

Cross Environmental Ethics: Challenges and Potential

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Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Tirupati

Overview

Some early proponents of environmental ethics linked up the environmental crisis to a methodological individualism propounded in the humanities too. In their view, many Euro American philosophers, who are traded as belonging to the core of the philosophical canon, promoted a conflictual relationship to nature. While these figures indeed allowed humans to possess rational faculties which would (potentially at least) bridge the ontological gap between themselves and nature, environmental ethicists saw a direct link between this conflictual relationship to nature and the relative neglect of environmental concerns. They pointed to how individual human subjects were presumed to be the sole adequate objects of philosophical analysis. Their interlinkages between each other and to the non-human environment were simply deemed to be impertinent for scholarly analysis. One result of such a methodological individualism was that the environment itself faded from view; as a result, the analysis was not geared to register the effects of a synthetically-altered environment on human life. Environmental destruction continued unabated in the name of humanism, civilization and technological progress.

Soon, a search for conceptual alternatives began. Specialists started to turn towards Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, etc. in an attempt at uncovering useful resources through comparisons. However, these specialists were suspected of dabbling with 'mystical' sources that were beyond the ken of academic philosophy. In addition, comparative exercises were said to engage in cultural appropriation of source material. Today, cross-cultural scholarship is moving away from such easy compare-and-contrast exercises.

The course will consist of a text and an active engagement component. It will focus on some readings which move away from standard comparative exercises with European environmental ethics. It will also involve an active engagement with local community groups in Tirupati. Students will be encouraged to engage with initiatives in the area which actively, and in different ways, seek to contribute to environmental protection. They will use their work with these groups to reflect about the readings.

Objectives

- I. Providing students with an insight into different problems and approaches in environmental ethics
- II. To familiarize students with the relation between scientific progress and moral principles;
- III. To make students understand the importance of co-existence of human well-being and environmental well-being
- IV. To emphasize the importance of conservation of environment and ethics to students

Course Details

Lecture 1

Text: Jim Cheney and Anthony Weston; Environmental Ethics as Environmental Etiquette

The first lecture introduces this text. Rather than regarding ethics as a response to the known, this text will allow us to explore how our relationship with nature can be changed if we tweak our understanding of knowing itself.

Lecture 2

Text: George Alfred; The Construction of India in Some Recent Environmental Philosophy.

The representation of Indian philosophies and religious ideas in environmental philosophy have been largely dominated by coloniality. This depiction of India continues till today. It remains a hurdle to an analysis of the role of Indian thought for environmental philosophy. This session will also discuss the salience of binaries like 'east'-west and 'occidental-oriental'.

Lecture 3

Text: Ramachandra Guha; Toward a Cross-Cultural Environmental Ethic

Lecture 3 will draw attention to the political philosophies underlying conceptions of environmental ethics. Also, Guha's claim that the Indian debate on environmental ethics can expand the US debate will be discussed and analysed.

Lecture 4

Text: Vasudha Narayana; Water, Wood, and Wisdom: Ecological Perspectives from the Hindu Traditions

Lecture 4 will offer a backdrop against which we can begin our critical discussion on environmental protection in India. This session will examine the relation between religion and ecological concerns in Hinduism from textual, theological, anthropological, feminist, and eco-activist perspectives. We will discuss the most relevant factors of the Hindu tradition, seeking out the ecological effects of pilgrimage and sacred geography, earth and river goddesses, the beliefs and ritual practice of villagers, caste consciousness, and Vedanta, Tantra, and Goddess theologies in this lecture.

Lecture 5

Text: Lance Nelson; Purifying the Earthly Body of God: Religion and Ecology in Hindu India

Here, in this session, the relation between religion and ecological concern in Hinduism are examined from textual, theological, anthropological, feminist, and eco-activist approaches. An attempt to bring together an international, interdisciplinary scholarship on the subject is done. We will discuss the most relevant factors of the Hindu tradition, seeking out the ecological effects of pilgrimage and sacred geography, earth and river goddesses, the beliefs and ritual practice of villagers, caste consciousness, and Vedanta, Tantra, and Goddess theologies in this lecture.

Lecture 6

Text: Emma Tomalin; Biodivinity and Biodiversity: The Limits to Religious Environmentalism for India

The text by Emma Tomalin argues that 'Nature religion' has to be distinguished from 'religious environmentalism'. In India, sources from Hinduism may not always provide reliable sources to increase environmental consciousness. This text will be used to initiate a critical discussion on embedding environmental consciousness in such sources.

Lecture 7

Text: L. Clarke; The Universe Alive

This lecture will deal with one grounding of ecological philosophy using Islamic sources. The lecture will focus on Jalal-al-Din Rumi's understanding of the human-nature relationship. It will work out how Rumi argues that we should rediscover our inherent relationship to nature using the power of 'ishq'.

Lecture 8

Text: Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken; Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds

Buddhism's understanding of the intricate web of life may be critical to the recovery of human reciprocity with nature. But how can the doctrine of the interrelatedness of all life forms be interpreted in the context of environmental ethics? The authors explore theoretical and methodological issues and analyse the prospects and problems of using Buddhism as an environmental resource in both theory and practice.

Lecture 9

Text: Christopher Key Chapple; Jainism and Ecology

Jainism emphasizes nonviolence as the only true path leading to liberation. It offers a worldview seemingly compatible with the goals of environmental activism. But is it possible for Jainism to adopt a socio-centric environmentalism without compromising its own ascetic principles and spiritual tradition and if so, how does traditional Jain cosmology view the natural world? These questions will address the Jaina concern for individual self-purification and the contemporary dilemma of ecosystem degradation. The dynamic nature of the Jaina doctrine and its willingness to engage in discussion on a modern social issue are relevant topics today.

Lecture 10

Text: Vandana Shiva and Jayanto Bandyopadhyay; Chipko: India's Civilizational Response to the Forest Crisis

Widespread deforestation in India is alarming. The ecological balance of the country has been altered. The Chipko movement show how environmental consciousness need not necessarily be a top-down process. This text by Vandana Shiva and Jayanto Bandyopadhyay underline the significance of the movement in Indian environmentalism and in social obligation towards the preservation of nature, not only in India but around the globe.

Lecture 11

Text: Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha; Ecology and Equity

Environmental destruction is not seen as a matter of worldwide concern but as a Third World problem. This lecture explores India as one of the most ecologically complex nations in the world and with its geography ranging from dense forest to wasteland. The competitions between social groups and environmental conflict in India becomes a bigger problem as it is an intensely complex network. Different economic interests among the communities also lead to further exploitation of natural resources but this is dealt mostly as a third world problem.

Lecture 12

Text: Ramaswamy. R Iyer; Toward Water Wisdom: Limits, Justice, Harmony Towards Water Wisdom

Lecture 12 will discuss the water crisis Iyer argues that the projected water crisis has more to do with mismanagement than with scarcity. He calls for a more equitable, harmonious and sustainable management of water. He also discusses the Indus Treaty, the differences over Baglihar, the Cauvery and Ravi-Beas disputes, and the rehabilitation problems in the Narmada Valley. What is the idea of property rights when dealing with water issues? How can we understand the fundamental human right to water? These are some questions which will be highlighted.

Teaching Faculty



Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach is Professor of Philosophy at University of Konstanz, Germany. She engages with normative issues which are crucial to modern, pluralistic societies in her work on immigration ethics, cultural pluralism, structural injustice, etc. She seeks to relate her work in this field with her research on the new, burgeoning field of intercultural and comparative philosophy. Here, her main focus lies on how the plurality of standpoints driving this discipline of philosophy can be buttressed. In this regard, she also examines the role of intercultural and comparative philosophy in developing (societal) narratives which facilitate cross-cultural understanding.

Kirloskar-Steinbach initiated the bi-annual, peer-reviewed journal *Confluence: Online Journal of World Philosophies* (Karl Alber Verlag, Munich/Freiburg), which she currently co-edits with Jim Maffie (University of Maryland). She is currently the Vice-President of the Society of Intercultural Philosophy, Germany.



Bharath Kumar is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Tirupati, Tirupati. He works in the areas of Moral Philosophy, Social and Political Philosophy and Contemporary Indian Philosophy. He is interested in engaging with the philosophical and theoretical concerns of modern Indian thinkers

DEADLINE

Interested candidates can e-mail their latest CV to bharathk@iittp.ac.in

Last date for receipt of applications: **31st October 2020**

Shortlisted candidates will be intimated by e-mail.

FEE

The participation fees for taking the course is as follows:

Academic Institutions:

- Students: Rs 500/-
- Faculty members: Rs 1000/-

Research Organizations: Rs 2000/-

The above course fee includes all reading materials, stationary kit, refreshments, certificates and library facility.

The outside participants will be provided with accommodation on nominal payment basis.

COURSE COORDINATOR

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