

Ethics: The Environment

Summer 2012, July 9th–August 10th

Instructor: Laura Guidry-Grimes ♦ **Email:** lkg8@georgetown.edu

Office Hours: Wednesdays and Thursdays, 11:45–12:45, 2nd floor of New North

***NOTE: SYLLABUS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.**

OVERVIEW

Environmental ethics is a branch of applied philosophy, and it spans over a number of issues. Do landscapes, trees, or animals have value? If so, what is the source of this value? How should human needs and wants be weighed? Philosophers disagree on the contours of our obligations and duties regarding nature and non-humans. Technological developments and increases in scientific knowledge have further complicated the picture. This course will begin by helping to motivate moral concern for the environment. After briefly discussing the enterprise of applied ethics, we will look at some classic texts on different philosophical approaches to environmental ethics. Students will be asked to critically analyze these approaches so as to recognize the benefits and burdens of each position. From here we will delve into three topics: animal ethics, global justice, and climate change. The class concludes with a conversation about environmental activism. How can policy-makers responsibly balance the competing interests and values involved in any one of these issues? How should we, in our daily interactions with the environment, make these determinations and promote responsible behavior?

COURSE GOALS

- Develop critical thinking and writing skills, which for philosophy involves the following:
 - recognizing the parts of arguments
 - understanding how these parts work together to form a coherent argument
 - critiquing the steps, reasoning, consistency, or validity of the argument as a whole
 - inferring the implications of the argument, given your critique or other critiques that can be made
- Identify some of the major ethical concerns about the conservation, preservation, and general treatment of the environment, species, and individual members of an ecosystem
- Compare, contrast, and analyze different positions on these issues
- Understand some of the tactics and strategies of environmental activism

LOGISTICS

PHIL-138 will be meeting **Monday–Thursday from 1:00–3:00 in Maguire 103**. You can find class readings on Blackboard, but all other class materials and information will be on the course website.

<http://ethics-environment.weebly.com>

Field trip. On July 26th at 3:30 pm, there will be an *optional* field trip to the White House South Court Auditorium to watch a special director's cut of the new Ken Burns documentary, *Dust Bowl*. This event is hosted by the National Endowment for the Humanities, and a panel discussion with Earth Policy Institute President Lester Brown, historian Timothy Egan, and FreshFarm Executive Director Ann Yonkers will follow. Tickets are limited, so students need to let me know if they wish to attend ASAP, and they should commit to attending. If you cannot attend this event, then you need to watch a film from a preselected list on your own time.

ASSIGNMENTS

| Assignment | Weight | Deadline |
|----------------------------|--------|------------------------------------|
| Participation & Attendance | 20% | |
| Short Paper #1 | 10% | July 20 th , 11:59 pm |
| Idea for Final Project | | July 22 nd , 11:59 pm |
| Reflection Post | 10% | July 27 th , 11:59 pm |
| Short Paper #2 | 10% | July 28 th , 11:59 pm |
| Short Paper #3 | 15% | August 3 rd , 11:59 pm |
| Discussion Leadership | 15% | (depends on your assigned day) |
| Final Project | 20% | August 10 th , 11:59 pm |

DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS

Participation. You are expected to participate regularly and thoughtfully. You should demonstrate that you have read the required material, and you should also engage with your classmates. *If there are not enough people participating on a given day, I will give out a pop quiz.* In case you've been too quiet, you can improve your grade by contributing to the class blog on our website:

<http://ethics-environment.weebly.com/class-blog.html>.

Blog posts cannot be fully substituted for in-class participation, however.

Short writing assignments. You are required to write three short (500 words) papers based on the prompt that I provide. The prompt can be on any readings that we have done up to that point. The point of these papers is to help you build your philosophical writing skills. You must submit to turnitin.com.

Reflection post. Regardless of whether you attend the *Dust Bowl* event or watch a film from home on July 26th, you need to make a blog post (see above link). Your post should be a thoughtful reflection on the film, given what we have discussed in class. The post should be between 2-4 paragraphs.



Discussion leadership. In the first week, you will choose a day in the term to lead discussion. You need to have discussion questions and a handout prepared for one reading. The handout should include a breakdown of the main argument and some potential problems with the argument. You must submit the handout and discussion questions to Blackboard (look under ‘Assignments’) by 8 PM the day before your assigned date. Your classmates will be able to access your documents once you upload them.

Final project. You should find a topic within environmental ethics that excites you. The topic should be manageable; in other words, “climate change” is not a manageable topic because it is too vast. Narrow in on a smaller topic that you can lay out and discuss critically. Once you find an alluring ethical problem, you will need to research some of the necessary facts related to the topic, and you will also need to reflect on the relevant arguments that philosophers/ethicists/activists have published. Then you need to make your own contribution to the debate. Your project can be in one of three formats: 1) a traditional term paper, 2) a website, or 3) an extended Power Point (which you would not present). *Regardless of which format you choose, your project should have the equivalent of 4-5 pages of text.* You will submit the project through turnitin.com. This project is meant to serve as a launching pad in case you wish to pursue environmental advocacy. You are free to take up any well-argued and well-researched position you find compelling.

CLASS MATERIALS

REQUIRED:

All required readings will be available on Blackboard (<http://campus.georgetown.edu>). You do not have to purchase anything for this course.

RECOMMENDED:

Anthony Weston’s *A Rulebook for Arguments*

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance and tardiness. You are expected to attend class every day, and you should avoid tardiness. I will take roll daily. If you miss roll due to lateness, it is your responsibility to make sure that I have corrected the attendance sheet. If you need to miss class, you must e-mail me, preferably before the class meets. Keep in mind that sleeping in, fun local events, and work do not excuse you. Due to the shortness of the summer term, *you are only permitted one unexcused absence before points are deducted from your grade.*

Turning in assignments. You will submit papers to turnitin.com, but you will submit your discussion leadership documents to Blackboard (see above). Keep in mind that the deadline applies even if you



have computer trouble, so I recommend you set up your Turnitin profile well before an assignment is due.

Late assignments. You must turn assignments in on time unless you are given permission to do otherwise. I will deduct a full letter grade for each day an assignment is late (e.g., an 'A' paper becomes a 'B' for one day late; an 'A' paper becomes a 'C' for two days late). It is conceivable that you will have multiple deadlines and stressors in the same week as you have a deadline for this course, but this is not grounds for asking for an extension. In the case of piling deadlines, I recommend that you work out an earlier deadline for your assignment for this course. Except in extraordinary circumstances, I will not grant extensions when the assignment is due in less than 24 hours.

Paper length. You have 100-word leeway either way for papers. This means that your short papers must be between 400 and 600 words, or I'll deduct points. How many points are deducted will depend on how much you go over or under the word limit. Same goes with the final project.

Cell phone use. Your cell phones should be turned off when class begins.

Drafts and outlines. I will not look at drafts over e-mail or in office hours. However, you can bring in or send *short outlines*. I do not accept attachments, so you will need to copy and paste your text into the body of an email.

Appealing grades. It is within your rights as a student to ensure that your grades fairly reflect the quality of your work. If you believe you deserve a higher grade on an assignment, you need to send me a list of concrete reasons for appealing your grade. I will then take 24 hours to review your work, and I will either keep your grade as is or raise it. After you have completed this step, you can appeal to my teaching mentor if desired. My mentor can give you a higher *or a lower* grade, depending on her judgment of your work.

GEORGETOWN HONOR SYSTEM

As signatories to the Georgetown University Honor Pledge, and indeed simply as good scholars and citizens, you are required to uphold academic honesty in all aspects of this course. You are expected to be familiar with the letter and spirit of the Standards of Conduct outlines in the Georgetown Honor System and on the Honor Council website. As faculty, I too am obligated to uphold the Honor System and will report all suspected cases of academic dishonesty.

Standards of Conduct. <http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53519.html>



ACADEMIC RESOURCE CENTER AND ADA ACCOMMODATIONS

If you have a disability or believe you might and would like to receive accommodations in my course, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu) to register as a student with a disability or for an evaluation referral. You should do this at the beginning of the term. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodation in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies. The Center is located on the third floor of the Leavey Center, Suite 335. You may access their website at <http://ldss.georgetown.edu>.

WRITING CENTER

Please consider taking advantage of the resources of the Writing Center. The Writing Center provides one-on-one peer tutoring focused on improving your writing skills. I encourage you to take your paper drafts to the Writing Center. Visit <http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu> for more information. You can also schedule an appointment with a Writing Center tutor online on the center's website.

DAILY BREAKDOWN OF READINGS & DEADLINES

*ALL READINGS ARE REQUIRED UNLESS NOTED AS RECOMMENDED (REC)

WEEK ONE

Monday, July 9th

Topic: Applying values to the environment—introduction

No required readings

Tuesday, July 10th

Topic: Applying values to the environment—introduction (cont'd)

“Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Value” by Michael J. Zimmerman

»pgs. 1-8 (until end of 1st paragraph) and pgs.30-34

“Ethics and Environmental Ethics” by Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III

“Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?” by Richard Sylvan

Wednesday, July 11th

Topic: Valuing nature

“The Ethics of Respect for Nature” by Paul W. Taylor

“Values in and Duties to the Natural World” by Holmes Rolston III

“The Land Ethic” by Aldo Leopold



Thursday, July 12th

Topic: Valuing nature (cont'd)

“The Good of Trees” by Robin Attfield

“Duties Concerning Islands” by Mary Midgley

Rec: “What’s Wrong with Plastic Trees?” by Martin H. Krieger

WEEK TWO

Monday, July 16th

Topic: Some approaches to environmental ethics

“Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy of Our Time?” by Warwick Fox

“Biocentric Individualism” by Gary Varner

“The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism” by Karen J. Warren

Tuesday, July 17th

Topic: Some approaches to environmental ethics (cont'd)

“Ecofeminism: Toward Global Justice and Planetary Health” by Greta Gaard and Lori Gruen

“Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics” by Anthony Weston

“Women, Poverty, and Population: Issues for the Concerned Environmentalist” by Gita Sen

Wednesday, July 18th

Topic: Human-centered ethics

“Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism” by Bryan G. Norton

“Anthropocentrism vs. Nonanthropocentrism: Why Should We Care?” by Katie McShane

Thursday, July 19th

Topic: Critics and concerns

“Another Look at Leopold’s Land Ethic” by Boris Zeide

“When Preservationism Doesn’t Preserve” by David Schmidtz

“Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique” by
Ramachandra Guha

*Short writing assignment #1 due by 11:59 pm on Friday, July 20th

*Idea for presentation topic must be emailed to Laura by 11:59 pm on Sunday, July 22nd

WEEK THREE

Monday, July 23rd



Topic: Animals vs. the environment?

“Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Bad Marriage, Quick Divorce” by Mark Sagoff

“Can Animal Rights Activists Be Environmentalists?” by Gary E. Varner

“Is There a Place for Animals in the Moral Consideration of Nature?” by Eric Katz

Tuesday, July 24th

Topic: Animal interests, animal rights

Film and discussion, TBA

“Animal Rights: What’s in a Name?” by Tom Regan

“All Animals Are Equal” by Peter Singer

Rec: “The Rights of Animals and Future Generations” by Joel Feinberg

Rec: *Animals and Why They Matter* by Mary Midgley

Wednesday, July 25th

Topic: Species

“Are All Species Equal?” by David Schmidtz

“How to Worry about Endangered Species” by Tom Regan

“Why Do Species Matter?” by Lilly-Marlene Russow

Thursday, July 26th

NO CLASS:

Dust Bowl event at White House South Court Auditorium @ 3:30

OR

Film at home

*Reflection post due by 11:59 pm on Friday, July 27th

*Short writing assignment #2 due by 11:59 pm on Saturday, July 28th

WEEK FOUR

Monday, July 30th

Topic: Eating habits, animals, and the environment

The Ethics of What We Eat by Peter Singer and Jim Mason (excerpts)

“Meat Is Good for You” by Stuart Patton

Rec: “Ethics and Genetically Modified Foods” by Gary Comstock



Tuesday, July 31st

Topic: Global justice and the environment

“Do We Consume Too Much?” by Mark Sagoff

“Sustainability and Intergenerational Justice” by Brian Barry

“Redefining the Good Life in a Sustainable Society” by Lester W. Millbrath

Wednesday, August 1st

Topic: Global justice and the environment (cont'd)

Film and discussion, TBA

“Living on a Lifeboat” by Garrett Hardin

“Recent Population Trends” by Elizabeth Willott

Thursday, August 2nd

Topic: Global justice and the environment (cont'd)

“The Tragedy of the Commons” by Garrett Hardin

“The Real Tragedy of the Commons” by Stephen Gardiner

*Short writing assignment #3 due by 11:59 pm on Friday, August 3rd

WEEK FIVE

Monday, August 6th

Topic: Global justice and the environment (cont'd)

“Feeding People versus Saving Nature?” by Holmes Rolston III

“Global Environment and International Inequality” by Henry Shue

Rec: “Saving Nature, Feeding People, and Ethics” by Robin Attfield

Tuesday, August 7th

Topic: Climate change

“Selling Environmental Indulgences” by Robert E. Goodin

“Ethics, Public Policy, and Global Warming” by Dale Jamieson

Wednesday, August 8th

Topic: Climate change (cont'd)

“Winners and Losers in a Changing Climate” *New York Times*

(http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/02/us/20070402_CLIMATE_GRAPHIC.html)



Climate Change Justice by Eric Posner and David Weisbach (excerpts)

Thursday, August 9th

Topic: Activism and advocacy

“Environmental Philosophy Is Environmental Activism: The Most Radical and Effective Kind” by
J. Baird Callicott

“Taking Environmental Ethics Public” by Andrew Light

“The Environmentalists’ Dilemma: Dollars and Sand Dollars” by Bryan G. Norton

*Final project due by 11.59 pm on Friday, August 10th

