

PHL 273: Environmental Ethics

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Description

Although it is probably too early to be optimistic, people are increasingly recognizing that humans are the cause of many environmental problems, but we are also capable of remedying them. The problems are many: climate change, species extinction, fresh water loss, glacial melting, ocean acidification, desertification, increased flooding and droughts, and more. At the same time, the twentieth century saw a significant increase in the attention paid to these problems.

This course will survey some of the ethical questions related to the environment: What sorts of things have intrinsic value? Can species be valuable, or even entire ecosystems? What are our obligations to non-human animals? Is eating meat ever morally permissible? What responsibilities do we have to future generations? We will also consider some radical proposals: genetically engineering humans and getting rid of carnivores.

Requirements

At its core, philosophy consists of considering questions, thinking about possible solutions, and communicating one's ideas to others. This course is concerned with *your* ideas regarding the issues we will consider, not merely your ability to communicate what others have written. Experience suggests that this is different from many other subjects.

Some students find this refreshing. There is no need, e.g., to spend long hours in the library (or on the internet) reading books and articles so that your papers have lengthy bibliographies. In fact, you are strongly discouraged from consulting material outside of the course.

In contrast to lots of research, your main requirement for this course is easy to describe: you need to spend lots of time *thinking*. Doing well in this course requires demonstration that you have put considerable effort into the topics we will be considering. Philosophy progresses by communicating ideas to other philosophers, so once you have thought about these questions, the next step is to communicate your thoughts in a clear way. This is the purpose of the papers.

Grading

This is a writing intensive course. The first essay should be around 1,500 words, which is approximately 4–5 pages. The second essay must be no longer than 2,500 words. Please use standard formatting: 1 inch (2.54 cm) margins with 12-point, Times New Roman (or another suitable serif) font. You are strongly discouraged from consulting non-course material for your papers. Late papers will be penalized one letter point per day (e.g., a paper submitted one day late will go from a B to a B–). The final exam will consist mostly of short-answer questions.

Summary	10%
Paper 1	20%
Paper 2	40%
Final Exam	30%

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence which many students commit unintentionally. It is your responsibility to know what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it. In particular, for this course, you are required to give a citation whenever you discuss someone else's work. This is true regardless of whether you directly quote the author or, alternatively, summarize the author's ideas in your own words. This course, and philosophy in general, has no agreed-upon style guide. You can use whichever method you prefer, so long as I can find the relevant passage. Most importantly, *you must provide page numbers*. Here are two examples:

Direct quotation: In the introduction of *Reasons and Persons*, Derek Parfit says “Like my cat, I often simply do what I want to do” (p. ix).

Summarization: In the introduction of *Reasons and Persons*, Derek Parfit describes how he often behaves like his cat by acting in whatever way he wants to (p. ix).

If you are unsure how to properly cite something, consult one of the following sources: [The Writing Centre website](#); [one of the physical writing centres](#); or me, the instructor. For

more information on academic integrity, please consult the [university's webpage](#).

Contacting the Instructor

I will do my best to respond to emails within 24 hours. If you email me, please include the course code in the subject or body of the message. If you are unable to attend my office hour (right before class) we can usually arrange to meet another time either in person or via Skype, Google Hangouts, or some other medium.

Reading Schedule

There is no assigned textbook or reading pack for this course. All of the readings are either available for free online or will be made available on Blackboard.

Reading Schedule

Lecture 1: Introduction to Ethics

- Shelly Kagan, “Consequentialism,” from *Normative Ethics*, pp. 59–69.
- Immanuel Kant, “The Categorical Imperative”.
- Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, chapter 9.

Lecture 2: The Moral Status of Animals

- Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, Chapter 1.
- Tom Regan, excerpt from *The Case for Animal Rights*.
- Peter Carruthers, “Against the Moral Standing of Animals”.

Lecture 3: Eating Animals

- Patrick Hopkins and Austin Dacey, “Vegetarian Meat: Could Technology Save Animals and Satisfy Meat Eaters?” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 21 (2008): 579–96.
- David Foster Wallace, “Consider the Lobster,” from *Consider the Lobster*.

Lecture 4: Intrinsic Value

- Elliot Sober, “Philosophical Problems for Environmentalism,” from *The Preservation of Species*, 173–194.
- Christopher Stone, “Chapter 1,” from *Should Trees Have Standing? Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects*.

Lecture 5: Intrinsic Value

- Ben Bradley, “The Value of Endangered Species,” *Journal of Value Inquiry* 35 (2001): 43–58.
- John Callicott, “On The Intrinsic Value of Nonhuman Species,” from *The Preservation of Species*, 138–172.

Lecture 6: Deep Ecology and Ecocentrism

- Aldo Leopold, excerpt from *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*
- Arne Naess, excerpt from *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*

Lecture 7: Collective Action Problems

- Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, “It’s Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations,” *Advances in the Economics of Environmental Research* 5 (2005): 293–315.

Lecture 8: Future Generations

- Derek Parfit, “Energy Policy and the Further Future: The Identity Problem,” from *Energy and the Future* (1983): 166–179.
- Robin Attfield, “Environmental Ethics and Intergenerational Equity,” *Inquiry* 41:2 (1998): 207–222.

Lecture 9: Future Generations

- Bertram Bandman, “Do Future Generations Have the Right to Breath Clean Air? A Note,” *Political Theory* 10:1 (1982): 95–102.
- Joel Feinberg, “The Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations,” in *Philosophy & Environmental Crisis*, pp. 43–68.

Lecture 10: Having Children and Genetically Enhancing Them

- Sarah Conly, excerpt from *One Child*.
- Liao, Sandberg, and Roache, “Human Engineering and Climate Change,” *Ethics, Policy and Environment*, 15:2 (2012): 206–221.

Lecture 11: Global Commitments

- Henry Shue, “Global Environment and International Inequality,” *International Affairs* 75:3 (1999): 531–545.
- Holmes Rolston, III, “Feeding People versus Saving Nature,” from *World Hunger and Morality*, 248–267.
- Simon Caney, “Cosmopolitan Justice, Responsibility, and Global Climate Change,” *Leiden Journal of International Law* 18 (2005): 747–75.

Lecture 12: Geoengineering and Abolitionism

- Jeff McMahan, “The Meat Eaters,” *The New York Times*, September 19th, 2010.
- George Dvorsky, “The Radical Plan to Phase Out Earth’s Predatory Species,” *io9*, 2014.
- Michael Specter, “The Climate Fixers,” *The New Yorker*, May 14, 2012.