



Environmental Ethics

Lecturer: Dr. Ofer Margalit

2 lectures per week (1.5-hour lectures twice a week)

3 academic credits.

Course description

This course is an introductory survey of key issues and debates in contemporary environmental ethics and philosophy. It aims to introduce you to some of the main and controversial topics in the field of Environmental Ethics. The course will deal first with the glossary and principles of the definition of ethics. It will cover the historical roots and ideas of the way of thinking that eventually led to the current ecological crisis. We will also read and discuss some central texts in philosophy and especially in environmental philosophy; compare and contrast schools of thought, and explore the interaction of personal, social and political environmental issues. Throughout the course, students will encounter various topics and ethical dilemmas. The main goal of this course is to improve your ability to think critically, and to help you clarify our own values and life choices surrounding these topics.

Key topics include: anthropocentrism vs. ecocentrism, development vs. conservation, animal rights, nature in western and non-western religions, social ecology, Environmental Psychology, Future Generations.

Course expectations

Attendance and active participation

A fundamental requirement for the course is attending and being prepared to participate in class. The class is built equally on the reading materials, lectures, and dialogue. Active participation in discussions, asking thoughtful and meaningful questions, and listening to one another's perspective are core values of this course.

Short personal presentation

In class, students will present a 10–15-minute presentation on a selected environmental ethics theme. In their presentation, students will examine the ethical issue in the perspective of the questions and dilemmas that arise. Those who prefer not to present, have the option of writing an essay instead. More details on this assignment will be given in class.

Final exam

The final exam will be comprised of two essay questions at the end of the semester.

Grading

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| Attendance | 10% |
| Active Participation | 25% |
| Short personal presentation (or short assignment instead) | 25% |
| Exam | 40% |

Readings:

The academic reading materials will be available in Google Docs.

Recommended reading and selected essays from:

Boylan Michael, ed. Environmental Ethics, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

Jamieson Dale. Ethics and the Environment: An Introduction, Cambridge University Press, 2012 (Online publication. Print publication, 2008)

Pojman Louis P., Pojman Paul, McShaine Katie, eds. Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application, Cengage Learning, 2017.

SYLLABUS

Week 1–Introduction to Environmental Ethics

- What is ethics and how do we define an ethical dilemma?
- History of Environmental Ethics
- Course overview, expectations and learning styles

Week 2 - Anthropocentrism, Biocentrism and Ecocentrism

- Deep and shallow ecology
- The Land Ethics
- Speciesism and Carnism

Weeks 3-4 – Three aspects of responsibility

- Introducing the biological, sociocultural, and temporal aspects
- Animal and plants rights
- Are all animals equal?
- Case study: ethics in animal research

Week 5 – The biological aspect of responsibility (religion and modernity)

- Religion and Anthropocentrism (Abrahamic Religions and Indigenous Religions)
- Traditional Native American attitudes toward nature
- Religion in an Age of Environmental Crisis
- Ecofeminism and male-centered society

Weeks 6-7 - The sociocultural aspect of responsibility (environmental justice)

- The rights of the commons
- Spaceship vs. Life Boat models of ethics
- International politics and the tragedy of the commons
- Property and personal responsibility

Week 8 – The temporal aspect of responsibility (Future Generations)

- The rights of those who are not yet to come
- Future generations and the heuristic of fear
- Case study: future generations and population control

Week 9 – Applied Ethics I (Technology and Progress)

- Where are we progressing?
- Technology and its limits
- What is natural and what is artificial?
- Technological Optimism
- Case study: A.I and the future of education

Week 10 – Applied Ethics II (Climate, Consumption and Food Ethics)

- Climate change and the future of food
- The future of food and Genetic Engineering
- Case study: Climate Change and Civil Disobedience
- Guest lecture, Illana Leizin: *"Ethical Design and Consumption"*

Week 11– Eco-phenomenology

- Phenomenology and science
- Eco-phenomenology and virtue ethics
- Emotions and ethical interconnectivity
- Psychological barriers to environmental behavior change

Week 12 – Ethics of care and responsibility

- The moral responsibility of governments and individuals in the context of the coronavirus pandemic
- Secularism, spirituality and the sacred earth

Week 13 –Final Exam

COURSE READINGS (IN THEMATIC ORDER)

The course's weekly reading will include also short ethical dilemmas from current events. They are not presented below.

- Leopold, Aldo (1949). "The Land Ethics" in *A Sand County Almanac*, Oxford University Press.
- Naess, Arne (1985). "Ecosophy: Deep Versus Shallow Ecology," in Michael Tobias (ed.) *Deep Ecology*, Santa Monica, CA publications.
- Joy, Melanie (2009). *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows*, Red Wheel Weiser Conari Press, pp. 11-35.
- Singer, Peter (1974). "All Animals Are Equal," *Philosophic Exchange*, Vol. 5: No. 1, Article 6.
- White, Lynn (1967). "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155, pp. 103-120 .
- Foltz, Richard C., (2003), *Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment*, Cengage Learning; 1st edition pp. 7-16.
- Baier, Annette C. (2015). "The Rights of Past and Future Persons," in *Reflections On How We Live*, Oxford Scholarship.
- Warren, Karen J. (1990). "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism," *Environmental Ethics* 12 (2):125-146.
- Hardin, Garrett (1974). "Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor," *Psychology Today*. Vol. 8. pp. 38–43.
- Lorraine, Elliott (1998). *The Global Politics of the Environment*, Macmillan Publishers, London. pp. 242-257.
- Carton, Wim (2009). *Nature and the Myth of a Sustainable Capitalism*, Aalborg University, Faculty of Development and International Relations (DIR).
- Murdoch, William W., Oaten, Allan (2011). "Population and Food: A Critique of Lifeboat Ethics," in *Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application*. Wadsworth, Boston (6th edition).
- Selwyn, Neil (2019). "AI, Robotics and the Automation of Teaching," in *Should Robots Replace Teachers? AI and the Future of Education*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Guthman, Julie (2010). "Excess consumption or over-production? US farm policy, global warming, and the bizarre attribution of obesity," in Peet et.al. *Global Political Ecology*, Routledge. pp. 51-66.
- Franks, Benjamin. Hanscomb, Stuart. Johnston, Sean F. (2017). *Environmental Ethics and Behavioral Change*, Routledge, pp. 112-125.
- Goodenough, Ursula (1998) *The Sacred Depth of Nature*, Oxford University Press, pp. 167-175.