

Simplicity and Sustainability

Social Science 220, Section A, TR 1:00pm-2:15pm

DAV 114

Instructor: Professor Russell Arben Fox

Office and Office Hours: Davis 313; MTRF 3:00pm-4:30pm and by appointment

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The Topic:

The notion of achieving “simplicity” in one’s life and livelihood is a very old and very admirable one. It makes one think of numerous related concepts—“wholeness,” “integrity,” and so forth. And it carries with it a host of purported psychological and/or spiritual benefits—the appeal of quiet, peace, confidence, security, and more. “Sustainability” is not as old a notion, though some of the principles and practices associated with it are: think of old phrases or mottos, like “waste not, want not,” or “fix it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without,” or of the contemporary appeal of a “DIY” (“do-it-yourself”) lifestyle. The idea throughout all this is to be able to sustain oneself or one’s loved ones or one’s community with what one has on hand, to avoid dependency upon resources or decisions that are outside of one’s control, and thus to achieve some sort of (again, purportedly) “natural” equilibrium: you can take care of yourself. In that sense, sustainability and simplicity are entwined concepts.

This course will explore that entwining, through reading the works of those who have pondered and (to a lesser or greater degree) lived these concepts, and well as attempting to see them put into practice. The course topics will range from moral and religious reflections, to a study of political economy and sociology, and beyond. We will study both the empirical evidence associated with these notions, as well as reflect philosophically upon the ideas behind them. This course is imagined as a companion to POLS 250, Christianity and Social Justice, and like that class aims to balance social science with theoretical considerations. This course satisfies the Social and Behavioral Science Perspectives general education requirement, and serves as an elective for the History and Political Science major as well.

There will be a great deal of reading involved in this course, but I hope the reading to only provide a platform, a common knowledge base, upon which our conversations and arguments may be able to build convictions and practices that will shape our lives. Even if this class doesn’t convince you that there is a way of constructing a simple and sustainable life, much less convince you to personally pursue such, I hope that it will at least convince you of the richness and importance of the argument about it all.

The Instructor:

That’s me. My name, office phone number and office e-mail are included at the top of this sheet. Please make use of my office hours if you have a question or concern, or send me an e-mail message.

The Reading:

There are four required books for this course; they are:

Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (2007) [DE]

E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (1973) [SB]

Barry Schwartz *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less* (2004) [PC]

Robert E. Goodin, *On Settling* (2012) [OS]

There will also be numerous readings either handed out or posted on Moodle which will be referred to throughout the course. The Moodle readings should be accessible in class as part of our discussions; you can do this by printing them out, or saving them on electronic devices. Either way, have them available!

The Schedule:

Follow this schedule closely. Every class period has some sort of reading assignment which you should complete before coming to class.

Tuesday, August 25—first day of class; course introduction

Thursday, August 27—Biblical, Daoist, and Confucian readings; simplicity and the religious question

Tuesday, September 1—Goodin, *OS*; the philosophy of simplicity, settling, and striving

Thursday, September 3—*PC*, 1-44; navigating the world of choice

Tuesday, September 8—*PC*, 47-96; deciding and maximizing

Thursday, September 10—*PC*, 99-146; abundance and opportunity costs

Tuesday, September 15—*PC*, 147-200; adaption and disappointment

Thursday, September 17—*PC*, 221-236, Ben-Porath reading; responding to the burden of choice

Tuesday, September 22—Crawford readings; who is making the choice, anyway?

Thursday, September 24—*DE*, 1-45; the downside of growing abundance

Tuesday, September 29—*DE*, 46-94; sustainability and the environmental costs of abundance

Thursday, October 1—*DE*, 95-128; “satisficing” and the civic costs of abundance

Tuesday, October 6—*DE*, 129-176; the economics of collective limits

Thursday, October 8—*DE*, 177-232; the sustainability and virtue of collective limits

Tuesday, October 13—midterm examination

Thursday, October 15—local food tour; no class

Tuesday, October 20—Read and Roberts readings; simplicity, complexity, and economics

Thursday, October 22—professor attending professional conference; no class

Tuesday, October 27—Keynes and Sidelsky readings; capitalism and the lack of limits

Thursday, October 29—Daly and Cobb readings; modern economics and misplaced concreteness

Tuesday, November 3—Daly and Cobb readings; *oikonomia* and community

Thursday, November 5—*SB*, xi-41; alternative thinking about economic growth
(book report rough drafts due)

Tuesday, November 10—*SB*, 42-80; the real economics of size

Thursday, November 12—*SB*, 83-124; sustainable thoughts on education and land

Tuesday, November 17—*SB*, 155-169, Berry readings; sustainable thoughts on energy and technology

Thursday, November 19—*SB*, 237-270; a sustainable approach to economics

Tuesday, November 24–Thanksgiving Day holiday; no class
Thursday, November 26–Thanksgiving Day holiday; no class

Tuesday, December 1–*SB*, 271-312; a sustainable future for ownership
(book reports due)
Thursday, December 3–book presentations

Tuesday, December 8–book report presentations
Thursday, December 10–last day of class; course review
(sustainability reports due)

Tuesday, December 15, 1:00pm–final examination

The Grades:

Grading in this course will follow a strict 100-point scale:

91 - 100 = A
81 - 90 = B
71 - 80 = C
60 - 70 = D
59 and below = let's not talk about that, shall we?

In calculating the grades, however, I throw in a 10-point margin for error, as the following scale shows:

Book report	15 points
Book presentation	10 points
Midterm exam	25 points
Sustainability outings	15 points (five points for each outing, lecture, or event)
Sustainability report	10 points
Final exam	35 points

Total: 110 points

So, while grades will be distributed according to the 100-point scale listed above, there is actually 110 points possible in this class. Therefore, it is technically possible to, for example, blow off the book report and presentation entirely and still earn a solid B. I wouldn't recommend that though! This margin exists to provide cover for those inevitable bad days and mistakes that plague us all. Don't abuse it.

Your *book report* will be the only significant writing requirement you will have in this class. You will each choose a book that deals, in one way or another, with important themes connected to the notions of or practices regarding simplicity and sustainability (I will present several candidates to the class), read it thoroughly, think about it, then prepare an 8 to 10 page (typed, double-spaced) report that closely exams, (and criticizes if you think necessary) what the book has taught you about these ideas and ways of living. This report will be worth up to 15 points. These need not be research papers, though if you choose to develop your report along those lines it would be accepted (please use footnotes and a works cited page); however, purely analytical response papers would be acceptable as well. The primary point of the report is to show me that you have read the book in question, thought about it, taken seriously what it has tried to say, and formulated an informed reaction to it. Please be aware that I have read **ALL** the books in

question, and thus **will know if you just make something up**. In order to make certain give yourself time to follow through on this assignment, I am requiring you to turn in a rough draft (at least 5 pages in length) of your book report on Thursday, November 5; the final report will be due a month later on Tuesday, December 1 (though it can be turned in before that if you choose to do so). Anyone who fails to turn in an adequate rough draft (which I will read, comment on, and return to you) will lose **HALF** of the full points which the final report may earn. Please note that **late reports (rough draft or final) are UNACCEPTABLE, the SOLE exception being for hospital stays or other emergencies that you can provide SIGNED DOCUMENTATION for**. Use every writing resource available to you in working on these papers, as **spelling, grammar, format, and structure will all most DEFINITELY count**.

Your *book presentation* will be a short, 5-10-minute lecture on the book you have read that you will prepare to deliver to the class sometime during the final couple of class meetings. This can be a straightforward presentation, but the more innovative you get (using handouts, demonstrations, video, etc.) the more impressive your presentation will be, and thus possibly the more points you will earn (the presentation will be worth up to 10 points). My main criteria as a listener and grader will be whether you introduce and summarize one or more of the book's observations and arguments well, and whether you are persuasive in making your case for or against or even just in commentary upon those elements of the book which you focus upon. Don't be frightened by this assignment; look upon it as a fun end-of-the-course summing up! (I'll probably provide something to encourage the celebratory atmosphere.)

Your *sustainability outings* and *sustainability report* will involve your involvement in one or more "outings" that will be organized during the semester. On **THREE** occasions this semester, I will be arranging trips, tours, visits and lectures, all involving individuals and organizations which are committed to some version of local, sustainable, simple economics and living. I will seek to schedule these outings so that as many students as possible can come along. You **WILL** be expected to attend as many of them as possible, and your presence on such an outing will qualify you for the points offered (in other words, just showing up to a scheduled event will be the easiest 5 points you earn all semester). You will want to record or take notes on one of these events or outings, because you will also be expected to write a report upon what you see and hear. The report will be a relatively short (4 to 5 pages, typed, double-spaced) summary of and commentary on what you heard, saw, or learned; I definitely do not require or expect this to be a research paper of any sort, though if you feel some additional sources might help you better understand or respond to the information you gained from the trip, speaker, or event, that would be acceptable. The report will be due no later than Thursday, December 10, and again, **late reports are UNACCEPTABLE, the SOLE exception being for emergencies that you can provide SIGNED DOCUMENTATION for**.

The *midterm examination* will include a multiple choice section (fifteen questions of which you will choose to answer ten, worth 1 point each, for a total of 10 possible points), a short answer section (ten questions of which you choose to answer five, worth 2 points each, for a total of 10 possible points), and a short essay question (worth a possible 5 points, for an overall total of 25 points for the exam). The exam will only address material that we will have covered in the first half of the course. The multiple choice questions will deal with the relatively few specific names, places, and terms which I will have emphasized as significant during the semester. The short answer questions will be fairly specific, only requiring a sentence or two to answer. The essay question will likely require two or three paragraphs to adequately answer the question. The *final examination* will differ only in that, in addition to a short, five-point essay question, there will be a longer, 10-point question, which will be *comprehensive*. Remember that **exams CANNOT be made up, the SOLE exception being for hospital stays or other emergencies which you can provide SIGNED DOCUMENTATION for, or scheduling conflicts which you work out with me MORE THAN A WEEK in advance**.

Four Declarations:

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, accommodations may be made for any student who notifies me of their needs. **It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to my attention**, as I am not allowed to ask about such matters. Students who may require special assistance in emergency evacuations should talk to me in order to work out the most appropriate procedures to follow in such an emergency.

I am sympathetic to those who suffer any sort of family emergency and/or tragedy during this semester, and I am frequently open to working out alternative ways of completing assignments when responsibilities prevent you from attending class and so forth. That being said, it must be understood that **life goes on**, and so does this course. Funerals or prolonged hospital stays for loved ones, while clearly and properly demanding of one's time and energy, are **NOT** an acceptable excuse for ignoring class expectations, policies, or grading; if it appears you must make a choice between family obligations and class assignments, **please inform me as soon as possible**, rather than simply assuming that I will be understanding and let things slide out of sympathy after the fact, because I probably won't.

For the sake of maintaining class discipline and making certain an environment conducive to hearing and participating in the lectures and discussion exists for all students in the class, **both individually and collectively**, there will be **NO** laptops allowed in this classroom without explicit arrangements being made with me in accordance with university access policies. Moreover, I reserve the right to either take away for the duration of the class cell phones, iPods, Blackberries, or any other kind of electronic communications or text-messaging device, or ask those who have such to leave the classroom. I **REALLY** don't want to have to enforce this, because doing so is a hassle, but I will if I have to, for the sake of those students who are trying to follow along and get something out of class. Let's make it easy: simply turn off your cell phones, or turn them to silent, while in the classroom, and if you have an important call you somehow can't wait a half-hour before returning, just politely excuse yourself.

It should go without saying that **ANY** sort of academic dishonesty is detrimental to both your own education and my ability to fairly and sympathetically administer and grade this class. Hence, **any cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, or other general malfeasance that I verify will result in an automatic ZERO ("0") for the assignment or test in question, and potentially the ENTIRE COURSE, depending on the gravity of the offense**. In order to enforce this policy, I reserve the right to take whatever steps I deem appropriate, including banning cell phones and other electronic implements during test-taking, changing the deadlines of assignments (with due notice), and so forth. You're grown-ups by now, so you consider the consequences. If you feel you need more guidance or specifications on this policy, see the attached **HONOR CODE** sheet.

HONOR CODE Sanctions and Procedures:

The value of an Academic Honor Code and Sanctions for Honor Code violations is that it allows faculty and students to have a clear indication of how specific types of “cheating” and violations of academic integrity are addressed.

Sanctions for first time offenses:

The professor suspects and verifies violation of the honor code and notifies the Division Chair/Program Director who sends the information via a form to the Registrar to check for priors. The professor meets with the student to discuss the problem. If the student has no priors, he or she can admit and accept the sanction (generally a zero for the assignment). If the student disagrees, a meeting with the Division Chair/Program Director is scheduled. If the student then agrees to the sanction, notification is sent to the adviser and appropriate division chair/program director. The case is closed and filed in the Registrar’s office. If there is no agreement, the case is sent to the Academic Integrity Board for a final decision.

Sanctions if there has been a prior offense:

All second (or 2+) time offenses and those where the student doesn’t agree with the sanctions will be heard by the Academic Integrity Board. If the student is deemed not guilty, the case is closed and the information is filed in the Registrar’s office. If the student is found responsible, sanctions could include a failing grade for the course, a notation on the transcript, suspension or expulsion from the university or any combination of these sanctions.

Examples of Academic Dishonesty:

1. Cheating: using unauthorized notes, study aids, or information on an examination; altering a graded work after it has been returned, then submitting the work for re-grading; allowing another person to do one's work and submitting that work under one's own name; submitting identical or similar papers for credit in more than one course without prior permission from the course instructors.

2. Plagiarism: submitting material that in part or whole is not entirely one's own work without attributing those same portions to their correct source.

3. Fabrication: falsifying or inventing any information, data or citation; presenting data that were not gathered in accordance with standard guidelines defining the appropriate methods for collecting or generating data and failing to include an accurate account of the method by which the data were gathered or collected.

4. Obtaining an Unfair Advantage: (a) stealing, reproducing, circulating or otherwise gaining access to examination materials prior to the time authorized by the instructor; (b) stealing, destroying, defacing or concealing library materials with the purpose of depriving others of their use; (c) unauthorized collaborating on an academic assignment (d) retaining, possessing, using or circulating previously given examination materials, where those materials clearly indicate that they are to be returned to the instructor at the conclusion of the examination; (e) intentionally obstructing or interfering with another student's academic work (f) unauthorized consultation with other students personally, or use of any electronic devices or (g) otherwise undertaking activity with the purpose of creating or obtaining an unfair academic advantage over other students' academic work.

5. Aiding and Abetting Academic Dishonesty: (a) providing material, information, or other assistance to another person with knowledge that such aid could be used in any of the violations stated above, or (b) providing false information in connection with any inquiry regarding academic integrity.

6. Falsification of Records and Official Documents: altering documents affecting academic records; forging signatures of authorization or falsifying information on an official academic document, grade report, letter of permission, petition, drop/add form, ID card, or any other official University document.

7. Unauthorized Access to computerized academic or administrative records or systems: viewing or altering computer records, modifying computer programs or systems, releasing or dispensing information gained via unauthorized access, or interfering with the use or availability of computer systems or information.

Examples of academic dishonesty used by permission of the Northwestern University Undergraduate Academic Conduct Committee