

Cross Environmental Ethics: Challenges and Potential

MARCH 2022

(Weekend Lectures on Saturdays & Sundays)

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 inter linkages 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, Islam, 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 focus on some readings which move away from standard comparative exercises with European environmental ethics. Every session will include presentations on initiatives currently working toward environmental protection.

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 familiarize students with interdisciplinary work.

Course Details

Week 1 (5th & 6th March)

Day1

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.

Day2

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'.

Reading for Week 1: Ramaswamy. R Iyer; Toward Water Wisdom: Limits, Justice, Harmony Towards Water Wisdom

Week 2 (12th & 13th March)

Day 1

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

This lecture 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.

Day 2

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.

Reading for Week 2: Lance Nelson; Purifying the Earthly Body of God: Religion and Ecology in Hindu India.

Week 3 (19th & 20th March)

Day 1

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'.

Day 2

Text: Richard Foltz, Islamic Environmentalism: A Matter of Interpretation

This lecture focuses on an environmental ethic that can be derived from the Islamic scriptures; it tries to deal with the approach that treats environmentalism as a religious duty and the need for contemporary re-reading of Islamic tradition that contains rich sources.

Reading for Week 3: Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha; Ecology and Equity

Week 4 (26th & 27th March)

Day 1

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.

Day 2

Text: Christopher Key Chapple; Jainism and Ecology

Jainism emphasizes nonviolence as the only true path leading to liberation. It offers a world view 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.

Reading for Week 4: Vandana Shiva and Jayanto Bandyopadhyay; Chipko: India's Civilizational Response to the Forest Crisis.

Teaching Faculty



Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach is a Professor of Philosophy at VU University Amsterdam. Her research focuses on world philosophies and political philosophy. She engages with normative issues which are crucial to modern, pluralistic societies in her work on immigration ethics, cultural pluralism, structural injustice, etc. Here, her focus lies on how the plurality of standpoints driving this discipline of philosophy can be buttressed.

She is the founding co-editor of the bi-annual, peer-reviewed Journal of World Philosophies (Indiana University Press), the Bloomsbury Introductions to World Philosophies and the Bloomsbury Studies in World Philosophies.

Course Coordinator

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 Ethics, Contemporary Indian Philosophy, Social and Political Philosophy.



Registration

The participation fee for taking this online course is as follows:

- ❖ Students: Rs 500/-
- ❖ Faculty members: Rs 1000/-
- ❖ Participants from abroad: US \$ 50

Deadline

- ✓ Interested candidates can fill the google form for which the link is given below:
<https://forms.gle/sJmfx3DniJES3dtj7>
- ✓ Last date for receipt of applications:
28 February 2022
- ✓ Shortlisted candidates will be intimated by e-mail for registration
- ✓ For any queries drop an email to bharathk@iittp.ac.in