

ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES 35 ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Fall 1996

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office hours: when I'm in my office
(normal business hours, but never on Wednesday)



Drawing by Dana Fraden: © 1975 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

'Miss Dugan, will you send someone in here who can distinguish right from wrong?'

PURPOSE

In Environmental Studies courses we continuously raise policy questions with moral or ethical content. What is a "reasonable" risk to take in the release of a toxin? What methods of land use control are "fair"? Do we have a moral obligation to preserve endangered species? Should resources be preserved for future generations? Why? or why not?

Any answers to questions like these must be based on deep beliefs about the purpose of human life, the importance of individual freedom, the yearning for social justice, the relationship between human beings and other species, and the meaning of words such as "moral," "ethical," and "right." Environmental Studies 35 is intended to explore these beliefs. We will do so in the context of specific case studies -- real, ongoing policy problems that raise difficult ethical questions (as all ongoing policy problems do). We will listen to opinions on different sides of the issues and learn to recognize the unspoken assumptions, values, and ethical choices behind each argument. In each case, and in a case chosen by you toward the end of the term, you will be asked to explore your own ethics. What do you think is the *right* way to decide this issue? *Why* do you think it's right?

Our aim is to give you practice and feedback in developing the following skills:

1. Ability to analyze the ethical aspects of a complex problem incisively and quickly.
2. Awareness of the role of facts, assumptions, and values in human decision-making.
3. Familiarity with basic ethical theory.
4. Ability to uncover and discuss the values underlying policy positions with accuracy, fairness, and comfort.
5. Clarity about the source and content of your own values and ethical choices.
6. Ability to deal with situations where opinions conflict.
7. Excellent self-expression in writing and speaking.
8. Ability to work constructively in a group to produce a quality result and meet a deadline.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

In order to achieve those results, you have three responsibilities in this course:

1. Readings

The readings consist mainly of a packet of short articles about each specific case. We will also read four general books about ethical theory or the applicability of ethics to environmental problems. The books are: Donald VanDeVeer and Christine Pierce, *Environmental Ethics and Policy Book*; Robert Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*; Brian Swimme *The Universe is a Green Dragon*; and Daniel Quinn, *Ishmael*. You will find these readings helpful in formulating your view of the cases and of ethics in general.

The readings will tend to come in large bunches at the beginning of each case. I will assume that you are familiar with the materials in each case packet, and you will be asked to represent one or more of the authors' positions in class. Otherwise there will be no exams, quizzes, or other punitive devices to make you keep up with the reading. If you don't keep up, you won't enjoy the course or learn much from it, you will not contribute usefully in class discussions, and the papers you write will be uninformed. It's your education; you be responsible for it.

The Pirsig, Swimme, and Quinn books will be discussed on specific dates listed in the schedule at the end of this syllabus. I will assume that you have completed the books by those dates.

There is much more to read about each case than the assigned readings, and very much more to read about environmental ethics, so if you want more, let me know.

2. Class Discussion

This is not a course with clear right and wrong answers or Divine Truth handed down from the professor. This is a field where everyone is searching for answers,

including the professor. Therefore lectures will be rare. Questions, interruptions, contradictions, expressions of opinion or emotion will be welcome, as long as they stay within the bounds of basic politeness. Your tasks are to let us know what you are thinking and to get to the bottom of what others are thinking. Be a devil's advocate, try arguing the other side just to see what it feels like. Challenge assumptions, including your own. Share what is really going on with you.

In particular you are welcome in this course to question or challenge the professor. (You'll actually be admired for that, after I simmer down.) My own ethical position on any case raised in class should be no more or less relevant to you than anyone else's position, including those of other students or of visitors to class. I may or may not have a strong view on a case. I may shift views. I may argue the other side, just for fun. I will try not to advertise my own position, but my biases will be as obvious as anyone else's -- and as open to attack. You are not only free to disagree with my view, you are free to try to change it. (It has happened more than once in this pesky course!)

The class discussions are the heart and soul of the course. They will be microcosms of public discussions, and the processes we go through will be good training for real-world ethical persuasion and choice. *So be there*, not only physically, but with your whole mind and self. And *participate*. If you don't, you will miss most of the course.

3. Papers

You are expected to write four papers. The first three will be your analyses of the three cases we discuss in class. The fourth will be on a case chosen by you. The first three papers will be done in cooperation with one or two classmates; the fourth you'll do on your own. Due dates are listed in the schedule at the end of this syllabus.

No late papers will be accepted. I mean that! As a newspaper columnist who has to meet a deadline every week, I have both practical and ethical reasons for being hard-nosed about deadlines.

The format for papers is given below. You are *required* to follow this format, unless you have a good reason, cleared with me in advance, for deviating from it. The papers may be of whatever length you need to carry out your analysis. I much prefer short, concise, well-organized papers, rather than long blathery ones. You need not throw in academic-sounding filler. Just say what's important, say it in plain language, and stop. Clear writing and accurate spelling and grammar are expected, not sloppy first drafts. Pictures, lists, diagrams, poems, Socratic dialogues, or any other symbolic means of expression are acceptable, if you feel they help you make your point.

Papers should be typed, of course. Please leave wide margins and room between the lines for comments.

FORMAT FOR PAPERS

1. Summary of the arguments

Where does disagreement arise about this problem? What are the major viewpoints? What policies do the different sides favor? In this part of the paper please *summarize* (a list or a map may do) the main players in the debate. Group the spokespersons into however many sides you think there are to the argument. State in a few

sentences what each side thinks and that side's main justifications for its position. This opening summary can be very short, just enough to lay out a framework for what follows.

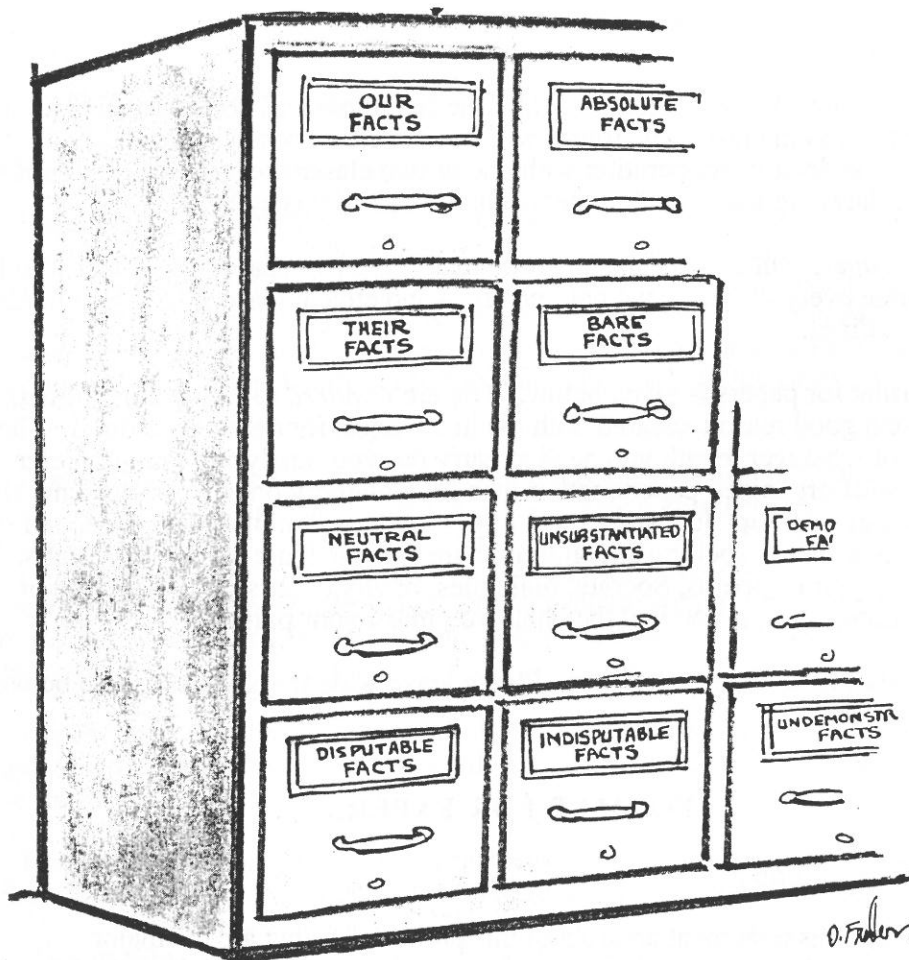
2. List of facts

fact:

1. *that which actually exists; reality; truth*
2. *something known to exist or to have happened*
3. *a truth known by actual experience or observation*
4. *the quality of being actual, something that has actual existence, a piece of information presented as having objective reality*

In this course we will define a "fact" as a statement that meets *both* of the following criteria:

- It is considered important by at least one side of the argument.
- All sides of the argument would agree that it's true (though some may think it's irrelevant).



Sorting out fact from opinion-ridden fiction is harder than it looks. Even official statistics such as census reports or economic indicators have built-in source of bias. The list of indisputable facts in any of our cases will be short, probably not exceeding one or two pages. It will be an excellent mental exercise to ferret this list out. You do not need to go into detail "explaining" each fact -- you need only remind me of material discussed in class or contained in class readings.

The purpose of this exercise is to list as clearly and completely as possible what is known with certainty about the problem at hand. That provides a solid foundation upon which to stand while sorting out the arguments about assumptions and values. The ideal will be a list that is:

- straightforward and unbiased,
- endorsable without reservation by people from all positions and points of view,
- so clear and complete that a being from another planet could read it and understand the current situation quickly and fully,
- so clear and complete that a being from this planet can see where and how the current situation is or is not congruent with his or her values (which is to say, can see where the problem is).

3. Underlying assumptions or model

assumption:

1. *act of taking for granted or supposing*
2. *something taken for granted; a supposition.*
3. *the supposition that something is true*
4. *a fact or statement (as a proposition, axiom, postulate, or notion) taken for granted.*

synonyms: hypothesis, conjecture, guess, postulate, theory

The best way to handle this section is just to list the assumptions you think each side is making. Assumptions are usually about *causality*, about *future consequences*, about *what would happen if...*, and about such fundamental complexities as the nature of human nature, the purpose of human society, or the nature of nature itself. Some of the most important assumptions in most arguments are not stated explicitly. If you see that one side has clearly made some assumption ("human life begins at conception"), look to see whether the other side is assuming that too, or assuming something different.

When your lists are as complete as you can make them, back off, read them over and add some general comments. How does each side *see the world*? What do they think caused the problem, and how do they envision the consequences of various policies? Are there a few basic assumptions that account for the difference in views? Why do the different sides make different assumptions? What is each side *not* seeing? Is that not-seeing deliberate or willful?

The purpose of this exercise is to sort things out clearly enough to:

- separate *beliefs about the world* (assumptions) from *beliefs about what is good, bad, preferable, better, worse* (values).
- expose the assumptions underlying various positions so you can find the crucial differences upon which the argument rests.

- gain enough clarity to design tests, experiments, or observations in the world that could resolve the differences in assumptions -- that could foster *learning*.

4. Values, priorities, and ethical theories

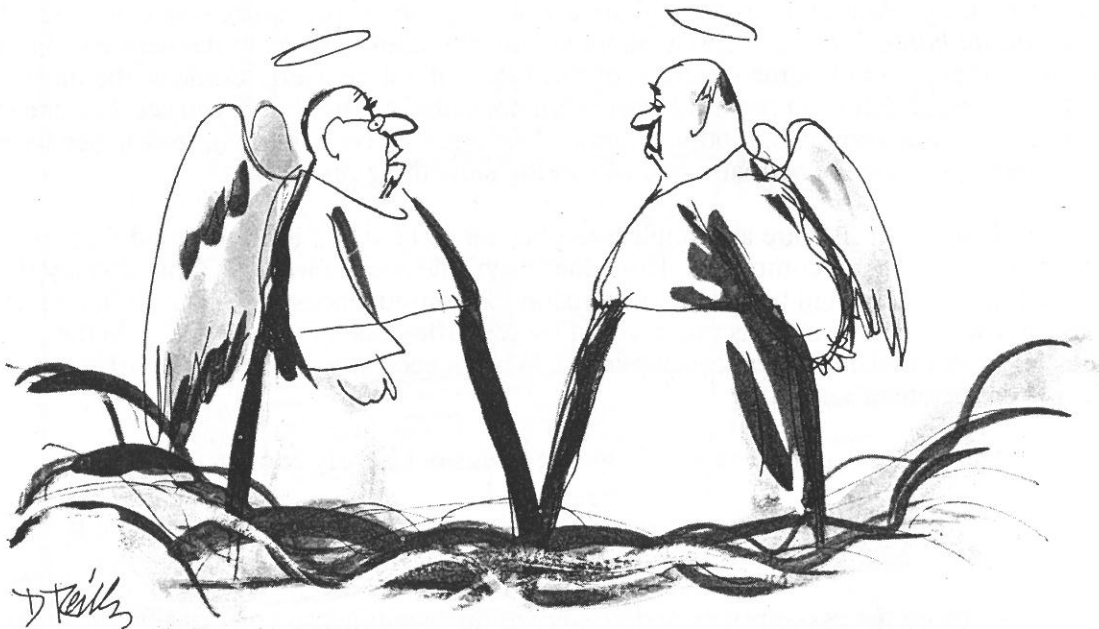
value:

1. *something intrinsically valuable or desirable.*
2. *in sociology -- the ideals, customs, institutions, etc. of a society toward which the people of the group have an affective regard. These values may be positive, as cleanliness, freedom, education, etc. or negative, as cruelty, crime, or blasphemy.*
3. *in ethics -- any object of quality desirable as an end in itself.*

Values are the big concepts that we haul out when we really want to slug each other. Freedom. Truth. Life. Diversity. Harmony. Peace. Prosperity. Self-esteem. Sustainability. Equity. Justice. Security. God. Motherhood. The Flag. The Free Market.

For each side of the argument, list the values, the ultimate goals, *desirable in themselves rather than as means to something else*, that you see as important to that side. Pay attention to *order of priority*, as far as you can see it. Does one side value the freedom of the mother more than the life of the unborn child, while the other side makes the opposite trade-off? Be on the lookout for values that are implicit in the argument but not openly stated.

Also, if you can, state the *ethical theory* being used by each side. Is anyone really practicing the Golden Rule or searching for the Greatest Good for the Greatest Number? Is anyone using the Rawlsian Veil of Ignorance? Are the two sides using different and conflicting ethical theory?



"I was damned lucky to get here before industrial pollution became a sin."

Again, after you've made your list, back off and summarize. Do these people differ mainly about values or about assumptions? Are their value differences absolute, or are they only relative, about priorities, about how much of one value they're willing to give up to get another? What *assumptions* have they made about the necessary *value* tradeoffs? Are there differences of ethical theory? Is anyone actually trying to be ethical? What, now that you have sorted out the facts from the assumptions from the values, is the central cleavage point of this argument?

5. Your own view

So where do you come out on all this? Which "facts" do you believe? *WHY*? Which assumptions do you find most plausible? *WHY*? What is your own set of value priorities and your preferred ethical theory? *WHY*? (Watch out for these "whys." They may be very, very difficult to answer. Keep trying.) What policy or set of policies do you think is most ethically correct or morally defensible? By what definition of ethical or moral? You are obviously free to take a position different from any of the major arguments you have analyzed. See if you can find any gray between the black and the white. Is gray necessarily the most moral shade in the argument?

This last section is the most important part of your paper. It should not be a stream of opinion, an editorial, a political speech, a polemic, or an exercise in persuasion. (Avoid at all costs tub-thumping phrases such as "we must," and "any moral person can see that...") What is needed here is not bombast, but an honest exploration of what you really believe and *how you can believe it in the face of the opposing beliefs you have just analyzed.*

It may be that your group will want to write this section together. More likely, each person in the group will want to express his or her individual view. Do read and discuss each others' viewpoints, however, and write a short summary statement by the group as a whole.

Whatever you do in this section, please *don't* try to make your view come out the same as the professor's view -- unless that's your real view. For reasons I can't explain, I tend to come down hardest on positions that are most like my own. But I will be evaluating you not by what your position is, but by how well you analyze and defend it. The important thing in this inquiry is not *WHAT* anyone thinks, but *WHY* he or she thinks it -- what facts, models, values, and ethical theories have been brought to the decision.

GRADES

Each of your papers will be returned within a week with copious comments and no grade. I will record for my own use a verbal (not 0-100, not A-B-C) summary of my opinion of your papers, under three headings:

- general quality of writing -- is it clear? does it indicate that you have read the cases and thought about the issues? can I understand what you are trying to say?
- thoroughness of analysis -- have you actually sorted out facts from assumptions from values? have you been comprehensive, covering all the facts and assumptions? have you done a plausible job of prioritizing the values as seen by each side of the argument? have you understood what each side is saying on the surface and assuming underneath?

- expression of your view -- are you probing to find what you really think, as opposed to what you think someone else wants to hear? are you examining *why* you think it? are you using some identifiable form of moral reasoning or moral theory to get to your position? are you clear what that reasoning or theory is?

Out of my notes from your four papers, plus my assessment of your contribution to the class as a whole (quality, not quantity), plus your own evaluation and those of the groups within which you have worked, we will somehow devise a grade for you by the end of the term. In the meantime, keep your eye on your learning, not on your grade.

CLASS AGREEMENT

We have a unique opportunity in this course not only to talk in a detached and analytic way about a moral society, but also to try to create one. I suggest the following list as a minimum set of agreements that will make the course run on a high level of responsibility and effectiveness. This list is meant to be a set of goals to aim for, not rules to be enforced. We may want to discuss, amend, and add to them during the term. But to begin, let us understand that you, by taking this course, and I, by teaching it, have agreed to make these our common guidelines for our dealings with each other.

1. We will take joint responsibility for the successful operation of the course. We will arrive for meetings on time, close on time, and keep absences to an unavoidable minimum. We will keep discussions on track, contributing to our joint purposes, not our egos. If we find ourselves bored or impatient, we will solve the problem not by checking out, but by participating more fully.

2. We will do what we say we will do. We will not make promises we don't intend to keep. We will keep the ones we make. If something happens unexpectedly to prevent us from keeping a promise, we will let the person to whom the promise was made know immediately, and we will clear up all difficulties connected with our inability to keep the promise.

3. We will abide by the Dartmouth Honor Principle. We will take credit only for work that is our own, cite all sources and contributions, etc. In group projects we will contribute fully to the group and take responsibility for the quality of the entire project.



4. *We will respect all persons*, especially those holding opposing opinions. We will listen to them without discounting or ridiculing them. We will assume that our opponents are sincere, informed human beings whose beliefs are as important to them as ours are to us. We will do our best to understand those beliefs.

5. *We will deliver complaints promptly, and only to the person who can do something about them* -- not to uninvolved sympathetic listeners. We will assist others in directing complaints to the source of the problem and will not encourage general griping.

6. *We will acknowledge the contributions of others*, as fully and promptly as possible, directly to them and to anyone else who should know. Acknowledgement is the grease that lubricates the wheels of society.

7. *As far as we are able, we will treat each other ethically*. We will do unto others as we would be done to. We will make decisions as if we could be any of the persons affected by the decision. We will seek the greatest good for the greatest number. We will preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. (Or whatever other ethical theory you wish to apply.)



"I've never been what you'd call an 'ethics head.' "

ENVS 35 SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE)

(A star* before a reading means a class handout. Readings without a star* can be found in VanDeVeer and Pierce -- page numbers are listed below.)

Thursday, September 26	introduction to the course - video - "China's Only Child"
POPULATION CASE	READ FOR NEXT CLASS: - Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons" - 422 - Hardin, "Lifeboat Ethics" - 378 - Aiken, "The 'Carrying Capacity' Equivocation" - 384 - Hawkins, "Reproductive Choices: The Ecological Dimension" --390 - Simon, "Can the Supply of Natural Resources Really be Infinite?" - 401 - *Wong, "Why Communities of Color Fear the Population Debate" - *Thurow: "Why the Ultimate Size of the World's Population Doesn't Matter" - *Hynes, "Taking Population Out of the Equation" - *Pimentel et al: "Natural Resources and an Optimum Human Population" - *Dasgupta: "Population, Poverty and the Local Environment." - *Robey et al.: "The Fertility Decline in Developing Countries."
Tuesday, October 1	population case - positions and facts
Thursday, October 3	population case - assumptions
ETHICAL THEORY	READ FOR NEXT CLASS: - VandeVeer & Pierce, Ch. 1, pp. 1-40 - White, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis" - 45 - Leopold, "The Land Ethic" - 138
Tuesday, October 8	guest, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, Chairman, Philosophy Department -- a review of ethical theory
Thursday, October 10	population case -- ethics and values
FOREST CASE	READ FOR NEXT CLASS: - * Dobbs & Ober, excerpts from "The Northern Forest" - Stone, "Should Trees Have Standing?" - 112 - Locke, "The Creation of Property" - 430 - Shrader-Frechette, "Property Rights in Natural Resources" - 433 - Goodin, "Property Rights and Perservationist Duties" - 434 - Sagoff, "Takings: Just Compensation and the Environment" - 451 - * Marzulla, "Does Environmental Protection Require the Sacrifice of Private Property Rights?"

- * Brookes, "Hijacking Development?"
- * International Paper Corp.: "All Forests are not the Same"
- * Swan, "A Multi-Use Working Forest"
- * Sayen, "Obligatory Skepticism"
- * Proctor, "Whose Nature?"

Tuesday, October 15

POPULATION PAPER DUE

video -- "Rage Over Trees"

class discussion of positions in forest case

Thursday, October 17

the forest and the trees -- field trip, Pine Park

Matt Landis, Cam Webb, forest ecology graduate students

Tuesday, October 22

the Northern Forest,

guests, Jamie Sayen, Northern Forest Forum

~~Herb Bormann, forest ecologist~~

Thursday, October 24

the Northern Forest

guests, Eric Kingsley, NH Timberland Owners Assoc.

Joe Sax, legal counsel, U.S. Department of the Interior

Tuesday, October 29

Starpower: a game about power

READ FOR NEXT CLASS: *Ishmael*

Thursday, October 31

discussion of *Ishmael*

Tuesday, November 5

Guest, Ron Green, Director, Dartmouth Ethics Institute

FOREST PAPER DUE

ENDOCRINE CASE

READ FOR NEXT CLASS:

- Daly, "Boundless Bull" - 345
- Baxter, "People or Penguins" - 303
- Freeman, "The Ethical Basis of the Economic View of the Environment" -307
- Sagoff, "At the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima" -315
- * "Silent Sperm"
- * excerpts from Colborn, Myers, and Dumanowski, *Our Stolen Future*
- * Wingspread consensus statement
- * Erice consensus statement
- * Simon, "Against the Doomsayers!"
- * Ray and Guzzo, "The Blessings of Pesticides"
- * selected reviews of *Our Stolen Future*

Thursday, November 7

class discussion: endocrine ~~suppressors~~ ^{disruptors}

~~guest?~~ how does the endocrine system work?

Bill Roelucke

Tuesday, November 12

Someone from Monsanto? Bob Hansen?

Kate Fish

Thursday, November 14

guest, Dianne Dumanowski?

READ FOR NEXT CLASS:

- Ehrlich and Ehrlich, "Influencing Policy" - 621

- Foreman, "Strategic Monkeywrenching" - 603

Tuesday, November 19

why be moral? and how? ENDOCRINE PAPER DUE

READ FOR NEXT CLASS: *Zen and the Art...*

Thursday, November 21

PROPOSALS DUE FOR FINAL CASE -- by Blitzmail
discussion of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle
Maintenance* -- part 1

Tuesday, November 26

discussion of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle
Maintenance* -- part 2

READ FOR NEXT CLASS: *The Universe is a Green
Dragon*

Thursday, November 28

THANKSGIVING

Tuesday, December 3

discussion of *The Universe is a Green Dragon*

Thursday, December 5

FINAL CASE PAPER DUE

