can also repeat the basic steps in the argument each author makes for equal inherent value for humans and animals (Regan) or for equal consideration of the interests of animals and humans (Singer). Do you share their assumptions? How do you think a believing Christian, Jew, or Muslim would react to Singer and Regan’s dismissal of reli-

gious views regarding humans being created in the image of God? (Cf. chapter one, note 14 on pp. 270-71 in Singer or p. 112 in Regan).

You might also find it helpful to pay attention to how each author sees the function of reason in religion. Do you agree with the position each takes on this subject?

\*\* Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* 2nd ed., New York: New York Review, 1990, pp. 1-23; pp. 270-72, note 14.

\*\* Tom Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights," in *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, ed. by Tom Regan and Peter Singer, pp. 105-114.

\*\* Three short articles on Utilitarianism, Rights-based ethics, and Social Contract theory will be handed out in class. I have not yet located suitable pieces.

\* J. Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair," chapter 1 in *In Defense of the Land Ethic*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989, pp. 15-38, 268-275.

\* J. Baird Callicott, "The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic," Chapter 5 in *In Defense of the Land Ethic*, Albany: State University Press of New York, 1989, pp. 75-99.

Lewis G. Regenstein, "The Bible's Message of Conservation and Kindness to Animals," chap. 1, pp. 19-44 in *Replenish the Earth*, New York: Crossroad, 1991.

Jan E. Dizard, *Going Wild: Hunting, Animal Rights, and the Contested Meaning of Nature*, Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994.

Keith Tester, *Animals and Society: the Humanity of Animal Rights*, New York: Routledge, 1991.

Michael P.T. Leahy, *Against Liberation: Putting Animals in Perspective*, New York: Routledge, 1991.

Thomas R. Dunlap, *Saving America's Wildlife: Ecology and the American Mind, 1850-1990*, Prince: Princeton University Press, 1988.

J.J.C. Smart, "Utilitarianism," Vol. 8, pp. 206-212, in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1967.

Stanley I. Benn, "Rights," Vol. 7, pp. 195-199, in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

### **Week 14 (November 24-25): Are Liberalism and Environmentalism Compatible?**

*Note:* Because of Thanksgiving holiday, there will be no discussion sections this week. We will discuss the assigned pieces during sections on December 4 and 5.

\*\* Stanley Hauerwas, "The Church and Liberal Democracy: The Moral Limits of a Secular Polity," chapter 4, pp. 72-86, in *A Community of Character*.

\*\* Richard A. Baer, Jr., "The High Court's 'S' Word," *Christianity Today*, Vol. 33, No. 12 (September 8, 1989), 20-21.

\*\* Robert Coles, "The Hero Without and Within," pp. 113-117 in *Harvard Diary*.

\* Michael Eldridge, "Theology and Agricultural Ethics in the State University: A Reply to Richard Baer," *Agriculture and Human Values*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Fall 1985), pp. 47-53.

\* Richard A. Baer, Jr., "Theology and Agricultural Ethics at State Universities: A Rejoinder," in *Agriculture and Human Values*, Vol. VI, No. 3 (Summer 1989), pp. 99-104.

\* Richard A. Baer, Jr., "The Supreme Court's Discriminatory Use of the Term 'Sectarian,'" *The Journal of Law and Politics*, Vol. VI, No. 3 (spring 1990) pp. 449-468. This piece focuses mainly on religion and education; I mention it here because it contains important ideas about whether ethics based on religious convictions ought to be acceptable in formulating public policy and structuring our common life.

Thomas A. Spragens, Jr., *The Irony of Liberal Reason*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1988.

THANKSGIVING RECESS BEGINS AT 1:10 P.M. WED NOV 26. CLASSES RESUME 7:30 A.M. ON MONDAY, DECEMBER 1.

### **Week 15 (December 1-5): More on Liberalism and Environmentalism; Praise For All Things**

\*\* Richard A. Baer, Jr., "Praise for All Things," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Vol. II, No. 2 (New Series), 1979.

Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Notre Dame, Indiana: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984.