

PHIL\*2070-DE

Instructor: Natalie Evans

## 1. Course Description and Learning Objectives

This course is an examination of ethical arguments regarding the environment from a number of different perspectives. The course is designed to enable students to:

- a. identify and understand philosophical arguments concerning our moral obligations to the environment and the extent of those obligations, and
- b. critically evaluate those arguments while developing their own moral stance on current environmental issues.

### **Upon successful completion of the course students will have:**

1. An understanding of the main ethical theories and how they apply to environmental issues.
2. Examined some of the historical sources of our moral views about the environment and whether or not we have moral obligations to it.
3. Explored and evaluated the main philosophical arguments and theories put forth by modern environmental philosophers.
4. Demonstrated critical thinking by applying theory to current environmental issues while taking into account possible objections and strengths of each theory.
5. Constructed their own view on the moral status of the environment, while remaining flexible to new ideas and arguments.
6. Developed the ability to isolate and identify the underlying arguments within current media and popular discourse surrounding environmental issues.

### **Success in this course requires:**

- Time spent reading the material carefully in the course reader, as it presents ideas and/or terms that you may not be familiar.
- Participation in online discussions, as this is the main source of interaction and the place where you can learn from others and the instructor
- Self-motivation, to stay on top of the readings, discussions, quizzes and assignments-regular participation and work is absolutely necessary
- Attention to the timeline of the course. The Coursework timeline will help you find the deadlines for all components of the course.
- A desire to learn with an open mind and to have fun with the material!

## 2. Instructor Information and Contact

Your instructor is Natalie Evans, PhD student at the University of Waterloo, and sessional instructor at the University of Guelph.

Natalie completed her Master's in Philosophy at the University of Guelph, in the area of Environmental Philosophy. She is currently working on a dissertation in ethics, with a focus on self-concept, autonomy, free action, and animal minds. She has participated on various ethical committees, both academically and in the community. Natalie has taught courses at the University of Guelph, University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University, the University of Guelph-Humber, and Humber College, primarily in ethics.

She lives in a small zoo in Guelph, which includes her two Siberian huskies, two cats, and of course her husband.

Natalie can be reached at:

[natevans@uoguelph.ca](mailto:natevans@uoguelph.ca)

### 3. Course Topics and Objectives

Each unit in this course will last for 3 weeks. During each Unit, you will read the required readings from the course reader, and participate in online discussions using related video clips that provide examples of current environmental issues. Each unit will cover the following topics:

#### **Unit One**

An introduction to the area of environmental ethics, and the reasons why and how philosophy can contribute to the study of the environment. Questions will be explored concerning whether or not the environment can obligate us to act morally on its behalf, the kinds of value that exist and if they are intrinsic or extrinsic to the environment, and whether or not traditional moral theories can be applied to environmental issues.

Students will gain an understanding of the traditional moral theories found in philosophy, and how moral arguments work. This will allow the student to understand where moral claims come from, and the reasons why many people debate the proper role humans should play in conserving, protecting, or regulating aspects of the environment. Students will also learn that ethics is not just relative or about 'anything goes', but rather a structured way of reasoning about moral standards and guidelines. Students will identify their own moral standards and will see that everyone has them, even if we have not evaluated them carefully.

Students will also gain an understanding of the historical values and world-views that have contributed to current moral debates, and the relevance of religious and cultural views that have affected our beliefs about the moral status of nature. This is particularly important given Canada's multicultural society, and the differences in world-views that often result in disagreement.

#### **Unit Two**

There are three main positions in environmental philosophy that provide a basis for all moral arguments concerning nature. These positions reflect different ways of viewing the source of value we are examining. Is the environment only valuable insofar as it provides us with the

necessary items for survival, as a species? Is all value human-dependent, that is, are humans the source of all value? Are things valuable only because humans say they are? These questions reflect the anthropocentric position.

Ecocentrism focuses on the importance and value of the ecosystem, or ecosphere. Value is found in the whole of nature, and this leads to what is often called the 'expanding circle' argument. What is the proper place of humans within the ecosphere? How do species interact in ways that promote the overall health of the environment? When should humans interfere with issues of species control for the overall health of the environment. These questions reflect the ecocentric position.

Biocentrism focuses on the value of individuals, both human and non-human. Equality among all natural entities is the main moral claim here. If all species play a role in the health of the environment, how can we properly distinguish which species is more valuable than another? How can humans claim they are more important and valuable than any other living entity? These questions reflect the biocentric position.

### **Unit Three**

In this section we will explore some less popular environmental philosophies, or ones that are sometimes called 'alternative'. These movements challenge both traditional moral theories and the traditional three positions held in environmental philosophy.

Deep ecology focuses on the individual and how they can 'shift' their understanding of the world around them to see that the distinction between 'human' and 'nature' does not really exist. Self-realization and identification with nature are key elements in this view. Suggestions on how this view can be integrated into personal actions and at a societal level are examined in this section.

Ecofeminism reflects a feminist critique of traditional moral and environmental philosophies, that posit a connection between the domination of women and the domination of nature. This view provides an historical and philosophical understanding of our environmental crisis, with a focus on the role that patriarchal society has played in our treatment of women and nature.

This section also provides the student with the main animal rights philosophers and their views, with a specific focus on how traditional moral theories have failed to consider the moral value of animals. This section provides both a critique of traditional moral theories while also positing various positions on how we should treat animals given their intelligence and ability to suffer.

### **Unit Four**

How does economics play a role in determining our moral obligations to the environment? Should economic concerns and methods be applied to environmental issues? We will be analyzing the problems that arise when we try to weigh economic concerns with moral concerns.

Global warming is a major issue for Canadian society and countries around the globe. What exactly is global warming? What role have humans played in this? Who should we listen to when trying to determine the truth about global warming and how we ought to act? Should

Canada endorse the Kyoto Protocol? These questions will be addressed and analyzed in this section.

Finally we will also examine current environmental activism, to see what kinds of actions ought to be taken on behalf of the environment. Do certain forms of activism go too far? What forms of activism are morally acceptable? Does activism work? Is philosophy a form of activism?

#### 4. Learning Strategies

The following learning approaches will be utilized as they encourage active learning rather than passive learning. Philosophy as a discipline encourages individuals to actively challenge and learn from other's views and beliefs. Students are therefore strongly encouraged to share their insights, beliefs, life experiences, perspectives and attitudes during this course and semester. This course is aimed at providing a respectful forum to challenge your own views along with those of others for the purpose of developing a more informed and examined position on these topics. As a philosophy professor once said 'If someone presents you with a view or argument that is better than your own, you should be able to admit that you must change your own view accordingly'.

The following learning approaches are strongly encourage:

- Reading from text, journals and websites
- Conducting your own research and contacting others in the academic field to gain further knowledge
- Discussion-listening very carefully to other views, reflecting seriously on your own, debating different views, and creating your own
- Writing and taking notes-keep a journal of your thoughts and insights as they occur to you to better allow to share your views during discussions and in your written work

Readings will be used to provide a strong basis of knowledge concerning ethics and environmental theories. Internet websites will also be provided to allow you to further investigate issues of interest, but you are also encouraged to contribute website URL's to the group.

Philosophy cannot be done in a vacuum! As such, participation with other members of the class provides a rich source of knowledge and information that enables you to learn about yourself and others. This requires that all students recognize the value of each participant in the learning process, even if their views are very different from one's own. All students are encouraged to share their views in a respectful, collaborative way that will assist everyone in achieving the objectives of the course. Therefore, it is expected that you will be sensitive and respectful to others, in a way befitting our rational and emotional natures.

#### **Learning Culture—Guiding Principle**

Respect everyone. This is the guiding principle of this course, during discussions and interaction with each other. This means using non-threatening, safe, pleasant language that encourages and fosters growth and learning and not competition. It requires deliberation and empathy when

determining what is appropriate and not appropriate to say or write when addressing others. The greatest philosophers have approached others with a sense of charity and inquiry rather than competition and naïve criticism. We would all benefit to follow their example. Socrates once said, you cannot learn anything if you think you know everything!

## 5. Required Learning Resources

### **Textbook(s):**

*Philosophy of the Environment* Course Reader (August 2011 Edition).

The course reader is only available from University of Guelph bookstores:

- [University of Guelph Bookstore](#)
- [Guelph Campus Coop Bookstore](#)

### **eReserve:**

Beyond the course reader, there are required readings that are only available electronically on the course website through ARES (eReserve) at the McLaughlin Library at the University of Guelph.

### **Accessing eReserve:**

You can access electronic readings via the eReserve link, located in the top navigation bar of the course website. Alternatively you can access eReserve readings at [University of Guelph Library ARES](#). Note that you will need your Central Login ID and password to log in to ARES.

For further instructions on how to access electronic resources, see [Course Reserves & E Learning for Students](#). If you require assistance please visit the resource [Library Online Access Troubleshooting](#) or you can contact the library directly:

McLaughlin Library, First Floor  
University of Guelph  
Guelph, Ontario N1G 2W1

Tel: 519-824-4120 ext. 53621

Email: [libres2@uoguelph.ca](mailto:libres2@uoguelph.ca)

## 6. Course Assignments and Evaluation

Students will be evaluated in this course as follows:

Assignment	Due Date	Weight
<a href="#">Topic Discussions</a> (best 3 out of 4, worth 10% each)	Participate throughout the course.	30%
<a href="#">Unit Quizzes</a> (write all, 4 @ 5% each)	Weeks 3,6, 9 and 12	20%

	By 11:59 p.m. EST Saturdays	
<a href="#">Paper Outline/Proposal</a>	Week 9 By 11:59 p.m. EST Sunday	15%
<a href="#">Final Paper</a>	Week 12 By 11:59 p.m. EST Sunday	35%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Submitting Assignments:

Students are asked to submit their assignments electronically. Submit your assignments in RTF format, using the 'Submit' option on the course website. Instructions for saving as RTF can be found in the help option on the main navigation bar. Please fill out the Online Submission Cover Page (rtf). Then, copy the contents of this page into the document that you are submitting. If you have any questions about these forms, please contact the Office of Open Learning at [help@open.uoguleph.ca](mailto:help@open.uoguleph.ca)

### Late assignments:

Assignments handed in past the due date will be penalized 5% per day, up to a maximum of 30%, at which point it will no longer be accepted.

### 7. A Guide to Using the Course Website

The course website connects you to your instructor, allows you to interact with other course participants, and provides guidance and advice.

***\*\*\*You are responsible for all announcements, readings, activities, assignments and class material distributed online.\*\*\****

Remember to orient yourself to the course website navigation bar and all of the options. A description can be found in the [DE Handbook](#). Course website description:

### Conferences

The Conferences page provides opportunities for you to communicate with other students and the professor. Online conferences are a means of exchanging information, resources and files, posing questions, sharing and debating ideas and receiving feedback.

The following are the conference/discussion areas for this course. Be sure to check the conference areas often and post your responses in the appropriate conference listed below.

- **Introduction:** Introduce yourself to your peers in this discussion area.
- **Main Conference:** This conference enables you to ask the faculty questions. The faculty will read and respond to the postings in this conference area.
- **Unit Discussion Conference:** This conference area provides opportunities for you to discuss the course content as a class. Do not post your topic discussion postings in this area. You will be able to ask questions and post comments on the assigned readings and course work for the week. This conference area will be monitored by the faculty; however, he/she will not respond.
- **Topic Discussions:** Throughout the course you will be asked to post your reflective response to a specific topic/question. You will be placed into groups of 10-12 students for this conference area. Please check the classlist to determine which group you have been assigned. Please make sure you post your questions and comments in this area as your participation is being marked. Additional information is provided in the [Evaluation](#) section. The faculty will be monitoring and will on occasion respond to your postings to clarify or steer you toward particular perspectives.
- **Major Paper and Proposal:** You will be able to post your paper proposals and discuss them with each other, using the forum for advice, suggestions for improvement, and constructive criticism.
- **Coffee Shop:** This conference is a social area where you are free to raise non-course related issues. Relax, chat, and practice your computer conferencing skills, and get to know each other...with your own individual coffees, not provided here.
- **Technical Help Conference:** The 'Help Desk' personnel are ready to answer your computer questions. This conference is monitored on a daily basis so you are provided with computer support. Do not ask the 'Help Desk' questions relating to the course content.
- **Test Conference:** Use this conference to learn about the course conferencing system, and to practice sending and receiving messages. Test is a practice conference common to all web-based courses running this semester.
- **Course Feedback:** Take a few minutes during the course to provide us feedback and course related comments.

### **Class List**

You will be able to find out who is in your course and what group you have been assigned through this option. Remember, it will take approximately 24 hours after you have accessed the course website to be placed into a group. If it has been more than 24 hours and you have not been assigned into a group please contact the Help Desk.

**Grades**

You can use the 'Grades' page throughout the course to view your marks for unofficial grades for submitted assignments. Your final grade will be available to you on Web Advisor.

**8. Technical Requirements and Support**

Online help can be accessed by clicking on Help on the course website. If you have any questions regarding the technical requirements or access to the course website please contact:

**Technical Support**

Email: [help@coles.uoguelph.ca](mailto:help@coles.uoguelph.ca)

Phone: (519) 824-4120 extension 56939

Toll Free # for Canada and USA only: 1-866-275-1478

Fax: (519) 824-1112

Office: Room 211 Day Hall, University of Guelph