
Philosophy 238: Environmental Ethics

Instructor

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Office Hours: Wednesday 9:00AM - 10:00AM

Class Meetings: Monday/ Wednesday/ Friday 8:00AM - 8:50AM

Course Description

When you think about the environment, what image comes to mind? Do you picture the earth? The oceans? The forests? What about other people? Or animals? Or the plants? Now think about our relationship to the environment. What kind of relationship do we have to the environment? Is it merely something that people have authority over to do as they see fit (like your bank account)? Or is it something we have authority over but also a collective responsibility towards (like members of a community garden or a pet owner)? Or is our relationship to the environment like the relationship we have to other people? Friends? Or family? Another question to ask yourself is why is there environmental concern? Are we concerned about the environment because we value it on its own terms? Or are we concerned about the environment for some other purpose or end like the thriving and wellbeing of humanity?

These questions concern how we value the environment which encompass our attitudes and outlooks towards environmental issues and procedures. In this course, we will explore the ethical relationship we have to the environment. Part of this study includes understanding what is encompassed by the environment. Are humans our only and main environmental concern? What about sentient beings such as dogs, cats, chickens, cows? Or what about all living things including plants as well? And what about things like ecosystems, species, and biodiversity? Do we owe anything to any of these objects of value? And how do we value such things? Do we value them because they are intrinsically valuable or do we value them merely for our own aims and purposes? This course aims to dive into these and like-minded questions.

Learning Objectives

- Students will acquire an introductory working knowledge of select philosophical issues of concern and reflect on their relevance.
- Students will further gain a basic understanding of how these issues pertain to them as individuals and society more generally.

Attendance Policy

Attendance for this course is mandatory, and will, along with participation in discussions, account for 10% of your grade.

Late Assignments

In this course you will be required to complete weekly topic reflections, as well an analysis paper, a poster presentation, and a philosophy paper. The due dates of the analysis paper, poster presentation

¹ Please note that I generally answer emails within 24 hours of their receipt during the term.

and philosophy papers are posted for your convenience as well as mine. I will accept late assignments, within reason. If you are late by a few days etc. I will accept late assignments without penalty.²

Required Texts

There are no required texts for this class. Readings may take the form of journal articles, book chapters, reports from various Non-governmental agencies and governments, news stories, podcasts, or videos. When possible readings will be made available through Blackboard and/or the UM library.

Requirements

Attendance and Participation (15%)

Philosophy Lab (15%)

Summary/Exegesis (15%)

Photo Journal Assignment (15%)

Poster Presentation (20%)

Philosophy Paper (20%)

Assignments³

Participation (15%) - You are required to participate and attend class meetings regularly. The participation grade is a reflection of your ability to come prepared to class to discuss the assigned readings by contributing to class discussion. Being prepared is not merely a matter of asking questions but asking informed and relevant questions. Our class is heavily discussion-based. You should come prepared to class by reading the materials provided and being ready to engage with your fellow classmates, me, and yourself.

Philosophy Lab (15%) - In this assignment students will be assigned a set of questions to complete about a case study, and then will share what they came up with their assigned group. Each individual must complete 2 of the 3 assigned sets of questions. Everyone should answer set 3. But in addition to set 3, you must respond to either set 1 or set 2.

Here is how to determine which set you should work on in addition to set 3: If your last name begins with the letters A-K work on set 1; L-Z work on set 2. Groups will discuss their answers in groups before discussion among the class. Groups will be assigned for each philosophy lab.

Summary/Exegesis (15%) - You will be required to submit a summary/exegesis of the assigned readings. This task requires that you summarize in your own words what the reading is about, followed by a critical discussion on one of its main points (i.e. something that struck you). In other words, the assignment requires you to provide a summary of the main line of thought the reading puts forward and then asks you to critically examine a feature of the reading that you found particularly interesting. The summaries are 500 words in length. You must complete a total of 5 summaries. Each summary is worth 3% each, totalling 15% of your final grade. An example and further instructions will be available on Blackboard.

Photo Journal Assignment (15%) - For this assignment, you are tasked with creating an online photo album capturing your experiences with either: Category A: Natural and Built Environment or Category B:

² Email me with any questions you may have.

³ A more in depth explanation for each of these assignments will be posted to blackboard where applicable..

Plants and Animals. In the album, each picture should be accompanied by a brief annotation of 10-50 words describing the image and the whole album itself must be introduced with a description of 250 words that conveys what the relationship between the images and their relation to the album is. You are also required to write a reflection piece (500 words) that describes and articulates what the album's relationship to the course is and what particular environmental issue/theory it portrays. The platform we will be using is Google Photos.

Poster Presentation (20%) - In this assignment you will create a poster detailing a philosophical topic that we have covered in class. You will not merely layout the argument as described in one of the readings, but rather will contribute your own arguments for or against the subject matter. I will bring in a number of example posters in the first week of class that you can look over in order to get a better idea of what will be expected of you and your poster.

Note: I view this assignment to be one in which you, the student, should feel free to take the Mrs. Frizzle approach - "Take chances, make mistakes, get messy!" This includes both in the construction of your poster, its design, and in the topic of choice and argumentation.

Philosophy Paper (20%) - In this assignment you will write a short philosophy paper on a topic of your choosing. You will take a topic we have discussed in class, and attempt to expand upon it, using philosophical literature, and hopefully some of your own thoughts on the topic. This paper should be between 5-7 pages in length. (Email or otherwise discuss the topic and structure with me first. Topics outside of those discussed in class are welcomed, assuming you have previously invested time thinking about and attempting to understand said topic)

Note: I consider this a more formal assignment, as opposed to the presentation.

Grading Scheme

90-100 = A

80-89 = B

70-79 = C

60-69 = D

0-59 = F

Tentative Course Schedule

Please note that the schedule is subject to change as the term progresses. If as a class we are really feeling a topic, and discussion is excellent I may expand our discussion of it by a couple class periods. This may also happen if a subject would seem to require a couple extra discussion days.

Philosophy 238 Environmental Ethics (Tentative) Schedule Spring 2022
Week 1 Course Introduction

	Monday	Martin Luther King Jr. Day (No Class)
	Wednesday	Syllabus Sandler, What is Environmental Ethics? 1-15
	Friday	Class Introductions
Week 2 Intro to Environmental Ethics		
	Monday	Rolston, Anthropocene!: Beyond the Natural?
	Wednesday	Lynn, 'The historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis'
	Friday	Class Exercise
Week 3 Humans and Environment		
	Monday	Thompson, 'Anthropocentrism: Humanity as Peril and Promise'
	Wednesday	Rowlands, World on Fire, 'Animals, Energy, Land: An Overview'
	Friday	Class Exercise and Intro to Photo Journal
Week 4 Environment and Value		
	Monday	Leopold, 'The Land Ethic' Arne Naess, 'Deep Ecology Movement'
	Wednesday	Taylor, 'Biocentric Egalitarianism' Goodpaster, 'On Being Morally Considerable'
	Friday	Class Exercise
Week 5 Environment and Social Issues		

	Monday	Pulido, 'Flint, Environmental Racism, and Racial Capitalism'
	Wednesday	Warren, 'The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism'
	Friday Photo Journal Assignment Due	Class Exercise and Introduction to Poster Presentation
Week 6 Pollution		
	Monday	Pollution, You are what you breath, and We are all living in Bhopal, (Excerpt from Environmental Ethics Readings in Theory and Application) Plastic Ocean Documentary
	Wednesday	Liboiron, Pollution is Colonialism 'Introduction" and 'Land, Nature, Resource, Property'
	Friday	Class Exercise
Week 7 Climate Change		
	Monday	Rowlands, World on Fire, 'Good Morning Atlantis' Rowlands, World on Fire, 'Welcome to Venus'
	Wednesday	DeConto and Pollard, 'Contribution of Antarctica to past and future sea-level rise' Christopher Flavelle, 'Miami Will Be Underwater Soon: Its Drinking Water Could Go First'
	Friday	Class Exercise
Week 8 Animal Rights and Meat Production		
	Monday	Jonathan Anomaly, 'What's Wrong with Factory Farming?'

		O'Brien, 'Factory Farming and Human Health'
	Wednesday	Environmental Ethics and Agriculture: (Pamphlet) Movie: Food Inc.
	Friday	Class Exercise
Week 9 Spring Break		
	No Class	No Class
	No Class	No Class
	No Class	No Class
Week 10 Industrial Food Production		
	Monday	Pollan, In Defense of Food, 'The Industrialization of Eating'
	Wednesday	Shiva, 'Science and Politics in the Green Revolution'
	Research Paper Introduction PSA Due	Paper Introduction and Work Time
Week 11 Industrial Food Production		
	Monday	Horrigan, 'How Sustainable Agriculture Can Address the Environmental and Human Health Harms of Industrial Agriculture' Johns Hopkins, Center of a Livable Future, 'Industrialization of Agriculture'
	Wednesday	Environmental Ethics and Agriculture (Pamphlet)
	Research Paper Introduction PSA Due	Class Exercise

Week 12 Will Technology Save Us?		
	Monday	Rowlands, World on Fire, 'Salvation Technologies'
	Wednesday	Michael Barnard, 'Carbon capture is expensive because of physics' CI David Murphy and Charles Hall, 'Year in review – EROI or Energy Returned on (Energy) Invested'
	Friday	Class Exercise
Week 13 Alternative Approaches		
	Monday	Gotsch, Perennials (Pamphlet) Fukuoka, One Straw Revolution, (excerpt)
	Wednesday	J-F Bastin et al. (2019) 'The global tree restoration potential' Science 365, 3448, 76-79. Documentary: Syntropic Agroforestry
	Friday	Class Exercise
Week 14 Poster Presentations		
	Monday	Poster Presentations
	Wednesday	Poster Presentations
	Friday	Poster Presentations
Week 15 Poster Presentations		
	Monday	Poster Presentations
	Wednesday	Poster Presentations
	Friday	Poster Presentations