

Course # | Environmental Ethics

Description

This course explores how we ought to value the natural world and what this means for living an ethical life. What makes someone or something—like an animal, a plant, or a mountain—worthy of moral consideration and respect? Do trees have rights? Is a commitment to environmentalism compatible with the capitalist mode of production? What is “environmental racism,” and how might our everyday actions be contributing to it? Is there anything wrong with using genetic engineering technologies to “hack” a rabbit’s genome to create a bioluminescent bunny? Should ethically serious environmentalists support or oppose GMO crops? Is overpopulation a problem, and what should we do about it if it is? Do I have a personal obligation to reduce my carbon footprint even if no one else does? How should governments respond to the problem of climate change? How much can the present generation be expected to sacrifice to improve conditions for future generations? Is ecoterrorism or ecosabotage ever justified? We will consider these and other questions in an effort to understand our responsibilities to people past and present, to other species, and to the natural world.

Assignments

- (1) *Reading Critique*. Sign up to write a 1,000-word critique of a reading from one session of the course. These should both summarize and evaluate the reading. While your evaluations should take a position on the reading—i.e., do you agree or disagree with the author’s thesis?—they should also attempt to situate the article in the wider context of both the course as a whole and the section we are studying at that time. A critique does not necessarily mean the same thing as criticism. Strong criticism can often stand in the way of subtlety and depth. If you decide to be strongly critical, you should be sure to be critical in a way that still does justice to the author’s argument. Moreover, although you are responsible for summarizing the reading, a summary is not the same thing as a “play-by-play” of the reading. A good summary should be able to convey the essence of the reading without giving all the details. Fill in details only insofar as it is necessary to explicate the essential points. The best way to approach these critiques is to think of yourself as the teacher. What should students know from your reading? What questions should they ask about it? Finally, your critique should introduce questions and topics that would be useful and important for the class to take up in discussion. On the day that we cover the reading you critiqued, you should also be prepared both to summarize the reading and to facilitate the class’s discussion of this material: you will become the teacher! Also, if writing on more than one reading, you should feel free either to concentrate entirely on one reading or to write an integrative analysis of all of them. This should be posted to the course site forty-eight hours before the class on which the reading is due to give those who will critique it time to write their critiques.
- (2) *Peer Critique Responses (x2)*: In order further to facilitate productive discussion in class, you will also be responsible for writing two 300-word critiques of your peers’ critiques over the course of the semester. These should evaluate and react to the main arguments that your classmate has made in their critiques. You should answer the following kinds of questions: Do they misunderstand the reading? Do they overstate the author’s case? Do they understate it? Is their disagreement justified? You should email me these critiques before the beginning of the class on which we will cover this reading. This should also be posted to the course site for all to access.
- (3) *Personal Action Projects (x3)*: At three points in the semester, you will be asked to reflect on your personal impact on the environment (eating meat, consuming non-renewable resources, and contributing to climate emissions). For each question, decide whether or what action(s) to take in response to your personal contribution to the environmental harms you participate in and write a short paper explaining your choice. Note that taking “no action” is perfectly fine, but the decision ought to be defended. At the end of the semester, you will reevaluate your choices, again writing a short paper reflecting on this assignment. (300 – 500 words each.)
- (4) *Term Paper*: The major work of this semester is the writing of a term paper between 2,500 and 3,000 words in length on an approved topic. A number of mandatory, interim assignments are designed to help you write this paper:
 - a. 500-word proposal due [date]
 - b. 500-word propositional outline due [date]

- c. Rough draft due [date]
- d. In-class presentations on [date]
- e. Final draft due [date]

Course Texts

1. Keller, David R. 2010. *Environmental Ethics: The Big Questions*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Course Schedule

01. What is Environmental Ethics?

- Routley, “Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?”

Anthropocentrism

02.
 - Aquinas, “Humans as Moral Ends”
 - Bacon, “The Mastery of Nature:”
 - J.S. Mill, “The Amoral Status of Nature”
 - Locke, “Nature as Economic Resource”
 - Beckerman and Pasek, “In Defense of Anthropocentrism”

Moral Considerability

03.
 - Goodpaster, “On Being Morally Considerable”
 - O’Neill, “The Varieties of Intrinsic Value”
 - Stone, “Should Trees Have Standing?”

What We Owe to Animals

04.
 - Singer, “All Animals are Equal”
 - Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights”

Kant and Animal Rights

05.
 - Kant, “Indirect Duties to Nonhumans”
 - Korsgaard, Christine M. 2015. “A Kantian Case for Animal Rights.” In *The Ethics of Killing Animals*, eds. Tatjana Višak, Robert Garner, and Peter Singer. Oxford University Press, 154–77.

Attitudes Toward Nature

06.
 - Thoreau, “Walking”
 - Muir, “The Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West”
 - Passmore, “Attitudes to Nature”

Deep Ecology

07.
 - Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement”
 - McLaughlin, “The Heart of Deep Ecology”
 - Naess, “The Deep Ecology Movement”

The Land Ethic

08.
 - Leopold, “The Land Ethic”
 - Callicott, “Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic”

Anthropocentric Environmentalism

09.
 - Ferré, “Persons in Nature”

- Watson, Richard A. 1983. "A Critique of Anti-Anthropocentric Biocentrism." *Environmental Ethics* 5(3): 245–56.

Social Ecology

- 10.
 - Bookchin, "What Is Social Ecology?"
 - O'Connor, "Socialism and Ecology"

Ecofeminism

- 11.
 - Warren, "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism"
 - Merchant, "Feminism and the Philosophy of Nature"

Environmental Virtue Ethics

- 12.
 - Sandler, "Environmental Virtue Ethics"

Environmental Pragmatism

- 13.
 - Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics"
 - Light, "Methodological Pragmatism, Pluralism, and Environmental Ethics"

Ecological Science and Environmental Ethics

- 14.
 - Diamond, "The Ends of the World as We Know Them"
 - Sagoff, "Environmental Ethics and Ecological Science"

Economics and Environmental Justice

- 15.
 - Rees, "Sustainable Development: Economic Myths and Global Realities"
 - Daly, "Consumption: The Economics of Value Added and the Ethics of Value Distributed"

Regulating Pollution

- 16.
 - Kagan, Shelly. 2011. "Do I Make a Difference?" *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 39(2): 105–41.
 - Tank, Lukas. 2020. "The Unfair Burdens Argument Against Carbon Pricing." *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 37(4): 612–27.

Environmental Racism

- 17.
 - Bullard, "Environmental Justice for All"
 - Wenz, "Just Garbage: The Problem of Environmental Racism"

Endangered Species

- 18.
 - Rolston III, Holmes. 1985. "Duties to Endangered Species." *BioScience* 35(11): 718–26.
 - Panagiotarakou, Eleni. 2016. "Who Loves Mosquitoes? Care Ethics, Theory of Obligation and Endangered Species." *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 29(6): 1057–70.

Population Growth

- 19.
 - Sen, "Population: Delusion and Reality"
 - McKibben, "A Special Moment in History"
 - Bognar, Greg. 2019. "Overpopulation and Procreative Liberty." *Ethics, Policy & Environment* 22(3): 319-330.

Ethical Eating

- 20.
 - Joonathan Rauch (The Atlantic): "Will Frankenfood Save the Planet?"
 - Keller and Brummer, "Putting Food Production in Context: Toward a Postmechanistic Agricultural Ethic"

	Biohacking
21.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Charo, R. Alta, and Henry T. Greely. 2015. “CRISPR Critters and CRISPR Cracks.” <i>The American Journal of Bioethics</i> 15(12): 11–17. ▪ Robert, Jason Scott, and Françoise Baylis. 2003. “Crossing Species Boundaries.” <i>The American Journal of Bioethics</i> 3(3): 1–13.
	Managing Uncertainty and Risk
22.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Kelsey Piper (Vox): “Is climate change an “existential threat” — or just a catastrophic one?” ▪ Kriebel, David et al. 2001. “The Precautionary Principle in Environmental Science.” <i>Environmental Health Perspectives</i> 109(9): 871–76.
	Ethical Issues in Climate Models
23.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Frisch, Mathias. 2013. “Modeling Climate Policies: A Critical Look at Integrated Assessment Models.” <i>Philosophy & Technology</i> 26(2): 117–37. ▪ Cowan, Tyler, and Derek Parfit. 1992. “Against the Social Discount Rate.” In <i>Justice Between Age Groups and Generations</i>, eds. Peter Laslett and James S. Fishkin. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
	Duties to Future Generations
24.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parfit, Derek. 2017. “Future People, the Non-Identity Problem, and Person-Affecting Principles.” <i>Philosophy & Public Affairs</i> 45(2): 118–57. ▪ Kelleher, J. Paul. 2015. “Is There a Sacrifice-Free Solution to Climate Change?” <i>Ethics, Policy & Environment</i> 18(1): 68–78.
25.	Intergenerational Justice
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Heath, Joseph. 2013. “The Structure of Intergenerational Cooperation.” <i>Philosophy & Public Affairs</i> 41(1): 31–66.
26.	The Ethical Responsibilities of Individuals
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Kingston, Ewan, and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong. 2018. “What’s Wrong with Joyguzzling?” <i>Ethical Theory and Moral Practice</i> 21(1): 169–86. ▪ Johnson, Baylor L. 2003. “Ethical Obligations in a Tragedy of the Commons.” <i>Environmental Values</i> 12(3): 271–87.
27.	Responding to Environmental Injustices
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maltais, Aaron. 2013. “Radically Non-Ideal Climate Politics and the Obligation to at Least Vote Green.” <i>Environmental Values</i> 22(5): 589–608.
28.	Ecoterrorism & Eco-sabotage
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foreman, “Earth First!” ▪ Hargrove, “Ecological Sabotage: Pranks or Terrorism?” ▪ Abbey, “Earth First! and the Monkey Wrench Gang” ▪ Foreman, “More on Earth First! and The Monkey Wrench Gang” ▪ Hargrove, “Response”
29.	In-Class Presentations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Peer drafts (x2)
30.	In-Class Presentations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Peer drafts (x2)