



ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Fall 2015

PHIL/ENVI 221

Old Main 111

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What this course is about

As a field of inquiry, environmental ethics sprang up in the early 1970s with a whole host of questions that had not previously received much sustained philosophical thought or attention. The driving assumption behind this new field was the idea that the natural environment deserved our moral attention—deserved to be preserved and protected—in its own right. From this starting point, however, many debates emerged. Just what does it mean to give moral consideration to the natural environment? What is it in the environment that has moral value and so can demand something from us? Is it species, is it individual living things, is it ecosystems, or is it something else? What new ethical approaches are needed, such as Aldo Leopold's holistically-oriented land ethic, if this consideration is to develop to its fullest? Is there a tension between caring about the interests of

animals and the interests of the environment, or are the two compatible? What is the value of “the wild” and why should wilderness areas be protected?

Fast-forwarding to the present day, we can find these questions still being posed by environmental ethicists. But the question dominating environmental ethics today, as you might anticipate, is the question of the ethics of climate change. In some sense, talking about the ethics of climate change might seem to be a no-brainer: It is ethically right to act so that the climate is protected now and for the future. Profound ethical issues though lie in the details. What specific ethical responsibilities do individuals have toward the climate? What ethical values should underlie climate-related public policies and international agreements, such as the one to be adopted at the climate change conference in Paris this December? When it comes to asking countries to make commitments to cut back on their carbon emissions, what is fair?

One focus of this class will be on discussing the ethical questions related to mitigating climate change. Another will be the conundrum that while it is urgent to do something about climate change, most people do very little. Addressing this conundrum will take us into the area of moral psychology: How can the matter of climate change be made more ethically tangible so that more people will do something about it? What new conceptual models are needed to prompt more action? Finally, we will not be completely abandoning the older questions that lifted the field of environmental ethics off the ground. We will though be looking at them in a more practical context: What, for example, is the relationship between biodiversity and climate change ethics? And, finally, is there still moral space, in the world of today, for thinking about “the wild”?

Learning goals

You’ll find the learning goals for this course are organized around three themes: substance, skills, and self-awareness.

With respect to substance, this course is designed to help you acquire an increased understanding of: (a) the moral dimensions of issues in contemporary environmental ethics, especially the ethics of climate change; (b) how ethical theory can be used to clarify these issues and to inform decision-making about them; (c) the ethical implications of the ways that climate change problems are framed; and (d) the relevance of moral psychology to the ethics of climate change.

The design of this course is also intended to assist you in developing key skills in philosophy in particular and more generally in the liberal arts. By the end of this semester, you should be: (a) better able to read and analyze philosophical writing with an inquisitive and thoughtful mind; (b) more at ease with “doing” philosophy, including forming philosophical questions, framing ethical issues, and constructing philosophical lines of thought; (c) more adept in analytical and

argumentative writing; and (d) more able to engage in the “participatory” give-and-take involved in philosophical conversation.

Self-awareness as a philosophical learning goal has its roots in Socrates’ dictum that “the unexamined life is not worth living.” Your professor hopes this course will expand your own capacities for (a) moral reasoning about the environment and climate change; (b) acting responsibly (as per the college’s *Statement of Purpose and Belief*) with respect to issues connected to both; (c) respecting the well-reasoned ethical views of others, even when they are at odds with your own; (d) recognizing the assumptions you bring to thinking about ethical questions; and (e) understanding the positive value of being confused and confounded.

What you will be reading

There are three required books for this course:

Henry David Thoreau’s *Walking* (HarperCollins, 1994)

Climate Ethics: Essential Readings, edited by Stephen Gardiner, Simon Caney, Dale Jamieson, and Henry Shue (Oxford University Press, 2010)

The Ecological Thought, by Timothy Morton (Harvard University Press, 2012)

In addition, we’ll be reading some chapters from *Environmental Skill: Motivation, Knowledge, and the Possibility of a Non-Romantic Environmental Ethic*, by Mark Coeckelbergh (Routledge Press, 2015). This book is expensive; your professor could not justify asking you to purchase individual copies. It is available in the library on two-hour reserve.

There will be some other readings for the course as well; these will be available online or through Moodle. Other than for these readings, we will not be using Moodle for this course.

Academic Integrity

Consider this class to be a micro-environment. Sustaining this environment is important to facilitate learning. One sustaining force in this environment is honesty. In this course, it is anticipated that the work you do will be honestly presented. That’s not simply because this is an environmental ethics course; any course at Mac would have the same expectation. In writing your papers or preparing your team project, if you draw upon sources other than your own, original ideas your professor anticipates you will cite these contributions, not only as a matter of good academic practice but more importantly as a matter of academic integrity. If you are unfamiliar with it, please take a moment to look at the College’s *Academic Integrity Policy* as published in the *Student Handbook*. Your professor will adhere to this policy in considering your work for this class.

Accessibility of Content and Assignments

I am committed to making course content and assignments accessible to all of you in this course. If there are any elements of the course that might be inaccessible to you, reasonable academic accommodations may be implemented. If you think you might need accommodation for a disability, you should contact the Office of Student Affairs early in the semester. The Assistant Dean of Students, Robin Hart Ruthenbeck, coordinates services for first, second and third year students, as well as seniors new to accommodations. The Associate Dean of Students, Lisa Landreman, coordinates services for seniors. You may schedule an appointment with either of them by calling the Office of Student Affairs, 651-696-6220.

Devices

The best device you can bring to this class is your own attentive mind. The gift of your attention in class is important to sustaining the integrity of the classroom as a learning environment. I will not ask you to actually power down your devices while in class. I will though ask you for your own sake and out of respect for others to “virtually” power down: in other words, to refrain from googling, texting, tweeting, doing Facebook, checking incoming e-mails, calls, and text messages, etc. And, of course, please do put your cell phones on a setting so they will not ring.

Taking this class implies your acceptance of this policy. Repeated violations will result in a lowered grade for the class. I will let you know if you are at risk for having your grade lowered. I recognize of course that if there is an emergency you may need to take a call. If that’s the case, please let me know before the class period starts.

What you’ll be working on in this course

In this course, you will be developing your skills as an active participant in the construction of philosophical knowledge by writing two argumentative papers and by partnering with another student to do a “Sustainability in a Shoebox” project. This class will not have any quizzes or tests.

Working on your two argumentative papers will give you an opportunity to draw upon the knowledge gained in this class to analyze the thoughts of others, express your own ideas, and to practice your writing skills. If you are a sophomore, junior, or senior, this course will fulfill your graduation requirement in Writing. If you are a first-year student, please know that this is a “Writing as Argumentation” course that will count toward the fulfillment of your three-course writing requirement.

The rationale for Macalester's writing requirement states: "*Macalester seeks to ensure that all students receive instruction in writing that gives attention to writing as a process (writing is rewriting) and that provides students individually with feedback on the mechanics and substance of their writing.*" Your **first paper** will be a critical analysis of *The Ecological Thought*. It should be 6-8 double-spaced pages in a 12 pt. font. For this paper, you will need to write both a first draft and a revision, based on the written comments that you will receive. Your second paper, 8-10 pages long, will be based on readings in the *Climate Ethics* volume. For this paper, you have the option of further developing one of the papers in the book; or writing a paper to be included in an imaginary new edition. In either case, you will need to do some library research. More information about this second paper will be given in class. For this paper, you will be turning in a first draft; revisions will be optional.

You can find the due dates for first drafts on the syllabus. Revised papers will be due one week from when the first drafts are returned in class. Revising your paper may improve your grade by as much as, but not more than, a full letter grade. A late paper will be accepted without penalty if you have a good reason for turning it in late and you let me know in advance of when it is due that you will not be turning it in on time. *Unexcused late papers will be accepted up to one week after the due date, but you will lose half a grade (e.g. A- to B+) on the first day your paper is late, and every two days thereafter.*

In addition to writing your two papers, you will have the opportunity to develop your argumentative writing skills through completing in-class writing assignments. You will write in class on most Fridays throughout the semester; what you write will not be graded.

Course preceptor

Logan Stapleton '18 will be the preceptor for this course. As the preceptor, Logan will be available to discuss your ideas for your paper drafts and revisions, as well as go over your papers prior to your turning them in to look at their written expression and their argumentative logic. Logan, who is a sophomore and who has taken three philosophy courses, including critical thinking, can be reached at lstaplet@macalester.edu. He will also hold office hours; time and location will be announced in class.

Sustainability in a shoebox project

In class, we will talk about the fact that while many people know they ought to change the way they live in order to better protect the environment, they don't. How could the realities of climate change be made more tangible in order to close this gap between knowledge and action? You will work in teams of two to devise the contents of a shoebox to give to someone at the beginning of a walk. The walk could be around the perimeter of the campus, from campus to the Mississippi,

along the Mississippi. These are just some examples. The walk does not have to be in St. Paul and does not have to be a “walk”: it could be a path taken by someone in a bicycle or in a wheelchair. Nor does your walk have to be “outside.” The main point is to use the contents of your shoebox to inspire people’s moral imagination so they could care more about the environment that sustains their lives. More details will be given about this project in class.

This project will count 30% toward your final grade and will be worth 100 points. These points will be divided as follows:

One-paragraph abstract of your project	10 points
Longer description of your project	15 points
Oral presentation of your project	20 points
Quality of your the project itself	40 points
Reflective paper about your project	15 points

For this project, your first step will be to get a shoebox.

How your work will be evaluated

Your final grade for this class will be based on the following percentages:

First paper draft	10%
First paper final	15%
Second paper draft	20%
Second paper final	25%
Shoebox project	30%

Since this is a philosophy course, there will be ample opportunity for you to contribute to class discussions by raising questions, commenting on the readings, responding to points brought up by others, and the like. Here, the substance of what you say is more important than how often you speak. Your contributions to class discussions will be taken into account in the determination of your grade; and can raise or lower your course grade by one-half a letter grade.

As far as attendance goes, everyone will get two unexcused absences. Beyond that, each unexcused absence will result in three points being subtracted from your final grade for this course.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Please come to each class meeting prepared to talk about the reading assignment for that particular day. This schedule may change at the discretion of your professor.

Week One

- 2 September Welcome and orientation to the course
- 4 September A brief history of environmental ethics
No reading assignment for today

Week Two

- 7 September Labor Day—no class meeting
- 9 September Risk, uncertainty, and raccoons:
Some challenges of thinking about climate change ethics
Reading: *Climate Ethics*, Chapters 3 and 8
- 11 September **Reading:** *Walking* (entire book)

Week Three

- 14 September **Reading:** *The Ecological Thought*, Chapter 1
- 16 September **Reading:** *The Ecological Thought*, Chapter 2
- 18 September Your professor will present and lead discussion on writing an argumentative paper in philosophy. No reading assignment for today.

Week Four

- 21 September **Reading:** *The Ecological Thought*, Chapter 3
- 23 September **Reading:** *Environmental Skill*, Preface and Chapter 3
- 25 September **Reading:** *Environmental Skill*, Chapter 5
Today we will also be discussing the “sustainability in a shoebox” project

Week Five

- 28 September Discussion of climate change and the precautionary principle
Reading: *Climate Ethics*, Chapter 1
- 30 September Climate change and traditional principles of ethics
Reading: *Climate Ethics*, Chapter 17

2 October Climate change and traditional principles of ethics
Re-Reading: *Climate Ethics*, Chapter 17
First Paper Due

Week Six

5 October Climate change justice
Reading: *Climate Ethics*, Chapters 10 and 11

7 October Climate change justice
Reading: Eric Posner and Cass Sunstein, “Climate Change Justice” (available online)

9 October Is it immoral of me to drive an SUV just for fun?
Readings: *Climate Ethics*, Chapter 18; Avram Hiller, “Climate Change and Individual Responsibility” (available online)
An abstract of your shoebox project is due today

Week Seven

12 October **Reading:** Ibo van de Poel, Jessica Fahlquist, Neelke Doorn, et. al. “The Problem of Many Hands: Climate Change as an Example” (on Moodle)

14 October Climate change and global human rights
Reading: *Climate Ethics*, Chapters 7 and 9

16 October Today we will welcome a guest speaker, Maria Wesslerle, the foraging coordinator for the North Country Food Alliance. No reading assignment for today.

Week Eight

19 October **Reading:** Derek R. Bell, “Environmental Refugees: What Rights? Which Duties?” (on Moodle)

21 October **Reading:** Alexa Zellentin, “Climate Migration. Cultural Aspects of Climate Change” (available online)

23 October Fall Break—no class meeting

Week Nine

- 26 October **Reading:** Lilly Marlene-Russow, “Why Do Species Matter?” (available online)
- 28 October **Reading:** Darrel Moellendorf, *The Moral Challenge of Dangerous Climate Change*, Chapter 2, “The Value of Biodiversity” (on Moodle)
- 30 October **Reading:** Elizabeth Bristow, “Global Climate Change and the Industrial Animal Agriculture Link” (available online)
Longer description of your shoebox project is due today

Week Ten

- 2 November **Readings:** *Climate Change*, Chapter 16; Dale Jamieson, “Ethics and Intentional Climate Change” (available online)
- 4 November **Reading:** Tony Svoboda, “Is Aerosol Geoengineering Ethically Preferable to Other Climate Change Strategies?” (on Moodle)
- 6 November Discussion on the topic: Can paternalistic responses to climate change be ethically justified? No reading assignment for today.
Second Paper Due

Week Eleven

- 9 November **Reading:** *Environmental Skill*, Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 (skim)
- 11 November **Reading:** *Environmental Skill*, Chapter 9 and Chapter 10 (skim)
- 13 November **Reading:** *Environmental Skill*, Chapters 11 and 12

Week Twelve

- 16 November Class-chosen topic in environmental ethics
- 18 November Class-chosen topic in environmental ethics
- 20 November Your professor will be in Portland for a conference on Philosophy in the City. Please use this time to work on your shoebox projects and class presentation.

Week Thirteen

23 November Class-chosen topic in environmental ethics
25 November Thanksgiving holiday—no class meeting
27 November Thanksgiving holiday—no class meeting

Week Fourteen

30 November **Shoebox project class presentations**
2 December **Shoebox project class presentations**
4 December **Shoebox project class presentations**

Week Fifteen

7 December **Reading:** Holmes Rolston III, “Fishes in the Desert: Paradox and Responsibility” (on Moodle)
9 December **Reading:** Irene Klaver, “Wild: Rhythm of the Appearing and Disappearing” (on Moodle)
11 December Course wrap-up
16 December **Reflective papers on your shoebox project due by noon**