

Phil 1140: Environmental Ethics

A. Course Description

1. Number of credits: 3
2. Lecture hours per week: 3
Lab hours per week: none
3. Prerequisites: none
4. Co-requisites: none
5. MnTC Goals: 9 and 10

Do animals have rights? Do we have moral obligations to preserve endangered species? What is sustainable development and do we have an ethical obligation to promote it? Do people, including future generations, have a right to environmental protection? What is environmental racism? Do we have a duty to preserve biodiversity? Does nature have value, and if so, what kind of value? These are just a few of the questions addressed in environmental ethics. Environmental ethics is the study of the moral relationship between humans and the rest of nature. In this course, we will examine various efforts to understand the nature and extent of our duties to the nonhuman world. After a general introduction to a few major ethical theories and concepts in moral philosophy, we will investigate a variety of environmental issues through the lens of these theories and concepts. At the same time, we will critically reflect on the shortcomings of traditional moral theories and investigate new concepts, theories, and perspectives as ways of understanding the moral relationship between humans and nature.

B. Date last revised: Fall 2015

C. Outline of Major Content Areas

1. Ethical Theory (may include utilitarianism, Kantianism, virtue ethics)
2. Contemporary alternatives to traditional ethical theory (may include Deep Ecology, Biocentrism, Eco-Feminism, Ecocentrism, and others)
3. Economic, religious, and cultural understandings of nature
4. Applications of ethical theory or alternative ethical approaches to specific environmental issues (may include climate change, the moral status of animals, environmental racism and justice, agriculture and sustainability, population and consumption, food ethics, and others)

D. Course Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the course, the student will be able to

1. Explain several traditional ethical theories and their associated concepts and apply them to environmental issues (9b, 2b)
2. Analyze the ethical aspects involved in the diverse approaches to the environment taken by religious, economic, legal, and cultural perspectives (9c, 9d)
3. Analyze environmental ethical issues to arrive at individual reasoned responses to environmental problems (9a, 2b)
4. Use diverse theories/understandings of the value of the natural world imaginatively to generate alternative solutions to environmental problems (10e, 2b)
5. Explain the ways in which the emergence of environmental understanding is intertwined with and influenced by religious, cultural, and socio-economic factors (10b, 10c)
6. Articulate and defend one's own view regarding what actions to take on environmental problems (10f, 2c)
7. Understand basic facts about ecology and on the basis of that understanding make well-reasoned judgments about solutions to environmental problems (10d, 2a)

E. Methods for Assessing Student Learning

1. Essays and Papers
2. Exams and Quizzes
3. Service Learning
4. Homework Assignments
5. Discussion Projects and Participation

F. Special Information: none