

Philosophy 166 Environmental Ethics Syllabus Spring 2020

Instructor

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Office Hours: Mondays 1-2:30
and by appointment

M-W 4-5:15pm
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Course Description

Environmental Ethics provides an introduction to the ethical issues that arise in connection with anthropogenic climate change and other environmental problems. In this class, we will explore a variety of moral questions that arise in connection to the environment (broadly construed), including climate change, issues of sustainable individual behaviour, biodiversity loss, non-human animal welfare, and the value of the natural environment. Questions may include: (a) what are your obligations with respect to the environment?; (b) how should we understand the value of nature?; (c) what is the moral status of non-human animals, and how should we take their welfare into account?; (d) what should you do about climate change?; (e) how should we respond to climate change deniers?; (f) what role should technology play in combating climate change?; (g) in the face of climate change, what's the ethical status of, and what attitude should we take towards, urbanism?; (h) is biodiversity intrinsically or only instrumentally valuable?; (i) what duties do we have to future generations? The primary goal of this course is to engage in an overview of philosophically and ethically significant questions about the environment and our relation to it.

Course Goals

The aim of this course is to introduce you to some prominent questions, arguments, and views in environmental ethics. This course will also introduce you to philosophical methodology, focusing on reasoning and arguments that could support various positions in environmental ethics. The goal is for you to be able to clearly articulate concepts, arguments and ethical positions for different views on controversial and complicated questions relating to the environment, non-human animals, climate change, sustainability, as well as analyze and evaluate different and competing lines of reasoning, and give reasoned and critical support for your own views. Additionally, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your own relation to the environment and its denizens and make that relationship more sustainable. Crucially, we'll come to see that, as is generally the case with philosophy, the topics discussed are far more complex than they initially seem.

Grading

Reading Responses	25%
Sustainability Journal	25%
Final Paper	25%
Presentation	10%
Attendance and Participation	15%

Assignments

Students will complete short reading responses of various types throughout the semester. Some of these are reading questions, some are open-ended invitations for thoughts on a topic, and some are requests for questions about something you didn't understand in the reading. Collectively, these are worth 25% of your grade. They will be graded pass/fail and are due by the start of the class in which we are discussing the relevant reading. Complete and submit your responses on Moodle.

Students will also keep weekly 'sustainability' journal entries, to be submitted on Moodle, collectively worth 25% of the final grade. These entries involve two components: first, students will keep track of changes they make to their daily life and routine to make it more sustainable; second, students will offer a brief mindfulness reflection on their interaction with some aspect of the environment. The purpose is to both foster sustainability in your daily lives and reflect on why the environment or parts thereof are valuable or worthy of your respect.

There is one short paper due at the end of the semester, to be submitted in hard copy, worth 25% of your final grade. Paper prompts and instructions will be distributed mid-semester.

There is a short presentation, worth 10% of your grade. One or two students will present each session on a recent news article that discusses one or more of the topics we are discussing that week and raise some ethical issue pertaining to the topic. Presentation times will be assigned after add/drop.

There is also an attendance and participation grade, jointly worth 15% of your grade. Your showing up and being attentive and engaged in lecture will be reflected in your attendance and participation grade. This grade will start off at 100%, but can be negatively affected by unexcused absences from lecture (I will regularly take attendance; you have two 'freebies'), if you regularly violate the electronics policy or if you are disruptive in lecture (wearing headphones, regularly coming in late, doing homework for other classes, etc.).

Class Expectations

- **Course Readings:** Students should do all the assigned readings *before* the class in which they're discussed. All readings are available on the course webpage. There is no textbook, but students should print articles so they can bring them to class.
- **Attendance and Participation:** Attendance in class is expected. I will take attendance and keep track of student contributions in class. You can miss up to 2 classes without penalty and without notifying me. Any further absences will need to be justified.
- **Electronics Policy:** Laptops, tablets, and phones are not permitted during class unless needed for in-class work. Using electronics is distracting to both yourself and others, and studies have shown that it lowers grades of the user and those around them. If you require a special accommodation regarding electronics please come see me to request an exemption.

- **Late Work Policy:** Late assignments without an extension will be downgraded by 1/3 of a letter grade per day after the due date, up to a penalty of 2 full letter grades (after which they won't be accepted). Consult with me to request an extension. Late reading responses will not be graded.
- **Classroom Etiquette:** Students are expected to respect each other, allow others the chance to speak, and be open-minded to views different from their own. The topics covered may be controversial and evoke strong reactions. Please be aware of, and sensitive to, the feelings and experiences of others.
- **Syllabus:** Readings and schedule are subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class and on the course Moodle page.

Accessibility

I am committed to making this class accessible and welcoming for all students. Students with documented disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services in 161 Whitmore, or at <http://www.umass.edu/disability> to register and request any accommodations you might need. If you anticipate receiving accommodations from Disability Services, but are still waiting on paperwork, please come tell me as soon as you can so that we can put necessary accommodations in place.

Schedule

Week 1: Jan. 22

Introduction

W Introduction and course overview

Week 2: Jan. 27, 29

Philosophy, Ethics, and the Environment

M What is philosophy and ethics? (no readings)

W Routley, "Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?" (1973)

Attfield, "Some Key Concepts", ch. 2, *Environmental Ethics* (2018)

Week 3: Feb. 3, 5

Non-Human Animals: Utilitarianism and Deontology

M Singer, "All Animals Are Equal" (1975); **Add/Drop Deadline**

W Kant, "Duties Towards Animals" (1780)

Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights" (selections, 1983); **Presentation Dates Assigned**

Week 4: Feb. 10, 12

Non-Human Animals: Hierarchical Approaches

- M** Kagan, “Standing”, ch. 1 *How to Count Animals*, sect. 1.2 & 1.3 (2019)
- DeGrazia, “The Moral Status of Animals” ch. 2, *Animal Rights* (pp. 34-37; 2001)
- W** Nussbaum, “Beyond ‘Compassion and Humanity’: Justice for Nonhuman Animals” (2004)

Week 5: Feb. 18, 19 **Non-Human Animals: Current Practices**

- T** Rachels, “Vegetarianism and ‘The Other Weight Problem’” (1977)
- W** Pachirat, “Killing at Close Range”, ch. 6, *Every Twelve Seconds* (2012)

Week 6: Feb. 24, 26 **Non-Human Animals: Current Practices**

- M** DeGrazia, “Keeping Pets and Zoo Animals”, ch. 6 *Animal Rights* (2001)
- W** DeGrazia, “Animal Research”, ch. 7, *Animal Rights* (2001)

Week 7: Mar. 2, 4 **The Environment: Anthropocentrism and Biocentrism**

- M** White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis” (last section; 1967);
- Williams, “Must a Concern for the Environment Be Centred on Human Beings?” (1995)
- W** Leopold, *Sand County Almanac* (selections, 1949);
- Næss, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement” (1973)

Week 8: Mar. 9, 11 **The Environment: Oppression and Western Elitism**

- M** Plumwood, “Paths Beyond Human-Centeredness: Lessons from Liberation Struggles” (1999)
- W** Guha, “Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique” (1989)

Week 9: Mar. 16, 18 **Spring Break: No Class**

Week 10: Mar. 23, 25 **The Environment: Sustainability**

- M** Rolston, “Biodiversity” (2001)

