ETHICS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

ENVST-UA.400/PHL-UA.0053 - SYLLABUS – FALL 2013

T Th 2-3:15pm KIMM 808

INSTRUCTOR: David Frank | df81@nyu.edu | Office location: 285 Mercer ave. # 908 | Office hours: TTh 3:15-4:15pm (after class) or by appointment.

TEACHING ASSISTANT: Ben Phillips | ben.s.phillips@gmail.com | Office location: TBA | Office hours: M 2-3pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course introduces philosophical ethics through an engagement with environmental issues of population growth and resource use, pollution and environmental justice, sustainability, non-human animal welfare, biodiversity loss, and global climate change. No prior experience with philosophy is required. The two main goals of the course are to provide students with a more sophisticated conceptual vocabulary to make and evaluate ethical arguments across domains and to engage students’ ethical reasoning and reflection on environmental issues in particular.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

1. Two in-class exams (short answer and essay questions) each worth 15% of the final grade;

2. Two < 1000-word (1.5-3 page) short papers, each worth 15% of the final grade;

3. One final 1500-2000-word (5-7 page) paper critically examining a philosophical argument and/or environmental issue, worth 20% of the final grade;

4. Class participation and attendance (at lectures and discussion sections) will count for 20% of the final grade. There will occasionally be short assignments (e.g. “write three critical questions about the reading”) that will be turned in at lecture and/or discussion section and count toward participation.

NYU bookstore and at online retailers. Other required and recommended readings will be made available on the course website.

**COURSE WEBSITE:** See the Blackboard site at [http://newclasses.nyu.edu/](http://newclasses.nyu.edu/)

**OTHER RESOURCES:** The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy is an excellent resource. Available here: [http://plato.stanford.edu/](http://plato.stanford.edu/). See also the links to Jim Pryor’s helpful guides to philosophical terms, methods, and writing and reading philosophy, in the recommended reading for September 3.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### WHAT IS ETHICS? WHAT IS THE ENVIRONMENT?

**T SEPT 3:** Welcome to the course. Welcome to philosophy. Styles of ethical reasoning. Environmental problems. Outline of the course. No required reading.

*Recommended:* Jim Pryor’s guides to philosophical terms and methods, reading philosophy, and writing a philosophy paper, available here:

http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/index.html,  
http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html,  
http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html

**TH SEPT 5:** Environmental problems as ethical problems.


### METAETHICS AND NORMATIVE ETHICS: A WHIRLWIND TOUR

**T SEPT 10:** Challenges to ethics: amoralism, theism, relativism

Read: Jamieson, ch. 2.

**TH SEPT 12:** Metaethics: what do we mean by ‘right’, ‘wrong’, ‘good’, ‘bad’? Are there *objective* answers to ethical questions?

Read: Jamieson, ch. 3.
T SEPT 17: Normative ethics. Consequentialism, deontology, virtue theory.

Read: Jamieson, ch. 4.

NOTE: Depending on student interest and understanding, these discussions of metaethics and normative ethics may have to be extended a week, resulting in less time for climate ethics at the end of the semester.

ANTHROPOCENTRIC ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

TH SEPT 19: Population growth, pollution, and resource overexploitation as tragedies of the (unregulated) commons.


T SEPT 24: Environmental (in)justice.


  Recommended: Visit the Environmental Protection Agency’s website on environmental justice here: [http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/](http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/)


T OCT 1: Challenging anthropocentrism: the last person argument.


Short paper 1 due.
CHALLENGING ANTHROPOCENTRISM 1: NON-HUMAN ANIMALS

TH OCT 3: Humans, other animals, and speciesism: is species membership ethically relevant?


T OCT 8: Managing wild populations and zoo populations.


TH OCT 10: Eating animals: factory farming, vegetarianism, veganism, and the conscientious omnivore.


T OCT 15: Fall recess: no class.

TH OCT 17: Exam 1. Covers moral theory, anthropocentric environmental ethics, and animal ethics.

CHALLENGING ANTHROPOCENTRISM 2: BIOCENTRISM, BIODIVERSITY, AND SPECIES LOSS

T OCT 22: Biocentrism and biocentric individualism.


TH OCT 24: Biodiversity and the value of species.


**T OCT 29**: Biodiversity, species preservation, and and ecological tradeoffs.


**TH OCT 31**: Plural values, biodiversity, and human livelihoods.


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**CHALLENGING ANTHROPOCENTRISM 3: ECOCENTRISM, DEEP ECOLOGY, AND WILDERNESS**

**T NOV 5**: Ecocentric holism and deep ecology.


**TH NOV 7**: Wilderness.


**Short paper 2 due.**

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**CASE STUDY 1: HYDRAULIC FRACTURING (“FRACKING”) AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS OF DOMESTIC ENERGY PRODUCTION**

**T NOV 12**: Background on the debate surrounding hydraulic fracturing.
Interactive explanations of hydraulic fracturing, from the New York Times and the Environmental Defense Fund:


EDF: http://www.edf.org/climate/five-areas-of-concern

Read: 1. Report from advocacy group Environment America, “Fracking by the Numbers: Key Impacts of Dirty Drilling at the State and National Level,” especially the Executive Summary, and pages 1-28, available here:


2. Pro-fracking op-eds by Joe Nocera and Bjorn Lomborg, available here:

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/28/opinion/nocera-how-to-frack-responsibly.html

and here:

http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/a-fracking-good-story-by-bj-rn-lomborg

3. Especially for Thursday’s class, read Steven Cohen’s short HuffPo piece on “The Political Minefield of Hydraulic Fracturing in New York State,” available here:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steven-cohen/the-political-minefield-o_b_2758217.html

Other optional readings:

Bill McKibben “Why Not Frack?” and response letters, available here:


John Upton “Fracking won’t fix the climate,” available here:


TH NOV 14: Class presentations on the NY State moratorium on hydraulic fracturing.

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CASE STUDY 2: ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

T NOV 19: Climate change: science and economics.


TH NOV 21: Climate change ethics: A perfect moral storm?

T NOV 26: Exam 2. Covers biodiversity, biocentrism and ecocentrism, hydraulic fracturing case study, climate change basics.

TH NOV 28: Thanksgiving break: no class.

T DEC 3: Climate change and global justice.


TH DEC 5: Climate change and virtues.

Read: Jamieson, D. “When Utilitarians Should be Virtue Theorists.” In Gardiner et al. eds. 315-331.

T DEC 10: Climate change and individual responsibility.


Final paper due date TBA.

COURSE POLICIES

LATE ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMS: Late assignments will not be accepted or late exams given, except in cases of medical and family emergencies. For example, oversleeping will not be accepted as a legitimate excuse for missing an exam.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course. If you are not sure what counts as plagiarism, ask your TA or see NYU Arts and Sciences policy on academic integrity here: http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity, especially section II, “Some Guidelines.”

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: All students with disabilities will be accommodated. These students should see the instructor at the beginning of the course with a letter from the Moses Center to make arrangements for the semester.