

80-244 Environmental Ethics

Professor Nicole Hassoun:

Office Hours: Wednesday 5pm

Location: LT1203

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Description of the Course:

The aim of the course is to provide students with an introduction to environmental ethics. The course will cover topics that should help us assess what the best relationship between humans and the rest of the natural world should be. I hope that by the end of the course you will be able to evaluate the positions presented and defend a position of your own. This is important because everyday each of us face choices about how to interact with our environment and collectively these choices determine the future of the world we live in.

We will begin by considering climate change and what, if anything, we should do about it. We will then look at the general structure of many environmental problems and some possible solutions to these problems. Is making everything private property or creating more laws likely to help? Or is something more radical called for? What kinds of solutions to environmental problems we favor may depend on what we think matters. Should we care about species or ecosystems? Do non-human animals have rights? If animals have rights is it okay to eat meat or have pets? Finally, we will consider environmental ethics from global and local perspectives. What should we do when not everyone agrees that we should preserve the environment? What do we do when protecting animals or plants harms people? To protect the rain-forest, for instance, we must decide what to do with the poor people who live there. And, not only do we have to deal with the affects of conservation and preservation on other humans but we also have to deal with its effects on the environment itself. If we save elephants we may be killing trees and smaller animals. It even seems like some of the underlying principles for saving individuals conflict with those for saving whole communities. If we save ecosystems we are sometimes required to kill individuals and people. Can these issues be resolved and are some ways of resolving the issues morally wrong? How should we resolve environmental conflicts? And, what can all of this tell us about the environmental problems here in Pittsburgh?

By considering what to believe about climate change, animal rights, conservation, and human interaction with the natural world in the present day context, we will work toward developing a strong philosophical perspective to lay the groundwork for dealing with the important environmental issues that confront us everyday.

Conduct of Course:

There will be a reading assignment for every lecture. To facilitate the discussion, it is essential that you come prepared to each class. You should therefore be prepared to give your opinion about the arguments of the assigned readings as well as your preliminary response to the wider questions raised by the readings. Specifically, you should come to classes with a considered view regarding the main thesis of the assigned reading: what is the content of this thesis, what reasons are adduced by the author in defense of this thesis, is the thesis plausible, and is there a better alternative?

You will grade your own participation every day and receive full credit for attendance by doing so. We will also take your self-evaluation into account in assigning your final participation grade. The form is

due at the start of class and must be typed (you can print out an extra if you would like to update your notes). You can miss three participation grades for free or get 3 extra credit points for showing up and participating in all classes. After that, if you want to be excused you must provide appropriate documentation for all missed classes (e.g. a doctor's note). Professionalism is also a part of your participation. This means being punctual, attentive, considerate, and prepared. Because the class is discussion-based I discourage excessive note-taking and, so, ask you to please turn off all electronic devices before class, do not read the newspaper, and be ready to participate. I also expect students to respect others in this classroom.

In addition to class participation, undergraduates will write three papers, do a few short assignments, and do a group presentation. Your participation, performance on the papers and the group presentation will constitute the majority of your grade. The first paper will constitute 15% of your grade, performance on the second will constitute 20%, performance on the third paper will constitute 25% of your grade. The presentation will constitute 20% of your grade. Class attendance, participation, conduct, and/or additional assignments will also constitute 20% of your grade. Assignments must be turned in to: politicalphilosophy@gmail.com I may also ask you to submit another copy of your long writing assignments to turnitin.com

Objectives:

I hope that by the end of this course you will be able to 1) relay and analyze some of the main arguments about environmental ethics in the readings, 2) create, consider objections to, and defend your own views on these important topics orally and in writing, and 3) demonstrate an understanding of how moral and political considerations can shape individuals views on environmental issues.

Academic Integrity:

I really want you to succeed in this class. If you feel like you are not going to do as well as you would like please talk to me and we may be able to arrange something. If you cheat and get caught this may entail such penalties as failure in the class or even dismissal from the university. You are responsible for knowing university policies on cheating and plagiarism available at: <http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents/Cheating.html>. You can also refer to "University Policies" in The Word: Undergraduate Student Handbook.

Keys to Success:

- Attendance – Nationally 85% of students who come to class every day get an A or a B. That is why attendance is required. I also ask that everyone be on time as latecomers disrupt the flow of the class.
- Participation – it may seem obvious that asking questions when you are confused is a good idea, however I understand that it is very difficult for some people to speak in front of others. As this class will concentrate on argumentation it is important to practice giving and critiquing arguments in front of others. Please feel confident that if you are confused there is probably someone else who is also confused. I need to know what is confusing in order to explain it, so please speak up. I have included a 20% incentive to do this.
- Come to my office hours – if you are confused either meet with fellow students who seem to be "getting it" or come and talk to me. I can help you develop better study skills or answer questions for you.

Required Materials:

Because I realize the course materials are expensive, the relevant articles are all online. Many can be found, however, in:

David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willott (Eds.) 2001. *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*. Oxford University Press.

Peter Singer. 2001. *Animal Liberation*. Harper Perennial.

Course Content:

First Topic: Considering the Nature and Causes of our Environmental Problems

January 11th Introduction

January 13th "Introduction to Arguments"

January 18th Introduction to *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*
Argument assignment 1 due

January 27th Introduction to Climate Change and Gardiner, "Ethics and Global Climate Change"

January 20th Shue, "Global Environment and International Inequality"

January 25th Sagoff, "Do we Consume too Much?" (Do the <http://www.myfootprint.org/> quiz and bring your quiz results to class *Argument assignment 2 is also due*)

February 1st How to Write a Paper in Philosophy

February 3rd Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons"

February 8th David Schmidtz, "The Institution of Property"

Second Topic: Meet Your Meat: The Nature of Environmental Value

February 10th Case Study: Salmon in the Pacific Northwest (Check out:

http://www.mbayaq.org/cr/cr_seafoodwatch/sfw_issues.asp)

Presentation drafts due

February 15th Leopold, "The Land Ethic" and Carlson, Excerpts from *Silent Spring*

February 17th Mathews, "Letting the World Grow Old: An Ethos of Countermodernity"

February 22nd Singer, "All Animals are Equal"

February 24th *Case Study: Meet your Meat (Read: Lyman and Merzer, "Mad Cowboy: The Cattle Rancher Who Won't Eat Meat," and Singer, "Down on the Factory Farm" - Ch. 3 from *Animal Liberation*)

March 1st Schmidtz, "Are all Species Equal?"

Paper 1 due: Give one argument for or against preserving (at least one part of) nature?

Third Topic: Saving People vs. Nature

March 3rd Case Study: Smokey Mountain (*Watch a movie TBA)

March 15th *Nickel, "A Human Right to a Safe Environment"

March 17th *Schmidtz, "Natural Enemies an Anatomy of Environmental Conflict"

March 22nd *Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

March 24th *Rolston III, "Feeding People Versus Saving Nature"

March 29th Schmidtz, "When Preservationism Doesn't Preserve"

Paper 2 due: What is the best objection to your argument for or against preserving (at least one part of) nature?

Fourth Topic: How Should We Preserve Nature: Conflict and Environmental Activism

March 31st Rawles, "The Missing Shade of Green"

April 5th Norton, "Fragile Freedoms"

April 7th Norton, "The Environmentalists' Dilemma: Dollars and Sand Dollars"

April 12th Rao, "Women Farmers of India's Deccan Plateau: Ecofeminists Challenge World Elites"

April 19th *Watson, "Tora! Tora! Tora!"

April 21th *Martin Luther King, Letter from a Birmingham Jail and Thoreau, Civil Disobedience

(available here: http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html and

<http://thoreau.eserver.org/civil.html>)

April 26th Thoreau, selections from *Walden* (read: "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," "Solitude,"

and "The Ponds" available here: <http://thoreau.eserver.org/walden00.html>)

April 28th Review

Paper 3 due: What is the best response to the objection you considered to your argument for or against preserving (at least one part of) nature?

*I will attempt to inform you as soon as possible if I make changes to this syllabus.