

Ethics and the Environment

V36.0400/V83.0053

Fall 2009

Course Website:

Professor Ben Sachs—Program in Environmental Studies and Center for Bioethics

Office:

Office Hours:

Office Phone:

Email:

Required Course Materials: None. All readings will be posted on the course website.

Goal for the course: When human activity leads to global warming and depletion of natural resources, who, if anyone, is obligated to fix the problem? This semester we will systematically search for an answer to that question. We will begin by discussing individual and group obligations, proceed on to corporate obligations, and wrap up with national obligations. Along the way we will try to figure out who these obligations are owed to and what their content is.

Grading

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Points Possible</u>
Participation	30
1 st Essay—Topics 1-3	30
2 nd Essay—Topics 1-4	30
3 rd Essay—Topics 4-5	<u>30</u>
	120

Participation: There are two ways to earn your participation grade. The first is to be a contributor to classroom discussion, which involves offering interesting comments and questions. To move forward classroom discussion, comments and questions should build off of the assigned reading(s) and off of whatever comments and questions have been raised already. My judgment of how much you're contributing to classroom discussion is subjective, of course, but I am always happy to tell you where you stand so that you can adjust accordingly. The second way to earn your participation grade is to write QCCs. This stands for Question, Comment or Criticism, and the subject for each QCC is the assigned reading. A QCC should be about one paragraph long and must be posted on the course website the night before class in order for you to get credit. At various points during the class I might read aloud a QCC in order to generate some discussion. If I don't read your QCC during class, I will return it to you the next class with a short response. To receive all 30 points via QCC, you have to turn in 15 of them (one a week).

Essays: The basic idea for an essay is that you make and argue for a point that moves forward the discussion of one of the topics we've covered. I'll provide more detailed guidance when the time comes. I encourage you to speak with me ahead of time about your topic and what you have to say about it. For your first essay, there will be two

automatic rewrite opportunities. This way, the first paper you get graded on is a nice, polished third draft.

Topics and Readings

Introductory Readings:

- John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, selections
- John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, selections
- Stephen Jay Gould, “The Golden Rule,” selections

PART I: INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP OBLIGATIONS

Topic 1: Cost-benefit Analysis

Case Study: The Larry Summers Memo

Readings

- Dale Jamieson, “Ethics, Public Policy and Global Warming”
- Sagoff, “At the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima Or Why Political Questions Are Not All Economic”
- David Schmidtz, “A Place for Cost-Benefit Analysis”

Topic 2: Collective Action Problems

Case Study: Michael Walzer, “The American People and the War in Vietnam”

Readings

- Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons”
- H.D. Lewis, “Collective Responsibility,” selections
- Virginia Held, “Can Random Individuals Be Morally Responsible?,” selections
- Henry Shue, “Climate Change: Compounding Injustice and Globalizing Harm”

Topic 3: Obligations to Future Generations

Case Study: Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback*, pp. xii-xv

Readings

- Stephen Gardiner, “The Global Warming Tragedy and the Dangerous Illusion of the Kyoto Protocol”
- Brian Barry, “The Ethics of Resource Depletion”
- Henry Shue, “Bequeathing Hazards”
- Martin Golding, “Limited Obligations to Future Generations”
- Joel Feinberg, “The Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations”
- Derek Parfit, “Energy Policy and the Further Future: The Identity Problem”

PART II: CORPORATE OBLIGATIONS

Topic 4: Corporate Obligations

Case Study: “Dorrence Corporation Trade-Offs,” in *Ethical Issues in Business*
Readings

- Milton Friedman, “The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase Its Profits”
- Kenneth Goodpaster, “Business Ethics and Stakeholder Analysis,” Section II

PART III: NATIONAL OBLIGATIONS

Topic 5: National Responsibility for Past Environmental Damage; Pollution Credits

Case Study: Bryan Green on the Ozone Hole

Readings

- Henry Shue, “Global Environment and International Inequality”
- Peter Singer, “One Atmosphere,” from Singer, *One World*
- Dale Jamieson, “Climate Change and Global Environmental Justice”
- Henry Shue, “Subsistence Emissions and Luxury Emissions”
- Eric Posner and Cass Sunstein, “Climate Change Justice”