

**PHILOSOPHY 322
ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS**

BULLETIN INFORMATION

PHIL 322: Environmental Ethics (3 credit hours)

Course Description:

Examination of principles and arguments surrounding moral issues involving the environment.

SAMPLE COURSE OVERVIEW

This course will provide you with a theoretical foundation based on which you should be able to recognize and develop rational arguments in support of various viewpoints on contested issues concerning the environment. In particular the course will introduce you to traditional ethical theories in philosophy and provide illustrations of how these theories may apply to or be employed in the context of current environmental issues. You will learn the major approaches to applying ethical viewpoints to nature and the environment from both theoretical and practical standpoints. You should be able to recognize and understand how environmental ethics informs decisions and policy making on environmental issues, and analyze and evaluate arguments in support of or opposition to those decisions. We will discuss a variety of issues, from wilderness policy to the moral status of animals and the environment, to population growth and sustainability, as well as others.

ITEMIZED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of Philosophy 322, students will be able to:

1. Identify the sources and functions of values in the context of debates about environmental issues such as (but not limited to) wilderness policy, the moral status of animals and the environment, and population growth and sustainability;
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of values and ethics for policy-makers, business owners, and private citizens in their deliberations about the environment;
3. Demonstrate the ability to reflect on how both personal values and ethical theories shape personal and community ethics and decision-making about the environment.

SAMPLE REQUIRED TEXTS/SUGGESTED READINGS/MATERIALS

1. Louis Pojman, *Environmental Ethics*. 5th ed. Wadsworth Publishing.
2. James and Stuart Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. 5th ed. Rowman and Littlefield.

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS AND/OR EXAMS

1. **Two papers:** As described below*, you may substitute a service learning project for Paper #2.
 - a. **Paper 1:** Write a paper of about four pages, following the directions below. You may, but need not, consult other sources, but YOU MUST CITE OTHER SOURCES IF YOU USE THEIR IDEAS! Also, feel free to discuss your issue with other people, but you should make note of others' ideas in a footnote. Follow these guidelines:
 - i. *Choose a theory for addressing issues associated with environmental ethics, and describe your chosen theory.* Your theory should be based on one of the class readings or lectures. In other words, it should involve one of the following: some form of animal rights, biocentrism, ecocentrism, deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology, or some form of enlightened anthropocentrism (based on divine command, natural law, utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, or social contract theory).
 - ii. *Argue for your theory by presenting at least two reasons (the more reasons, the better) that it is a good one.* These reasons can be taken from the book, from class lecture, or from your own creativity. Your reasons could involve the intuitive plausibility of your theory (or its consequences), the counter-intuitive characteristics or consequences of other ethical theories, and/or the practical value of using your theory for addressing environmental issues.
 - iii. *Present at least two objections (the more, the better) that proponents of other ethical theories would develop against your theory.* In other words, give reasons why proponents of other ethical theories prefer their theories over your chosen theory. These reasons can be taken from the book, from class lecture, or from your own creativity.
 - iv. *Reply to the objections against your theory.* In other words, explain why you think that your chosen theory is still a good one, despite the reasons that others give for rejecting it. These responses can be taken from the book, from class lecture, or from your own creativity.
 - v. *Introduce the paper very briefly, using a sentence or two to state the theory that you will be describing.*
 - b. **Paper 2:** Write a paper of about four pages, following the directions below. You may, but need not, consult other sources, but YOU MUST CITE OTHER SOURCES IF YOU USE THEIR IDEAS! Also, feel free to discuss your issue with other people, but you should make note of others' ideas in a footnote. Follow these guidelines:
 - i. *Choose, from the Unit on Specific Issues in Environmental Ethics, an issue that you would like to discuss, and describe the main debates concerning that issue carefully and efficiently.* (The six potential issues are: wilderness preservation, economics, private property, population growth, obligations to future generations, and sustainable development.)
 - ii. *Identify and state a position or claim regarding that issue that you would like to defend.* If the issue involves a lot of different ideas and debates, try to choose one fairly straightforward claim to defend (e.g., if you're addressing the issue of wilderness preservation, you might defend the

claim that we should just abandon the concept of “wilderness preservation” and instead focus on the goal of maximizing biodiversity by whatever means appear to be most effective).

iii. *Argue in defense of your chosen position or claim by presenting at least two reasons that you think the position is a justifiable one.* I strongly urge you to use one or more of the ethical theories that we discussed in the first unit of the course as at least part of the reasoning in favor of your position. You could also use ideas from an article that supports your position. See if you can be creative and use at least some ideas that aren’t already in the readings, though.

iv. *Present at least two objections against the position that you are defending.* One of these objections should draw explicitly from another article discussed in this unit. For example, if you are defending the claim that we should abandon the concept of “wilderness preservation,” you could appeal to the Hettinger and Throop article for some objections against your position.

v. *Reply to both objections against your chosen article.* In other words, explain why you think that your chosen position is still defensible, despite the objections that you mention. You can use ideas from class and readings, but try to come up with some ideas of your own as well.

2. Participation: Attendance (more than 3 absences will be penalized); Joining in-class discussions during the first unit; Participating with in-class debates during the second unit

3. “Hot Topic” Paper and Presentation

a. Choose a relatively recent news item (from a newspaper, news magazine, or online source, for example) and develop both a class presentation (preferably via PowerPoint) and a four-page paper regarding this issue. *If possible, please provide a copy of the news item when you turn in your paper.* Both the paper and the presentation should include the following four elements (but the presentation will obviously provide the elements in a shorter, simplified format).

i. *Write a short synopsis of your chosen issue, explaining why the issue is important from the perspective of environmental ethics.*

ii. *Identify two (or at most three) major alternative courses of action that are either being proposed or that could plausibly be proposed for addressing the issue. For example, if you chose a news article about global warming, one of the major courses of action might be to ignore it, and another course of action might involve implementing the Kyoto Treaty.*

iii. *Identify the main ethical reasons that are either being proposed or that could plausibly be proposed in support of each major course of action. Try to clarify how these ethical reasons incorporate (or could incorporate) the ethical theories discussed in the first half of the course. For example, you might claim that the proponents of one major course of*

action appear to be following an anthropocentric utilitarian line of reasoning, whereas proponents of the other course of action are appealing to ecocentric thinking. It is also possible that proponents of both actions are actually using (or could use) the same basic ethical theory, but their disagreement is arising from differing factual beliefs or other aspects of their reasoning.

iv. *Provide the most convincing ethical case that you can develop in support of one particular course of action.* This will involve arguing that there are stronger ethical reasons in favor of one course of action than there are in favor of the alternative course of action. Your argument might involve addressing objections to the position that you are taking.

b. You should plan to spend about 7-8 minutes presenting the four elements listed above. The remainder of the time (varying from as little as 2 to as much as 10 minutes, depending on how many other presentations we have on your day) should be devoted to class discussion of your issue. You are encouraged to develop a few questions that you could ask the class. For example, you might inquire if they agree with your ethical reasoning, if they can identify any other courses of action, etc.

4. Two exams (mid-term and final, non-cumulative)

5. Instead of doing Paper #2, you may spend at least three hours doing **service** with some environmentally related organization and write a 2- to 3-page description of what you did, what the mission of the organization is, and relate those activities some topics from class. For example, do the activities exemplify an ethical position discussed in class? (In this case, your Paper #1 or Hot Topics grade, whichever is higher, will double as your Paper #2 grade for the purpose of calculating a final grade.) You must get the approval of the professor prior to engaging in the activity and turn in a signed copy of the liability form at <http://www.sc.edu/servicelearning/pdf/SLLiability.pdf>. You must also get a signature from someone at the organization to document your hours of service. IF YOU CHOOSE THIS OPTION, IT IS DUE WEEK 13.

SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE WITH TIMELINE OF TOPICS, READINGS/ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS/PROJECTS

Unit 0: Introduction to Environmental Ethics

Week 1: Introduction to Basic Issues: *An Inconvenient Truth* (movie)

1. What is environmental ethics?
2. How should we deliberate about environmental ethics?
3. What ethical issues are there to consider in our deliberations about the environment?

Week 2: The Basis for Ethical Thinking: Rachels 1, *Next Industrial Revolution* (movie)

1. What is ethical theory and how might it inform ethical decision-making?
2. How might ethical thinking reframe traditional disputes about the environment, such as the supposed conflict between 'economic growth' and 'sustainable living'?

Unit 1: General Ethical Theory for Environmental Ethics

Week 3: Divine Command & Natural Law; Utilitarianism & Deontology: Rachels 4, 6-9

1. Does morality depend on religion?
2. Is there a natural law common to all?
3. Are consequences all that matter for ethical consideration?
4. Are there absolute moral imperatives?

Week 4: Social Contract & Virtue Ethics; Review of ethical theory: Rachels 10, 12, 13

1. What holds society together?
2. What obligations can society impose on individuals?
3. How are various ethical theories related to one another, in theory and in application?

Unit 2: Ethical Theory Specific to Environmental Issues

Week 5: Obligations to Animals: Pojman 7, 9-11

1. Are animals moral beings?
2. Do humans have obligations to animals? If so, what are they?
3. How are obligations to animals (if any) balanced by other obligations or rights?

Week 6: Biocentrism & Deep Ecology Pojman 17, 25-26

1. Does the environment itself deserve moral consideration?
2. Do humans have obligations to the environment itself? If so, what are they?
3. How are obligations to the environment (if any) balanced by other obligations or rights?

Week 7: Ecocentrism, Ecofeminism & Social Ecology: Pojman 5, 19-20, 28

1. Do human beings hold a special place in nature as regards intrinsic value?
2. What would follow, as regards ethical consideration, if the answer is 'no'?

Week 8: "Enlightened" Anthropocentrism: Pojman 30, 39

1. If humans are special as regards intrinsic value, do they nonetheless have obligations to the environment?
2. What could ground such obligations?
3. How are they balanced against other rights and obligations?

Unit 3: Specific Issues in Environmental Ethics

Week 9: Economics and the Environment: Pojman 45, 68-69

1. What rights or obligations do humans have to engage in economic activity?
2. How might those rights or obligations be balanced by the rights of the environment, or our obligations towards it?

Week 10: Private Property: Pojman 77, preparation for in-class debates

1. How might the right of ownership of private property come into conflict with societal obligations to the environment?
2. Can society impose restrictions on property ownership for the sake of protecting the environment? Even when there is not a direct human interest at stake?

Week 11: Wilderness Preservation: Pojman 21-22, preparation for in-class debates

1. Do we have an obligation to preserve wilderness?
2. What exactly does appropriate preservation entail? Complete lack of human intervention? What exactly *counts* as 'preservation'?

Week 12: Obligations to Future Generations: Pojman 42-43, preparation for in-class debates

1. Do we have obligations to future generations?
2. How might those obligations, if any, lead to specific choices about environmental policy?

Week 13: Population Growth: Pojman 44, 46, 48, preparation for in-class debates

1. Do humans have an unrestricted right to procreate?
2. What public policies are permissible in order to address the potential social problem of population growth? Or is there a problem?

Week 14: Sustainable Development: Pojman 54, 76, 79, 81-82

1. Is economic growth compatible with serious commitment to environmental preservation?
2. What exactly *counts* as 'sustainable' development?

Week 15: Review

Final Exam according to University exam schedule