

SYLLABUS

PHIL 243 Global Environmental Ethics

Fall 2016, George Mason University

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Office: Robinson B, 453
Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:00-3:00 and by appointment.
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Text: **Environmental Ethics: An Anthology**
eds. A. Light and H. Rolston III (Blackwell Publishing, 2003)

Other readings made available through **on Blackboard**.

Summary of Class and Requirements:

Has the history of philosophy, especially ethics, contributed to the creation of our current global environmental problems? If so, how can philosophical tools of analysis be used to mitigate or resolve those problems? This class will offer a foundation for discussion of these issues with a focus on the contemporary field of environmental ethics. In the first part of the class we will discuss a variety of philosophical debates that have evolved over the past thirty years (primarily in North America, Australia, and Europe) among philosophers answering the call to develop a new, environmental, ethic. Topics to be covered include individual versus collective approaches to moral consideration of the environment, varieties of assessment of the intrinsic (or non-instrumental) value of nature, and the question of whether environmental ethics should embrace some form of moral pluralism. In the second part of the class we will examine critiques of the dominant schools of thought in environmental ethics, including ecofeminism and environmental pragmatism. Finally, we will look at several specific environmental issues and examine what various environmental ethicists have to offer to debates regarding environmental policy, including the questions of whether we should try to restore the nature we have damaged, whether it makes sense any more to attempt to preserve areas as "wilderness," and how we can best respond to concerns over humanly caused climate change. This course is inherently interdisciplinary as we will be drawing from work in contemporary philosophy and relevant environmental sciences such as conservation biology, restoration ecology, and climatology. It is also designed to help you to connect this work to normative questions involving contemporary public debates over environmental policy. Finally, it is an essential class for further work in the GMU philosophy department on environmental ethics, in particular our Philosophy 343 which offers student the opportunity for more advanced work on a particular topic in the field.

The primary requirements for the course will be two in-class examinations, each counting equally toward the determination of the final base grade for the class. Examinations will consist in several short-answer questions and one essay. These questions will test your ability to critically examine the quality, credibility, and limitations of the arguments presented by the various authors we will be reviewing during the course as well as evaluate your skills in written communication. Possible essay questions will be passed out one week prior to the examination along with a list of concepts from the lectures that are important for you to know in order to answer the short answer questions on the exam. Tests are open book assuming that no elaborate notes are taken in your book.

A secondary part of the course is *optional* and provides you with an opportunity to raise your base grade. Five times during the semester you may turn in a critical media commentary, no

more than one page long, which either (a) evaluates an argument presented in one of our assigned readings against an actual environmental issue that is discussed in the media or (b) evaluates the moral dimensions of a media story about an environmental issue. For example, a commentary of the (a) sort might evaluate Gary Varner's argument that we may have obligations to hunt deer under certain conditions against a local news story about game management in suburban Virginia. A commentary of the (b) sort might evaluate a story on attempts to create a Federal regulation that reduces greenhouse gases on how well it presents a case for our possible moral obligations to enact such policies. Each of these commentaries will be given a grade of E (excellent), P (passing), S (satisfactory), or U (unsatisfactory). If the average of all commentaries is S then your grade will not be changed as a result of your completion of this part of the course. If the average of all commentaries is P then your base grade will be raised one third step (e.g., from a B to a B+). If the average of all commentaries is an E then your base grade will be raised two steps (e.g., from a B to an A-). *You must turn in five media commentaries by the last day of class (not the day of the final exam) to qualify for this amendment to your grade.*

Finally, while most evaluation in this class is designed to assess your written communication skills, it must be remembered that philosophy is as much an oral practice as a written practice. Active class participation in class arguments and debates are expected from all participants. The instructor reserves the right to reward particularly good contributions to class discussions by allocating additional Es or Ps to particularly good forms of class participation thus increasing the possibility for an overall positive average for a given student's media commentaries should they decide to take them up.

Statements on Disability, Drop-Add Deadlines, Appeals, and Assessment

Disability: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Resources at 703-993.-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office. Notification should occur at the beginning of the semester.

Drop-Add Deadlines: The deadlines for courses that last the whole semester are given below.

Last Day to Add/Last Day to Drop with no penalty:	September 6, 2016
Last Day to Drop with a 33% tuition penalty:	September 20, 2016
Final Drop Deadline with a 67% tuition penalty:	September 30, 2016
Selective Withdrawal Period:	October 3-28, 2016

Once the add and drop deadlines have passed instructors do not have the authority to approve requests to add, drop, or withdraw late. Late adds (adds up until the last day of classes) are reviewed and approved by the department chair of the course being offered. These requests should be approved only in the case of a documented university error (such as a problem with financial aid being processed). Requests for non-selective withdrawals and retroactive adds (adds after the last day of classes) must be approved by the student's academic dean. In the case of students whose major is in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, this is the Office of Undergraduate Academic Affairs (College Hall 211; 703-993-8725; chssdean@gmu.edu).

Appeals: Appeals of any grades must be made in writing (typed) providing a detailed argument for why a grade should be increased. Any work plagiarized or the result of cheating will be given a mark of 0 and disciplinary action will be taken. Late work will not be accepted. *Finally, it should go without saying that students are expected to read all assignments in advance of the course and be prepared to discuss them in class. As a consequence you must bring a copy of the assigned reading to every class meeting.*

Assessment: All academic programs at Mason (including the General Education Program) have student learning outcomes that are assessed periodically. Your work from this course may be selected for use in such an assessment. Your anonymity is assured and your grade will not be affected. At any time, you may contact the Office of Institutional Assessment (assessment@gmu.edu) with questions, concerns, and comments about the use of your work.

Reading Schedule (Subject to Change)*

- A30: Introduction to Class and Philosophical Methodology.
 S01: Overviews: Light & Rolston, p. 1 and Palmer, p. 15 (recommended).
- S06: Overviews continued.
 S08: *What is Environmental Ethic?* Leopold, p. 38.
- S13: *What is Environmental Ethic?* Sylvan, p. 47.
 S15: *Who Counts in an Environmental Ethic?* Individualism: Singer, p. 55; Regan, p. 65.
- S20: *Who Counts in an Environmental Ethic?* Holism: Katz, p. 85;
 Problems with Holism: Varner, p. 95.
 S22: **No Class.**
- S27: *Is Nature Intrinsically Valuable?* Nonanthropocentrism: Rolston, p. 143.
 S29: *Is Nature Intrinsically Valuable?* Nonanthropocentrism vs. Weak Anthropocentrism: Hargrove, p. 175 and Norton, p. 163.
- O04: *Is There Only One Environmental Ethic?* Pluralism and Its Critics: Stone, p. 193 and Callicott, p. 203.
 O06: *Is There Only One Environmental Ethic?* Recovering Pluralism: Light, p. 229.
- O11: **No Class: Columbus Day Holiday.**
 O13: **In Class Midterm**
- O18: *What Alternatives Exist?* Deep Ecology: Fox, p. 252 and Naess, p. 262.
 O20: **No Class.**
- O25: *What Alternatives Exist?* Pragmatism: Weston, p. 307 and Minter & Manning, p. 319.
 O27: *Environmental Issues.* Wilderness: Callicott, p. 437 and Noss, p. 444.
- N01: *Environmental Issues.* Feeding People or Saving Nature: Rolston, p. 451 & Attfield, p. 463.
 N03: *Environmental Issues.* Climate Change: Screen in Class "An Inconvenient Truth."
- N08: *Environmental Issues.* Finish "An Inconvenient Truth" and discuss.
 N10: *Environmental Issues.* Climate Change: Gardiner, "The Perfect Moral Storm," (**BB**).
- N15: *Environmental Issues.* Climate Change: Shue, "Climate Hope," (**BB**).
 N17: *Environmental Issues.* Climate Change: Light, "Climate Diplomacy," (**BB**).
- N22: Catch up day on climate change discussion.
 N24: **No Class: Thanksgiving Holiday.**
- N29: *Environmental Issues.* Restoration Ecology: Elliot, p. 381 and Katz, p. 390.
 D01: *Environmental Issues.* Restoration Ecology: Light, p. 398.
- D06: Make up day and pass out final review.

D08: Final review.

D15: **Final Examination 1:30-4:15 pm.**

* Readings are listed by author's last name and the first page of the assigned chapter. Additional readings will be posted on blackboard (**BB**).