

Environmental Ethics

Course description: As we face massive environmental degradation, climate change, and loss of biodiversity, it is more important than ever to understand how humans should relate to nature, and how we ought to treat both our fellow humans and the broader nonhuman world. The guiding principle of this course is that the discipline of philosophy, and environmental ethics in particular, can be used as a tool to help us better understand and answer these questions. Each week we will ground our discussions in contemporary case studies, considering real-world problems like: What ought we to do about invasive plants and animals in places like Yellowstone National Park and the Galapagos Islands? Should we use geoengineering to address global warming? How should we respond in cases where radical environmentalism, which may be necessary to save certain natural environments, risks harming vulnerable humans?

Course goals:

1. Learn how philosophical methods can be used as tools to analyze and evaluate difficult environmental dilemmas.
2. Understand various philosophical theories on human-nature relationships and how these theories can be applied to real-world cases.
3. Investigate the fundamental concepts which underly common assumptions about the natural world.
4. Develop critical thinking, speaking, and writing skills.

Required texts: There are no required texts for this course – all reading material will be provided through Canvas.

Assignments:

- **First evaluative essay** (3-4 pgs.) – Choose from 3 prompts.
- **Design a city exercise** – Design a future environmentally-friendly city. Create some kind of visual component to accompany your description.
- **Second evaluative essay** (3-4pgs.) – Choose from 3 prompts.
- **Write-up on one case study** (1-2pgs.) – Find a contemporary case study that you would like to write your final essay on. Answer a series of questions about the case study.
- **Presentation** (5 mins) – Present on your final topic. You will be graded on both your presentation and your feedback to your peers
- **Final essay evaluating chosen case study** (5-7pgs.)

Assignment help: I am very happy to help you with your assignments, but please do not send me full drafts. Instead, see me during office hours with specific questions or to bounce ideas off

me. You can also email me your questions. If you want help with a paper, please email me ahead of coming into office hours so that I can help you to prepare for the meeting.

Extensions: You have 5 extension days (in total) that you can use for any assignment, for whatever reason. For example, you may choose to turn in several assignments 1 day late, or 1 assignment 5 days late. You do not need to let me know when you are using an extension day – if an assignment is late, I will keep track of how many of your extension days you have used. I will let you know when you have 1 extension day left. Beyond the allotted extension days, all late assignments will lose 4% per day that they are late.

Attendance: You are allowed 2 unexcused absences from class, no questions asked. Any further absences will affect your attendance and participation grade unless the absences are excused. Examples of excused absences include: medical or family emergencies, religious observances, and job interviews.

Electronics policy: I have tried to design the course in such a way that the use of electronics for notetaking is not necessary. I encourage you to consider putting away all electronic devices so that we can focus on learning without distraction. If you choose to use your electronics, please sit towards the back of the class to avoid distracting others. If you need to look at your phone during class (for childcare purposes, emergencies, etc.) then just let me know ahead of time so that this does not affect your participation grade.

Accommodations: It is important to me that students are provided with the resources that they need to succeed in this course. If you have a disability which you feel will negatively affect your experience of this course, please see the Office of Student Disabilities Services to file an accommodations request (more information about this on the Canvas site). I am always happy to hear more from anyone about what I can do to make this class more accessible.

Academic integrity: All assignments will be put through plagiarism-detection software upon submission. Assignments found to be plagiarized will be given a failing grade – serious cases of plagiarism will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct. Please familiarize yourself with Penn’s Code of Academic Integrity. If you are struggling such that you feel the need to cheat (because of time management, course content, or any other reason), come talk to me instead – we will figure something out.

Resources: On our Canvas site you will find links to various academic resources (including information about the Weingarten Center, tutoring services, Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), and disability services), philosophy resources (including tips on writing and reading philosophy, and helpful online encyclopedias), and environmental ethics resources (including information about environmental programs in Philly, ideas on how to reduce carbon emissions, etc.)

Schedule:

Wed. August 31 – Introduction to course

Unit 1: Valuing the Environment

Wed. September 7 – What is environmental ethics?

- Carson, Rachel - “A Fable for Tomorrow” and “The Obligation to Endure” from *Silent Spring* (1962)
- VanDeVeer, Donald and Christine Pierce – “An Introduction to Ethical Theory: Moral Arguments and Ethical Theory” (Part 1) from *The Environmental Ethics & Policy Book* (1998)
- **Optional:** VanDeVeer, Donald and Christine Pierce – “An Introduction to Ethical Theory: Influential Ethical Ideas and Theories” (Part 2) from *The Environmental Ethics & Policy Book* (1998)
- **Optional:** Jamieson, Dale – “The Environment as an Ethical Question” from *Ethics and the Environment: An Introduction* (2008)

Mon. September 12 – Intrinsic vs. Instrumental value

- Sylvan (Routley), Richard – “Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?” *Environmental Philosophy* (1973)
- Jamieson, Dale – “Intrinsic Value” from *Ethics and the Environment: An Introduction* (2008)
- Maguire, Lynn and James Justus – “Why Intrinsic Value is a Poor Basis for Conservation Decisions” *Bioscience* (2008)

Wed. September 14 – Conservation values

- Maclaurin, James and Kim Sterelny – “Taxonomy Red in Tooth and Claw” from *What is Biodiversity?* (2008)
- Maclaurin, James and Kim Sterelny – “Conservation Biology: The Evaluation Problem” from *What is Biodiversity?* (2008)

Unit 2: How should we treat the nonhuman world?

Mon. September 19 – Environmental/animal rights trade-offs

- Leopold, Aldo – section of “The Land Ethic” from *A Sand County Almanac* (1949)
- Callicott, J. Baird – “Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair” *Environmental Ethics* (1980)

Wed. September 21 – Animal ethics – looking and zoos (**First Evaluative Essay Assigned**)

- Berger, John – “Why Look at Animals?” from *About Looking* (1980)
- Cooke, Steve – “Betraying Animals” *The Journal of Ethics* (2019)
- Hone, Dave – “Why the World Needs Zoos” *Guardian* (2017)
- Jamieson, Dale – “Against Zoos” from *In Defense of Animals* (1985)

Mon. September 26 – Analyzing and writing philosophy

- How to structure your paper
- A Guide to Argument Analysis

Wed. September 28 – Native vs. non-native

- Predator-free New Zealand: [What is Predator Free 2050? - Predator Free NZ Trust](#)
- Marris, Emma – “Learning to Love Exotic Species” from *Rambunctious Garden* (2013)
- Knights, Paul- “Native Species, Human Communities, and Cultural Relationships” *Environmental Values* (2008)

Mon. October 3 – Stasis and change

- Clements, Colleen – “Stasis: The Unnatural Value” *Ethics* (1976)
- Hobbs et al - “Evolving Ecological Understandings: The Implications of Ecosystem Dynamics” from *Beyond Naturalness* (2010)

Wed. October 5- The Anthropocene (First Evaluative Essay DUE)

- Crutzen, Paul and Eugene Stoermer – “The Anthropocene” (with commentary) from *The Future of Nature* (2013)
- Hourdequin, Marion – “Ethics, Adaptation, and the Anthropocene” *Ethics, Policy, and Environment* (2020)
- **Optional:** An Ecomodernist Manifesto (2013)

Unit 3: Humans and Nature

Mon. October 10 - The role of humans in nature (Design a city exercise assigned)

- Nash, Roderick – “Island Civilization” from *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967)
- Kimmerer, Robin - “Skywoman Falling” from *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013)
- Cordova, V.F. “What is the Role of a Human in the World?” from *How It Is* (2007)

Wed. October 12 – Concepts of nature and wilderness

- Cronon, William - “The Trouble with Wilderness” *Environmental History* (1996)

Mon. October 17 – Urban nature

- Matsuda, Will - “Housing Projects and Empty Lots” (*Guardian*) (2021)

- Corbyn, Zoe - “Ecologists Shun the Urban Jungle” (*Nature*) (2010)
- Lundholm, Jeremy and Paul Richardson – “Habitat analogues for reconciliation ecology in urban and industrial environments” *Journal of Applied Ecology* (2010)

Wed. October 19 – Deep ecology and holism (Design a city exercise DUE)

- Devall, Bill and George Sessions – “Deep Ecology” from *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (1985)
- Naess, Arne – “Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World” *The Trumpeter* (1987)
- **Optional:** Loy, David – “Loving the World as Our Own Body: The Nondualist Ethics of Taoism, Buddhism and Deep Ecology” *Worldviews* (1997)

Mon. October 24 - Ecofeminism

- Plumwood, Val – “Nature, Self, and Gender” *Hypatia* (1991)
- Davion, Victoria – “How Feminist is Ecofeminism?” (1994)
- **Optional:** Warren, Karen – “The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism” *Environmental Ethics* (1990)
- **Optional:** Whyte, Kyle and Christine J. Cuomo – “Ethics of Caring in Environmental Ethics: Indigenous and Feminist Philosophies” *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics* (2016)

Unit 4: Environmental Justice

Wed. October 26 - Radical environmentalism (Second Evaluative Essay Assigned)

- Woodhouse, Keith Makoto – excerpt of “A Radical Break” from *The Ecocentrists* (2020)
- Foreman, Dave – “Strategic Monkeywrenching” (1985)
- Scarce, Rik – “The Sea Shepherds: Bringing Justice to the High Seas” (2006)

Mon. October 31 – Social Ecology and the population question

- Rolston III, Holmes – “Feeding People vs. Saving Nature?” *Environmental Values* (1998)
- Bookchin, Murray – “Social Ecology vs. Deep ecology: A Challenge for the Ecology Movement” (1987)
- **Optional:** Hardin, Garrett – “Lifeboat Ethics” *Psychology Today* (1974)

Wed. November 2 – Environmental justice

- Guha, Ramachandra – “Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique” *Environmental Ethics* (1989)

- Tubert, Ariela – “Environmental Racism: a causal and historical account” *Journal of Social Philosophy* (2021)
- **Optional:** Jalais, Annu – “Unmasking the Cosmopolitan Tiger” from *Forest of Tigers* (2010)

Mon. November 7 – Climate change

- Weart, Spencer – “The Carbon Dioxide Greenhouse Effect” from *The Discovery of Global Warming* - [The Carbon Dioxide Greenhouse Effect \(aip.org\)](http://aip.org) (2020)
- Gardiner, Stephen – “A Perfect Moral Storm” *Environmental Values* (2006)

Wed. November 9 – Climate justice (Second Evaluative Essay DUE)

- Robinson, Mary – “Understanding Climate Justice” and “Learning from Lived Experience” from *Climate Justice: Hope, Resilience, and the Fight for a Sustainable Future* (2018)
- Shue, Henry – “The Unavoidability of Justice” from *Climate Justice* (2014)
- **Optional:** [Climate Stories Project \(www.climatestoriesproject.org\)](http://www.climatestoriesproject.org)
- **Optional:** Taiwo, Olufemi – “The Green New Deal and the Danger of Climate Colonialism” *Slate* (2019)

Unit 5: Particular ethical questions

Mon. November 14 – Geoengineering (Case Study Write-Up Assigned)

- Video - [Geoengineering: A Horrible Idea We Might Have to Do - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7G111111111)
- Robock, Alan – “Benefits and Risks of Stratospheric Solar Radiation Management for Climate Intervention” *The Bridge* (2020)
- Bodansky and Biniiaz – “Climate Intervention: The Case for Research” *Technical Report for C2ES* (2020)

Wed. November 16 – “Playing God” in nature

- McKibben, Bill – Excerpt from *The End of Nature* (pgs. 127-144) (1989)
- Marris, Emma – “Assisted Migration” from *Rambunctious Garden* (2013)
- **Optional:** Maier, D.S. and D. Simberloff – “Assisted Migration in Normative and Scientific Context” *Journal of Agriculture and Environmental Ethics* (2016)

Mon. November 21 – Accessibility in nature (Case Study Write-up DUE)

- Alison Kafer – “Bodies of Nature: The Environmental Politics of Disability”
- Sax, Joseph – “The Parks as They Ought to Be” (from *Mountains without Handrails*) (1980)

- Jubler, Eric- “Open Wilderness Land to the People” *Chicago Tribune* (1971)
- Nuer, Rachel – “Should National Parks Offer Wifi and Cellular Coverage?” (2013)

Wed. November 23 (no class – Friday schedule)

Mon. November 28 – Beauty in Nature (Aesthetics)

- Muir, John – “Yosemite Falls at Midnight” (1871)
- Rolston, Holmes – “Natural Value” *Environmental Ethics* (1988)
- Saito, Yuriko – “The Aesthetics of Unscenic Nature” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (1998)

Wed. November 30 – The Good Life - Virtue and Vice (or optional alternative material)

- Cafaro, Philip – “Gluttony, Arrogance, Greed, and Apathy: An Exploration of Environmental Vice” from *Environmental Virtue Ethics* (2005)
- Milbrath, Lester – “Redefining the Good Life in a Sustainable Society” *Environmental Values* (1993)

Mon. December 5 - Presentations

Wed. December 7 - Presentations

Mon. December 12 – Moving forward

- Kimmerer, Robin – “Epilogue: Returning the Gift” (from *Braiding Sweetgrass*) (2013)
- Robinson, Mary – “Paris: The Challenge of Implementing” (from *Climate Justice: Hope, Resilience, and the Fight for a Sustainable Future*) (2018)
- “How to Save a Planet”: Calls to Action - [How to Save a Planet: Calls to Action & Resources \(google.com\)](#)
- Project Drawdown - [Solutions | Project Drawdown](#)

Finals week – Final paper due