

# Environmental Ethics

Spring 2024

PHIL-155 | TR 9:25 – 10:40 AM | Maybank 100

Instructor: Nicolas Delon Office: 14 Glebe St, #302

Pronouns: He/Him Office Hours: [ndelon.youcanbook.me](https://ndelon.youcanbook.me/)

Contact: delonn@cofc.edu

This is an introduction to the ethics of our relations to the environment. It is philosophical but draws from a 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 global justice; climate change; animal rights; agriculture and food ethics; values across cultures; and intersections between environmental values and social justice.

### Course Objectives

To provide students with 1) the intellectual tools to make, grasp and evaluate ethical arguments across a domains and practical contexts and to foster their critical reflection on environmental issues; 2) a solid and comprehensive theoretical and empirical background on these issues; and 3) an overview of both classical and recent readings. No background in philosophy or environmental studies is required, but students must be willing to confront with a variety of views, concepts, arguments, and controversies. Rigor, clarity, and critical self-reflection will be key. Class will alternate between short lectures, discussion, and group activities. It is intended to be interactive while providing comprehensive content.

### Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

At the end of this class, students should be able to:

* distinguish, define, and discuss the main theories of environmental ethics (anthropocentrism, ecocentrism, biocentrism, sentientism) and important concepts (e.g., nature, ecosystem, conservation, biodiversity, moral status, intrinsic value, climate change, environmental justice);
* incorporate course materials and essential arguments into their written work;
* critically evaluate discussions of environmental issues from an ethical standpoint;

*GenEd Humanities SLOs*

1. Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture. [weekly assignments, essay questions]
2. Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the humanities area under study and interpret the material in writing assignments (or alternatives that require equally coherent and sustained analysis). [weekly assignments, essay questions]

### Required Texts, Equipment, Technology

The textbook for this class is **Jamieson, Dale, *Ethics and the Environment* (Cambridge, 2008)**.It is available [online through the library](https://pascal-cofc.library.cofc.edu/permalink/01PASCAL_COFC/bkrgbh/alma991010421079705613). You don’t need to purchase a copy though you are welcome to (plenty of cheap used copies on Amazon). A revised edition is due to come out soon too late for this class. Other readings will be available on OAKS. Do not hesitate to seek guidance for further reading.

OAKS, including Gradebook, will be used for this course throughout the semester to provide the syllabus and class materials and grades for each assignment, which will be regularly posted.

Laptop use is strongly discouraged. Cellphones must be silenced and left in your bag. Electronic devices cause serious distractions for yourself and others and are normally not needed for class meetings unless necessary for notetaking. If you can spare it, it’s much better for everyone. Handouts will be provided regularly, and slides made available after class. You will need a computer or smartphone for some class activities. I will notify you in advance in such cases.

For reading and writing purposes, Jim Pryor (NYU) offers valuable guidance on his website:

* Philosophical terms and methods (<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/index.html>)
* Reading philosophy (<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>)
* Writing a philosophy paper (<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>)

### Course Policies

**Lateness/Extensions**: Out of fairness to other students and out of concern for my schedule, plan ahead and advise early if you anticipate that you will be unable to complete an assignment in time. Extensions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances **and** if requested early. As a rule, do not count on extensions as they will only be granted on a case-by-case basis. “Technical issues” will not normally be accepted as excuses (again, plan ahead).

Please refer to the course schedule for deadlines. You are expected to complete assignments unless they are marked as optional. Most of the assignments should be submitted on OAKS. Don’t wait until the last minute to submit in case you face technical issues, and always save and back up your drafts. Don’t write in OAKS first; draft, save, and back up on cloud-based storage, then copy/upload to OAKS.

**Expectations:** As a student, you are expected to read all assigned material before class, attend class, take notes, and review them in-between class meetings, participate in discussions, and complete assignments on-time. Check your email and OAKS regularly for announcements. You are responsible for knowing material covered in the assigned readings even if the material is not presented during class. Likewise, you are responsible for material covered during class (including discussions and activities) even if it is not covered in the assigned readings. Please seek help from me or your classmates and never hesitate to ask questions, consult campus resources for assistance. Needing help is expected and there are no silly questions. Silly is not asking questions when you need to.

**Time, food, and attire etiquette**. Please be in class on time. I will start class promptly and may turn away students who casually come to class significantly late without prior notice. Take bathroom/water breaks between classes if you can, otherwise be quiet and respectful. You may drink water in class, but please only consume food if you really can’t have lunch before class. If you do eat, be mindful of others. If you’re late and carrying coffee, you probably could have been on time. Don’t leave class early unless previously authorized.

### Evaluation

I use a standard grading scheme:

A 93-100%

A- 90-92

B+ 87-89

B 83-86

B- 80-82

C+ 77-79

C 73

C- 70-72

D 60-69

F 0-60

I use a balance of criteria to grade your work:

1. form (structure, rigor, precision, clarity)
2. understanding and application of references and material (accurate, precise, detailed discussion)
3. critical skills (analysis, arguments, objections, persuasion)
4. originality (going beyond a mere restatement of lectures and readings)

Papers and exams are graded with the grading shorthand that I will make available in OAKS.

### Assignments

* **Tests** (70%): **three quizzes** (multiple-choice questions) (10% each), **a midterm exam** (20%), and **a final exam** (20%). Tests cover all materials up to test day. The exams will be a mix of multiple-choice and short essay questions.
* *Both of the following require doing the readings before class:*
	+ **Weekly activities** (20%): Reading questions, annotations, and discussion posts.
	+ **Participation** (10%): (online and in class) Come prepared. I will assess your efforts to engage with arguments, verify assertions, research facts, unpack implicit assumptions, critically examine your positions, and work with the class with mutual respect and dedication. It’s understandable that some of you are shyer than others, and less willing to speak their mind in class. You should contribute to OAKS discussions and come to office hours. Please feel welcome to express yourself as long as you do so respectfully.

### Attendance Policy

No more than three classes without permission/documented excuse will be allowed. I will do my best to accommodate you. If possible, bring documentation. Email me **before missing class whenever possible (if not, ASAP after class)**. You are solely responsible for catching up with missed materials and pertinent information. Ask your classmates for notes. Don’t ask me if you missed anything important.

Only students officially registered (graded or auditing) for this course may attend class. During the week following the drop/add deadline, I will verify student enrollments in this course. Any student appearing on the class roll but determined not to have attended the class even once will be removed, except for cases where a student is absent because of quarantine or isolation due to illness.

### Academic Integrity Policy Statement

*As members of the College of Charleston community, we affirm, embrace and hold ourselves accountable to the core values of integrity, academic excellence, liberal arts education, respect for the individual student, diversity, equity and inclusion, student centeredness, innovation and public mission. Congruent with these core values, the College of Charleston expects that every student and community member has a responsibility to uphold the standards of the honor code, as outlined in the* [*Student Handbook,*](https://deanofstudents.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php) *In pursuit of academic learning, you are expected to reference the work of other scholars, and complete your own academic work, while utilizing appropriate resources for assistance. Any acts of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students and addressed through the conduct process. Your adherence to these practices and expectations plays a vital role in fostering a campus culture that balances trust and the pursuit of knowledge while producing a strong foundation of academic excellence at the College of Charleston. Any questions regarding these expectations can be clarified by your instructor.*

### Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

The College of Charleston is committed to providing access and inclusion for all persons with disabilities. Students with disabilities who anticipate or experience disability-related barriers in the academic setting should notify their professor, and also initiate contact with the [Center for Disability Services (CDS)](https://disabilityservices.cofc.edu/) to move forward with the college’s established accommodation process (email: snap@cofc.edu; phone: 843-953-1431; location: Lightsey Center 104). Students already connected with CDS for academic-related accommodations should share their Professor Notification Letter (PNL) with each professor as early in the semester as possible so that accommodations can be made in a timely manner. The PNL informs faculty of potential course access and accommodations that might be necessary and reasonable. It is the student’s responsibility to follow this process each semester.

### Inclement Weather, Pandemic or Substantial Interruption of Instruction

If in-person classes are suspended, faculty will announce to their students a detailed plan for a change in modality to ensure the continuity of learning. All students must have access to a computer equipped with a web camera, microphone, and Internet access. Resources are available.

### Permissible use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI)

In this class, we may use generative artificial intelligence (GAI) writing tools such as ChatGPT. I will inform you as to when, where, and how these tools will be permitted for use, along with guidance for referencing. Any use outside of this permission constitutes a violation of the CofC Honor Code.

There are a variety of GAI programs available to assist writers, yet such tools must not replace human creativity, originality, and critical thinking. However, within limited circumstances, and with proper referencing, GAI programs may be used as a tool per the guidance/instructor of your professor.

The use of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) tools is permitted as a resource and starting point in this course, and may be used for brainstorming, outlining, generating ideas, and collecting information about the basic understanding of a topic/idea. All uses of GAI must be cited and have appropriate documentation and references. Failure to do so constitutes an Honor Code violation and will be reported to the Honor Board. If you use GAI, be **explicit and reflective** about it in your work. Note that I have allowed the use of GAI in previous classes: it shows and does not yield the best results.

### The Center for Student Learning

The [CSL](https://csl.cofc.edu/) offers academic support services for most College classes in a centralized location in the Addlestone Library. Services include drop-in and by appointment tutoring, SI (Supplemental Instruction), and academic coaching, offered at no additional charge for CofC students. Peer educators—recommended by faculty and trained by CSL staff—comprise the bulk of the staff, and as one of the largest student employers on campus, the CSL can offer on-campus employment to 130+ qualified students each year. All students are encouraged to visit, call, or email the CSL at the start of each semester to discuss which academic support services align with their current course schedule; they can also request a Personalized Resource Plan.

### Mental & Physical Wellbeing

The College takes each student’s mental and physical wellbeing seriously. If you find yourself experiencing physical illnesses, please reach out to student health services (843.953.5520). And if you find yourself experiencing any mental health challenges (for example, anxiety, depression, stressful life events, sleep deprivation, and/or loneliness/homesickness) please consider contacting either the Counseling Center (professional counselors at CofC Counseling Center or 843.953.5640 3rd Floor of Robert Scott Small Building) or the Students 4 Support (certified volunteers through texting "4support" to 839863, or meet with them in person 411 (4th Floor) Stern Center). Learn more about Students 4 Support on CofC’s Hub. These services are there for you to help you cope with difficulties you may be experiencing and to maintain optimal physical and mental health.

### Food & Housing Resources

Many CofC students report experiencing food and housing insecurity. If you are facing challenges in securing food (such as not being able to afford groceries or get sufficient food to eat every day) and housing (such as lacking a safe and stable place to live), please contact the Dean of Students for support (SALT - Student Affairs Leadership Team). Also, you can go to Student Food and Housing Insecurity to learn about food and housing assistance that is available to you. In addition, there are several resources on and off campus to help. You can visit the Cougar Pantry in the Stern Center (2nd floor), a student-run food pantry that provides dry-goods and hygiene products at no charge to any student in need. Please also consider reaching out to Professor ABC if you are comfortable in doing so.

### Safe Environment

CofC is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination, including sexual harassment and violence (i.e. sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, and gender or sex-based bullying and stalking). If you have experienced discrimination or harassment, help and support are available. CofC employees, other than designated confidential resources, must report information they receive about prohibited discrimination, including sexual harassment and sexual violence. This means that if you tell me about a situation involving sexual harassment, sexual violence, discrimination, or harassment, I must share the information with the Title IX Coordinator. You may speak to someone confidentially by contacting the Office of Victim Services at 843-953-2273, Counseling Center at 843-953-5640, or Student Health Services at 843-953-5520. You can also report any sexual misconduct or discrimination, or learn more about your options and resources, by contacting the Office of Equal Opportunity Programs at 843-953-5754.

### Religious Accommodation for Students

The College acknowledges that religious practices differ from tradition to tradition and that the demands of religious observances in some traditions may cause conflicts with student schedules. In affirming this diversity, like many other colleges and universities, the College supports the concept of “reasonable accommodation for religious observance” in regard to class attendance, and the scheduling of examinations and other academic work requirements, unless the accommodation would create an undue hardship on the College. Faculty are required, as part of their responsibility to students and the College, to ascribe to this policy and to ensure its fair and full implementation.

# Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change. Check OAKS regularly for updates.

A : Tuesday readings / B : Thursday readings. Readings are to be done before the date of the class in the schedule. For instance, on Tuesday, January 16, we will cover chapters 1 and 2 of Jamieson’s textbook.

| **Week #** | **Topics** | **Readings** | **Assignments** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Unit 1: Historical and theoretical background** |
| **1** | Introductions |  | Read syllabusCheck out OAKS |
| **2** | Environmental issues and ethical concern | A. Jamieson, ch. 1-2B. Carson, from *Silent Spring* | **Annotations** |
| **3** | The place of humans in nature: Anthropocentrism | A. Merchant, Dominion over natureB. Routley, Is there a need for a new, an environmental ethic? | **Discussion** |
| **4**  | The place of humans in nature: The value of nature | A. Jamieson, ch.6, § 3-4B. Thoreau, Walking Muir, Hetch Hetchy Valley | **Annotations** |
| **5**  | Moral theory: the nature of value; right, good, and other concepts | A. Jamieson, ch. 3B. Jamieson, ch. 4 |  |
| **Unit 2: Theories of environmental ethics** |
| **6**  | Challenging anthropocentrism1. Ecocentrism | Jamieson, ch. 6, §1Leopold, from *A Sand County Almanac* | **Quiz** |
|  | 2. Biocentrism | Jamieson, ch. 6, §2Taylor, from *Respect for Nature* | **Reading questions** |
| **8** | 3. Sentientism | A. Singer, All animals are equalRegan on animal rightsB. Jamieson 6.5. on conflicts | **Discussion****Midterm** |
| **Unit 3: Environmental issues** |
| **9** | Species, biodiversity, conservation | A. [*Environmental Biology*](https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/envirobiology/part/chapter-5-conservation-biodiversity/), chap. 5Russow, Why do species matter?B. The spotted own controversySandler, The ethics of reviving long extinct species | **Discussion** |
| **10**  | Public goods and commons***Public goods game*** | A. Hardin, Tragedy of the commons B. Ostrom et al. on commons | **Annotations** |
| **11**  | Climate change: Science and values | A. Anderson, Democracy, public policy, and lay assessments of scientific testimonyB. McKinnon, Should we tolerate climate change denial?**OPT**: IPCC, Sixth Assessment Report | **Quiz** |
| **12**  | Climate change: Justice | A. Gardiner, A perfect moral stormB. Shue, Global Environment and International Inequality | **Annotations** |
| **13** | Climate change: Nonhumans | A. McShane, Anthropocentrism is climate ethics and policyB. Palmer, Saving Species but Losing Wildness: Should We Genetically Adapt Wild Animal Species to Help Them Respond to Climate Change? | **Discussion** |
| **14** | Food, animals, and the environment | Schlottman and Sebo, *Food, Animals, and the Environment* (selections) | **Quiz** |
| **15** | Individual and Collective responsibilities | A. Martin, Factory Farming and Consumer ComplicityJamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, ch. 5B. Cripps, Do parents have a special duty to mitigate climate change?Schwenkenbecher, Why Business Firms Have Moral Obligations to Mitigate Climate Change | **Discussion** |
| **16** | Fear, grief, love, and hope | A. McShane, Loving an Unfamiliar World: Dementia, Metal Illness, and Climate ChangeLeboeuf, Fearing the Future: Is Life Worth Living in the Anthropocene?B. Jamieson, Loving nature | **Final exam** |