



**Environmental Ethics**  
**PHIL/ENVI 221**

**Spring 2019**  
**Main 111**

**Professor Diane Michelfelder**

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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. When I say I have a moral responsibility to protect the environment, what am I really saying? What has value when it comes to the environment? To whom or what should my responsibility be directed? Should it be to species, individual living things, ecosystems, or something else? These questions, ones that look at what matters, are deeply intertwined with the question of why they matter, which points us in the direction of ethical theory. What ethical approaches are needed, such as Aldo Leopold's holistically-oriented land ethic, if one's responsibilities are to be developed to their fullest?

Fast-forwarding to the present day, we can find these questions still being posed and debated by environmental ethicists. But new questions have come into play, in particular the question of the ethics of climate change. In some sense, talking about the ethics of climate change might seem to be, and is, a no-brainer: It is ethically right to act so that the climate is protected now and for future generations? Profound ethical issues though lie in the details surrounding just what needs to be done, both with respect to the wide scope of public policy and the more narrow range of individual behavior and action. Considering these issues well have demanded a focus on values and principles escaping the foreground of traditional environmental ethics.

In this class, we will be giving critical reflection to ethical issues associated with both phases of environmental ethics, so that you will be able to have a comprehensive introduction to this important subfield of philosophy. We will move from looking at basic concepts and approaches to a consideration of “tough issues” in environmental ethics, including the skeptical question of whether individual action matters with respect to environmental protection. Throughout the course, we will toggle back and forth between our textbook and journal publications. In other words, the textbook will serve as a lily pad from which we can take a deeper dive into some of the most pressing ethical issues of our times.

### **Course learning outcomes**

You’ll find the learning outcomes 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) key concepts, issues, and debates within environmental ethics as a whole, both traditional and contemporary; (b) key theoretical approaches guiding responses to these issues and debates; (c) “tough ethical choices” involving the environment that face both individuals and policy-makers.

The design of this course is also intended to assist you in developing important skills for 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’ observation 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) identifying the ethical dimensions of

environmental-related issues; (c) respecting the well-reasoned ethical views of others, even when they are at odds with your own; (d) recognizing the assumptions and predispositions you bring to the consideration of questions in environmental ethics; and (e) understanding that there can be a positive value to being confused.

### **What you will be reading**

There is one required book for this course, available at *The Highlander*:

Ronald Sandler. 2018. *Environmental Ethics: Theory in Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Other course readings will be available online or will be posted on the course's Google Team Drive.

### **What you'll be writing**

In this course, you will be developing your skills as an active participant in the community of philosophical inquiry by writing two argumentative papers and by completing in-class reading responses which will also serve as opportunities for informal writing practice and opportunities to improve your argumentative writing skills. You will also get an opportunity to present your second paper so that you can benefit from the feedback of your peers. This class will not have any midterms or final exam.

Because *Environmental Ethics* is a "Writing as Argumentation" (WA) course, it will count toward the fulfillment of your three-course graduation requirement in writing. 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.*"

With this in mind, you'll be writing two argumentative papers for this course.

The **first paper** is intended to give you a chance to make a case for your own point of view (POV) on a particular issue in environmental ethics. You'll have an opportunity to select a topic from a list of "From my point of view...." options provided in class. In expressing your POV, you'll be asked (as the subtitle of our textbook states) to show how ethical theory can be used to inform environmental-related practices.

Once you turn in a first draft, you'll get it back with comments on how well your paper works as an example of academic writing (including mechanics and expression), and how well the arguments within it are presented. You will then have a week from when you get your paper back to revise it. First drafts will be

returned with a preliminary grade on them, but the grade itself will not be recorded. Revising your paper may improve your grade by as much as, but not more than, a full letter grade.

In your first paper, you will basically be talking to yourself, exploring your own ideas and trying to sort through them to come to a thoughtful and defensible position; such a reflective approach is an important aspect of philosophical thinking. In your **second paper**, you will also be developing a position but doing so in the context of contributing to a community of philosophical inquiry. In other words, --you'll be entering into a "conversation" with an author by extending, critiquing, or otherwise engaging with that person's ideas. Through the Macalester library, you have online access to the premier journal in environmental ethics, called (not surprisingly) called *Environmental Ethics*. The "prompts" for your second paper will be connected to articles in this particular journal.

Toward the end of the semester, you'll have an opportunity to take your thoughts in this paper and enter into a conversation with others in the class, by making an oral presentation of your first draft. You should plan on a ten minute presentation, which may be accompanied by slides if you desire to put some together.

Your first paper should be between 1250 and 1750 words long (5-7 double-spaced pages), and your second paper should be 2500 words long (10 pages)

Late papers will be accepted without penalty if you have a good reason for turning it in late and you let us know in advance of when it is due that you are unable to turn it in on time. *Unexcused late papers will be accepted up to one week after the due date, but you will lose half a letter grade (e.g. B+ 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 philosophical skills through informal, in-class reading reflections. This writing will be done at the beginning of class on most Thursdays to a prompt given by your professor that relates to one of the readings for that day, and will serve as a basis for that day's discussion. The prompts will be informal: "So, what do you think about m's argument for n"? These will be evaluated on a check plus/check/check minus basis.

### **Academic Honesty**

In many environments, the principle of "reduce, reuse, recycle" is good advice. Not so, though, for environments whose primary purpose is to facilitate successful individual learning and to model best scholarly practices. In this course, it is anticipated that the work you do will be honestly presented: in other words, that wherever you incorporate the ideas, words, or sentence structure of other authors into your own work, you will give them credit. That's not simply because this is an ethics course; any course at Mac would have the same expectation. In

reviewing your work for this course, your professor will adhere to Macalester's *Academic Integrity Policy*. This policy can be found in *Student Handbook*. Please have a look at it if you are not familiar with it.

### **Accessibility of Content and Assignments**

I am committed to making course content and assignments accessible to all of you taking this course. If there are any course elements 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 Melissa Fletcher, Director of Disability Services, early in the semester. She is reachable at [mfleche@macalester.edu](mailto:mfleche@macalester.edu) or at 696-6874.

### **Devices in the classroom**

Just as giving others credit where credit is deserved supports the value of academic work, so the gift of your attention helps support the integrity of the classroom, the place within which academic learning takes place.

The best device you can bring to this class is not electronic. It is your own attentive mind. Please refrain from googling, e-mailing, texting, tweeting, doing Facebook or Instagram, and checking in-coming messages during class. And, of course, please do put your cell phones on a setting so they will not ring. If you are aware that you might need to take an incoming call because of an emergency, please let me know before class begins.

This policy is for the sake of yourself as well as for your peers. Paying attention in class allows you to participate to your fullest, and so helps to create and sustain a vibrant learning environment. It is also a sign of respect to your fellow learners, including your professor. And, last but not least, a growing body of research shows that “distracted learning” in class can inhibit understanding and recall of the material being discussed.

Let me encourage you to keep to this policy in order to avoid having points deducted from your final course grade (2 points initially and 2 for each repeated violation).

### **How your work will be evaluated**

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

POV paper	20%
Research paper	30%
Oral presentation of your research paper	10%

In-class reading reflections	20%
Class participation	20%

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. 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

**RS refers to the textbook; all other readings are mentioned by name and how to access them. GTD stands for “Google Team Drive”; we will be using this instead of Moodle for this course. 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

Thursday, 24 January	Welcome and orientation to the course How are ethics and the environment related to one another?
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#### Week Two

Tuesday, 29 January	Is nature normative? <b>Reading:</b> RS, pp. 45-59
Thursday, 31 January	Is naturalness valuable? <b>Reading:</b> RS, pp. 67-74, 77-85; Eric Katz, <a href="#">"The Big Lie"</a> In-class writing #1

#### Week Three

Tuesday, 5 February	Consequentialist environmental ethics <b>Reading:</b> RS, pp. 138-148, 168-177, 185-187
Thursday, 7 February	Respect for nature as a basis for environmental ethics <b>Reading:</b> RS, pp. 198-205; 217-219; Paul Taylor, <a href="#">"The Ethics of Respect for Nature"</a>

In today's class, we will also look at how to write an argumentative paper in philosophy

**In-class writing #2**

#### **Week Four**

Tuesday, 12 February

Aldo Leopold's land ethic

**Reading:** RS, pp. 242-269

Thursday, 14 February

Critical discussion about the land ethic; can it be translated for today's challenges?

**Reading:** J. Baird Callicott, "[The Land Ethic](#)"; Christina Eisenberg, "[A Millennial Land Ethic, or What would Leopold Do Today?](#)"

**In-class writing #3**

#### **Week Five**

Tuesday, 19 February

Environmental virtue ethics

As part of today's class, we will listen to an interview on "Philosophy Bytes" with the environmental ethicist Dale Jamieson

**Reading:** RS, pp. 222-239

Thursday, 21 February

Can "greening" the virtues help with climate change?

**Reading:** Dale Jamieson, "When Utilitarians Should be Virtue Theorists"; Joachim Wündisch, "Green Votes not Green Virtues" (GTD)

**In-class writing #4**

#### **Week Six**

Tuesday, 26 February

Is there an ethical value to wild spaces?

**Reading:** Wallace Stegner, "[The Wilderness Letter](#)"; Michael Nelson and John Vucetich, "[The Values of Wilderness](#)"

Thursday, 28 February

The ethical value of wildness/wilderness debated

**Reading:** William Cronan, "[The Trouble with Wilderness](#)"; Philip Cafaro, "[Valuing Wild Nature](#)"

**First Draft of First Paper Due**

## **Week Seven**

Tuesday, 5 March

Environmental justice  
**Reading:** RS, pp.354-380

Thursday, 7 March

Justice, human rights, and climate change

Henry Shue, "Human Rights, Climate Change, and the Trillioneth Ton" (GTD); Michel Bourban, ["Climate Change, Human Rights, and the Problem of Motivation"](#)

Second paper introduced  
**In-class writing #5**

## **Week Eight**

Tuesday, 12 March

More on climate change and justice:  
**Reading:** Dale Jamieson, ["Climate Change, Responsibility, and Justice"](#)

Thursday, 14 March

Climate change, mitigation, and adaptation  
**Reading:** Clare Heyward, "Ethics and Climate Adaptation" (GTD); Henry Shue, "Mitigation: First Imperative of Environmental Ethics" (GTD)  
**In-class writing #6**

## **Week Nine**

**Enjoy Spring Break!**

## **Week Ten**

Tuesday, 26 March

The concept of a "climate/environmental refugee" and the debate over their formal recognition  
**Reading:** [Briefing from the European Parliament](#)

Thursday, 28 March

Ethical issues associated with environmental refugees  
**Reading:** Alexa Zellentin, "Climate Migration: Cultural Aspects of Climate Change" (GTD)  
**In-class writing #7**

### Week Eleven

Tuesday 2 April

Species and biodiversity

**Reading:** RS, pp. 294-311; Holmes Rolston III, ["Duties to Endangered Species"](#)

Thursday, 4 April

How ethical is it to engineer ecosystems and the climate?

**Reading:** RS, pp. 312-328; Christopher Preston, ["Ethics and Geoengineering"](#) Steven Gardiner, [Geoengineering and Moral Schizophrenia](#)  
**In-class writing #8**

### Week Twelve

Tuesday, 9 April

When it comes to protecting the environment, do individual actions matter? Setting the background....

**Reading:** Kristin Shrader-Frechette, "Ethical Energy Choices" (GTD)

Thursday, 11 April

The debate over individual actions

**Reading:** Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, ["It's Not My Fault"](#), Avram Hiller, [Climate Change and Individual Responsibility](#) (this is available on JSTOR if the link fails to work)

**In-class writing #9**

### Week Thirteen

Tuesday, 16 April

Environmental ethics and the Anthropocene

**Reading:** RS, pp. 410-420; Holmes Rolston III, ["The Anthropocene! Beyond the Natural?"](#)

Thursday, 18 April

Some further questions

**Reading:** Avner de Shalit, "From Environmental Ethics to Environmental Action" (on GTD); possible selection from Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*

**First Draft of Second Paper Due**

### Week Fourteen

Tuesday, 23 April                      Round One of Oral Presentations

Thursday, 25 April                     Round Two of Oral Presentations

**Week Fifteen**

Tuesday, 30 April                      Round Three of Oral Presentations

Thursday, 2 May                        Refreshments and course wrap-up

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Saturday, 11 May                      **Final Draft of Second Paper Due by Noon**  
Please turn it in by e-mail

*The photo on the front of this syllabus was taken in December 2018 on Big Talbot Island off the east coast of Florida. From left to right: female hooded merganser, tri-colored heron, snowy egret.*