

Ethics in a Time of Climate Crisis

QUARTER YEAR

Instructor information

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Course description

Humanity faces a devastating climate crisis. Its effects are already tangible, including a loss of biodiversity and wildlife, rising sea levels and the disappearance of traditional living space, the accumulation of extreme weather events, and increased migration due to growing hostility of previously agreeable and fertile natural environments. And this is nothing to speak of the potentially catastrophic effects of global heating yet to come. In this course, we will discuss both historically influential and recent works that can help us get a better understanding of the ethical challenges of our current situation. Our discussions will center around three thematic questions: What is our relation to nature? In what sense is climate change a matter of justice? And what are the right ways of addressing our current environmental predicament?

Texts

All texts will be made available online.

Course requirements

- Thoughtful participation in discussion: 20%
- A 10 minute in-class presentation: 30%
- Final 10–15-pages essay: 50% (due Month/Day)

Assessment

Thoughtful participation in discussion means that you regularly attend class and come prepared to each meeting ready to discuss the material. This not merely involves articulating your own point of view but also the ability to take in what others are saying and to genuinely engage with it. An excellent in-class presentation conveys the content of the reading concisely without overly simplifying, is presented clearly, raises interesting questions and/or criticism, and connects the reading with previous course material. You can find a short guide on how to write a good philosophy paper [here](#), and you can find the rubrics for the assessment of your oral presentation and essay [here](#) and [here](#) respectively. You can also find a brief guide on using AI tools in philosophy papers [here](#).

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

If you need accommodation, please inform me as soon as possible. All discussions will remain confidential.

Schedule

Week 1: Humans and Nature

Month/Day. Introduction; what is nature?

Raymond Williams, 'Nature'

Month/Day. What is our relation to nature?

Bernard Williams, 'Must a concern for the environment be centered on human beings?' (excerpt)

Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (excerpt)

Week 2: Deep Ecology

Month/Day. Are Humans and Nature one?

Goethe, 'Reflections on Nature'

Arne Næss, 'The Shallow and the Deep'

Month/Day. Against deep ecology

Val Plumwood, 'Deep ecology and the denial of difference' (excerpt)

Week 3: Rights of Nature

Month/Day. Rights for natural objects?

Christopher Stone, 'Should Trees have Standing?'

Month/Day. Who can have interests?

Joel Feinberg, 'The Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations'

Leif Wenar, 'Rights' (excerpt)

Week 4: Sustainability and Future Generations

Month/Day. Intergenerational equality of what?

Brundtland Report (excerpt)

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (excerpt)

Amartya Sen, 'Why We Should Preserve the Spotted Owl'

Month/Day. Sustainability and capabilities

Martha Nussbaum, 'Beyond "Compassion and Humanity"'

Breena Holland, 'Why Sustainable Ecological Capacity Is a Meta-Capability'

Week 5: Climate Justice

Month/Day. Climate Change and Human Rights

Derek Bell, 'Does Anthropogenic Climate Change Violate Human Rights?'

Month/Day. Climate Change and Indigenous Rights

Rebecca Tsosie, 'Indigenous People and Environmental Justice: The Impact of Climate Change'

Week 6: Climate Justice cont.

Month/Day. Sharing the Burden of Climate Change

Simon Caney, 'Climate Change and the Duties of the Advantaged'

Month/Day. Climate Change and Migration

Cara Nine, 'Ecological Refugees, States Borders, and the Lockean Proviso'

Week 7: Ecosocialism

Month/Day. Capitalism and Alienation from Nature

Joel Kovel and Michael Löwy, 'An Ecosocialist Manifesto'
Steven Vogel, 'Marx and Alienation from Nature'

Month/Day. Ecosocialist politics

Michael Albert, 'Ecosocialism for Realists'

Week 8: Ecofeminism

Month/Day. Nature as a feminist issue

Karen Warren, 'Nature Is a Feminist Issue: Motivating Ecofeminism by Taking Empirical Data Seriously'

Optional: Françoise d'Eaubonne, *Feminism or Death* (excerpt)

Month/Day. Oppressive conceptual frameworks

Karen Warren, 'The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism'

Optional: Carol Adams, 'The Sexual Politics of Meat'

Week 9: What to do now?

Month/Day. Geoengineering

Stephen Gardiner, 'Is 'Arming the Future' with Geoengineering Really the Lesser Evil?'

Month/Day. Climate Activism

Candice Delmas, 'Political Resistance: A Matter of Fairness?'

Extinction Rebellion, Why Rebel?

Week 10: summary

Academic Integrity

Academic work is an author's original contribution and properly cites all sources used (such as articles, books, interviews, films, podcasts etc.). This matters for both epistemic and moral reasons. For epistemic reasons, it is crucial that academic work can be double-checked by academic peers, so readers must be able to easily identify all sources an author relied on. For moral reasons, it is crucial that other authors receive the credit they deserve.* Feel free to consult with me before completing your assignments if you should have any concerns about the correct way to reference the work of others. The consequence of plagiarism will be a failing grade. In the unfortunate event that a student is suspected of plagiarism, I also have to follow the university's official guidelines for responding to academic misconduct.

Climate and Inclusion

Philosophy involves the ability to formulate your own and carefully attending to others' arguments, both in writing and in conversation. Even when philosophers disagree, this is not an adversarial activity: philosophy can only be done well as a collective activity with the shared end of furthering our mutual understanding. This requires that all of us be prepared to listen carefully and seriously to what others have to say, no matter how strongly we may disagree. Creating such an inclusive environment matters not merely for moral reasons, but for epistemic reasons too. If some groups are left feeling unwelcome and their perspectives left unheard, we seriously impair our collective ability to make progress in knowledge. It is therefore my goal as an instructor to create an environment where everyone feels respected and welcome. I encourage you to reach out to me if you have suggestions for promoting a welcoming and open academic environment, and I will give them serious consideration. If there are any circumstances that make you feel uncomfortable in our classroom, please let me know. All discussion will remain confidential.

* For instance, these academic integrity and climate statements are modelled after Tyler Zimmer's syllabus on Philosophy of Economics (2022).