

Environmental Ethics

Course Description:

This course examines philosophical thinking about nature and the environment in order to understand the intellectual and economic roots of the current climate crisis, as well as the potential means to address climate change. In addition to historical, cross-cultural, and faith-based perspectives on the relations between human beings and the natural world, we will study themes from contemporary environmental ethics including the relation between ecology and ethics, intrinsic and instrumental forms of value, wilderness and the human built environment, and animal rights. Taking up the problem of anthropogenic climate change, we will ask what moral responsibilities it places upon us, as well as what forms of technological intervention may be warranted to stave off its worst effects.

Learning Objectives:

Develop understanding of how philosophical and religious traditions of thinking about nature have shaped present-day conceptions.

Recognition of the scope and moral dimensions of climate change and ability to connect discussions in environmental ethics to potential solutions to ecological crisis.

Units and Readings (15 weeks)

Historical and Religious approaches to the Natural World (4 weeks)

[1] *The Natural and the Artificial: Aristotle and the Dao*

Aristotle: *Physics* II; Selections from

[2] *Animism and Culture*

Selections from Native American Literature; Philippe Descola: “Beyond Nature and Culture.”

[3] “*The Rationalists*”: *Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz*

Descartes: Selections from *Discourse on the Method*; Spinoza: Selections from *Ethics*; Leibniz: *De Ipsa Natura*

[4] *Genesis and Nature: Dominion or Stewardship?*

Lynn White, Jr.: The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis; Pope Francis: selections from *Laudato Si*; Patrick J. McCormick: “Tending Eden’s Beauty”

Ecology and Value (3 weeks)

[5] *Ecology and “The Land Ethic”*

Aldo Leopold: Selections from: *A Sand County Almanac*; Holmes Rolston III: “Is There an Ecological Ethic?”

[6] *Intrinsic and Instrumental Value*

John O’Neill “The Varieties of Intrinsic Value.”; Brian Casas and Richard A. Burgess II. “The Practical Importance of Philosophical Inquiry for Environmental Professionals: A Look at the Intrinsic/Instrumental Value Debate.”

[7] “Shallow” vs. “Deep” Ecology

Arne Næss: “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements.”; Warwick Fox: “Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy of our Time?”; Ramachandra Guha “Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique.”

Challenges to Tradition: Animal Rights, Feminism, Wilderness, and the Re-Enchantment of Nature (4 weeks)

[8] *Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics*

J. Baird Callicott: “Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair.”; Tom Regan: “The Case for Animal Rights”; Dale Jamieson: “Animal Liberation is an Environmental Ethic.”

[9] *Ecofeminism*

Karen J. Warren: “The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism”; Val Plumwood: “Being Prey”

[10] *Wilderness and Built Environment*

Thomas H. Birch: “The Incarceration of Wildness: Wilderness Areas as Prisons”; Roger J. H. King: “Environmental Ethics and the Built Environment”; Clare Palmer: “Placing Animals in Urban Environmental Ethics”

[11] *The Reenchantment of Nature and Panpsychism*

Alison Stone: “Adorno and the Disenchantment of Nature”; Freya Mathews” selections from *For the Love of Matter: a Contemporary Panpsychism*

Climate Change, Technology, and the Future (4 weeks)

[12] *The Challenge of Climate Science*

Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway: Selections from *Merchants of Doubt*

[13] *Climate Change and Responsibility*

Stephen M. Gardiner “A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics and the Problem of Moral Corruption” ; Chris J. Cuomo: “Climate Change, Vulnerability, and Responsibility”

[14] *The Future of Food*

Wyatt Galusky: “Technology as Responsibility: Failure, Food Animals, and Lab-Grown Meat”; Heather Looy, Florence V. Dunkel, John R. Wood: “How then shall we eat? Insect-eating attitudes and sustainable foodways”; Bob Fischer: “Bugging the Strict Vegan”

[15] *The Ethics of Geoengineering*

Christopher J. Preston: “Re-Thinking the Unthinkable: Environmental Ethics and the Presumptive Argument Against Geoengineering”; Toby Svoboda: “The Ethics of Geoengineering: Moral Considerability and the Convergence Hypothesis”