

Philosophy 342 Environmental Ethics

Fall 2019

T & Th 10:20-11:40

120 Berkey Hall

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 1-2 pm and by appt.

(Note that the best way to contact me outside of class is by email. I will always try to respond within 24 hours.)

Course Description

Traditional ethical theory has focused on the morality of human action directed towards other living humans. The impact of humans on other humans via the environment has not been addressed until recently, partly because of an assumption of a nature so plentiful and abundant that humans could not harm other humans through the environment. The problem of how humans are to act towards non-humans (or towards future humans) has been either ignored or left for later development of a theory that is often never accomplished. Recognition of the profound impact humans can have on the environment has led to efforts to develop ethical positions that encompass more than direct human-human interaction. The work being done in this area often challenges traditional ethical theories and calls for a reexamination of basic issues such as what are rights and what are morally significant beings. This course will provide an overview of environmental ethical theory, discussing the tensions among various approaches, the challenge these approaches pose to traditional theory, and what the various approaches call on us to do.

After the introduction, the course is divided into two basic parts: the first deals with what humans owe each other regarding the environment and the second deals with what humans owe to non-humans. Thus, in the first part, we will assume that humans are the only morally relevant beings. Even with this assumption, human impact on other humans through environmental harm raises difficult moral questions, such as the value of a statistical life, the value of beauty, distributive concerns, and our duties to future generations of humans. In the second part, we will open up the possibility that other entities may have moral standing. There are several general proposals for which entities have moral standing, including individual animals, species, and ecosystems. The problems with these proposals will be discussed, as will the challenge they pose to our ethical theories.

Students will learn:

- 1) how traditional ethical theory informs and diverges from environmental ethics
- 2) how to read philosophical texts carefully
- 3) how to express normative ideas and concepts precisely
- 4) why environmental ethics is not captured by a single over-arching theory

Required Text

Environmental Ethics from the Roots Up: An Introductory Anthology (First Edition)

By Heather Douglas (University Readers), 2018, ISBN # 978-1-5165-3214-8

This text should be ordered online once you are sure you will take the course. Instructions for ordering the text:

Step 1: Go to <https://store.cognella.com/60278-1a-002>

Step 2: Create an account (or log in if you have an existing account).

Step 3: Follow the instructions that guide you through the rest of the ordering process.

Payment can be made by all major credit cards or with an electronic check.

Course Requirements and Assessment

Final grades will be computed as follows:

In-class quiz 1 (Sep. 17): 5%

In-class quiz 2 (Oct. 22): 5%

In-class quiz 3 (Nov. 19): 5%

Final exam (Dec. 12): 40%

On-line reading quizzes: 15%

Reading questions: 15%

Short paper proposal (due Oct. 31): 5%

Short paper (due Nov. 26): 10%

In-class quizzes and the final exam will consist of short to medium-length answer questions about key conceptual points from the readings and class lectures. The quizzes will serve as practice runs for the final exam, as the format for final exam will be the same as the quizzes, only with more questions. The quizzes will take about 20 minutes at the start of class time, and cover the material since the previous quiz. By the time we get to Quiz 3, you should be comfortable with the format for the quizzes and thus also the final. The final will be given during the final exam period on Dec. 12. The final exam is cumulative, i.e. all the material for the course will be covered.

In addition to these in-class quizzes and exams, it will be crucial that you complete readings before class and complete two brief assignments on the reading prior to class:

1) For each reading (except Kant) there will be on-line reading quizzes that will check comprehension of the reading. They must be taken before class and will be available at least 24 hours prior to the class meeting through D2L. Reading quizzes will ask one multiple choice question about the reading that you should be able to answer after doing the reading. You will have one minute to answer the question, and you may consult the reading. But you will need to have read the assignment prior to the quiz to know where to look. You are required to pass at least 15 quizzes over the course of the semester (25 will be offered) in order to receive full credit. Note that reading quizzes will not ask questions similar to the in-class quizzes, but rather be multiple choice questions that can be answered quickly based on the reading. There will be no reading quiz for days for

which there is no assigned reading. Do be sure your internet connection is reliable for the online quizzes.

2) After completing the reading and the reading quiz, you should also submit a reading question for that reading assignment. Reading questions can be about things you found unclear in the reading, important implications of the reading, or comparing the reading to other material. They are starting points for the class discussion, and I will read them over prior to the class meeting. They will be graded on a scale of 0-2, based on whether they are turned in on time (they must be completed prior to class– late reading questions will receive no credit) and whether they show thoughtful reflection on the reading prior to class. I will drop the 6 lowest grades (of 26) for reading questions.

Finally, you will write a paper of 750-1000 words which will describe a recent news story concerning ethical issues with the environment and which will analyze the story using the concepts covered in the course. A proposal for this paper, including the news story you want to use and the ethical issues you propose to address is due Oct. 31. The paper is due November 26 and should be submitted online via D2L, in a folder using the Turnitin function. More details about this paper will be provided separately.

Course schedule with required readings

Note: The schedule of readings may shift as the course progresses. News of such changes will be posted on D2L. Most of the readings are in the textbook. When not in the textbook, they will be posted on D2L, along with additional optional material so that you can examine issues of interest in more depth.

Aug. 29 *Introduction to Philosophical Argumentation*

Douglas, *Introduction to Environmental Ethics* (pp. vii-xiii)

Sep. 3 *Introduction to Ethical Theory*

Douglas & Richards, *A Historical Introduction to Ethical Theory* (pp. 1-10)

Sep. 5 *Deontological Ethical Theory*

Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (pp. 11-24)

Sep. 10 *Theory of Justice*

Douglas, John Rawls' *Theory of Justice* (pp. 25-30)

Sep. 12 *Utilitarianism* (guest instructor)

Mill, *Utilitarianism* (pp. 31-38)

Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (pp. 39-40)

Smart, *Two Implications of Utilitarianism* (pp. 41-42)

Sep. 17 **Quiz 1**

Economics and the Environment I

Douglas, *Introduction to Competing Human Interests* (pp. 45-50)

Freeman, *The Ethical Basis of the Economic View of the Environment* (51-61)

- Sep. 19 *Economics and the Environment II*
Sagoff, At the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima, or Why Political Questions are not all Economic (pp. 63-75)
- Sep. 24 *Cost-Benefit Analysis*
Kelman, Cost-Benefit Analysis: An Ethical Critique (pp. 77-85)
Butters, Calfee & Ippolito, Reply to Steven Kelman (pp. 87-88)
- Sep. 26 *Discounting the Future*
Parfit, The Social Discount Rate (pp. 89-94)
- Oct. 1 *Future Generations*
Kavka, The Futurity Problem (pp. 95-106)
- Oct. 3 *Sustainability*
Solow, Sustainability: An Economist's Perspective (pp. 107-113)
Williams, Discounting vs. Maximum Sustainable Yield (pp. 115-120)
- Oct. 8 *Issues of Justice & the Environment*
Douglas, Introduction to Justice & the Environment (pp. 123-126)
Locke, Of Property (pp. 127-130)
- Oct. 10 *Private Property and the Commons*
Hardin, The Tragedy of the Commons (pp. 131-137)
Monbiot, The Tragedy of Enclosure (pp. 139-141)
- Oct. 15 *Distributional Justice and Environmental Waste*
Wenz, Just Garbage (pp. 143-153)
- Oct. 17 *Indigenous Populations and Historical Injustice*
Tarbell & Arquette, Akwesasne: A Native American Community's Resistance to Cultural and Environmental Damage (on D2L)
- Oct. 22 **Quiz 2**
Valuing Beauty I
Douglas, Introduction to Aesthetics & the Environment (pp. 157-159)
Elliot, Faking Nature (pp. 161-170)
- Oct. 24 *Valuing Beauty II*
Carson, Aesthetic Appreciation of the Natural Environment (pp. 171-182)
- Oct. 29 *Wilderness*
Douglas, Introduction to Humans & Nature (pp. 185-187)
Cronon, The Trouble with Wilderness (pp. 189-207)

Oct 31 **Paper Proposal Due**

Humans and Nature

Passmore, Attitudes to Nature (pp. 209-217)

Nov. 5 *Animal Ethics*

Douglas, Introduction to Animal Ethics (pp. 221-224)

Singer, All Animals are Equal (pp. 225-238)

Nov. 7 Video: Inside the Animal Mind Part III

Nov. 12 *Animal Rights*

Regan, The Case for Animal Rights (pp. 239-247)

Jamieson, Rights, Justice, and Duties to Provide Assistance (pp. 249-253)

Nov. 14 *Animal Justice*

VanDeVeer, Interspecific Justice (pp. 255-272)

Nov. 19 **Quiz 3**

Species Rights

Douglas, Introduction to Duties to Environmental Collectives (pp. 275-278)

Rolston, Duties to Endangered Species (pp. 279-290)

Nov. 21 *The Land Ethic*

Leopold, The Land Ethic (pp. 291-302)

Nov. 26 **Short Paper Due**

Collectives and Ecological Theory

Worster, The Ecology of Order and Chaos (pp. 303-315)

Nov. 28 **Thanksgiving Break** (No class)

Dec. 3 *Respect for Nature*

Taylor, The Ethics of Respect for Nature (pp. 317-334)

Dec. 5 *Conclusion and Review for Final Exam*

Douglas, Final Assessments (pp. 337-339)

Midgley, Duties Concerning Islands (pp. 341-352)

Sober, Philosophical Problems for Environmentalism (pp. 353-369)

Final Exam, Thursday Dec. 12, 10 am - Noon

Course policies

Communication: Communication outside of class will primarily be through MSU email via D2L. Be sure to actively monitor your MSU email for any course updates.

As the MSU statement on diversity and inclusion notes, “MSU welcomes a full spectrum of experiences, viewpoints, and intellectual approaches because they enrich the conversation, even as they challenge us to think differently and grow. However, we believe that expressions and actions that demean individuals or groups compromise the environment for intellectual growth and undermine the social fabric on which the community is based.” This class will be a mixture of lecture and discussion, and as such, the classroom should be a space where ideas and their implications can be collectively and critically explored. Please come to class prepared for engaging constructively in this kind of discussion.

It is strongly recommended that you not use electronic devices in the classroom. Student learning is generally hampered rather than helped by such devices, as for most, taking notes by hand improves comprehension and recall. Some, however, find electronic devices a crucial aid. If you use electronic devices, please sit so that your screens are less of a distraction to others. If you are found using such devices for non-course purposes while in class or if your device makes disruptive noise, we will confiscate your device for the duration of the class. Repeated violations will lead to a ban on devices for that individual.

Attendance: Attendance at class is not strictly required, but is strongly advised. You will be responsible for the material covered in class for the quizzes, the final exam, and the short paper. Failure to reflect course material in your work will substantially harm your grade. Thus, it is in your interest to attend class regularly.

Illness: Regular attendance is important to doing well in the course. However, please do not come to class if you are ill. In particular, if you are running a fever higher than 100 F (without medication) or you are vomiting, you are probably contagious and you should stay home. Be sure to notify me via email and to get notes from fellow classmates to find out what you missed. In order to successfully request adjustments for any graded items, you will need to provide documentation of illness.

Grades: Your final grade will be first determined on a 100-pt. scale based on the weightings given above, and then converted to a 4.0 scale according to the tabulations below. For example, a final grade of an 83% corresponds to a 3.0 and a 77% corresponds to a 2.5. Rounding to the nearest whole number will take place on the 100-pt scale prior to conversion to the 4.0 scale.

4.0=90% and above

3.5=85–89%

3.0=80–84%

2.5=75–79%

2.0=70–74%

1.5=65–69%

1.0=60–64%

Incompletes: The MSU policy for incompletes is as follows:

The I-Incomplete may be given only when: the student (a) has completed at least 6/7 of the term of instruction, but is unable to complete the class work and/or take the final examination because of illness or other compelling reason; and (b) has done satisfactory work in the course; and (c) in the instructor’s judgment can complete the required work without repeating the course.

You must document your compelling reasons in your request for an incomplete.

Limits to Confidentiality: Materials submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University’s student record policies. However, students should be aware that University employees, including instructors, may not be able to maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues based on external legal obligations or that relate to the health and safety of MSU community members and others. As instructors, we must report the following information to other University offices if you share it with us in a material submitted or a conversation:

- Suspected child abuse/neglect, even if this maltreatment happened when you were a child
- Allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment when they involve MSU students, faculty, or staff, and
- Credible threats of harm to oneself or to others.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In almost all cases, it will be your decision whether you wish to speak with that individual.

If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting you are encouraged to make an appointment with the MSU Counseling Center.

MSU Counseling Center: 517-355-8270

24 Hour Sexual Assault Crisis Line: 517-372-6666^[1]_[SEP] *Counseling Center Sexual Assault Program:* 517-355-3551^[1]_[SEP] *MSU Safe Place:* 517-355-1100

<http://endrape.msu.edu>

<http://safeplace.msu.edu>

Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is central to any learning environment. As the Spartan Pledge¹ makes clear, violations of academic integrity damage both your learning and the learning community in which you are participating. Any cheating, whether on an exam or plagiarism on a paper, will result in an automatic failure of that assignment.

More about academic integrity can be found here:

<https://ombud.msu.edu/academic-integrity/What%20is%20Academic%20Integrity.html>

¹ “As a Spartan, I will strive to uphold values of the highest ethical standard. I will practice honesty in my work, foster honesty in my peers, and take pride in knowing that honor in ownership is worth more than grades. I will carry these values beyond my time as a student at Michigan State University, continuing the endeavor to build personal integrity in all that I do.”

Consistent with MSU's efforts to enhance student learning, foster honesty, and maintain integrity in our academic processes, we will use a tool in D2L called Turnitin OriginalityCheck to compare a student's work with multiple sources. The tool compares each student's work with an extensive database of prior publications and papers, providing links to possible matches and a "similarity score." The tool does not determine whether plagiarism has occurred or not. Instead, we will use the tool to help us judge the originality of your work. All essay submissions to this course may be checked using this tool. Students should submit assignments to be screened by OriginalityCheck without identifying information included in the assignment (e.g., the student's name, PID, or NetID); the system will automatically show identifying information to us when viewing the submissions, but this information will not be retained by Turnitin.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at rcpd.msu.edu. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a verified individual services accommodation ("VISA") form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term or at least two weeks prior to the accommodation date (exam, presentation, etc.). Requests received after this date will be honored whenever possible.

Online SIRS Course Evaluation: Michigan State University takes seriously the opinion of students in the evaluation of the effectiveness of instruction and has implemented the Student Instructional Rating System (SIRS) to gather student feedback (<https://sirsonline.msu.edu>). Because student feedback is vital to future versions of this course, we utilize the online SIRS system, and hope you will participate in providing your evaluation of the course. You will receive an e-mail during the last two weeks of class asking you to fill out the SIRS web form at your convenience. Lack of participation in the online SIRS system involves grade sequestration, which means that the final grade for this course will not be accessible on STUINFO during the week following the submission of grades for this course unless the SIRS online form has been completed. Alternatively, you have the option on the SIRS website to decline to participate in the evaluation of the course. We hope, however, that you will be willing to give us your frank and constructive feedback. If you access the online SIRS website and complete the online SIRS form (or expressly decline to participate), you will receive the final grade in this course without sequestration once final grades are submitted.