

PHIL 243 Global Environmental Ethics

Fall 2017 George Mason University

Instructor: David Morrow, Visiting Fellow, Institute for Philosophy & Public Policy

Office: Robinson Hall B, Room 442C

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30–2:30

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Course Description

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. We will consider perspectives that are critical of the dominant approaches in environmental ethics, including ecofeminism, environmental pragmatism, and ecomodernism.

In the second part of the class, 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 it makes sense any more to attempt to preserve areas as “wilderness,” how we can best respond to concerns over human-caused climate change, and whether we should try to restore the nature we have damaged. The class will choose a fourth global environmental issue to discuss at the end of the semester.

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. 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. Finally, it satisfies the Global Understanding component of the Mason Core, which teaches students about global patterns and processes, the interconnectedness and diversity of global society, and individual and collective responsibilities within a global society.

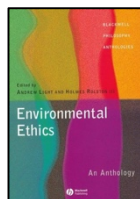
Course Requirements

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. They will also be designed to support the learning outcomes of the Global Understanding component of the Mason Core, especially the analysis of responsibilities in a global society. 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. **Make-up exams are available only with written documentation of a valid excuse for missing an exam.**

A secondary part of the course is **optional** and provides you with an opportunity to raise your base grade. You can write a **1,200–1,500-word paper on any topic we discuss in class up until the Thanksgiving holiday**. The paper is due two weeks after we discuss the topic. If you earn an A on your paper, your base grade will be raised by one letter grade (e.g., from a B– to an A–). If you earn a B on your paper, your base grade will be raised by two-thirds of a letter grade (e.g., from a B– to a B+). If you earn a C on your paper, your base grade will be raised by one-third of a letter grade (e.g., from a B– to a B). **Late papers will not be accepted. Even though this is an extra credit assignment, I will refer instances of plagiarism to the Office of Academic Integrity for disciplinary action.**

Course Textbook

There is one textbook for this course, which is **required**. The textbook is:



Andrew Light & Holmes Rolston, III, eds.
Environmental Ethics: An Anthology. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002)

Used copies of the book are available through many online retailers, such as Amazon and textbooks.com. Please buy your textbook as soon as possible.

Additional readings will be provided through Blackboard.

Students are expected to read all assignments in advance of the course and be prepared to discuss them in class. Thus, I expect you to bring a copy of the assigned reading to every class.

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. Please notify me as soon as possible, preferably at the beginning of the semester, so that we can arrange accommodations for you.

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 5, 2017

Last Day to Drop with a 33% tuition penalty: September 19, 2017

Final Drop Deadline with a 67% tuition penalty: September 29, 2017

Selective Withdrawal Period: October 2–27, 2017

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.

Assessment: All academic programs at Mason (including the Mason Core) 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.

Course Calendar

The following course calendar is tentative and subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class and on Blackboard. All readings are from the textbook, except for those marked **(Bb)**, which will be available on Blackboard. You are responsible for completing the assigned readings before the class session for which they are assigned.

Tues., Aug 29	Introduction to course; discussion of The Sixth Extinction <i>Assigned reading:</i> None
Thurs., Aug 31	Philosophical methodology <i>Assigned reading:</i> None
Tues., Sep 5	Overview of environmental ethics <i>Assigned reading:</i> Light & Rolston, p. 1; Palmer, p. 15 (recommended)
Thurs., Sep 7	Origins of environmental ethics in Western philosophy, Part 1 <i>Assigned reading:</i> Leopold, p. 38
Tues., Sep 12	Origins of environmental ethics in Western philosophy, Part 2 <i>Assigned reading:</i> Sylvan, p. 45
Thurs., Sep 14	NO CLASS—INSTRUCTOR AWAY AT CONFERENCE
Tues., Sep 19	Who matters in environmental ethics? Individualism <i>Assigned reading:</i> Singer, p. 55; Regan, p. 65
Thurs., Sep 21	Who matters in environmental ethics? Holism <i>Assigned reading:</i> Katz, p. 85; Varner, p. 95
Tues., Sep 26	Who matters in environmental ethics? Nonanthropocentrism <i>Assigned reading:</i> Rolston, p. 143; Nolt (Bb)
Thurs., Sep 28	Who matters in environmental ethics? Weak anthropocentrism <i>Assigned reading:</i> Hargrove, p. 175; Norton, p. 163
Tues., Oct 3	Is there only one environmental ethic? Pluralism and its critics <i>Assigned reading:</i> Stone, p. 193; Callicott, p. 203
Thurs., Oct 5	Is there only one environmental ethic? A defense of pluralism <i>Assigned reading:</i> Light, p. 229
Tues., Oct 10	NO CLASS—CLASSES ON MONDAY SCHEDULE
Thurs., Oct 12	NO CLASS—EXTRA CREDIT LECTURE EVENT AT 2:00 PM
Tues., Oct 17	EXAM #1
Thurs., Oct 19	What alternatives exist? Deep ecology <i>Assigned reading:</i> Fox, p. 252; Naess, p. 444

Tues., Oct 24	What alternatives exist? Ecofeminism <i>Assigned reading:</i> Gaard & Gruen, p. 276
Thurs., Oct 26	What alternatives exist? Pragmatism <i>Assigned reading:</i> Weston, p. 307
Tues., Oct 31	What alternatives exist? Ecomodernism <i>Assigned reading:</i> Asafu-Adjaye et al. (Bb)
Thurs., Nov 2	Environmental Issue #1: Wilderness <i>Assigned reading:</i> Callicott, p. 437; Naess, p. 444
Tues., Nov 7	Environmental Issue #2: Feeding People vs Saving Nature <i>Assigned reading:</i> Rolston, p. 451; Attfield, p. 463
Tues., Nov 9	Environmental issue #3: Climate Change <i>Assigned reading:</i> Gardiner (Bb)
Tues., Nov 14	Environmental issue #3: Climate change <i>Assigned reading:</i> McKinnon (Bb)
Thurs., Nov 16	Environmental issue #3: Climate change <i>Assigned reading:</i> Palmer (Bb)
Tues., Nov 21	Environmental issue #3: Climate change <i>Assigned reading:</i> Hourdequin (Bb)
Thurs., Nov 23	NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING
Tues., Nov 28	Environmental issue #4: Restoration ecology <i>Assigned reading:</i> Elliot, p. 381; Katz, p. 390
Thurs., Nov 30	Environmental issue #4: Restoration ecology <i>Assigned reading:</i> Light, p. 398
Tues., Dec 5	Environmental issue #5: To be chosen by class
Thurs., Dec 7	Environmental issue #5: To be chosen by class
Thurs., Dec 14	EXAM #2