



Environmental Ethics¹

Meeting time / place:
Instructor: Nicolas Delon
Email:
Phone:
Office location:
Office hours:
or by appointment ([link here](#))

Course description

This course is an **introduction** to the ethics of our relations (or lack thereof) with the environment. Covering both the history of environmental and moral thought and current environmental issues, the course is philosophical but draws from a wide range of methods and disciplines. We will discuss fundamental questions pertaining to the value(s) of nature; how different ethical frameworks can address environmental issues; what kinds of things are morally considerable (humans, animals, plants, ecosystems, planet) and what our duties regarding/to them consist in; and the value of species and biodiversity. We will also examine issues relating to intergenerational and transnational justice; global climate change; animal rights; agriculture and food ethics; values across cultures; and intersections between environmental values and social justice.

The **goals of the course** are to provide students with 1) the intellectual tools to make, grasp and evaluate ethical arguments across a variety of domains and practical contexts and to foster their critical reflection on pressing environmental issues; 2) a solid and comprehensive theoretical and empirical background on these issues; and 3) an overview of both classical and recent essential readings. There are **no prior requirements** in philosophy or environmental studies, but students are expected to be willing to confront with a variety of views, concepts, arguments, and controversies. Debates around the issues covered in this course demand rigor, clarity, and critical self-reflection on both conceptual and empirical matters. Class will alternate between lectures, discussion, group exercises and workshops. It is intended to be as interactive as can be reasonably done while providing comprehensive content. Active participation is

¹ This syllabus is subject to change. Please refer to the most up-to-date version available on the course website, check your emails and the website regularly for updates and take note of important information given in class. [Photo credit:](#) Mishka Henner.

therefore required, based on careful analysis and respectful appreciation of others' views. The course will also feature guest speakers, one field trip, and oral group presentations.

Course requirements and evaluation

All assignments must be submitted online.

Grading criteria: Structure and coherence (25%), understanding of references and course-related materials (25%), critical skills, originality (25%), rigor and clarity (25%).

- **Tests** (30%): **2 short quizzes** (multiple-choice and short answer questions) (5% each) and **1 midterm exam** (essay questions) (20%). Tests cover all course materials up until test day. Dates and details TBA.
- **Paper** (20%): A **response paper** (1000-1500 words). Students can choose their own topic but need to consult with me and have it approved early on, or they can choose one of the suggested prompts. A **preliminary outline** will be due at least 3 weeks before the deadline. All students will be required to peer-review two anonymous classmates' outlines online.
 - I will gladly answer all your methodological questions (either briefly by email or more substantially during office hours)
 - *Recommended*: Jim Pryor's guides to philosophical terms and methods, reading philosophy, and writing a philosophy paper, available here:
 - <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/index.html>
 - <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>
 - <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>
- **Collaborative project** (30%): on a specific issue of public concern — students will give a group oral presentation at the end of term (10%) and submit an individual paper (1500-2000 words, plus references) presenting their own contribution to the project (20%). We will discuss the projects and requirements in class. Creative, innovative, multimedia-based formats are encouraged, as is fieldwork.
- **Weekly response** (10%): Each student will closely analyze one week's readings and post a 1-page outline and response (including questions) on the course website **at least 24h before class**; other students are required to post brief comments online.
- **Attendance and participation** (10%):
 - Missing more than one class without permission will negatively impact your grade (you are required to **email me in advance** and bring a note to class). You must arrive on time, consult with me promptly to make up for missed assignments, and you are solely responsible for catching up with missed materials and information.
 - **Active participation** is critical (weekly discussion on course website and class participation). Class activities (debates, policy-making, advocacy, journalism simulations) will be organized.
 - Students will be assessed according to their demonstrated capacity to engage with arguments, verify assertions, research facts, unpack implicit assumptions, and critically examine their own positions.
 - Students must come prepared with their copies of the weekly readings and textbook, personal notes and questions.

- **Extra credit:** Students can earn extra credits by writing a short **critical review** (750-1000 words) of Jamieson, Dale (2013) *Reason in a Dark Time* (Oxford), *and/or* by attending and writing a **report** (750-1000 words) on one of the public events advertised on the website.

Policies

- **Laptops** are allowed **only for note taking**. Please disable your internet connection during class time. **Cell phones** must be silenced and left in your bag. Laptops and other electronic devices will be banned for everyone if they cause any distraction.
- **Academic honesty:** plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will be checked for electronically and may result in failure for the class and referral to an academic dean. They include: copying fragments from any source without quotes or references; not citing every source used in your papers; citing internet information without proper citation; presenting someone else's work as your own; or copying verbatim from any source. See the University policy on Academic Integrity ([link here](#)) and take advantage of the University's writing and research support and tutoring.
- **Lateness/Extensions:** Out of fairness to other students, extensions can only be given in exceptional circumstances AND if requested at least a week in advance.
- If you need **special accommodations** of any sort, please advise me early in the semester.
- The University provides reasonable accommodations to students **who document their disability**. These are adjustments to policy, practice, and programs for students with disabilities and provide equal access to the University's programs and activities. Accommodation plans and other related services are individualized based on each student's disability-related needs, disability documentation and program requirements.

Readings

Readings can be found as pdfs on the course website or via the University electronic resources. Unless otherwise specified, all readings are mandatory. Titles below refer to selections as available in the readings folder. Recommended readings are also available.

The textbook for this class is **Jamieson, Dale (2008), *Ethics and the Environment* (Cambridge)**. Please bring a copy of the readings to class.

Helpful: Gardiner & Thompson (eds.) (2017), *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics*

Schedule²

1. Introduction: Welcome to class!

- Ethical reasoning. Environmental ethics: what, how, why. Outline of the course
- *Recommended reading*: Dale Jamieson, chapter 2

UNIT 1: BACKGROUND

2. Environmental issues and ethical concern

- Dale Jamieson, chapter 1
- Lynn White Jr., The historical roots of our ecological crisis
- Rachel Carson, from *Silent Spring*

3. The place of humans in nature

- **Part 1: Anthropocentrism and nature**
- selections from Aristotle, René Descartes and Francis Bacon
- Charles Darwin, from *On the Origin of Species*
- Richard Routley, Is there a need for a new, an environmental ethic?

- **Part 2: The value of nature and wilderness**
- Dale Jamieson, sec. 6.3-6.4
- John Stuart Mill, from *On Nature*
- Henry David Thoreau, Walking
- John Muir, Hetch Hetchy Valley
- *Elliot, R. Faking nature

4. Moral theory (normative theories; metaethics): the nature of value; what's right, what's good, does anything matter, and what does it all mean?

Group presentations starters

- Dale Jamieson, ch. 3, section 3.5 on intrinsic value, p. 68-75
- Weston, A., Beyond intrinsic value
- *McShane, K., Why environmental ethics shouldn't give up on intrinsic value

UNIT 2: THE LANDSCAPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

5. Challenging anthropocentrism

- **Part 1: Ecocentrism: the land ethic; deep ecology**
- Dale Jamieson, sec. 6.1
- Aldo Leopold, from *A Sand County Almanac*
- *Arne Naess, The basics of deep ecology

- **Part 2: Biocentrism: the inherent value of life**
- Dale Jamieson, sec. 6.2
- Paul Taylor, Biocentric egalitarianism

² The exact schedule will be determined based on the length and frequency of class sessions and on whether the course is Introductory or Advanced (*).

- *Varner, ch. 3 of *In Nature's Interests?*

Further reading

- John Baird Callicott, from *In Defense of the Land Ethic* and *Beyond the Land Ethic*
- Albert Schweitzer, Reverence for life
- Woolf, V. "The Death of the Moth"

6. Part 3: Speciesism and the moral status of animals

- Peter Singer, All animals are equal
- Tom Regan, from *The Case for Animal Rights*
- Lori Gruen, The moral status of animals
- Elizabeth Anderson, Animal rights and the values of nonhuman life

7. The boundaries and basis of moral considerability

Group presentations midpoint review

- Christopher Stone, Should trees have standing?
- Kenneth Goodpaster, On being morally considerable
- Bernard Williams, Must a concern for the environment be centered on human beings?

**Further reading*

- Mark Sagoff, Animal liberation and environmental ethics: bad marriage, quick divorce
- Dale Jamieson, Animal liberation is an environmental ethic

UNIT 3: ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

8. Species, biodiversity, wildlife conservation

- Holmes Rolston III, Biodiversity
- Elliott Sober, Philosophical problems for environmentalism
- Dale Jamieson, sec. 6.5
- Marc Bekoff, Who lives, who dies, and why

**Further reading*

- Russow, L. 1981. Why Do Species Matter?
- Bradley, B. The value of endangered species
- Hourdequin, M. The ethics of ecosystem management

Class meets outdoors! FIELD TRIP (tba)

Debate: what's wrong with killing Cecil the Lion?

9. Anthropocentric preservation, sustainability, population growth

Class activity: tragedy of the commons simulation (pollution; fishing)

- Garrett Hardin, Tragedy of the commons
- Bryan Norton, Environmental ethics and weak anthropocentrism
- *Derek Parfit, Energy Policy and the Further Future

10. Climate change: carbon, science, global justice (I)

Class activity: debating roles — science, values and policy

- Stephen Gardiner, Ethics and climate change
- Naomi Oreskes and Eric Conway, from *The Collapse of Western Civilization*

- Anderson, E., Democracy, public policy, and lay assessments of scientific testimony

11. (*) Climate change: carbon, science, global justice (I)

Class activity: debating roles — science, values and policy

- David Weisbach, selections from Gardiner & Wesibach, *Debating Climate Ethics*
- Simon Caney, Just emissions
- Henry Shue, Global Environment and International Inequality
- D. Jamieson, Climate change, responsibility, and justice

Further reading

- *Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain, Global warming in an unequal world
- IPCC, 2014: Summary for Policymakers. In: Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

12. Food, animals and the environment: factory farming, humane farming, fishing

- Lori Gruen, Eating animals
- Jonathan Safran Foer, from *Eating Animals*
- Peter Singer and Jim Mason, from *The Ethics of What We Eat*
- Jennifer Jacquet, Silent Water

13. Justice and intersections: nations, culture, race, gender

- **Part 1: Justice and diversity**
- Dale Jamieson, sec. 7.2
- Sheila Foster and Luke Cole, Environmental racism
- Mark Dowie, Conservation refugees
- **Part 2: Ecofeminism**
- Carolyn Merchant, from *The Death of Nature*
- Karen Warren, Feminism and ecology: making connections

**Further reading*

- Ramachandra Guha, Radical American environmentalism and wilderness preservation: A Third World critique
- Vandana Shiva, Women and the gendered politics of food

14. Nature and technology

Class activity: predicting, writing, creating the future

- James McWilliams, from *Just Food*
- Paul B. Thompson, Genetically modified foods: ethical issues
- *S. Gardiner, Is Arming the Future with Geo-engineering Really the Lesser Evil?
- *D. Jamieson, Energy, ethics, and the transformation of nature

CONCLUSION

15. Living and dying in the Anthropocene

Group presentations

- Dale Jamieson, Life in the Anthropocene
- Roy Scranton, Learning how to die in the Anthropocene
- Diane Ackerman, from *The Human Age*