

# PHIL 261, Philosophy of the Environment

Fall, 2013

MW 3:00-3:50; TYD 0117 & Friday discussion sections

Instructor: Lane DesAutels  
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Tu 12:00-2:00 (and by appointment)  
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**Aims of the course:** In this course, we will employ philosophical methodology to examine a variety of issues about the environment. We will explore questions like: *why* should the natural environment be preserved? *What* should be preserved: local populations, species, or ecosystems? What *kinds of arguments* have been given (and can be given) in answer to these questions? And *how* can philosophy inform our environmental policy? This course will explore potential answers to these questions (and others) by proceeding in four parts. In part (1), we will give a brief introduction to ethics, animal rights, and religious attitudes toward the environment. In part (2), we will explore a few approaches (specifically) to environmental ethics, paying careful attention to the different conceptions of value appealed to therein. In part (3) we will explore some broader issues in the philosophy of biology, economics, and social policy. And we will conclude, in part (4), by confronting some challenges (both philosophical and policy-related) to environmentalism at large.

**Goals of the course:** The student should become familiar with different kinds of arguments from diverse disciplinary perspectives for preserving the natural environment. The student should be able to use some basic critical thinking and logic skills to analyze these arguments. And the student should become well-informed on at least one current environmental policy issue, bringing to bear what he/she has learned in the course to analyze it.

## Course Requirements:

- (1) One 2 page writing exercise (topic to be announced). Late papers are accepted but 1/3 of a letter grade will be deducted for every 24 hours that the paper is late.
- (2) One 5 page paper on an environmental issue of the student's choice. Students will submit both a rough draft and a final draft. The final paper grade will be an average of the two; a detailed assignment sheet to be provided. Again, late papers will be deducted 1/3 of a letter grade for every day they are late.
- (3) 10 quizzes based on assigned reading. These will typically be true/false, multiple-choice, or fill in the blank questions. Quizzes may be given during lecture or discussion sections. Quizzes may not be made up. The student's two lowest quiz grades will be dropped in calculating his/her final grade.
- (4) A midterm examination and a cumulative final examination.

(5) Class attendance and meaningful class participation, based in part on assigned reading, is expected.

**Grading:** Final grade calculation: 15% for quizzes; 10% for writing exercise; 20% for midterm; 20% for final exam; 10% for class participation; 25% for final paper.

**Absences:** University policy excuses the absences of students for illness (of one's self or one's dependent), religious observances, participation in University activities at the request of university authorities, and compelling circumstances beyond the student's control. Students must *request the excuse in writing and supply appropriate documentation*, e.g., medical documentation to the TA. Students with written, excused absences are entitled to a makeup midterm exam (but not a makeup quiz) at a time mutually convenient for the instructor/TA and student.

**Canvas space for the course:** The course will use the Canvas web space to post assigned readings and other course materials. Go to [elms.umd.edu](http://elms.umd.edu) [note: no www at beginning]. Sign on with your usual directory ID and password. If you are not familiar with Canvas, there are various tutorials available at the ELMS site.

**Classroom Etiquette:** Please arrive on time and leave only after the class is over. Please do not talk to your neighbor during class. Turn off and put away all cell phones and message devices. Laptops may NOT be used during lecture (unless proper DSS documentation is provided).

**Accommodations:** If a student has a documented disability and wishes to discuss academic accommodations with the instructor, please contact the instructor and the TA in writing (email is OK) as soon as possible. If a student is a member of a religious group that will require accommodations in the academic calendar, please send email to both the instructor and the TA within the first three weeks of class to indicate what the conflict is and what accommodation is requested.

**Honesty:** Honesty on the part of students is presumed. The University has approved a **Code of Academic Integrity** (<http://www.shc.umd.edu/code.html>), administered by the Student Honor Council, which prohibits students from cheating on exams, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, facilitating academic dishonesty, submitting fraudulent documents, and forging signatures. Plagiarism policy: all quotations taken from other authors, including from the internet, must be indicated by quotation marks and referenced. Paraphrasing must be referenced as well.

Students may get help with the grammar and structure of their writing, such as at the **Writing Center** (see <http://www.english.umd.edu/writingcenter> or call 301-405-3785 for appt.). However, students may not get unacknowledged help with the content of their work. Please contact the TA with any questions about what is acceptable or unacceptable outside help.

**Assigned Readings:** All assigned readings will be uploaded onto ELMS by at least one week prior to when they are assigned. There is no required textbook for this class.

## **Schedule of Readings and Assignments**

Major grading events are indicated by: (\*\*\*)

### **9/4, Introduction**

No discussion sections on Friday 9/6

## **Part 1: Ethics**

### **9/9, Introduction to Ethical Theory: Facts vs. Values**

- Required reading:
  - o “Moral Argument and Ethical Theory”, VanDeVeer & Pierce, pp 1-16

### **9/11, Ethical Egoism, Social Darwinism, Divine Command Theory**

- Required reading:
  - o “Influential Ethical Ideas and Theories” (part 1), VanDeVeer & Pierce, pp 16-20

### **9/16, Standard Ethical Theories: Utilitarianism, Kant, Contract Theory, An Environmental Ethic?**

- Required reading:
  - o “Influential Ethical Ideas and Theories” (part 2), VanDeVeer & Pierce pp 24 – 37

### **9/18, Animal Rights**

- Required reading:
  - o “A Utilitarian Defense of Animal Liberation”, Peter Singer

### **9/23, Animal Rights**

- Required reading:
  - o “The Radical Egalitarian Case for Animal Rights”, Tom Regan;
  - o “A Critique of Regan’s Animal Rights Theory”, Mary Ann Warren

### **9/25, Western Religious Attitudes toward Nature**

- Required reading:
  - o “The Historic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis”, Lynn White Jr
  - o “Judaism and the Environment”, Robert Gordis

**\*\*\*September 27<sup>th</sup>: 2 page writing exercise due at the beginning of discussion sections**

## **Part 2: Constructing an Environmental Ethic: Intrinsic vs. Non-Intrinsic Value**

### **9/30, Constructing an Environmental Ethic: Biocentric**

- Required reading:
  - o “On Being Morally Considerable”, Kenneth Goodpaster
  - o “The Ethics of Respect for Nature”, Paul W. Taylor

## 10/2, **Constructing an Environmental Ethic: Ecocentric**

- Required reading:
  - “The Land Ethic” (excerpt), Aldo Leopold,
  - “The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic”, J. Baird Callicott

## 10/7, **Deep Ecology**

- Required reading:
  - “Deep Ecology” DeVall and Sessions,

## 10/9, **Does Nature Have Intrinsic Value?**

- Required reading
  - “Naturalizing Values: Organisms and Species” Holmes Rolston III,
  - “Comments on Holmes Rolston’s ‘Naturalizing Values’”, Ned Hettinger

## 10/14, **Environmental Pragmatism**

- Required reading:
  - “Integration and Reduction: Two Approaches to Environmental Values”, Bryan Norton

## 10/16, **Obligations to Individual Organisms: Aesthetic Values**

- Required reading:
  - “Why Do Species Matter?”, Lilly-Marlene Russow

## 10/21, **Midterm exam review**

**\*\*\*October 23<sup>rd</sup>: Midterm exam**

## **Part 3: Biology, Economics, and Ethics in Policy**

### 10/28, **Reality of Species and Obligation to Preserve Species**

- Required reading:
  - “What is a Species?”, Stephen Jay Gould,
  - “Tropical Forests and their Species: Going, Going...” Norman Myers

### 10/30, **Private Property and the Environment: Tragedy of the Commons**

- Required reading:
  - “The Tragedy of the Commons”, Garrett Hardin;
  - “The Creation of Property”, John Locke,
  - “Property Rights in Natural Resources”, Kristin Shrader-Frechett

### 11/4, **The Economic View of the Environment**

- Required reading:
  - “The Ethical Basis of the Economic View of the Environment”, A. Myrick Freeman III;
  - “Preview”, VanDeVeer & Pierce, pp. 336-341

**11/6, The Economic View of the Environment, continued**

- Required reading:
  - o “At the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima, or Why Political Questions are not all Economic” Mark Sagoff

**11/11, Issues of Finite Resources: Functional Equivalence?**

- Required reading:
  - o “Can the Supply of Natural Resources Really be Infinite? Yes!”, Julian Simon;
  - o “The Case that the World has Reached its Limits”, Robert Goodland

**11/13, Climate Change**

- Required reading:
  - o “Understanding the Causes of Global Climate Change”, Pew Center on Global Climate Change,
  - o “Ethics and Global Climate Change”, Stephen Gardiner

**\*\*\*November 15<sup>th</sup>: First draft of 5 page paper due at beginning of discussion sections**

**11/18, Population**

- Required reading:
  - o “A Special Moment in History: the Challenge of Overpopulation and Overconsumption”, Bill McKibben,
  - o “The Unjust War Against Population”, Jacqueline Kasun

**11/20, Food**

- Required reading:
  - o “Lifeboat Ethics”, Garrett Hardin,
  - o “Population and Food: A Critique of Lifeboat Ethics”, Murdoch & Oaten

**11/25, GMO’s**

- Required reading:
  - o “The Unholy Alliance”, Mae Ho

**11/27, No Class**

**12/2, Pesticides**

- Required reading:
  - o “Silent Spring” (excerpt), Rachel Carson,
  - o “Is Silent Spring Behind Us?”, David Pimentel

**Part 4: Challenges to Environmentalism**

**12/4, Environmental Sexism**

- Required reading:
  - o “Development, Ecology, and Women”, Vandana Shiva,
  - o “How Feminist is Ecofeminism?” Victoria Davion

**12/9, Future Generations: Repugnant Conclusion?**

- Required Reading:
  - o “Reasons and Persons” (excerpt), Derek Parfit

**12/11, Final Exam Review**

**\*\*\*December 15<sup>th</sup>: Final draft of 5 page paper due by 11:59pm**

**\*\*\*December 18<sup>th</sup>: 1:30-3:30pm, Final Examination in lecture classroom  
No change in time allowed**

This syllabus may change. Students will be notified of important changes. The most recent version will be posted on ELMS.