

# PHIL 3301: Environmental Ethics

Spring 2024 | M/W 9:20-11am | Blegen 220



Photo by Beth Moon

## Instructors:

Dr. Philip Bold (he/they)

Email: [bold0169@umn.edu](mailto:bold0169@umn.edu)

Office: Heller 717

Office hour: Wed. 11:15-12:05pm; Fri. 1-2pm

**Course Description:** This course will survey major themes in environmental ethics. Two fundamental questions that will span through the entire semester will be: (1) How should we understand the relationship between nature and humanity? (2) How should we understand the value of nature and our obligations to it? Specific topics covered along the way include: anthropocentrism vs. biocentrism, the aesthetic value of nature, the ethics of eating animals, humanistic approaches to environmental value, eco-feminism, indigenous care ethics, and our obligations to sealive.

## STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Students in the course **can identify, define, and solve problems.**

### Addressing the outcome

In this course, students will grapple with major problems in environmental philosophy. By studying a wide variety of perspectives on our ethical relation to nature, students will be given an opportunity to investigate these problems and offer solutions.

### Assessment of learning related to the outcome

The learning related to this outcome will be evaluated through regular participation in class discussion, a series of critical papers in which students will be required to clearly formulate their own reasoning on a particular theme, including a final paper in which students will conduct an extended critique of a central issue discussed in the course.

**Required Texts:** There are no required textbooks for this course. All readings will be provided on Canvas.

## Course Requirements:

1. Weekly Discussion Posts (10 total) 10%
2. Three papers
  - a. First Paper (2-3 pages) 15%
  - b. Second Paper (2-3 pages) 20%
  - c. Third Paper (4-5 pages) 25%
3. Participation 30%
  - a. Attendance
  - b. Quality of Discussion Posts
  - c. Class Discussion

### Major Deadlines:

Discussion Posts	Before Wednesday class
Paper 1	Sat Mar 2 by midnight
Paper 2	Sat Mar 23 by midnight
Paper 3	Wed May 1 by midnight

## Description of Requirements

**1. Discussion posts:** Students will be required to write a weekly discussion post (a minimum of 1 paragraph, roughly 5 *thoughtful* sentences) that responds to a question posed by the instructor. The purpose of the discussion posts is for students to state as clearly as possible *their own answer* to the question posed. The question will be relevant to the readings assigned during that week of class, but students *are not required* to discuss the assigned readings in their discussion post (though they can if they so desire). To be clear: the purpose of the discussion posts is for students to state *their own opinion* – as clearly, thoughtfully, and respectfully as possible – in response to a question related to class.

Students can optionally (and are strongly encouraged to!) *write a response* – clearly, thoughtfully, and respectfully – to a discussion post written by one of their peers. It is not sufficient to write something like, “I agree with so-and-so, thanks for writing a great post!”; rather, a response must make a *substantive* contribution to the discussion (and as with an original post be at least 1 paragraph, roughly 5 *thoughtful* sentences). Options include: offering an example that illustrates

the idea expressed in the original post, an objection (either one's own or "playing devil's advocate") to the original post, a comparison of the original post with the ideas of some author studied in the course, a further question that the original post brought to mind for you. Be creative!

**Students are allowed to skip 3 of the assigned discussion posts.** Since 13 discussion posts are assigned, students are required to complete 10 discussion posts throughout the semester.

Discussion posts are simply graded for completion, but their general quality will be factored into one's *Participation grade*.

**2. Three Paper Assignments (double-spaced, 12-point font, Times New Roman, 1-inch Margins):** Three total writing assignments are required for this class (to be submitted via Canvas). More detailed instructions for each will be posted online in closer proximity to the deadline. Students are allowed to complete paper assignments with a partner (but no more than one).

**3. Participation:** Discussion is the core of this class. That is why participation counts for 30% of your course grade. **You should come to every class prepared to talk about the assigned readings and the course topics.** The participation component of your grade will also factor in your attendance record as well as the regular completion and quality of your forum posts. Please feel free to check in with your instructor at any point in the semester if you are ever concerned about your participation.

## Course Schedule

- \* Schedule is subject to change. \* Complete readings prior to class.
- \* Some of the required (and optional) audio/video content will be posted on Canvas, but others will require access to Netflix (*Cowspiracy*, *Seaspiracy*)

### **Introduction**

Wed Jan 17 – Syllabus & Introduction to class

### **Anthropocentrism, Conservationism, & Preservationism**

Mon Jan 22 – Selections from *Genesis*, Aristotle, Locke, Darwin, and Muir  
*Optional:* Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis"

Wed Jan 24 – Pitcher & Welchman, "Can an Environmental Paradise be Regained?"  
Gifford Pinchot, "Principles of Conservation"  
John Muir, "The Hetch Hetchy Valley"

### **Respect for Nature and Biocentrism**

Mon Jan 29 – Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic"

Wed Jan 31 – Kenneth Goodpaster, "On Being Morally Considerable"

## **Environmental Aesthetics**

Mon Feb 5 – Elliot Sober, “Philosophical Problems for Environmentalism”

Wed Feb 7 – Allen Carlson, “Appreciation and the Natural Environment”

## **Nature and Humanity: More Complicated Attitudes**

Mon Feb 12 – Bernard Williams, “Must a Concern for the Environment Be Centered on Human Beings?”

Wed Feb 14 – Val Plumwood, “Being Prey”

## **Buddhist Ecology**

Mon Feb 19 – Thich Nhat Hanh, “Emptiness: The Wonder of Interbeing”

Wed Feb 21 – Rita Gross, “Toward a Buddhist Environmental Ethic”

## **Urban & Racial Ecology**

Mon Feb 26 – No Class

Wed Feb 28 – Val Plumwood, “Nature, Self, and Gender”

***Saturday March 2<sup>nd</sup> – First Paper (2-3 pages) due by midnight***

**Spring Break:** Mon March 4<sup>th</sup> – Fri March 8th

## **The Ethics of Eating Animals**

Mon March 11 – David Foster Wallace, “Consider the Lobster”

Wed March 13 – Peter Singer, “All Animals are Equal”

Mon March 18 – Elizabeth Anderson, “Animal Rights and the Values of Nonhuman Life”

Wed March 20 – **No class meeting**

Discussion post assignment:

Watch *Cowspiracy* (Netflix) and comment on the film.

## **Land, Justice, Resistance**

Mon March 25 – Jessi Quizar, “Working to Live: Black-Led Farming in Detroit’s Racialized Economy”

Wed March 27 – *Guest Speaker*: Tamara Fakhoury  
Tamara Fakhoury, “Wadi Climbing: Quiet Resistance in the West Bank”  
*Resistance Climbing* (Reel Rock documentary)

***Saturday March 30 – Second Paper (2-3 pages) due by midnight***

**Indigenous Kinship Ethics and Environmental Justice**

Mon April 1 – Kyle Whyte, “Kinship Through Action: Indigenous Environmental Justice”

Wed April 3 – Deborah McGregor, “Mino-Mnaamodzawin: Achieving Environmental Justice in Canada”

Mon April 8 – Melanie Yazzie, “We Must Make Kin to get Free”

Wed April 10 – *Guest Speaker*: Ash McLeod  
Reading TBD

Mon April 15 – *Guest Speaker*: Sean Haase-Olivia  
Reading TBD

Wed April 17 – *Guest Speaker*: Áila O’Loughlin  
Reading TBD

**Obligations to Sealife**

Mon April 22 – *Seaspiracy* (Netflix) & *Plastic Wars* (PBS)

Wed April 24 – *Guest Speaker*: Christiana Hardie  
Reading TBD

**Conclusion**

Mon April 29 – Review, Reflection, Final Papers

***Wednesday May 1 – Final Paper (4-5 pages) due by midnight***

**Course Policies**

1. **Late Work:** Unless special permission is obtained in advance, late papers will not be accepted without grade penalty. The penalty for late papers is 5% for every day the paper is submitted past the official deadline. Discussion posts cannot be made up and must be completed on time for credit. Extended deadlines *on paper assignments* are granted liberally within 1 week of the deadline, but you must receive permission from your instructor. Further extensions on papers will require a formal excuse with evidence, such as a medical note or a note from a parent in the case of a family emergency.

**2. Grading:** Final grades will be calculated using the following scale.

F	D-	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A
0	62	65	68	72	75	78	82	85	88	92	95

Below is a list of criteria that will be used to evaluate your papers. Note that the %'s only give a *rough* indication of how important these aspects are, and that not all of the criteria will apply equally to each of the different assignments; this is not a mathematical scale. There will be slightly different standards for each of the individual assignments, which I will state when those assignments are announced.

- Quality of ideas (50%)
  - *Range and depth of argument; fair representation of philosopher's position; logic of argument; quality and/or originality of thought; appropriate sense of the complexity of the topic; appropriate awareness of opposing views.*
- Organization and Argumentation (40%)
  - *Clarity of thesis statement in the introduction; logical and clear arrangement of ideas; effective use of transitions; unity and coherence of paragraphs; good development of arguments through supporting details and evidence.*
- Clarity, style, and grammar (10%)
  - *Ease of readability; appropriate voice, tone, and style for the assignment; clarity of sentence structure; grammatically correct sentences; accurate spelling; careful proofreading.*

**3. Plagiarism:** Plagiarism will result in a final grade of F for the course. If you have any questions about plagiarism or how to properly cite sources, do not hesitate to ask me. According to the UMN Student Conduct Code: "Plagiarism shall mean representing the words, creative work, or ideas of another person as one's own without providing proper documentation of source".

**4. ChatGPT:** (TLDR: You are **not** allowed to use ChatGPT for any assignment in this course.) The Board of Regents Student Conduct Code states the following in Section IV, Subd.1: Scholastic Dishonesty:

"Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarism; cheating on assignments or examinations, including the unauthorized use of online learning support and testing platforms; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work, including the posting of student-generated coursework on **online learning support and testing platforms** not approved for the specific course in question; taking, acquiring, or using course materials without

faculty permission, including the posting of faculty-provided course materials on online learning and testing platforms; ..."

Artificial intelligence (AI) language models, such as ChatGPT, and online assignment help tools, such as Chegg®, are examples of **online learning support platforms**: they can not be used for course assignments except as explicitly authorized by the instructor. The following actions are prohibited in this course:

- Submitting all or any part of an assignment statement to an online learning support platform;
- Incorporating any part of an AI generated response in an assignment;
- Using AI to summarize or contextualize source materials.

If you are in doubt as to whether you are using an online learning support platform appropriately in this course, I encourage you to discuss your situation with one of your instructors.

- 5. Disability Accommodations:** If you have, or think you have, a disability in any area such as mental health, attention, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) <https://ars.unc.edu/> to arrange confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations. If you are registered with the DRC and have a disability accommodation letter dated for this semester or this year, please contact your TA early in the semester to review how the accommodations will be applied in this course.
- 6. Sexual Misconduct.** Sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, and relationship violence) includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such behavior is prohibited in the University setting.

Per the [U of M policy on sexual harassment](#), *I am required to share information that I learn about possible sexual misconduct* with the campus Title IX office. Within the requirements of my job, I will be as responsive as possible to your requests for confidentiality and support. You can also, or alternately, choose to talk with a confidential resource that will not share information that they learn about sexual misconduct. Confidential resources include:

- The Aurora Center 24hr Helpline (612-626-9111)
- Boynton Mental Health (612-624-1444)
- Student Counseling Services (612-624-3323)

**7. Other Useful Resources:**

- Technology resources for remote learning: <https://it.umn.edu/working-learning-campus/get-internet-access-campus>
- University Policies: <https://policy.umn.edu/>
- Student Writing Support: <http://writing.umn.edu/sws/>

- Disability Resource Center: <https://disability.umn.edu/>
- Student Counseling Center: <https://counseling.umn.edu/>
- The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu>