

**Environmental Ethics**

Fall 2023

PHIL-155 | MWF 1:00 - 1:50 PM | ECTR 111

Instructor: Nicolas Delon Office: 14 Glebe St, 302

Pronouns: He/Him Office Hours: MW 10:00-11:30 AM or by appt

Contact: delonn@cofc.edu

Classes are held in-person. If a session is held on Zoom, the recording will remain available for the term.

Course Description

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. Active participation is required, allowing for careful analysis and respectful appreciation of others’ views.

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, group project]
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). [essay, group project]

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) and will be on 4-hour loan in the [course reserve](https://pascal-cofc.library.cofc.edu/discovery/search?query=any,contains,PHIL-155&tab=CourseReserves&search_scope=CourseReserves&vid=01PASCAL_COFC:COFC&offset=0). You don’t need to purchase a copy. Other readings will be available on OAKS. The course reserve also includes *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics*, a very helpful resource for your research. Do not hesitate to seek guidance before looking for further reading.

Course Policies

**Electronics.** Laptop use is 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.

**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.

Course Assignments

**Evaluation criteria**: a balance of structure and coherence, understanding of references and course-related materials, critical skills and originality, and rigor and clarity. Papers and exams are graded with the grading shorthand available in OAKS.

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>)

**Assignments**

* **Tests** (30%): **3 short quizzes** (multiple-choice questions) (5% each) and **1 take-home midterm exam** (essay questions) (15%). Tests cover all materials up until test day.
* **Paper** (25%): An essay (1,500-2,000 words) due between the exam and the final group project. On a topic of your choice after consulting with me. The essay must include at least: a thesis, a roadmap, sections, arguments for the thesis, at least one objection to it (and a reply), and at least two academic references. Midway checkpoints: preliminary outline and/or draft of the introduction, peer-reviewed anonymously by a classmate.The assessment will cover all stages of the writing process.I will provide detailed instructions during the semester.
* **Collaborative project** (25%): Groups of 4-5 students will work from Weeks 8-14 on an aspect of environmental ethics not covered in class and present their work together at the end of term (brief oral presentation with slideshow or poster) (15%) and each students will submit a short individual reflection on their contribution (10%). Innovative, multimedia-based, field-based projects also welcome.
* **Weekly activities** (10%): Reading comprehension questions, annotations, and discussion posts.
* **Participation** (10%): (online and in class) Come prepared with the readings and notes. 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, concern and dedication. It’s understandable that some of you are shyer than others, and less willing to speak their mind in class. I generally don’t call on students, but I will kindly ask the most talkative to enable the less talkative to partake. You should also take the opportunity to chime in on OAKS discussions. There is no such thing as a silly question (unless it’s obviously answered in the syllabus), a view that is not worth sharing simply because it’s not popular, or an authorized point of view that students should take. Please feel welcome to express yourself as long as you do so respectfully, in good faith, and following course policies and etiquette.

**Grading Scale**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| A | Superior | 4.00 |
| A- |  | 3.70 |
| B+ | Very Good | 3.30 |
| B | Good | 3.00 |
| B- |  | 2.70 |
| C+ | Fair | 2.30 |
| C | Acceptable | 2.00 |
| C- |  | 1.70 |
| D+ |  | 1.30 |
| D | Passing | 1.00 |
| D- |  | 0.70 |
| F | Failure | 0.00 |

Attendance Policy

No more than three classes without permission/documented excuse will be allowed. Missing classes mechanically affects your participation grade. That said, there are good reasons to miss a class, in which case your performance will not be negatively affected. 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.

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.

OAKS

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.

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 to provide students with these essential tools.

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.

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.

Attendance Verification

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 COVID-19.

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**

| **DATE** | **Topics** | **Readings** | **Assignments** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Unit 1: Historical and theoretical background** |
| **Week 1**8/23 – 27 | IntroductionsEnvironmental ethics: what, how, why? | Jamieson, Living with climate changeScranton, Learning how to die in the Anthropocene |  |
| **Week 2**8/28 – 9/1 | Environmental issues and ethical concern | Jamieson, ch. 1-2Carson, from *Silent Spring*Lynn White Jr., The historical roots of our ecological crisis | **Annotations** |
| **Week 3**9/4 – 8 | The place of humans in nature: Anthropocentrism | Descartes, *Discourse*, pt. 6Merchant, Dominion over natureDarwin, selectionsRoutley, Is there a need for a new, an environmental ethic? | **Reading questions** |
| **Week 4**9/11 – 15  | The place of humans in nature: The value of nature | Jamieson, sec. 6.3-6.4Mill, *On Nature* Thoreau, Walking Muir, Hetch Hetchy Valley | **Reading quiz****Annotations** |
| **Week 5**9/18 – 22  | Moral theory: the nature of value; right, good, and other concepts | Jamieson, sec. 3.5 & pp. 68-75McShane, Why environmental ethics shouldn’t give up on intrinsic valueHourdequin and Wong, A relational approach |  |
| **Unit 2: Theories of environmental ethics** |
| **Week 6**9/25 – 29  | Challenging anthropocentrism1. Ecocentrism
 | Jamieson, sec. 6.1Leopold, from *A Sand County Almanac* |  |
| **Week 7**10/2 – 6  | 1. Biocentrism
 | Jamieson, sec. 6.2Taylor, from *Respect for Nature*Stone, Should trees have standing? Woolf, The Death of the Moth | **Reading questions** |
| **Week 8**10/9 – 13  | 1. The moral status of animals
 | Singer, All animals are equalRegan on animal rightsCallicott, Animal liberation: A triangular affairJamieson on conflicts | **Reading questions****Essay topic****Midterm** |
| **Unit 3: Environmental issues** |
| **Week 9**10/18 – 20 | Species, biodiversity, conservation | Rolston, BiodiversitySober, Philosophical problems for environmentalismJamieson, sec. 6.5Bekoff, Who lives, who dies  | **Fall break – No class on Monday****Quiz 2** |
| **Week 10**10/23 – 27  | Public goods, anthropocentric preservation***Public goods game*** | Hardin, Tragedy of the commons Ostrom et al. on commonsNorton, Environmental ethics and weak anthropocentrism | **Annotations** |
| **Week 11**10/30 – 11/3  | Climate change: Science and values***Science, values, policy*** | Oreskes & Conway, *The Collapse of Western Civilization*Anderson, Democracy, public policy …**OPT**: IPCC, Sixth Assessment Report | **Essay draft** |
| **Week 12**11/6 – 10  | Climate change: Justice | Gardiner, A perfect moral stormShue, Global Environment and International Inequality Agarwal and Narain |  |
| **Week 13**11/13 – 17  | Food, animals, and the environment | Gruen, Eating animals Jacquet et al on bivalves | **Quiz 3****Annotations** |
| **Week 14**11/20 | Nature and technology***Writing the future*** | McWilliams, from *Just Food*Thompson, Genetically modified foods Shiva on cash cropsGardiner, Is Arming the Future with Geo-engineering Really the Lesser Evil? | **Essay due****Thanksgiving****No classes WF** |
| **Week 15**11/27 – 12/1  | Environmental and social issues: Justice and diversity | Bullard on environmental justiceGuha, Radical American environmentalism and wilderness preservationDowie, Conservation refugees | **Group projects** |
| **Week 16**12/4 | Environmental and social issues: Ecofeminism | Warren, Feminism and ecology Kheel, The liberation of nature | **Group projects**Last class Monday |