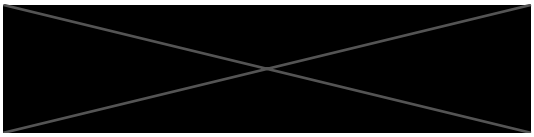
Environmental Ethics: What Do We Owe to the World?



Subject Area and Catalog Number: Philosophy, LASE 2500

Year and Term: Summer 2021

Class Title: Environmental Ethics: What Do We Owe to the World?

Number of Credits: 2 credits

Delivery Mode Expectations (classroom and web-based classes, specify any live (synchronous) meetings, dates, times, and location of delivery): Synchronous web-based lecture, M/W/F 10AM – 12PM

Class Description: Do we have a moral obligation to maintain a healthy planet for future generations? Do animals and plants - or perhaps even entire areas of the globe - warrant our moral concern? What, precisely, do we owe to the world and its inhabitants? These questions ask us to make and evaluate moral claims and judgments, and to defend our decisions to others—fundamental skills in the academy, life, and work. In this course, students will acquire the conceptual and argumentative tools requisite to evaluate a particular set of pressing ethical concerns. Through careful study of contemporary philosophical thought on the subject, students will learn how to better articulate their own outlook. This will give them the tools to collaborate more effectively with their peers when it comes to facing the problems posed by an increasingly volatile environment, and more generally for everyone facing moral questions and decisions they must defend to others.

Learning Outcomes or Objectives:

- Students will learn how to engage in thoughtful, critical, and constructive dialogue about their own arguments.
- Students will receive the technical and argumentative resources to debate environmental issues with greater clarity, concision, and effectiveness. (We will proceed through the lens of environmental ethics, but honing your argumentative is a skill that will apply beyond the confines of this particular issue.)
- Students will master the material from our readings and be able to formulate their own arguments about environmental issues within the framework of ethical theory.

Required Texts: Dale Jamieson, *Ethics and the Environment: An Introduction*. ISBN: 978-0-521-68284-8. (Available via Virgo)

All other course readings will be made available under the "Resources" tab on Collab.

Required Technical Resources and Technical Components: Access to Zoom and Collab.

Class Specific Information

Assignments

***Online journal*:** At the end of every class, I will provide you with a set of guiding questions that are related to the following class session's reading. You will write a 100-200 word journal entry responding to *one* of those questions and post it to our online discussion forum by 11:59 PM the night before our next class meeting. **You will turn in an online journal post for each of our Monday and Wednesday class meetings, so your posts are due by Sunday and Tuesday at 11:59 PM, respectively.** Late journal entries will not be accepted.

The guiding questions will vary. They will sometimes ask you about your own view on a subject; other times, they will ask you to consider the merits and demerits of a particular argument: and so on. However, answering them will be key to active classroom participation, and we will talk about the questions in class. Thus, they should not consist merely in a summary of the reading – they require critical engagement.

These will be graded on a 3-point scale.

0 points: No submission.
1 point: The response tackles the question but is either inaccurate to the course material or lacks critical engagement with it.
2 points: The response is adequate to the prompt but does not critically engage with the course material.
3 points: The response raises interesting and critical concerns with the prompt, and goes beyond what was said in the course readings.

What does it mean to 'go beyond what was said in the course readings'? This will vary from prompt to prompt, but the basic idea is that you should ask *your own* questions of the material, or raise *your own* objections to a view, and so on. These replies do not have to be wholly original, but they must show that you've thought over the issues on your own terms.

Additionally**,** over the course of the semester **you must respond to *three* posts** – again, in 100-200 words. In responding to these posts, you should either (a) raise an objection to your classmate or, if you agree with your classmate, (b) raise critical concerns/questions with your classmate's post. Basically, you should move the conversation on the topic one step further, treating your classmate's post as the text with which you engage.

So, there are *seven* posts due, and you should respond to *two* of your classmates' posts. That means that there are 30 points available. Here's the grading scheme for journal entries:

A: 26-30
A-: 20-24
B+: 16-20
B: 11-15

C: 6-10
F: < 5

Writing assignments: Three shorter assignments (~300-500 words) and one longer assignment (~500-750 words) which expands upon one of the three shorter assignments.

Short Assignments: In the first two assignments, you will pick a view discussed in class that week and present an argument for that position, either your own or an original spin on one from the text. When I comment on them, I will respond by providing an objection to your argument for you to consider.

In the third assignment, you will respond to an objection to one of the views discussed in class that week. When I comment on them, I will respond by providing a defense of the position to which you are objecting.

Long Assignment: For the longer assignment, you will take one of your shorter assignments and push the conversation one step further. If you pick one of the first two, you will respond to the objection that I provided to your argument and show why your argument still stands. If you pick the third assignment, you will explain why the defense of the position I provided is inadequate and argue that your objection still stands.

For the first three assignments, I will provide you with some topics to choose from, but you can run ideas by me if you want to pick your own topic.

***Participation/classtime*:** Participation is an integral component of this course. As such, you must first and foremost attend all class meetings in order to complete the course objectives.

At the beginning of the course, you will be assigned to a small group with which you will remain for the rest of the semester. Class time will consist of alternating activities between small groups and lecture. Each time you're with your group, you will be assigned a particular question (or set of questions) to address. When everyone returns, groups will share their answers with the rest of the class, and we will tie it back in with the course material.

Participation thereby involves addressing the questions your group receives, working constructively with your group members, and engaging in active discussion with the rest of your classmates – each of these factors will be taken into account.

You are allowed ***one*** unexcused absence. After that, you should contact me and let me know about any extenuating circumstances. Each further unnotified absence will result in a **1/3rd of a letter grade** being deducted from your participation grade.

How to Write: Writing philosophy is quite different from any other writing you've done in academia. We'll cover what this genre of paper writing looks like, but I encourage you to reach out via email or stop by my office hours if you have any questions, want to discuss paper structures, etc.

Class schedule w/ readings and assignment due dates

Week 1: Introduction

6/21 – Class introduction, getting to know each other, etc.
Read: Leopold, "The Land Ethic"
Post: Journal entry

6/23 – What sorts of problems are relevant to environmental ethics?
Read: Jamieson ch. 1 (pp. 1-25)
Post: Journal entry

6/25 – What role does morality play in environmental ethics? What challenges does it face?
Read: Jamieson ch. 2 (pp. 26-45)
Submit: Short assignment 1

Week 2: Ethics and the environment

6/28 – Do we need to rethink ethics to do environmental ethics correctly?
Read: Routley, "Is there a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?"
Post: Journal entry

6/30 – What do we mean when we make moral claims?
Read: Jamieson ch. 3 (pp. 46-75)
Post: Journal entry

7/2 – What sort of moral theory is best suited to addressing environmental concerns?
Read: Jamieson ch. 4 (pp. 76-101)
Submit: Short assignment 2

Week 3: Our relationship to non-human animals

7/5 – NO CLASS

7/7 – What moral relationship do we bear to non-human animals?
Read: Jamieson ch. 5.1-5.2 (pp. 101-120)
Read: Singer, "Not for Humans Only: The Place of Nonhumans in Environmental Ethics"
Post: Journal entry

7/9 – How do these relationships bear on our ability to use animals for our own gain?
Read: Jamieson ch. 5.3-5.4 (pp. 120-144)
Submit: Short assignment 3

Week 4: Future threats

7/12 – What's valuable in nature, and what's the nature of that value?
Read: Jamieson ch. 6.1-6.3 (pp. 144-155)
Read: Rolston, "Value in Nature and the Nature of Value"
Post: Journal entry

7/14 – What sorts of values are relevant in our practical moral judgements?
Read: Jamieson ch. 6.4-6.5 (pp. 155-180)
Post: Journal entry

7/16 – So, what are we going to do about our future? Climate change? Sustainability?
Read: Jamieson ch. 7 (pp. 181-205)
Submit: Long assignment

Grading scheme:

Journal: 20%
Short assignments: 15% each
Final assignment: 25%
Participation: 10%

Assessment Components and Grading Basis:

A+	100	A	99-93	A-	92-90
B+	89-87	B	86-83	B-	82-80
C+	79-77	C	76-73	C-	72-70
D+	69-67	D	66-63	D-	62-60
F	Below 60 (no credit)				

Class Policies, Requirements and Expectations, Including Communication and Response Time:

Extensions: I will grant paper extensions under extraordinary circumstances.

Late papers: Papers turned in late will be penalized 1/3rd of a letter grade for every day they are late. For instance, a paper that's turned in a week late will lose $2\frac{1}{3}$ letter grades. This means that I will grade it starting at a C+.

Communication: If you send me an email, you can expect a reply from me within 24 hours (except for weekends; I will reply first thing Monday morning).

Resources for Further Help:
Please see the **Student Support** tab in your UVA Collab class site for a list of Academic and Technical support resources.

Technical Specifications

- Computer Hardware: For currently supported technologies, please see https://in.virginia.edu/support
- Minimum Requirements
  - Hard drive free space: 256GB, SSD recommended
  - Processor speed: Intel Dual-Core i5 1.3 GHz or faster
  - RAM: 8GB
  - Network connectivity: 2 mbps download/upload speeds

Technical Support Contacts

- UVA ITS Help Desk (email, Netbadge, etc.): 434-924-4357 or https://in.virginia.edu/helpdesk (available 24/7)
- Collab Support: collab-support@virginia.edu
- Zoom Support: https://virginia.zoom.us and https://in.virginia.edu/zoom

Attendance: Students are expected to attend all class sessions. Instructors establish attendance and participation requirements for each of their courses. Class requirements, regardless of delivery mode, are not waived due to a student's absence from class. Instructors will require students to make up any missed coursework and may deny credit to any student whose absences are excessive. Instructors must keep an attendance record for each student enrolled in the course to document attendance and participation in the class.

Recording of Class Sessions: Class sessions for this course may be recorded. Recordings will be available only to the instructor(s) and students enrolled in the class, including those who cannot attend the live sessions. Recordings will be automatically deleted 180 days after their date of creation. Recordings may not be reproduced, shared with those not enrolled in the class, or uploaded to other online environments. Students who are not comfortable with participating in a recorded discussion session should let the instructor know and use an alternate method to engage in class (e.g., use of chat function or remove/change names in the recording). Students in a class are prohibited from recording of any kind unless authorization is obtained from the instructor.

University Email Policies: Students are expected to check their official UVA email addresses on a frequent and consistent basis to remain informed of University communications, as certain communications may be time sensitive. Students who fail to check their email on a regular basis are responsible for any resulting consequences.

University of Virginia Honor System: All work should be pledged in the spirit of the Honor System at the University of Virginia. The instructor will indicate which assignments and activities are to be done individually and which permit collaboration. The following pledge should be written out at the end of all quizzes, examinations, individual assignments and papers: "I pledge that I have neither given nor received help on this examination (quiz, assignment, etc.)". The pledge must be signed by the student. For more information, visit www.virginia.edu/honor.

Accessibility Statement: UVA is committed to creating a learning environment that meets the needs of its diverse student body. If you anticipate or experience any barriers to learning in this course, please feel welcome to discuss your concerns with your instructor. If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, you may also want to meet with the Student Disability Access Center (SDAC), to request an official accommodation. You can find more information about SDAC, including how to apply online, through their website at sdac.studenthealth.virginia.edu. If you have already been approved for accommodations through SDAC, please make sure to send your accommodation letter to your instructor and meet with them so that you can develop an implementation plan together.