Introduction to Environmental Ethics
Philosophy 235
Monday & Wednesday, 4:00 - 5:30PM, Psychology 249

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Course Description: This course is a general survey of environmental ethics. We will address a range of ethical issues surrounding animal rights, biocentrism, climate change, future generations and sustainability, species extinction, and wilderness protection.

Prerequisite(s): There are no formal prerequisites. However, if you have never taken a philosophy course, I strongly urge you to read the first two chapters of the VanDeVeer and Pierce reader cited below. Students should also be: curious about ethics and the environment, willing to learn not just from their instructor, but also from their classmates, committed to thinking philosophically, reading carefully, and writing clearly, ready to participate in the classroom both as an active listener and a thoughtful speaker, and prepared to work hard!

Course Objectives: By the end of the semester you should (in order of importance):

1. better understand what philosophy is and believe more fully that it is a worthwhile human pursuit, even if everyone doesn’t pursue it to the same degree. (It’d be great if a few of you decided that you wanted to pursue it more yourselves. But you don’t have to love something in order to value it, and my primary goal is that you value philosophical activity.),
2. have a clearer idea of people’s moral obligations with respect to the environment,
3. become a better critical thinker and a more skillful interlocutor; you should, for example, be prepared to distinguish a claim from an argument and a sound argument from a fallacious one; you should also know how to read a philosophical text, write an argumentative essay, and engage in a patient and charitable ethical discussion,
4. be familiar with the texts, arguments, and ideas that we have encountered in class.

Grades and Requirements: I have designed the assignments and the grading procedures to foster the development of the skills just mentioned in the course objectives. With that said, I recognize that students have different skills and learn in different ways. Hence I have tried to ensure that your grades depend on a good mix of assignments. Assignments add up to 100 points and grades will be assigned based on the usual WUSTL rubric (i.e. 100-94 = A, 93-90 = A-, 89-87 = B+, 86-84 = B, 83-80 = B-, and so on). Pass/fail students must achieve 75 points in order to pass.
Quizzes: (skills: reading, thinking). To prepare for our discussions, we need to study the readings carefully. Try to outline what the author’s main claim is, what her principal reasons for that claim are, what alternative position(s) she considers, and the reason(s) why she does not adopt those alternatives. To reward you for doing this work, there will be seven unannounced quizzes during the course of the semester. Each quiz will comprise four true-false or multiple-choice questions about the required reading for that day’s class. Each question will count for one point, and your top five quiz scores will count toward your final quiz grade. 20 points

Class Participation: (skills: presenting orally, thinking) The class will proceed largely by discussion. Everyone is expected to raise questions (about the issues, about the reading, about what someone else in the class said), to offer possible answers to any such questions, and to point to the text both in asking and answering questions. I will keep track of participation, and I will reward those who participate regularly with especially succinct, clear, and stimulating remarks and questions. Conversely, I will penalize those who fail to participate regularly or whose participation falls short of expected succinctness, clarity, and stimulation. Quality counts more than quantity. Also, though I doubt I will need to invoke this, I reserve the right to penalize even more harshly anyone who manages to disrupt the classroom. Causes of disruption include arriving late or departing early (without first clearing it with me), talking without being recognized during class, having a computer or other electronic device on during the class, having a cellular phone or other electronic device beep or ring during class, or otherwise engaging in activities other than attending to class during class. Also, although I prefer to have the discussion proceed voluntarily, I will sometimes call on students unprompted, and an inability to address the issues at hand will be noted. 20 points

Short Essays: (skills: writing, thinking) Each week, I will select at least one question, based on the discussions in class. These questions will be distributed by email Wednesday afternoon. If you are interested in one of these questions and have the time, you should write an essay addressing it, and submit the essay to me via email by noon the following Monday. (If you especially would like to write on a particular question, you should raise it in class. If the question only occurs to you after Wednesday’s class, email me to clear the question.) You must complete two short essays. The last date to submit your first essay is October 14; and the last date to submit your last essay is December 2. But you are strongly encouraged not to submit your essays on these days, but to write your essays when you have the time and interest to write well. Each essay, worth 15 points, should be between 900 and 1200 words in length (shorter or longer essays are subject to penalties) and will be assessed in accordance with the guidelines appended to this syllabus. Because everyone has choices about when to submit their essays, there will be no excuses for tardy submissions. Any essay that is late will be penalized by 2 points for every 24 hours or fraction thereof. 30 points

Long Essay: (skills: writing, thinking) The long essay should be between 2000 and 2400 words. You may write on any of the topics we cover in class, but you should clear your topic with me no later than November 25. You may use the final essay to revise and extend one of your short essays if you choose. The long essay must be sent to me via email before class begins on December 4 (the
last day of class). Any essay that is late will be penalized by 2 points for every 24 hours or fraction thereof. 20 points

Blogging: (skills: thinking, writing, discussing) Each week I will post the essay questions on a course blog on Blackboard. Students who are not writing an essay can participate in a discussion on these questions. Blog posts must be made before class by the following Monday. I will grade blog participation much like I grade class discussion; that is, I will reward those who contribute especially succinct, clear, and stimulating remarks and questions, and I will penalize people who are disruptive, unclear, or off-topic. Note that your posts should be contributions to a discussion. Hence at the very least (unless you are the first poster) you should acknowledge the arguments made by previous posters and explain how your post relates to their arguments. I expect each of you to contribute to at least two blogs during the semester (for five points each), but you may contribute as often as you like and I will count your two best posts toward your final grade. 10 points

On Plagiarism: Any student who submits work that does not conform to the University policy on academic integrity, printed in the Course Listings, will automatically fail the course, and will be subject to University disciplinary action. Each assignment you turn in must be your own work, and it must have been written specifically for this class. This should not be difficult, as you should not be doing extra research on any of these assignments. If you feel you must read other sources, be sure to cite them for any point you borrow (even when you have thoroughly paraphrased the point). To fail to cite sources for their points is one way of plagiarizing.

Cornerstone: I am committed to fostering an inclusive learning environment. If a disability or medical issue is affecting your academic performance, please be aware that there is an official, university-wide disability resources office to help you register and receive accommodations. Washington University’s Disability Resources is part of Cornerstone: The Center for Advanced Learning. Its staff determines and coordinates accommodations for “learning, attention, visual, hearing, psychiatric, mobility, and medical issues.” If you have a disability or suspected disability and need accommodations, you must initiate the registration process with Disability Resources directly as soon as possible. Services include, but are not limited to: learning accommodations (e.g., notetakers, reduced course loads); testing accommodations (e.g., extended time, use of a computer for essay exams, reduced distraction test location); access accommodations (e.g., physically accessible classroom, physically accessible residence hall room). Registering for Disability Resources is a confidential process; (unless you choose) I will not be told the reason for accommodations. Please visit disability.wustl.edu for more information, or speak with me if you have additional concerns.

Text(s): Just one required text has been ordered at the Mallinckrodt bookstore.


Most of the required readings are chapters in this volume, and are listed as such in the syllabus, with the abbreviation ’VP’ and the chapter number. The remaining required readings are (or shortly will be) available as pdf files on the course’s Blackboard site, abbreviated below as ’BB.’
Syllabus of Readings:

Wed 8/28 Introduction

The Anthropocentric Tradition
Mon 9/2 Labor Day
Wed 9/4 White, “The Historic Roots of our Ecological Crisis” (VP 4)

Expanding the Circle – Animals
Wed 9/11 Singer, “Animal Liberation” (VP 15)
Mon 9/16 Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights” (VP 16)
Wed 9/18 Cohen, “The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research” (BB)
Mon 9/23 VanDeVeer, “Interspecific Justice” (VP 17)

Expanding the Circle – Beyond Animals
Wed 9/25 Goodpaster, “On Being Morally Considerable” (VP 22)
Mon 9/30 Stone, “Should Trees Have Standing?” (VP 23)
Mon 10/7 Rolston III, “Why Species Matter” (VP 67)
Wed 10/9 Taylor, “The Ethics of Respect for Nature” (VP 24)
Mon 10/14 Leopold, “The Land Ethic” (VP 25)
Callicott, “The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic” (VP 26)

The Environment and the Market
Wed 10/16 Freeman, “The Ethical Basis of the Economic View of the Environment” (VP 39)
Mon 10/21 Goodin, “Selling Environmental Indulgences” (BB)

Natural Resources and Sustainability
Wed 10/23 Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons” (VP 47)
Hardin, “Lifeboat Ethics” (VP 55)
Wed 10/30 Goodland, “The Case That the World Has Reached Limits” (VP 89)
Meadows et al, “A Synopsis: Limits to Growth” (BB)
Mon 11/4 Simon, “Can the Supply of Natural Resources Really Be Infinite? Yes!” (VP 56)
Wed 11/6 Partridge, “Future Generations” (VP 59)
Mon 11/11 Solow, “Sustainability: An Economist’s Perspective” (VP 61)
Barry, “Sustainability and Intergenerational Justice” (BB)
Wed 11/13 Goodin, “Sustainability” (VP 62)

Climate Change
Mon 11/18 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, “Summary for Policymakers” (BB)
Mon 11/25 Caney, “Cosmopolitan Justice, Responsibility, and Global Climate Change” (BB)
Wed 11/27 No Class – Thanksgiving!
Mon 12/2 Gardiner, “Is ’Arming the Future’ with Geoengineering Really the Lesser Evil?” (BB)
Guidelines for Writing a Philosophy Paper

I will evaluate your papers based on the following five dimensions: structure, clarity, concision, persuasiveness, and style. The guidelines below are meant to help you better understand each of these dimensions. As a general rule these dimensions translate into letter grades as follows:

- A – high scores on all five dimensions.
- B – high scores on most dimensions, satisfactory scores on all dimensions.
- C – satisfactory scores on all dimensions.
- D – unsatisfactory scores on some dimensions.
- F – unsatisfactory scores on most dimensions.

Your papers must:

- Respond to the essay questions that are posed.
- Cite sources following the Chicago Manual of Style.
- Demonstrate that you understand the assigned reading.
- Be double spaced with 12 point font.
- Note the word count on the top of the first page.

Philosophical essays tend to have the following structure:

- Introduction - the introduction typically articulates your paper’s main question and explains why it is important, states your thesis (i.e. your answer to your paper’s main question), summarizes your arguments for your thesis, and outlines the rest of the paper.
- Definition of key terms - your paper’s main question probably has terms that need to be defined or clarified. For example, if your paper is on whether there is a right to privacy, you probably need to explain what you mean by “right” and “privacy.”
- Presentation of the main argument(s) - the bulk of your paper should be devoted to arguments that support your thesis.
- Objections and rebuttals - a good philosophical paper identifies objections to its main line of argument and rebuts these objections.
- Conclusion - your conclusion will typically briefly summarize your argument and explain what implications your argument has or what work remains to be done to answer the essay’s main question more completely.

Five rules for writing clearly and concisely:

1. Outline your arguments. Then, follow your outline and only follow your outline. Good papers don’t go on tangents. Every single sentence plays an argumentative purpose.
2. Use short sentences. Avoid sentence constructions that require dashes, semicolons, etc.
3. Avoid words you wouldn’t use in normal conversation. Of course technical jargon is sometimes necessary, but keep it to a minimum. Use a thesaurus to jog your memory for the right word. Do not use a thesaurus to find a long word you don’t understand.
4. Give your readers signposts. Use words such as “since,” “because,” “therefore,” and “thus” to signal when a sentence is a premise in or a conclusion to your argument.
5. Edit, edit, edit. There is no excuse for typographical, orthographical, or grammatical errors. When you edit, you should look for the common errors of grammar and style that William Safire summarizes as follows:
No sentence fragments. Avoid run-on sentences they are hard to read. A writer must not shift your point of view. Reserve the apostrophe for it’s proper use and omit it when its not needed. Write all adverbial forms correct. In their writing, everyone should make sure that their pronouns agree with its antecedent. Use the semicolon properly, use it between complete but related thoughts; and not between an independent clause and a mere phrase. Don’t use no double negatives. Also, avoid awkward or affected alliteration. If I’ve told you once, I’ve told you a thousand times: Resist hyperbole. If any word is improper at the end of a sentence, a linking verb is. Avoid commas, that are not necessary. Verbs has to agree with their subjects. Avoid trendy locutions that sound flaky. And don’t start a sentence with a conjunction. The passive voice should never be used. Writing carefully, dangling participles should be avoided. Unless you are quoting other people’s exclamations, kill all exclamation points!!! Never use a long word when a diminutive one will do. Proofread carefully to see if you any words out. Use parallel structure when you write and in speaking. You should just avoid confusing readers with misplaced modifiers. Place pronouns as close as possible, especially in long sentences such as those of ten or more wordsto their antecedents. Eschew dialect, irregardless. Remember to never split an infinitive. Take the bull by the hand and don’t mix metaphors. Don’t verb nouns. Always pick on the correct idiom. Never, ever use repetitive redundancies. “Avoid overuse of ‘quotation “marks.”’ ” Never use prepositions to end a sentence with. Last but not least, avoid clichés like the plague.

Seven rules for writing persuasively:

1. Put your arguments in standard form before you start writing; that is, identify your main conclusions and the premises that support those conclusions.
2. Devote most of your space to the most controversial features of your argument. Remember, you are trying to persuade your reader (in this case me!).
3. Use common sense. Make sure every argument you make meets the “sniff test.” A good way to test whether your argument stinks is to try it out on your friends, family, or anyone else who will listen.
4. Show your work. Philosophy papers make arguments, not assertions. All of your conclusions should be backed by reasons. Further, when you make claims about another author’s argument, make sure you give evidence from the text.
5. Think carefully before you use evidence or examples. Make sure they obviously support your arguments.
6. Make sure your premises are less controversial than your conclusions. Don’t beg the question!
7. State arguments that you plan to critique as charitably as possible. Don’t burn a straw man! If your critique seems obvious, you probably don’t fully understand the argument you’re critiquing.

Seven rules to write with a compelling style:

1. Don’t waste words. Strip any unnecessary words, phrases, sentences, and sections from your paper.
2. Say what you mean.
3. Avoid abstract language. Instead of “I exerted myself for a long duration today in the natural environment,” say “I went for a five mile run outside this afternoon.”
4. Use active verbs. Instead of “Singer’s paper is an application of utilitarianism,” say “Singer’s paper applies utilitarianism.”

5. Jump right in. Avoid the long, unhelpful introduction. Never, never start a paper with a sentence like, “Philosophers have debated justice for centuries.” A good way to start a paper is, “In this paper I will argue . . . ”

6. Read your work aloud. If you are really ambitious have someone read it out aloud to you.


Some ways to seek help:

- Come see me in office hours! (Unfortunately, since I have over 100 students this semester, I cannot read drafts. But I’m happy to talk arguments, structure, style, etc.)
- Make an appointment at the writing center (https://writingcenter.wustl.edu/).
- Trade papers with your peers.
- Check out http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html
- Consult books on writing and on writing philosophy in particular:
  - Williams’ Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace
  - Strunk and White’s The Elements of Style
  - Westin’s A Rulebook for Arguments
  - Martinich’s Philosophical Writing

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