

# ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

PHIL 328/SCHG 300-01

Fall 2011: 3 hours

MW 2:00 – 3:15 p.m., Davidson 204

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**Hours:** MF 11:00 – 12:00, 1:00 – 2:00  
and by appt.

<https://blackboard.louisville.edu>

**Course Description:** Examination of the moral status of the natural environment and ethical problems of human/environment interaction.

**Curricular Role:** This course fulfills a normative philosophy distributional requirement in the new PHIL major, a 3xx elective in the old PHIL major or in the PHIL minor, a 300+ Humanities elective for non-PHIL majors, and a Social Change elective for SCHG minors.

## **Required Texts:**

[DJ] Dale Jamieson, *Ethics and the Environment: an Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[SG] Stephen Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm: the Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

[BB] Primary-source articles available online (all available through “Course Documents” on Blackboard)

## **Technology:**

This course will make significant use of the Blackboard platform, including (*inter alia*) as a site for links to required readings. If you have not used Blackboard previously you should familiarize yourself with it. Also, I will use email to contact you if I need to. I will normally send email **only** to your U of L (cardmail) account. If you do not usually check that account, you should set it to forward to your preferred account. Also, I have a spam filter on my email account and so if you use email to turn in assignments you should send them **from** your U of L account (or through Blackboard) to ensure that my spam filter doesn't block them.

## **Purpose and Aims of the Course:**

Every philosophy course has two subject-matters. The first is the **content**. The second is **a distinctive way of interacting with the content**.

### *Content:*

This course has at its core two most-general questions: *how should we interact with natural phenomena* such as animals, plants, species, and ecosystems; and *how should we interact with one another* in light of our dependence on and desire for these natural

objects, given that natural objects may be degraded or diminished by certain ways we use them?

The course divides roughly into four parts. Part One is preparatory: in order to do environmental ethics we need to know something about the environment and something about ethics, and the first part of the course introduces both these subjects. Part Two is about ethics and animals: how ought we to treat them, and why? Are they morally significant only insofar as they are useful to people, or are they valuable in themselves? How valuable? Are they morally on a par with us, or do they inhabit some lower status? Part Three then considers Nature more broadly. Why, if at all, should we care about the natural environment? How, if at all, should we change our behavior in order to follow the prescriptions of moral theories regarding the environment? Finally, Part Four addresses climate. Global Warming is the single greatest known threat to human civilization, apart from the constant threat of nuclear annihilation. How should we understand it, and how should we think about our own situation in face of it?

By the end of the semester you should have gained and/or improved upon the following **content-related** skills and knowledge:

- Awareness and understanding of some environmental values and problems;
- Understanding of the causes and some potential solutions of certain problems;
- Appreciation of the nature and importance of global warming (global climate change) as a moral and philosophical challenge
- Recognition of the interrelation of environmental factors, and the interrelation between environmental and other moral, social, or political issues;
- Familiarity with main philosophical theories regarding the nonhuman world and regarding the interaction between humans and nonhumans;

#### *Interacting with content*

Consider, for a moment, radio waves. You could live your life without ever knowing they were there—as people did until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But they are all around us, coming from all directions, bouncing off us, sometimes tickling our ear drums. They make possible a lot of modern life. And, as you know if you’ve ever manually tuned a radio in a big city, tiny distinctions between wavelengths can make the difference between two completely different broadcasts. If your radio waves or your interactions with them get out of whack, things could go quite wrong; your life might even be unbearable.

Doing philosophy is like attending to radio waves. You could live your life without ever doing philosophy. But if you did, you might get your ideas tuned to all the wrong channels, and never be any the wiser. To be sure, doing philosophy is no guarantee that you will get the right answers; unfortunately, reality does not pause for station identification. But failing to do philosophy, or doing it badly, makes your chances of getting right answers vanishingly small.

Philosophy is in the first instance a particular way of interacting with what you read, hear, and think. The fundamental questions are “what does this mean?” “is this true?” and “if this is true, what are its implications?” In order to answer the first question we engage in *conceptual analysis*, which is a fancy word for *definition*. But philosophical definitions are not dictionary definitions; we don’t care to know how a word is generally used, but what the concept is. In order to answer the second question we engage in *argumentation*: the identification of premises and relationships among them; the drawing of distinctions as needed for disambiguation; the assessment of theses and inferences. And in order to answer the third question we set up a claim against other salient theses and determine whether they are compatible or incompatible, and why. Philosophy is fundamentally about understanding a reality that does not much care to be understood.

Certitude is the enemy of philosophy. Memorization and absorption of facts are *useful* for philosophy, for the sake of informing our philosophical reflection, but do not themselves constitute philosophy. But at the same time, pure speculation and rumination, detached from any purpose, also do not constitute philosophy. Finally, philosophy is not debate. We are here to reach the truth. That is the only way to “win.” In philosophical arguments, there is absolutely no value to *being* right, the only value is in *getting it* right.

By the end of the semester you should have gained or improved upon the following **philosophical** skills:

- Reasoning skills such as drawing inferences and distinctions, evaluating arguments, uncovering hidden assumptions, recognizing analogies and disanalogies across concepts, behaviors, social institutions, etc.;
- Ability to follow and evaluate written and spoken arguments;
- Ability clearly to summarize, without evaluating, arguments, in a way that emphasizes clarity, charity, completeness, and fidelity;
- Ability to evaluate arguments;
- Ability to *construct* written and spoken arguments, appreciating where your own view may be controversial;
- Capacity to assess controversial theses, including your own, in a way that is both charitable and critical, by appeal to moral and philosophical considerations;
- Ability to disambiguate by drawing distinctions or clarifying thoughts;
- Ability fruitfully to apply your knowledge and skill-base to new moral and environmental questions that arise in the future.

**Evaluation:**

1. Short Writing Assignments:	20%
2. Eco-Journals	25
3. Final exam	15
4. Major Paper	30
5. Preparation	<u>10</u>
Total	100%

1. *Short Writing Assignments.* [SW] Whenever we read a chapter of Jamieson or Gardiner, you may do a short writing assignment on that chapter. You must do **four** altogether in the following order: two Summaries first, and then two short Critical Responses. A summary need not summarize a whole chapter, but rather a key argument or section in the chapter. The idea of a summary is to lay out the content in your own words but with the author's ideas – that is, you do not evaluate, you report. Critical responses, on the other hand, might summarize briefly but only so as to provide – in a fair and friendly manner – the material for your critical assessment. These must be handed in on the day that the relevant chapter appears on the syllabus. You must have completed your summaries by the withdrawal deadline, and done your first critical response no later than November 2. These assignments should be somewhere around 2 pages (typed, double-spaced, etc.).
2. *Eco-journal.* [EJ] At the beginning of the semester you should set aside a small amount of time each day or week to keep this journal. I'll explain what this entails, and provide further information on the related assignments.
3. *Final Exam.* This will be a 30-minute **oral exam with a twist: we will each have a chance to ask the questions.** You may pick three articles or chapters on which to focus, one from each section of the course; you will be evaluated on your answers to my questions; on the quality of the questions you ask me; and on your ability to follow up based on my responses.
4. *Preparation.* The principal method of learning in this class is through discussion and my calling upon students to explain or assess particular theses and concepts. You should be ready for this every time; I will expect you to be present and prepared each class unless you have an excused absence. I will come to class each day with a list of people whose insights I will be particularly interested in soliciting that day, and will put those people's names on the board at the beginning of class; should there be few volunteers I will start calling on people from the list. (As far as possible, I will construct each day's list based on your interests.) You can expect to be on the list at least two or three times during the semester. While participation at all times will contribute to your preparation grade, **half** of that grade (5% of total) will depend on your performance on days that you are on the list.
5. *Major paper.* Then, **three weeks after the second time you are on the list (or on Dec. 7, whichever is earlier),** you must hand in a 5-7 page paper on the subject-matter of that day's discussion. The paper should take either of two forms: 1) articulate some thesis that was discussed in that day's class or reading, and then critically assess the thesis; or 2) clarify some confusing concept discussed in that day's class or reading, and then see what work the concept can do in environmental ethics. You may, but need not, use outside sources; but if you plan to do so, I recommend that you check with me for some suggestions. If you are not happy with your grade you may revise and resubmit this paper once, one week after I return it (**but no later than 12/2**), in light of my comments.

**A note on grading:** My classes usually have an average grade between about 78 and 82 percent, which is C+/B-. Unless something unpredictable happens, the course average will be no lower than a C+. If at least 85% of the students are in class every time (starting in week 2), I will guarantee that the course average will be no lower than a B. If 95% are in class every time, I will guarantee that it will be no lower than a B+. And if everyone has perfect attendance, then everyone who has satisfactorily completed every assignment will get an A.

**Handing in assignments:**

*Presentation.* With the exception of EJs, which may be handwritten, every assignment should be typed in normal fonts with normal margins. If you have any questions about what this entails, ask me. I will expect all work to be spell-checked and proofread; writing will be one criterion of evaluation. (Handwritten EJs must be legible; if I cannot read them they have not been completed.) All assignments should be submitted using the minimum of paper and frills—double-side if possible, no folders, etc.; just a single staple in the top-left corner as needed. **Always keep a copy** of your assignments when you hand them in, and do not throw them away after I've returned them to you. If there are any discrepancies, I will assume my records are accurate unless you can provide me with documentation.

SWs and eco-journals (if typed) may be submitted electronically in the following formats **only:** .doc, .docx, .rtf, or .odt. **If I can't open the assignment then it has not been submitted.** Your best bet is to submit such assignments through the "send email" function on Blackboard, but whatever you do **always use your U of L email account** and cc yourself on the email to ensure that the attachment was included. Then, keep that email at least until you have a grade for the relevant assignment. If there is any discrepancy, my records will be decisive unless you can show me **the original email with a date stamp and the correct document attached.**

**Deadlines:** With the exception of EJs, which are due at the end of class, assignments are due by the beginning of class on the day listed in the schedule below. Late assignments will be penalized one grade per school day late, beginning at 1:15 p.m. If you cannot hand in an assignment on time, you must communicate with me, and if at all possible turn in the assignment, *beforehand*. In general, unforeseeable physical impossibility and deaths in the family are the only valid excuses for late assignments.

**Disabilities:** The University of Louisville is committed to providing access to programs and services for qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student with a disability and require accommodation to participate in and complete requirements for this class, notify me immediately and contact the Disability Resource Center (119 Stevenson Hall, 852-6938) for verification of eligibility and determination of specific accommodations.

**Academic Integrity:** Cheating and plagiarism are immoral because a) they are *dishonest* (to me and others), in that the cheater/plagiarist presents as her/his own something that is not; b) they are *unfair* (to classmates), who work hard to meet requirements that the cheater/plagiarist circumvents; c) they violate *academic obligations* (to the university) that students voluntarily accept upon enrollment; and d) they may violate *self-regarding duties* of *self-development* or *self-perfection* (if such duties exist).

They can also get one in serious trouble. According to the University of Louisville's *Code of Student Conduct*, Section 5, "Academic dishonesty is prohibited at the University of Louisville. It is a serious offense because it diminishes the quality of scholarship, makes accurate evaluation of student progress impossible, and defrauds those in society who must ultimately depend upon the knowledge and integrity of the institution and its students and faculty." It is your responsibility to know this code and comply with its requirements. If I discover violations of this policy I will pursue the required disciplinary channels, which normally involve communicating with the dean for undergraduate affairs. If you have any questions about how to comply with this policy, ask me *in advance*.

**Schedule of topics**  
(Subject to change.)

Date	Topic	Reading	Due today	Notes
<b>Part I: Introduction: Environment and Ethics</b>				
<b>M8/22</b>	Introduction			
W 8/24	The Environment as an Ethical Question	DJ, chap. 1		
<b>M 8/29</b>	Limits, Dangers, Risks	<i>Living Planet Report</i> (BB)		
W 8/31	What should I do?	Hiller, "Climate Change and Individual Responsibility" (BB)	EJ1	
<b>M 9/5</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>CLASS</b>	<b>TODAY</b>	<b>Labor Day</b>
<b>W 9/7</b>	Human Morality	DJ, chap. 2		
<b>M 9/12</b>		DJ, chap. 3		
W 9/14		Continued		Thurs. 1/28 is last day to apply for a degree

<b>M 9/19</b>	Normative Ethics	DJ, chap. 4	<b>Last chance to hand in 1<sup>st</sup> SW</b>	
W 9/21		Continued	EJ2	
<b>Part II: Ethics and Nature</b>				
<b>M 9/26</b>	Humans and Other Animals	DJ, chap. 5	<b>Last chance to hand in 2<sup>nd</sup> SW</b>	
W 9/28	Are All Animals Equal?	Singer (BB)		
<b>M 10/3</b>		Pollan (BB)		
W 10/5		Continued	EJ3	
<b>M 10/10</b>	<b>FALL Break</b>			
W 10/12	The value of nature	DJ, chap. 6		10/13 is last day to withdraw
<b>M 10/17</b>	Ecocentrism	Leopold (BB)		
W 10/19		Continued		Film about Aldo Leopold on 10/22 at Bioneers
M 10/24	Ecofeminism	Warren (BB)		
W 10/26		Continued	EJ4	
<b>M 10/31</b>	Nature's Future	DJ, chap. 7	<b>Last chance to hand in 3<sup>rd</sup> SW</b>	
W 11/2		Continued		Friday 11/4 is Humphrey Colloquium
<b>Part IV: A Perfect Moral Storm</b>				
<b>M 11/7</b>		SG, introduction & chap. 1		
W 11/9		Continued		
<b>M 11/14</b>		SG, chap. 2		
W 11/16		Continued	EJ5	
<b>M 11/21</b>		SG, chap. 5		
W 11/23	<b>Thanksgiving</b>	<b>Break</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Class</b>
<b>M 11/28</b>		SG, chap. 7		
<b>W 11/30</b>		SG, chap. 9	EJ6	Friday (12/2) is

				last day to hand in paper revision
<b>M 12/5</b>	What should we do?	SG, chap. 11-12	<b>Last chance to hand in 4<sup>th</sup> SW</b>	
<b>T 12/6</b>	Reading	Day	Nothing	Scheduled
By Wed., Dec. 7, 5:00PM	<b>Final oral exams</b>			<b>You schedule; first-come, first-served</b>

### **Required Articles for PHIL 328/SCHG 301-01 Environmental Ethics**

1. *Living Planet Report 2010*. <http://www.worldwildlife.org/sites/living-planet-report/WWFBinaryitem18260.pdf>
2. Avram Hiller, "Climate Change and Individual Responsibility," *The Monist* (summer 2011). (Should be available electronically in time, in which case I'll circulate a link on Blackboard; otherwise, we'll use something else.)
3. Peter Singer, "Speciesism and Moral Status," *Metaphilosophy* 40 #3/4 (July 2009), 567-81 (on-campus access: click [here](#); off-campus: use [this](#) journal link and then scroll down the table of contents to the article).
4. Michael Pollan, "An Animal's Place," *The New York Times Magazine*, Nov. 10, 2002, p. 58 (on-campus access: click [here](#); off-campus access: click [here](#).)
5. Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic"  
<http://home.btconnect.com/tipiglen/landethic.html>.
6. Karen Warren, "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism" is on Blackboard under Course Documents.