

Environmental Ethics

PHIL 21, Summer I 2013

Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, 1:30-3:50

Instructor: Ben Sherman

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Office Hours: Monday 4:00-5:00, Wednesday 12:00-1:00

Course Description

This course offers an introduction to ethical theory and ethical reasoning as they relate to environmental issues in particular. Said introduction will be divided into two main parts. The first part of the course will give a brief overview of the basic concepts used in philosophical ethics, and then examine the special theoretical questions raised by environmental concerns, such as questions about what natural objects or systems are intrinsically valuable, what rights non-human living things can have, what duties human beings have with regard to the environment, how to balance human interests against non-human interests, and how we can tell what is better for the environment as such. The second part of the course will discuss questions raised in the application of ethical principles to decision making, including questions about how to prioritize conflicting concerns, what changes are worth making, and what individuals morally ought to do.

Learning Goals

- Acquiring a familiarity with some of the most influential positions, debates, and lines of inquiry in discussions of environmental ethics
- Developing the skills involved in good ethical thinking: analysis of problems and questions, judicious interpretation, careful argumentation, and awareness of context and nuance
- Refining a tentative ethical position on environmental matters, including views about what should be done, what should be studied further, and what sorts of considerations might be relevant to these position

Laptop Policy

No laptops, please, as they are apt to distract from class discussions.

Academic Integrity

All material submitted for a grade should be the student's own original, independent work. All uses of others' work should be properly documented through notes and citations. Unauthorized collaboration, plagiarism, and any other violation of University policies on academic integrity will result in disciplinary action, which can include grading penalties, suspension, or dismissal. If you have questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please consult the Rights and Responsibilities Handbook, contact the Office of Student Development and Conduct, or ask the instructor. More information can be found at <http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/srcs/index.html>.

Disability

Please let me know as soon as possible if you have a documented disability on record at Brandeis. I will be glad to make the appropriate arrangements.

Readings

All students are required to have access to the readings from *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, ed. Schmidtz and Willott, 2nd edition. All other required readings will be made available online.

Requirements

All students will be required to engage with the ethical questions presented in class, through careful consideration of the texts assigned, demonstrated in written work to be done at home and on exams in class. Work will be evaluated both on the basis of whether it shows knowledge of course materials, and whether it demonstrates the student's ability to engage in original analysis and argumentation.

Late Work: Assignments are to be turned in **by the beginning of class** the day they are due.

Late work will be penalized a mark for each day past the deadline (e.g., homework up to one day late will fall from check to check-minus.)

Independent Work: All written work must be original independent work. There will be no collaboration on homework assignments or exams, though collaboration in small-group discussion will be taken into account in the class participation grade.

Attendance: For each unexcused absence after the fourth, a student's grade will be lowered by a third of a letter grade (e.g. B- to C+). Attendance records will be taken at the beginning of class most days. A fair amount of important material will be presented only in lectures, and class discussions will be an important opportunity for students to hone their skills at reasoning, argument, and articulating positions.

Grading Schema:

4-6 page paper, 20%

Midterm exam, 25%

Final 7-10 page paper, 40%

Homework assignments, 10%

Class participation, 5%

Class Schedule

("EE #" indicates Schmidtz and Willott's *Environmental Ethics* anthology, and the page on which the reading begins. Readings marked "Latte" will be available on the class website.) Any changes will be announced in class in advance.

Monday, 6/3: Introduction: ethics, the environment, and historical attitudes

Wednesday, 6/5: **Early Environmentalism and Some Philosophical Challenges**

John Muir—Hetch Hetchy Valley EE 230

Krieger—What's Wrong with Plastic Trees? EE 232

Pitcher and Welchman—Can Environmental Paradise Be Regained? EE 258

Thursday, 6/6: **The Land Ethic and Deep Ecology**

Aldo Leopold—The Land Ethic EE 124

Naess—The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement EE 129

Monday, 6/10: **Animal Liberation and Environmentalism in Practice**

Singer—All Animals Are Equal EE 49

Stone—Should Trees Have Standing? EE 85

Whyte—The Elephant Management Dilemma EE 71

Wednesday, 6/12: **Animal Liberation and Environmentalism**

Sagoff—Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics EE 59

Sober—Philosophical Problems for Environmentalism EE 132

Thursday, 6/13: **Biocentric Individualism**

Taylor—The Ethics of Respect for Nature EE 102

Schmidtz—Are All Species Equal? EE 114

Monday, 6/17: **Ecofeminism**

Warren—The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism EE 157

4-6 Page Paper Due

Wednesday, 6/19: **The Problem of Environmental Justice**

Guha—Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation EE 145

Shrader-Frechette—Environmental Justice EE 204

Shiva—Water Wars EE 217

Thursday, 6/20: **Finding a Place in Nature?**

Schmidtz—Natural Enemies EE 220

Matthews—Letting the World Grow Old EE 271

Sagoff—Do We Consume Too Much? EE 302

Monday, 6/24: **Mid-term Exam**

Resource Use

Hardin—The Tragedy of the Commons EE 403

Schmidtz—The Institution of Property EE 406

Wednesday, 6/26: **Overpopulation**

Singer—Affluence, Famine, and Morality EE 486

Hardin—Living on a Lifeboat EE 493

Rollston—Feeding People Versus Saving Nature EE 504

Sen—Women, Poverty, and Population EE 187

Thursday, 6/27: **Climate Change**

Jamieson—Ethics, Public Policy, and Global Warming EE 538

Gardiner—A Perfect Moral Storm EE 547

Posner and Sunstein—Climate Change Justice (Latte)

Monday, 7/1: **Ethical Consumer Choices**

Singer and Mason, “What Should We Eat?” (Latte)

Comstock—Ethics and Genetically Modified Foods EE 598

Pollan—excerpt on Organic food from *Omnivore’s Dilemma* (Latte)

Final paper due date: TBA