

Environmental Ethics

PHIL 1180
Northeastern University
Fall 2018

GENERAL INFORMATION

- + Instructor: Prof. Arden Ali
- + Office location: 314 Holmes Hall
- + Office hours: Wednesdays 9:00am - 10:00am (and by appointment)
- + Mailbox location: 371 Holmes Hall (accessible during normal business hours)
- + Email address: a.ali@northeastern.edu

- + Course number: PHIL 1180 (13797)
- + Course website: <http://blackboard.northeastern.edu>
- + Meeting times: Wednesdays & Fridays, 11:45am - 1:25pm
- + Meeting location: Forsyth Building 130
- + Exam time and location: December 11th, 2018, 1:00pm – 3:00 pm (location TBA)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

- + Our relationship with the natural world generates some of today's most pressing ethical questions. This course challenges students to think critically about environmental problems at four levels of abstraction.
- + The first part of the course addresses the essence of our relationship to nature: if nature is defined as everything other than human beings, can there be a non-destructive relationship between people and the natural world?
- + The second part of the course concerns moral status: which parts of the environment have moral standing? We explore views that bestow status on people, animals, plants, and even ecosystems.
- + The third part of the course concerns environmental policy-making: what methodology should policy-makers use when making decisions about our shared environment and resources? Can cost-benefit analysis really tell us which policies to adopt?
- + In the last part of the course, we explore the ways that someone might defend their environmentalism against skepticism: why should someone care about conserving resources, reducing emissions, or protecting endangered species?

TEXTS

- + All required readings will be posted on Blackboard.
- + Optional textbook: Sandler, Ronald. *Environmental Ethics: Theory in Practice*. Oxford University Press, 2018. ISBN: 9780199340729.
- + Copies of the optional textbook have been ordered at the Northeastern bookstore.

REQUIREMENTS

- * Attendance and Preparation: Barring extraordinary circumstances, you are expected to attend every class session and complete all course readings.
- * Participation: You are required to participate during discussion. Participation includes asking questions, answering questions, raising objections, explaining material, helping other students, or simply voicing your confusion. Repeated failures to participate will impact your final grade. To ensure full credit for this requirement, you should make at least one comment about the required reading each week.
- * Discussion notes: In advance of most sessions, the instructor will send a prompt or question by email. You should prepare a thorough response to the question or prompt (1-2 paragraphs) and submit your response in the discussion forum on Blackboard (as a new thread) before the start of our class session. Please be prepared to share your thoughts with the class when asked. These assignments are graded on a pass/fail scheme.
- * Essays: You are required to complete four short essays (2-3 pages each). The instructor will provide prompts for each essay. These assignments are given a letter grade (see below for details).
- * Examination: There is a final comprehensive examination for this course.

COURSE POLICIES

- * Class preparation: You should complete all assigned readings before our session. Discussion notes should be submitted before the start of class. Please arrive on time.
- * Communication: I send course updates via email and Blackboard announcements. Please check your Northeastern email account regularly. Email is the best way to contact me outside of class.
- * Electronics policy: Please do not use laptops, cell phones, tablets, or other electronic devices during class, unless you are using these devices for an approved classroom accommodation or have explained your use of these devices to me in advance.
- * Submission of essays: You must submit your essays electronically using Blackboard before the specified due date and time. To do this, click on the 'Essay Assignments' link on the left navigational menu, select the appropriate assignment, and upload your essay.
- * Submission of discussion notes: You must submit your discussion notes electronically using Blackboard before the specified due date and time. To do this, click on the 'Discussion notes' link on the left navigational menu, select the appropriate forum, and start a new thread.
- * Late or incomplete written work: In general, essays and discussion notes will not be accepted after their due date/time unless an arrangement has been made before the due date. Talk to me if you fall behind, preferably long before the paper or assignment is due.
- * Excused absence from class: In accordance with the University's policy, students who are unable to attend classes or take examinations because of religious observance will have a reasonable opportunity to make up any coursework missed.

- Grading standards: Essays are evaluated for clarity, accuracy, and originality. Comments from the instructor will indicate areas for improvement on each assignment. Grades follow the following scheme:

LG	4.0-scale	Expected Quality
A	4.0	Exceptional performance
A-	3.67	Superior performance
B+	3.33	Good performance
B	3.0	
B-	2.67	
C+	2.33	Satisfactory performance
C	2.0	
C-	1.67	
D+	1.33	Minimally-adequate performance
D	1	
D-	0.67	
F	0	Unsatisfactory performance

- Dissemination of course materials: Recording and disseminating class lectures, discussions, and materials is prohibited without prior written permission.
- Accommodations: To request accommodations for a disability, contact Northeastern's Disability Resource Center (<http://northeastern.edu/drc/>). They are located at 20 Dodge Hall and can also be reached at (617) 373-2675. DRC will provide you with information about how to formally request an accommodation in this course.
- Title IX Protection: The University's Title IX Policy prohibits sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship or domestic violence, and stalking. The Title IX Policy applies to the entire community, including male, female, transgender students, and faculty and staff. For more information, or to learn about reporting an offense, visit <http://northeastern.edu/titleix>

FINAL GRADE CALCULATION

- Attendance and Participation 10%
- Discussion notes 10%
- Essay #1 15%
- Essay #2 15%
- Essay #3 15%
- Essay #4 15%
- Final Examination 20%

GETTING HELP

- If you are having any difficulties in the course, talk to me! Come to office hours (no appointment needed) or send me an email to set up a different time to talk.
- The Writing Center can provide assistance as you complete essays in this course. Visit <http://northeastern.edu/writingcenter/>.

- If you are having difficulties using the course Blackboard site, contact Information Technology Services. Visit <http://northeastern.edu/its/>.
- Northeastern University’s Health and Counseling Service offers safe and confidential support for mental health concerns. Don’t struggle alone; reach out for help when you need it. Visit <http://northeastern.edu/uhrs/counseling-services/>.
- If you have any concerns related to this course that you do not feel comfortable sharing with me, you can contact the Chairperson of the Department of Philosophy and Religion, Prof. Ronald Sandler, at r.sandler@northeastern.edu.

ACADEMIC RESPONSIBILITY

- A copy of Northeastern University’s Academic Honesty and Integrity Policy can be found at <http://northeastern.edu/osccr/academic-integrity-policy/>.
- Academic dishonesty, e.g. plagiarism or cheating, may result in a failed mark on assignments or examinations, failure in the course as a whole, or more serious disciplinary measures.
- This course will use plagiarism detection software for all written assignments.

IMPORTANT DATES (These dates are subject to change. See Blackboard for the updated schedule.)

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| • September 5th | First day of classes (college-wide) |
| • September 18th | Last day to elect pass/fail for fall courses |
| • September 25th | Last day to withdraw without W grade |
| • September 28th | Essay 1 due |
| • October 8th | No classes (college-wide) |
| • October 24th | Essay 2 due |
| • November 7th | Essay 3 due |
| • November 9th | No class (specific to this course) |
| • November 12th | No classes (college-wide) |
| • November 21st | No classes (college-wide) |
| • November 23rd | No classes (college-wide) |
| • December 5th | Last day of classes (college-wide) |
| • December 6th | Last day to withdraw with W grade |
| • December 7th | Essay 4 due |
| • December 7th – 14th | Final examination (exact time and location TBA) |

SCHEDULE (This schedule is subject to change. See Blackboard for the updated version.)

Unit I: Defining our relationship with nature			
Date	Due	Topic and Required Reading	Textbook
Sept 5th	--	Introduction to the course <i>No assigned reading</i>	--
Sept 7th	--	Isn't ethics all relative? <i>Read</i> Midgley, 'Trying Out One's New Sword'	Ch. 2
Sept 12th	--	Are humans part of nature? <i>Read</i> Vogel, 'Why 'Nature' has no place...'	Ch. 3
Sept 14th	--	Challenging anthropocentrism <i>Read</i> Sylvan, 'Is There A Need for a New...'	Ch. 5
Unit II: Merging the moral and ecological community			
Date	Due	Topic and Required Reading	Textbook
Sept 19th	--	From anthropocentrism to sentientism <i>Read</i> Singer, 'All Animals are Equal'	Ch. 7
Sept 21st	--	The argument for sentientism <i>Reread</i> Singer, 'All Animals are Equal'	
Sept 26th	--	Against sentientism <i>Read</i> Steinbock, 'Speciesism and the Idea..'	
Sept 28th	Essay #1	Motivating biocentrism <i>Read</i> Taylor, 'The Ethics of Respect for....'	
Oct 3rd	--	Is biocentrism plausible? <i>Read</i> Schmidtz, 'Are All Species Equal?'	
Oct 5th	--	From biocentrism to holism <i>Read</i> McShane, 'Individualist Biocentrism...'	Ch. 11
Oct 10th	--	Ecocentrism <i>Read</i> Leopold, 'The Land Ethic'	
Unit III: Making policy about the environment			
Date	Due	Topic and Required Reading	Textbook
Oct 12th	--	The cost-benefit approach to policy-making <i>Read</i> Kelman, 'Cost-Benefit Analysis...'	Ch. 8 and Ch. 15.2
Oct 17th	--	Defending cost-benefit analysis <i>Read</i> Leonard & Zeckhauser, 'Cost-Benefit...'	
Oct 19th	--	Free market approaches to environmentalism <i>Read</i> Baxter, 'The Case for Optimal Pollution'	--
Oct 24th	Essay #2	Non-anthropocentric deontological ethics <i>Read</i> Taylor, 'The Ethical System'	Ch. 9
Oct 26th	--	Non-anthropocentric deontological ethics <i>Read</i> Taylor, 'Priority Principles'	

Unit IV: Defending environmentalism			
Date	Due	Topic and Required Reading	Textbook
Oct 31st	--	Duties to conserve for future generations <i>Read</i> Parfit, 'Energy Policy and...'	Ch. 6.3
Nov 2nd	--	Duties to conserve for future generations <i>Reread</i> Parfit, 'Energy Policy and...'	
Nov 7th	Essay #3	Duties to protect endangered species <i>Read</i> Russow, 'Do Species Matter?'	Ch. 4 and Ch. 13
Nov 9th	--	Duties to protect endangered species (cont.) <i>Read</i> Sober, 'Problems for Environmentalism'	
Nov 14th	--	Should I do something about climate change? <i>Read</i> Sinnott-Armstrong, 'It's Not My Fault...'	--
Nov 16th	--	Individual responsibility (cont.) <i>Read</i> Hourdequin, 'Climate, Collective...'	--
Nov 21st	--	No class (Thanksgiving recess)	--
Nov 23rd	--	No class (Thanksgiving recess)	--
Nov 28th	--	Hard choices: population control measures <i>Read</i> Cripps, 'Climate Change, Population...'	Ch. 16
Nov 30th	--	Hard choices: feeding people v. saving nature <i>Read</i> Rolston, 'Feeding people v. saving...'	
Dec 5th	--	Radical forms of environmental activism <i>Read</i> Hettinger, 'Environmental Disobedience'	Box 12.2
Dec 7th	Essay #4	No class (Classes end on December 5th)	--
Dec 11th	Final	Final Examination 1:00pm – 3:00pm (Location TBA)	--