

Cynthia Willett, Philosophy.

The Piedmont Project changed my conception of what it is to teach philosophy. I have in the past taught Philosophy 215: Moral Issues along with other courses in an interdisciplinary style, and I have touched on issues of the environment. From the Project I learned very diverse philosophical approaches to the environment and promising pedagogical strategies for engaging students. I am especially excited about using these strategies throughout all my courses.

My philosophy course this fall will introduce the environment as a “philosophy of life”, rather than as a particular issue. We will reflect on how fast food has changed how we live and work, as well as its immediate impact on the environment. We will also touch upon questions of social justice, including problems of poverty and environmental racism. A very different philosophical approach emerges from romantic critiques of technology, and invokes community, nature or spirituality as sources of individual identity. In contrast with the autonomous individual that undergirds prevailing conceptions of justice, we will examine conceptions of the self as interdependent, connected with others, and/or rooted in a particular place. Other parts of the course will focus on issues not directly related to the environment (for example, racism and animal rights). However, I will encourage students to understand the larger connections between the various themes. For example, Cornel West diagnoses the breakdown of community and connection in urban areas as nihilism. With the students, I will ask how the nihilism that West finds in contemporary black America compares with the malaise that Schlosser describes in *Fast Food Nation*.

I am very excited about the wide range of teaching strategies emphasized by the program directors. Most striking was the idea of getting the students out of the classroom. I certainly will take the students for a walk through Emory’s forests as we discuss the impact of nature on our sense of who we are. But I also realize that students are much more likely to think about the ideas we discuss if they find them outside of the classroom. I am asking students to subscribe to a newspaper, and listen to the news as re-presented in late night comedy (“The Daily Show”). (I find the humor eases tensions in courses that address such tough topics as race). We will also discuss one popular film in each of my classes. Philosophy and most certainly philosophies of the environment can be found all over the place, and I want my students to learn to reflect on moral questions wherever they occur. I will also be borrowing some of these new strategies for other courses. For example, I would like to take my philosophy of culture students on field trips to see “tagging” (postmodern graffiti) which appears all over Atlanta. Similarly, I would like to take my metaphysics students in Introduction to Philosophy out into the forests as we contemplate philosophies of nature.

## ***PHILOSOPHY 215: CONTEMPORARY MORAL ISSUES***

Fall 2003

Professor Cynthia Willett

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**Class: Tues and Thursdays at 10-11:15 Callaway C101**

**Assist.: Michael Krom**

What are the ultimate moral principles for our personal and political lives? Must we respect the right for everyone to be happy? or is there something more important than happiness? Perhaps we should learn to make sacrifices so that we can survive on a finite planet. Is your lifestyle ethical? What do you think about affirmative action? Is racism the most divisive moral issue in America? Does comedy teach us to get along with another? Does it break down racial barriers? Does it combat depression, boredom, and cynicism, and teach us something about joy? Or does laughter teach cruelty? What about the happiness of animals? Do they have rights like the rest of us? Should they have the right to enjoy their lives? And gays? Do we all have the right to enjoy drugs? What about those who are disabled: should we assist those who suffer from horrible illnesses or disabilities to die? Or is the very question an insult to human dignity?

Aug. 28 Introduction

### **THE BIG MORAL THEORIES**

Sept. 2, 4 Read Part 1: *Theories About the Nature of Morality* in Rachels; For Tuesday, we will cover as much as we can of Chapters 3-6; and on Thursday Chapter 7-10

Sept. 9 On Tues, complete the moral theories from Rachels Chapters 3-10.

### **PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE: ENVIRONMENT**

Sept. 11 On Thursday, we think about the big theories, and discuss Chapters 16 *The Singer Solution to World Poverty*, and 17: *Feeding the Hungry*

Sept. 16, 18 Read and Discuss Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*

Sept. 23, 25 Read and Discuss Albert Borgman's *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*; Chapters 1,2 on Tues; Chapters 3,4 on Thurs.

Sept 30, Oct 2 On Tues. complete Borgman; Thurs: Chapter 22 from Rachel: *Preserving the Environment* We will discuss this article, as we walk around campus.

### **PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE: COMEDY AND RACISM**

Oct. 7, 9 Read and Discuss Buckley's *The Morality of Laughter, Part 1* for Tuesday; Chapters 5, 10, 11, 12, 13 for Thurs.

Oct. 14<sup>th</sup> FALL BREAK

Oct. 16 Environment Project Due; watch Spike Lee's film *Bamboozled*

Oct. 21, 23 Read and Discuss Cornel West's *Race Matters*; Tues: Chapter 1-3; Thurs: 4-6

Oct. 28, 30 On Tues, finish West: Chapters 7,8, Epilogue

Nov. 4, 6      On Tues, review for midterm and listen to West=s CD ASketches of My Culture@;  
On Thursday, MIDTERM

### **MORAL DEBATES**

Nov. 11, 13    **EUTHANASIA:** For Tues, read Chapter 18, 19 from Rachel; on Thurs: NYT  
article AShould I Have Been Killed at Birth?@ by Harriet McBryde Johnson

Nov. 18, 21    **DO ANIMALS HAVE RIGHTS?** For Tues , read chapters 20, 21 from Rachel;  
3-4 page position paper on euthanasia due on Tues. Continue discussion on  
Thursday.

Nov. 25        **SHOULD DRUGS BE LEGALIZED?** Read chapter 26 from Rachel; 3-4 page  
position paper on animal rights due.

Nov. 27<sup>th</sup>      THANKSGIVING

Dec. 2, 4      **WHAT ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY?** Read chapters 14, 15; 3-4 page position  
paper on drugs due on Tues.

Dec. 9         3-4 page position paper on homosexuality due; Conclusion

### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

OCT 16 (Thursday): 8-page essay on the Environment

NOV 6 (Thursday): COMPREHENSIVE MIDTERM on Environment, Laughter, Racism; bring  
bluebook

NOV 18 (Tues): 3-4 page position paper on Euthanasia

NOV 25 (Tues): 3-4 page position paper on Animal Rights

DEC 2 (Tues): 3-4 page position paper on Drugs

Dec. 9 (Tues): 3-4 page position paper on Gay Rights

### **GRADING:**

The grade for the course will be based 1/3 on the environment paper, 1/3 on the midterm, and 1/3  
on the position papers. You are required to do three of the four position papers. You can choose  
which topic to drop. There is no final exam. Outstanding participation in class discussion will  
raise course grade by half-letter grade. Chronic absences will lower course grade by half-letter  
grade.

### **OTHER EXPECTATIONS:**

Students are encouraged (but not required) to read the Sunday edition of the New York Times,  
and to watch Jon Stewart=s AThe Daily Show@ on Comedy Central.

### **TEXTS:**

Cornel West *Race Matters*

James Rachels *The Right Thing to Do*

Albert Borgmann *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*

F.H. Buckley *The Morality of Laughter*  
Eric Schlosser *Fast Food Nation*

**Electronic Reserve:**

AShould I Have Been Killed at Birth: The Case for My Life@ by Harriet McBryde Johnson from  
The New York Times Magazine, Feb. 16, 2003