

Phil 178M: Intro to Environmental Ethics

Cross listings: EhicsSoc278M, Phil278M, and PoliSci134L

Term: Winter 2023

Instructor: Michael Ball-Blakely

Class Meeting: Tu/Th 1:30-2:50

Sections: TBD

TA: TBD

Units: 4-5

Email: mbblake1@stanford.edu

Office Hours: Tu/Th 3:00-4:00

Note: Satisfies Ethical Reasoning (ER) Requirement

Course Description:

Environmental ethics forces us to reconsider the scope of our values, the limits of moral status, and our responsibility for global structural problems. Given the breadth of environmental ethics, no single course can investigate more than a subset of the discipline. In this class we will begin with a brief primer on philosophical and environmental ethics before orienting ourselves around three broad questions. Our focus in section 1a will be on the understanding and applying the distinction between moral principles and intuitions—a distinction that is particularly important when dealing with environmental ethics, an area where we often have plenty of intuitions and few well-reasoned principles! This will provide the normative resources needed to carefully consider questions in environmental ethics, and we will revisit and apply these tools through the term with section worksheets. Section 1b will include a brief overview of the debates in environmental ethics and one of the most important intuitive arguments in the area: Richard Sylvan’s “Last Man” argument. While this course will develop and apply normative tools from applied ethics and political philosophy, no prior experience in either will be required.

Second, in sections 2 and 3, we will consider whether and to what extent our obligations extend beyond sentient life to non-animal nature. If they do, then what grounds these obligations? Are rights held by nature? Or do we merely have indirect duties to nature, duties grounded in obligations to fellow humans? And what kinds of non-animal life—e.g., plants, species, or ecosystems—generate obligations in us by virtue of their intrinsic moral status?

Third, in sections 4 and 5 we will shift our attention to nonhuman animals, analyzing whether animal rights are compatible with environmentalism and what grounds the rights of nonhuman animals. And fourth, in section 6 we will look at an applied environmental issue that has been central in many of our minds: climate change. Section 6a will look into whether responsibility for climate change lies with individuals or with background structures and what this distinction means for climate action. We will end the course in section 6b by considering two questions in climate migration. How do the rights of would-be immigrants fit in with duties to the environment? And how should we understand the nature of climate refugees, including how to define them and who has duties to admit them?

Course Requirements and Grading:

Class Participation: You are expected to regularly attend & respectfully engage with the material. Participation can take the form of in-class discussion, emails, visits to office

hours, or conversations before and after class. See canvas handout for more details. **15%.**

Section Worksheets: At the beginning of sections 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 you will complete and submit worksheets on philosophical reasoning, ethical theories, and environmental ethics. The goal is to practice applying the tools from philosophical ethics and to think carefully about the environmental ethical issues prior to doing the reading for each section. **Due before the first class of each section 10%.**

Short Paper One. 2-3 (double-spaced) pages on the value of nonhuman nature. You can focus on arguments that nature has intrinsic value, extrinsic value, or you can compare and contrast these two views. **Due 2/13 10%.**

Short Paper Two: 2-3 (double-spaced) pages on the wilderness and our relationship to it (section 4). The focus here can be on the nature of the wilderness, how the wilderness forces us to rethink human values, or how to understand and adjudicate conflicts between human interests and the values of wilderness. **Due 3/1 15%.**

Term Paper: 8-10 (double-spaced) pages on any topic in animal status or climate change. These topics need to be approved by 3/7. Send a brief email—50-100 words—detailing your general topic and the conclusion you aim to defend. **Due 3/20 at 5pm. 50%**

Graduate Student Paper Option: Graduate students will be required to complete the worksheets, participate in class, and submit one 20-25 (double-spaced) page paper on a topic of their choosing. Topics must be approved by 3/7. **Due 3/20 at 5pm. 75%.**

Required Texts: None. All readings will be available on Canvas.

The required readings average 43 pages per week, with a low of 28 and a high of 66. Many of these, especially during weeks with lighter page counts, are demanding readings that will require that you take some time with the text.

The optional readings are there for those of you who want to dive deeper into the debates. Strongly consider reading them if they fall during topics on which you will be writing.

Reading List

The tentative reading schedule is listed below. If we have to modify the schedule—due to adverse weather, illness, or if we just need to spend more time with a reading—I will give notice and modify the writing topics to accommodate the new reading list.

Date	Topic	Reading 1	Reading 2	Optional Reading
1/10	(1a) Intro to Philosophical Reasoning	Barbara MacKinnon: Ethics and Ethical Reasoning (13)	David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willott: Rules, Principles, and Integrity (9)	
1/12	(1a) Intro to Philosophical Reasoning	John Rawls: Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics (21)		
1/17	(1b) Intro to Environmental Ethics	Clare Palmer, McShane, and Sandler: Environmental Ethics (16)		Baird Callicott: Environmental Philosophy as Activism (6)
1/19	(1b) Intro to Environmental Ethics	Richard Sylvan: Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic? (6)	Schmidtz and Willott: Respect for Nature (6)	
1/24	(2) The Extrinsic Value of Nonhuman Life	Immanuel Kant: Rational Beings Alone Have Moral Value (3)	Toby Svoboda: A Reconsideration of Indirect Duties Regarding Non-Human Organisms (12)	Janna Thompson: A Refutation of Environmental Ethics (14)
1/26	(2) The Extrinsic Value of Nonhuman Life	Allen Thomson: Anthropocentrism - Humanity as Peril and Promise (11)	Katie McShane: Anthropocentrism vs Non-Anthropocentrism (11)	BG Norton: Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism (18)
1/31	(2) The Extrinsic Value of Nonhuman Life	Sheila Watt-Cloutier: The Inuit Right to Culture (5)	Kyle Powys Whyte: Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Justice (17)	Kristin Schrader-Frchette: Environmental Justice - Creating Equality, Reclaiming Democracy (11)
2/2	(3) The Intrinsic Value of Nonhuman Life	Paul Taylor: Respect for Nature (22)	Aldo Leopold: The Land Ethic (14)	
2/7	(3) The Intrinsic Value of Nonhuman Life	Ronald Sandler: Ecocentrism (27)		Bernard Williams: Must a Concern for the Environment be Centered on Human Beings? (8)
2/9	(3) The Intrinsic Value of Nonhuman Life	Katie McShane: Individualist Biocentrism vs Holism Revisited (13)	Gary Varner: Biocentric Individualism (11)	
2/14	(4) The Value of Nature vs Human Values	Baird Callicott: The Wilderness Idea Revisited (26)		Elizabeth Willott: Restoring Nature, Without Mosquitos? (11)
2/16	(4) The Value of Nature vs Human Values	Holmes Rolston: The Wilderness Idea Reaffirmed (8)		Thomas Birch: The Incarceration of Wildness - Wilderness Areas as Prisons (24)
2/21	(5a) Animals and the Environment	Baird Callicott: Animal Liberation - A Triangular Affair (28)	Lyman & Merzer: Mad Cowboy - The Cattle Rancher Who Won't Eat Meat (6)	Holly Wilson: The Green Kant - Kant's Treatment of Animals (8)
2/23	(5a) Animals and the Environment	Carol Adams: Ecofeminism and the Eating of Animals (16)		Karen Warren: The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism (22)
2/28	(5b) Animal Moral Status	Peter Singer: All Animals are Equal (10)	Mary Ann Warren: Human Rights and Animal Rights (6)	Lori Gruen: Eating Animals (29)
3/2	(5b) Animal Moral Status	Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka: Universal Basic Rights for Animals (31)		
3/7	(6a) Climate Change and Blame	Walter Sinnott-Armstrong: It's Not My Fault (20)	Monica Aufrecht: Climate Change and Structural Emissions (18)	Avram Hiller: Climate Change and Individual Responsibility (18)
3/9	(6a) Climate Change and Blame	CJ Cuomo: Climate Change, Vulnerability, Responsibility... (19)	Kyle Powys Whyte: Ways Beyond the Lifeboat (9)	

3/14	(6b) Climate Change and Migration	Cara Nine: Ecological Refugees...and the Lockean Proviso (15)		Matthew Lister: Climate Change Refugees (11)
3/16	(6b) Climate Change and Migration	Philip Cafaro and Winthrop Staples III: The Environmental Argument for Reducing Immigration to the US (14)		Monica Aufrecht: Rethinking the Greening of Hate (20)