Sustainability in philosophy: a survey of education for sustainable development teaching in philosophy and history and philosophy of science

In 2005 the United Nations launched the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. According to UNESCO’s website,

The overall goal of the DESD is to integrate the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning. This education effort will encourage changes in behaviour that will create a more sustainable future in terms of environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society for present and future generations.

There’s a lot going on in those two sentences, but the aim seems laudable: to bring about good things for human beings and the environment, both now and in the future. This is to be accomplished, at least in part, by teaching sustainable development across the curriculum. As we’ll see in due course, some philosophers have reservations about this, but for now let’s simply keep UNESCO’s definition in mind: sustainable development is ‘seeking to meet the needs of the present without compromising those of future generations’.

One would have thought that education for sustainable development (ESD) lies in part on philosophical turf. For a start, philosophers certainly have a contribution to make to reflection on principles and values, thoughts about the nature of a just society, conceptions of the human relationship to the environment, understandings of obligations to present and future people, and to careful thinking about environmental rights and wrongs. The sciences can give us a grip on the facts about our changing environment, economics can inform us of the cost of action – certainly other disciplines have further contributions to make. But more than this is needed if we are to come to humane conclusions about ourselves and our world. The humanities, and no doubt philosophy, can make a real contribution to reflection on environmentally responsible action. However, it’s not clear how or even where the notion of sustainability is addressed in the UK by philosophers at work in higher education.

The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies has therefore undertaken this survey of ESD in philosophy and history and philosophy of science programmes.

1. Aims and methods

The main aim of this project is simply to identify existing ESD provision and use the resulting map to inform future work. I should say at the start that it’s my hope to slink into the background and confine myself mostly to reporting. This is, after all, a report on what’s going on, not an attempt to think things through.

According to the project proposal, making this information widely available might well raise the profile of existing philosophical contributions to ESD, facilitate the sharing of good practices and resources, identify teaching issues associated with ESD, and promote further curriculum developments and improvements. Philosophers are under-represented in debates about the environment in the wider world, and part of the hope behind this project is to identify and in some sense promote the distinctive contribution philosophy can make to larger discussions about our world.
The project began with a short online survey, consisting of three parts. The first asked general questions about courses taught, for example: ‘What modules or courses with a sustainability component do you teach, how many students do you have, and what degree course are they following?’ There were questions about other courses with a bearing on ESD which are also taught in the home institution by other philosophers, and other questions about the numbers of students involved in the classroom as those supervised and working towards higher degrees.

The second part of the survey focused on the teachers themselves. Where do they teach? How long have they been teaching? What are their areas of specialisation and competence?

The final section sprung entirely unfair questions on respondents, inviting them to say something about their understanding of sustainability and the contribution philosophy might make to ESD. How do you characterise sustainability when you introduce it to students? What distinctive contribution do you think philosophy can make to ESD? Assuming they should, how should philosophers become more involved in wider debates about sustainability? What would help them to do this?

A much more detailed case study survey was also prepared, consisting of nineteen questions broken down into four sections. The first covered the content of courses – what courses are taught, what topics are covered, and what courses might be added to the curriculum. The second section dealt with teaching as such – what is the general approach to the subject, what is the mode of delivery, what works well in the classroom, what is difficult to teach, how are these difficulties overcome, what feedback have students given, and so on. The third section attempted to identify good resources for teachers, such as books, websites, professional bodies, conferences, courses and workshops which have some bearing on ESD. The final section called for reflection on the role philosophy and the history and philosophy of science might play with regard to ESD, as well as details of anything that might help philosophers make this contribution.

In the summer of 2010 requests to take part in the survey were sent out on PHILOS-L, a large philosophy email distribution list, and personal emails were directed to philosophers known for their work on the environment. Recipients were asked to circulate the requests to anyone they knew who might be interested. While this sort of thing can never be comprehensive, the hope just was to have something of an initial picture of the provision, with further web-based research filling in the details.

Twenty-nine people responded to the main survey, and just one completed the case study survey – I see now that the case study was too large and demanding. Some left the survey blank – having a look out of curiosity – and many others who filled it in were not UK philosophers working in departments of philosophy. We’ll consider them in a moment. In the end, nine of the responses came from UK philosophers. More web-based research was therefore required.

A web search was conducted of every philosophy department and history and philosophy of science department in the UK. Again, this can’t be taken as comprehensive, as some academics engaged in ESD do not mention this on their profiles – and some departments do not have profiles at all. However, based on information gleaned from listed interests and courses taught, more than sixty additional emails were sent directly to philosophers, inviting them to take part in the survey or pass the request on to someone who might take part. More emails were sent which asked philosophers to
take part in a much shorter version of the case study survey. Another round of emails was sent to heads of departments, enquiring informally about ESD provision.

Based on the original survey, replies from various requests for information, and an examination of departmental websites, a draft outline of the provision was prepared. A final e-mail was sent to PHILOS-L, outlining the current provision as I had it, requesting corrections and further information.

2. Main Results

It turns out that many philosophers wouldn’t say that they are directly engaged in ESD – as we’ll see in section six. Bearing this in mind, here is as close as we can get to the project’s main aim: a snapshot of work in UK departments of philosophy which might be thought to have at least a bearing on sustainable development.

**Aberdeen** offers a lecture course called ‘Global Justice’. A contact reports that ‘A third [of the course] will be devoted to the ethics of climate change. There will be a heavy focus on questions that relate to sustainable development. Specifically: What is an adequate response? Is the potential sacrifice in economic welfare justified by the prospects of future climate harms? How should we distribute these burdens across nations or future generations? I know that the department is planning to offer a postgraduate seminar on ecology and the environment.’

According to a contact at the Centre for the Study of Global Ethics in **Birmingham**, a unit of the School of Philosophy and Religion, there is a module there on ‘development ethics that takes this up’.

The philosophy department at **Bristol** contributes a lecture on intergenerational justice to the university’s interdisciplinary unit on sustainable development.

A contact in the philosophy faculty at **Cambridge University** reports that, ‘The Political Philosophy paper in Part II (third year) includes a number of topics directly related to sustainability, in particular “Justice Between Generations” and “International Justice”, both under the broader heading of “Distributive Justice”. The Ethics paper in Part II includes a “Corporate Responsibility” section under the broader heading of “Ethics and Organizations”, aspects of which are directly related to issues of sustainability insofar as they connect with Corporate Social Responsibility.’


The Centre for Environmental Attitudes and Management in the Department of Philosophy at **Durham** offers both Applied Ethics and Ethics and Values. Applied Ethics includes four lectures on environmental ethics.

The **University of Edinburgh** Department of Philosophy offers a course called ‘Philosophy and the Environment’. There is also a course called 'Values and the Environment' which is taught by a philosopher working in the Geography Department but is open to philosophy students.
The University of East Anglia has several philosophers working on the environment and runs a research seminar called ‘the Environmental Philosophy Reading Group’. UEA offers a course called ‘Environmental Philosophy’ which takes up questions about the value of nature, environmental policy and concepts in ecology. I’m told it ‘is related to issues of sustainability insofar as it discusses questions about the value of nature, environmental policy and problems in the philosophy of ecology.’ UEA is also setting up a new MA in collaboration with Environmental Science, Philosophy, History and Literature, starting in September 2011. I’m also told that ‘this interdisciplinary course combines approaches in the humanities and the environmental sciences in order to think about the natural environment and our relationship as humans with it. The new course ties in with the concurrent development of a monthly research seminar in collaboration between the humanities and environmental sciences which will enable candidates to follow, and take part in, the research that is currently being undertaken in their subject.’

The department of philosophy at Glasgow has a course called ‘Environmental Ethics’.

The department of philosophy at the University of Hull offers a module called ‘Environmental Philosophy’. According to the module description, the course ‘explores a relatively new area of concern in philosophy and examines the philosophical (metaphysical, ethical, applied ethical) issues that arise in the environmental debate...It examines many of the distinctive concepts in the environmental debate and examines how they relate to each other and broader philosophical concerns.’ Hull also offers a module called ‘Values and the Environment’ as part of the MA in Applied Ethics.

Keele University is in the process of developing an MA pathway in Environmental Ethics. This will be based in the School of Politics, International Relations and Philosophy.

The department of philosophy at the University of Liverpool offers a course in Environmental Philosophy.

The department of philosophy at the University of Leeds offers an elective module in Environmental Ethics. I’m told that it ‘certainly touches on sustainability, particularly in connection to the lecture on intergenerational justice and the environment, and the lectures examining the ascription of intrinsic value to the environment.’

The BA (Hons) Philosophy course at London Metropolitan University has a second year module entitled ‘Nature/Nature”, which ‘involves some examination of environmental ethics and related issues.’

A contact at Nottingham says that one of the topics in the module ‘Distributive Justice’ is intergenerational justice and climate change.

The Open University has a substantial component in environmental philosophy as part of its second level course, ‘Philosophy and the Human Situation’. It also has interdisciplinary courses on the environment which include some philosophical content. I’m told that none of the latter deal in any detail with sustainability as an explicit topic.

A contact at Oxford says that the Faculty is exploring the possibility of developing a new finals paper on the environment, for PPEists, to be offered jointly with the Department of Economics. Discussions
are still at an early stage. ‘Sustainability’ was also discussed in a graduate seminar on the ethics of climate change last summer, and another graduate seminar about climate change is planned.

Queen’s University Belfast, offers an Applied Ethics course which, a respondent reports, ‘touches on the environment’.

The University of Reading offers a course called ‘Environmental Ethics’ and lists ‘the ethics of sustainability’ in an outline of course content.

The Philosophy Department at St Andrews does not offer courses on sustainability itself, however the university has a degree course in Sustainable Development, coordinated from the School of Geography and Geosciences, and some students take joint degrees in Sustainable Development and Philosophy.

Stirling’s philosophy department offers an Environmental Ethics module. According to their website, the ‘module will cover all the main approaches in contemporary philosophy to environmental ethics. Students will study theories on what the right moral attitude to the environment should be, and on what we all as individuals are morally obliged to do to conserve the environment; as well as on global environmental issues, such as population pressure.’

The department of philosophy at Warwick offers a course dealing with issues of international and intergenerational justice.

At York University an MA in practical ethics contains a module called ‘Environmental Philosophy’. According to their website, the ‘module explores philosophical issues arising out of reflection on the value of nature.’ There is also a module on environmental philosophy for undergraduates.

3. ESD in History and Philosophy of Science (HPS)

This project aims to identify existing ESD initiatives in both philosophy and departments of history and philosophy of science. Despite a reasonable look around – which turned up so much in departments of philosophy – no HPS programme dealing with ESD was discovered. While ESD might not appear in the classroom, there is evidence of HPS academics engaging in research which might have some bearing on sustainable development, in particular on climate change and history. A 2008 conference in Manchester, for example, brought together various academics to ‘discuss whether history, social sciences and science studies can provide a clear perspective on what climate anxieties are telling us about environmentalism and politics in late modern societies.’

4. ESD outside of UK departments of philosophy

Many people who got in touch in connection with this survey identify themselves as working on ESD outside of UK departments of philosophy and history and philosophy of science. Academics from the Republic of Ireland, Iceland and many colleagues from Canada and the United States completed the survey. Initially, I had more responses from outside the UK than within it, despite using a UK-based email list.
There are also a number of academics working as it were nearby, and here the picture blurs considerably. People housed in departments of government, politics, law, international relations, history, and social sciences, as well as some people in the sciences said their work touched on philosophical issues to do with sustainability. There are people with PhDs in philosophy teaching recognizable philosophy outside departments of philosophy, as well as others taking up what might be understood as a philosophical approach to ESD even though they themselves have a background in something else entirely. Some philosophers offer lectures in interdisciplinary courses on the environment. I don’t know how valuable categorising all this might be, but certainly philosophers here could learn lessons concerning ESD from philosophers elsewhere, as well as those teaching philosophy with little or no connection to philosophy departments.

Here are some examples of philosophical approaches to ESD outside philosophy departments.

There is a new MA in Social Ethics and Public Advocacy housed in the School of Health and Social Sciences at the University of Wales, Newport. According to a contact there, the MA is ‘geared towards those looking to deploy ideas from social and political philosophy in their campaigning work. There is an optional environmental ethics strand within the MA, in which moral/social justice-related arguments for sustainability feature as central themes. Environmental campaigners are one of its target audiences.’

At the LSE, a lecturer in political philosophy in the department of government says a new MSc course on the Philosophy and Politics of Environmental Change is about to be offered.

Exeter offers a course in Environmental Politics and Philosophy. Their website says that this ‘online course explores modern environmentalism, a philosophy which has grown from a fringe concern to a powerful political movement. We will study the historical and philosophical foundations of different perspectives on the environment as well as looking at global issues, efforts to tackle these, the meaning of sustainability, and the current status of green political thought.’

5. Other findings

With just nine surveys completed by people identifying themselves as UK philosophers, it’s important not to make too much of this, however the following points did emerge from the results. Of the seven who responded to a question about trends in student numbers, five said numbers were staying the same, one thought numbers were increasing, and another believed numbers were decreasing. Six of the nine respondents said of the courses they teach which have a bearing on ESD, around 25% or less of the content directly concerns sustainable development. There is at least some ground for thinking that the next generation of philosophers will have people familiar with ESD in it: the nine respondents are or recently were supervising a total of fourteen PhD students ‘whose work concerns sustainability’.

No clear patterns emerged regarding the teachers themselves. Some engaged in research concerning ESD, and some didn’t. Some had many years of experience teaching around the subject, and some were relatively new to it. Some considered their area of expertise the environment and some didn’t.
6. Teaching issues: conceptions of sustainability

One of the aims of this project is to identify ‘teaching issues in ESD’. Perhaps the most striking feature of the response to requests for information about ESD in departments of philosophy is the philosophers’ reflex response, ‘Just what do you mean by “sustainability”? ’ One wouldn’t image encountering a similar worry in a parallel survey on Education for Understanding French. ‘Just what do you mean by French?’ As might have been anticipated, though, the idea of sustainable development itself is the subject of philosophical scrutiny. There is a sense in which the main teaching issue raised just is the fact of philosophical interest in the idea of sustainable development and what effects this might have on ESD in philosophy.

The survey tried to get a backhanded grip on how philosophers understand sustainability by asking how they introduce the notion to students. Here are some replies:

‘I usually characterise it as a way of living sustainably with the environment, managing and conserving environments as opposed to a resource-driven approach.’

‘Activities and processes are sustainable that can be continued or sustained indefinitely, and thus satisfy the needs of every succeeding generation. Not everything sustainable is thereby desirable, but there is a strong contingent connection between sustainability and justice.’

‘[I] introduce this in terms of questions about human attitudes to the environment and the effects of our actions. It’s ultimately a question of how we live and live well – how to live in harmony with ourselves and all other living beings.’

Several philosophers mentioned the Brundtland Report:

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: the concept of “needs”, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environments’ ability to meet present and future needs.

Others took issue with the very notion of ESD. You can spot it already in the response above: ‘not everything sustainable is thereby desirable’. The concept is ‘slippery’, one said. Many point out that ‘sustainable’ does not always mean environmentally friendly. The word ‘greenwashing’ came up a number of times — exclusively in replies from those working in the United States. ‘If “sustainability” meant what it should,’ one said, ‘it would follow Derrick Jensen’s definition: an activity is sustainable if it does not damage the capacity of the land base to support its members.’

There is the further thought that sustainability is something other than sustainable development. Perhaps the worry is that talk of meeting the developmental needs of the present sneaks something under the radar, something not sustainable at all in some other, better sense. Some environmentalists, anyway, say that we’ve had quite enough development. I did worry that some philosophers thought there was something sinister behind this survey. I said to one respondent that I was only asked to find out who’s doing what, rather than support the infiltration of ‘a sustainable development agenda’ in UK higher education. I’m not sure he believed me.
Another philosopher pointed me to work in which he argues that the concept of sustainable development is ‘structurally unable to distinguish between on the one hand preparing to meet our obligations to the future, and on the other construing the future as putting us under obligations we are prepared to meet. As such the concept itself is radically anti-educational, encouraging forms of bad faith in policy and practice which are the negation of any social or individual learning.’

One philosopher expressed disquiet at the prospect of ESD as a kind of ‘social engineering’: ‘I’m not sure it’s our job to be engaging in education “for” anything. Why not education for world peace, while we’re at it? Or education for a healthy diet? However laudable, my concern is that this appears to conflict with what many of us believe are other, fundamental aims of a university education: the development of criticality and autonomy.’

7. Philosophy’s contribution to ESD

What distinctive contribution can philosophy make to ESD? Many respondents said something about the tools of philosophical enquiry: ‘Thinking through definitions; making distinctions between different approaches... raising awareness through teaching and scholarship.’ Philosophy, one said, can ‘distinguish and clarify notions of sustainability and supply and critique accounts thereof.’ Philosophers working on sustainability see themselves as getting on with the philosopher’s job of questioning assumptions, following arguments wherever they lead, getting clear on the real consequences of our beliefs.

There was another strand in the replies. Some said that philosophy has a special role to play in identifying connections between theory and action, between scientific facts and moral values. It has been said before that the humanities are needed if we are to come to an understanding of the facts of our changing world. If those in the sciences sometimes say that their job is to identify the facts, discover and present them objectively and leave it at that, perhaps others, including philosophers, are needed to interpret those facts. One said that philosophy brings out ‘the deeply normative dimensions of any discussion of sustainability and shows – at the very least – that ethics is required alongside science in addressing and understanding the sustainability challenge.’ Another said that ‘philosophers have a unique contribution to make not least to reinvigorate the notion of values-led science.’ One put it starkly: ‘ethical knowledge is at least as important as scientific knowledge.’

8. Philosophers and sustainability outside academe

There is the thought that philosophers should be involved in debates about sustainability in the wider world, and many respondents expressed some version of it. One said that philosophers, and in particular environmental ethicists, should be on government committees or advisory boards which had some bearing on the environment or energy. Another thought that philosophers should be better informed about the science before wading in.

One respondent had specific recommendations: ‘Sustainability can be explained to groups specialising in development studies such as the Development Studies Association, and to undergraduate groups in various universities. Membership of the International Development Ethics
Association and participation in its activities is another route. Also some NGOs welcome talks and discussions on sustainable development.

Some expressed regret at the level of support offered for such activities. ‘Sadly,’ one concluded, ‘universities are prone not to appreciate or foster such activities, guessing that research review panels will not be impressed by it.’ Another echoed the sentiment: ‘Environmental ethics has a low profile in the UK. This is disgraceful! More teaching of the subject is needed. More recognition at various levels of the importance and value of practical philosophy. Things need to change in terms of broadening RAE and research funding which tends to be more supportive of pure philosophy.’

9. Recommendations for further work

This survey raises a number of questions, and profitable research and action might be undertaken in three different areas. First of all the provision of ESD outside of UK philosophy departments might be examined by considering these questions:

- Where and how are philosophical approaches to EDS being undertaken outside of philosophy departments? Might philosophers somehow support this work? Might those outside philosophy, in the sciences for example, help philosophers engage more effectively in ESD?

- Where and how are philosophers outside the UK engaging in ESD? What lessons might we learn from them? How might we share information, methods and approaches?

Second, when philosophers were asked about the resources they used in connection to ESD, nearly all left the section blank. Some mentioned a favourite book, and two used the space to request help in this connection. Philosophers working on ESD, particularly those new to it, would benefit from sharing information.

- A listing of resources – books, articles, websites, conferences, networks, mailing lists, associations, sample syllabi and other classroom materials – for those engaged in ESD might be assembled.

- A web-based method for sharing this information, perhaps a wiki or email list, might help too. Inviting teachers of EDS to share methods and approaches at a conference might be of value.

Third, this survey suggests that at least some philosophers whose work concerns environmental matters feel less than supported in their attempts to take part in discussions in the wider world. Philosophers do seem well-equipped to contribute to conversations about sustainability, well-positioned to take part in debates about morally required action, values generally, as well as our understanding of our place in the world. Finding new ways to support philosophers interested in this would no doubt be welcomed by them. Some said they would like to become more involved, if only they had some idea of how to do so.

- Determining where and how philosophers might engage more fully in public discussion – and helping them to do so – might have a number of benefits.
Voices speaking in unison are sometimes amplified, and a working group dedicated to bringing philosophical rigour to public debate might be valuable.

It’s worth reflecting, finally, on the fact that at best we now know something about only half of ESD in UK philosophy departments. Even if we have a view of the ESD curriculum and philosophy’s contribution to it, we won’t really have a grip on the matter until we know more about the students who study it. What matters to them? Why do they take these courses? I wonder what they will do with the conception of things that gain by reflecting philosophically on the environment and sustainability. What principles, values and practices do they really walk away with, in the end?

James Garvey
Sustainability in Philosophy Case Study 1

1. What is your department and institution? Philosophy, School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences, University of Edinburgh

2. What courses do you teach which have an ESD component? How many students per course? Philosophy and the Environment, MA Honours level course (3rd and 4th year students) also offered to Taught MSc students. Approximately 35 undergraduate students and 2-3 MSc students each year.

3. What topics do you cover? What's your general approach? We cover metaphysics (philosophies of nature), animal ethics, environmental aesthetics. We consider dualism, monism and pluralism via Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz and link these with contemporary developments, looking at anthropocentrism, biocentrism, values, deep ecology, Sprigge, Whitehead. We also consider what is meant by ‘nature’ drawing on Bradley and Mill. On animal ethics, we focus on Singer and Regan and on environmental aesthetics, the main focus is on Kant and the sublime. General approach tries to link thinking about nature (metaphysics) and appreciation of nature (aesthetics) with ethical questions about how we should act in relation to nature.

4. What tasks do you set for the students in these courses? What works well? We adopt a standard lecture-seminar approach. Students prepare a presentation for discussion during the seminar. They are examined by an end of semester written examination and are encouraged to submit a formative essay during the semester. Final year students can opt to submit a 5,000 word essay in lieu of the exam and as part of their dissertation requirement. MSc students submit a shorter essay.

5. What do the students find difficult in these courses? Some students find the metaphysics hard. Others thrive on it.

6. What resources do you find valuable for these courses? Books? We find the Light and Rolston anthology invaluable (Light, A. and Rolston, H. (eds) (2003) Environmental Ethics: An Anthology (Blackwell). On journals, Environmental Values and Environmental Ethics are the most useful, though this intend to make use of a number of articles from the Trumpeter.

7. Do you do anything outside the classroom that has a bearing on discussions or debates about sustainability in the wider world? I co-ordinate the events programme on the environment at Edinburgh’s Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities. These fall under two headings. First, the Embodied Values Project which is a wider inter-institutional grouping of academics and practitioners that arose initially from a series of workshops on Embodied Values in 2007-08 and which now encompasses work on biosemiotics, environmental art, animals and questions about the animal-human divide. We are presently editing a volume of papers from the workshops, due to come out with Springer at the end of next year. On the events side, the Institute is currently running a series of seminars and public lectures on ‘Embodied Values: Bringing the senses back to environment’. Second, a Humanities and Climate Change seminar which meets roughly once a month.

I try to keep abreast of environment events and sustainability initiatives around the University, maintaining contact with the Transitions team and attending some climate change lectures. I am a member the CHCI (Consortium of Humanities Centres and Institutes) Affinity Group, ‘Humanities for the Environment”. I am working on a book on philosophies of nature.
Sustainability in Philosophy Case Study 2

1. **What is your department and institution?** Philosophy Group, Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, Manchester Metropolitan University, Cheshire Faculty.

2. **What courses do you teach which have an ESD component? How many students per course?** Applied Ethics, a 24 week course of which 12 weeks are devoted to ESD content, more if you include 4 weeks on animal ethics. (30 Students); Political and Social Philosophy, a 24 week course, of which 6 weeks are devoted to ESD content. (This will commence in 2011-2012 - expected to have 30 students).

Also, the first year critical thinking unit, uses ESD related material throughout in examples. For instance, for one of their assessments, the students are tasked to critically assess the arguments in Bjorn Ljomborg's work (those arguments don't fare well).

3. **What topics do you cover? What's your general approach?** In Applied Ethics we cover the following: metaethical questions in environmental ethics, e.g. the intrinsic value debate; we examine Gaia theory, and the debate between its advocates and selfish gene theory advocates; we look at the nature of an ecosystem: e.g. how does one distinguish between an ecosystem and an organism; we then spend 6 weeks on the ethics of climate change.

In Political and Social Philosophy we will cover the following: students will be introduced to Green Political Thought; taught the distinction between environmentalism and ecologism; and explore the political issues emerging from anthropogenic global warming and ask whether traditional political philosophy has the resources to address these issues adequately.

4. **What tasks do you set for the students in these courses? What works well?** Applied ethics is structured as a discussion forum. Readings are set each week and one student is tasked to introduce that week's topic for 10 minutes and raise questions for discussion.

Political and Social Philosophy at present has a more conventional lecture-seminar structure, though this is likely to change when the ESD material is incorporated next term.

In both units students must write two essays, give a presentation and sit an end of year exam.

5. **What do the students find difficult in these courses?** Unfortunately a significant proportion of the find it difficult to accept the truth of anthropogenic global warming! As in all ethics teaching, students find metaethical discussions difficult and a little dry. In many respects, teaching ESD related topics can help mitigate this.

Much of the material on environmental philosophy and ethics is of patchy quality, but resources are emerging which are of better quality.

I would like to hear recommendations for useful websites, professional bodies and workshops.

7. Do you do anything outside the classroom that has a bearing on discussions or debates about sustainability in the wider world? Not at present, but I am in discussions with colleagues in geography and outdoor studies in an attempt to devise a more radical approach, which would involve leaving the classroom and the university on field trips. I confess to still having little idea as to how this might work in an academically rigorous way. However, we'll continue to try.
Sustainability in Philosophy Case Study 3

1. What is your department and institution? Department of Philosophy, Durham University

2. What courses do you teach which have an ESD component? How many students per course? I teach - or teach on - several modules which touch upon issues in environmental ethics, namely: (1) Buddhist Philosophy (a Masters-level, seminar-based module, with about half a dozen students; it touches on the question of how one might be able to draw upon Buddhist thought to develop a tenable environmental ethic); (2) the Undergraduate Dissertation module (every year, a couple of final-year students choose to write on environmental philosophy); and (3) Applied Ethics (a final-year module, which attracts around 70 students each year; four lectures are devoted to environmental ethics). I'll focus on Applied Ethics in what follows.

None of these modules is billed as having anything to do with Education for Sustainable Development, however. I suspect that if they saw this phrase in the module description for, say, Applied Ethics, my students would worry that I'd use the lectures to preach to them about environmental issues.

3. What topics do you cover? What's your general approach? I'm not the module leader for Applied Ethics - I'm just drafted in to give the lectures on environmental ethics. So the general teaching format - lectures, tutorials, assessment by exam - is to a large extent out of my hands. In my lectures, I begin by trying to get the students to question the familiar 'moral status' approach to normative ethics (epitomised by the various attempts, as it were, to expand the moral circle, from writers like Singer and Goodpaster). I then move on to introduce some alternative approaches, namely, ethical holism (Leopold, Callicott, etc.) and environmental virtue ethics (Cafaro, my own work with David Cooper, etc.).

I should add that my aim, in teaching environmental ethics, is not to convince the students to lead greener lifestyles, but to inspire them to think about our moral relations with more-or-less natural environments. Personally, I think that there are good reasons to live one's life in a broadly green way, and I try to convey to my students what those reasons are. But, again, I'm very wary about sounding preachy.

4. What tasks do you set for the students in these courses? What works well? Since I'm just a lecturer for Applied Ethics, I don't have much opportunity to set my students tasks. (I'd have more opportunity if I were a tutor.) That said, I try to keep the lectures fairly interactive, and I do ask the students to defend whatever views they voice.

5. What do the students find difficult in these courses? A tricky question. Nothing in particular has come up in student evaluations, though I get the impression that quite a few students find it difficult to think about normative ethics in anything other than a moral status-focused, 'how far can we expand the moral circle' kind of way.

6. What resources do you find valuable for these courses? Books? Articles? Websites? Conferences? Workshops? Professional bodies or groups? In my view, the best
introductions to environmental ethics are (1) O'Neil, Holland and Light, *Environmental Values* (challenging for many students, but altogether an excellent introduction and a great piece of philosophy in its own right); (2) Jamieson's *Ethics and the Environment* (very accessible; engagingly written); (3) Rolston and Light's very useful anthology.

As for journals, I (and my students) tend to rely on *Environmental Values* and to a lesser extent (simply because it's not online) *Environmental Ethics*. The ISEE bibliography, accessed via the University of North Texas's website, is very useful, too.

7. Do you do anything outside the classroom that has a bearing on discussions or debates about sustainability in the wider world? I'm a keen amateur naturalist, and I guess I'd call myself a nature lover, but I'm not much of an environmentalist. To be sure, I have supported various environmental causes in the past (I used to be a fairly active member of my local Friends of the Earth group, for instance). But in recent years, and for no good reason, I've become less and less engaged. Terrible, really!