

# **UPI 2205 Ethics and the Environment**

## **Module Description**

In this module, we will read, discuss, think and write about certain fundamental ethical questions about the environment. The syllabus aims at equipping students with concepts and theories that will help them critically analyze environmental issues.

Units 1-2 are introductory in nature, and aim at giving students the intellectual and philosophical background necessary for a more in-depth analysis of the theories that we will study in rest of the semester. In addition to visiting the sources of anthropocentrism in Western thought, we will also be familiarizing ourselves with three moral positions: consequentialism, deontology and rights theory. All these three positions attempt to answer the question of “how I ought to live,” and you will find that our environmental theorists in the rest of the syllabus appeal to them (as well as a few other positions) over and over again.

Units 3-5 are the core of our syllabus and are divided into three topics: (1) animal ethics, (2) the intrinsic value and moral standing of nature, and (3) climate change. Debates are vibrant in these areas. We will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different scholarly theories, as well as examine their similarities and differences. Questions that we will explore include, but are not limited to:

- Should we accord moral consideration to non-human entities?
- Do animals and plants have interests and rights?
- Are meat-eating and animal testing justifiable?
- How can we adjudicate competing claims between human and non-human entities, or between different non-human entities?
- How do we account for our obligations to future generations? Do they have rights?
- How should CO2 emissions and the costs in combatting global warming be allocated?
- Should we rely on climate policies to redistribute material resources from richer countries to poorer countries?

## **Schedule of Readings and Assignments**

### **Unit 1 Introduction: Anthropocentrism in Western Thought**

Week 1 Aug 14

- White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” 1203-07
- Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 3, Part II, Chapter CXII (no need to read in advance)
- Genesis, chapter 1 (no need to read in advance)

Week 1 Aug 17

- Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*, pp.25-46 ONLY
- Kant, “Rational Beings Alone Have Moral Worth,” Section II only
- Descartes, “Discourse on the Method,” Part V, pp.31-33 and selected correspondences, pp.302-04, 365-67

## Unit 2 Introduction again: Ethical Theories

Week 2 Aug 21 Utilitarianism

- Shafer-Landau, “Consequentialism”, pp.117-153

Week 2 Aug 24 Kantian Deontology

- Shafer-Landau, “The Kantian perspective,” pp.154-165

Week 3 Aug 28 Rights

- Feinberg, “Nature and Value of Rights,” pp.243-58

## Unit 3 Animal Ethics

Week 3 Aug 31 Utilitarianism

- Singer, “All Animals are Equal,” pp.1-23
- Singer, “Tools for Research,” pp.80-94 (please skim only)
- Singer, “Becoming a Vegetarian,” pp. 159-183 (please skim only)

Week 4 Sep 4 The Rights View: Theory

- Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights,” pp.336-44
- Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, pp.151-156, 248-250, 276-280

(Read Feinberg’s paper on animal rights when I prepare)

Week 4 Sep 7 The Rights View: Application

- Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, pp.330-353 (vegetarianism) OR 363-394 (use of animals in research) (more details later)

Week 5 Sep 11 Alternative Views

- Cohen, “The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research?” pp.865-70
- Steinbock, “Speciesism and the Idea of Equality” pp.247-56
- Warren, “Difficulties with the Strong Animal Rights Position,” pp.345-349

Week 5 Sep 14 Marginal Cases

- Norcross, “Puppies, Pigs and People,” pp.229-245

Week 6 Sep 18 Capabilities Approach

- Nussbaum, “‘Beyond Compassion and Humanity’: Justice for Nonhuman Animals,” pp.299-320

Week 6 Sep 21 Taking stock: a comparison

### **Paper 1 due Sep 23**

## **Unit 4 Intrinsic Value and Moral Standing of Nature**

Week 7 Oct 2 Naturalism

- Rolston, “Naturalizing Values: Organisms and Species,” pp.76-86

Week 7 Oct 5 Taylor’s Biocentricism: a Kantian approach

- Taylor, “The Ethics of Respect for Nature,” pp.197-218

Week 8 Oct 9 Taylor’s Biocentricism: How to Adjudicate Conflicts

- Taylor, *Respect for Nature*, pp.256-264, 276-293, 304-306

## **Unit 5 Climate Change**

Week 8 Oct 12 Obligations to Future Generations

- Beckerman, “The Impossibility of a Theory of Intergenerational Justice,” pp.53-71

Week 9 Oct 16 Intergenerational Justice

- Bertram, “Exploitation and Intergenerational Justice,” pp.147-166

Week 9 Oct 19 The Ethics of Economic Measures

- Goodin, “Selling Environmental Indulgences,” 573-596
- Sandel, “It’s Immoral to Buy the Right to Pollute” (4 pages)

Week 10 Oct 23 Allocating CO2 Emissions Rights

- Singer, “One Atmosphere,” pp.14-50

Week 10 Oct 26 Allocating the Costs of Dealing with Global warming

- Shue, “Global Environment and International Inequality” pp.531-45

Week 11 Oct 30 Resource Distribution Again: an Alternative View

- Posner & Weisbach, “Punishing the Wrong-Doers,” pp.99-118

Week 11 Nov 2 Corrective Justice

- Posner & Weisbach, “Climate Change and Distributive Justice,” pp.73-98

Week 12 Nov 6 Capabilities Approach again

- Nussbaum, “Climate Change: Why Theories of Justice Matter,” pp.469-86

Week 12 Nov 9 Human Rights Approach

- Caney, “Climate Change, Human Rights, and Moral Thresholds,” pp.69-90

Week 13 Nov 13

- Paper Workshop

Week 13 Nov 16

- Paper Workshop

**Paper 2 due in Week 14.**

## **Requirements**

1. **Papers 1 and 2 (50%):** Students have to write two short papers of 1400-1600 words each.
2. **Short Papers (20%):**
  - for **seven** of class sessions (out of a total of twenty-five), students have to come up with one good and interesting question on the readings (no more than 30 words).

They then have to succinctly sketch out an answer to their own question (250-300 words).

- In answering your own question, you need to propose a claim which you will then defend. You need to provide reasons for the validity of your claim, in other words. Please make sure that your question is not so broad you cannot meaningfully answer it within 250-300 words.
- It is best to treat these short papers as miniature essays, in which you argue for a thesis, which in turn is your answer to the question your short papers investigate.
- students are welcome to choose which of the eight classes (i.e., eight sets of readings) they would like to write their responses on, as long as **four of these short papers are written before the recess, and the other four after the recess.**
- the objective of the exercise is to help you prepare for the class discussions.
- please upload the question and answer for the readings of **a particular class session** onto the “Short papers” file on IVLE **by 8pm the evening before the class.** Short Papers uploaded after 8pm that day will NOT be graded.
- your short papers will be graded on their **thoughtfulness, precision and conciseness.** Please make sure that both your question and answer are precisely and concisely articulated.
- if you are facilitating the class discussion on that day, please do not write your short paper or upload it onto IVLE. It will NOT be graded.
- please upload a word.doc and **not** a pdf file. Include your name at the top left-hand corner of the reading response.

3. **Class Participation (15%):** Assessed by classroom contributions.

4. **Facilitation of Class Discussion (15%):** students will be facilitating the class discussion for one time during the semester either by themselves or in groups of two. Each student is responsible for about 30 minutes of the class time and will need to meet with the instructor before the class. Detailed instructions will be given in a separate handout.

5. Attendance: only **three absences** are allowed, whether excused or unexcused. Four absences may result in a grade deduction.

### **Readings Uploaded on IVLE**

Aquinas, St. Thomas. *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Third Book, Volume Two, Chapter CXII.

Beckerman, Wilfred. “The Impossibility of a Theory of Intergenerational Justice.”  
Handbook of Intergenerational Justice. Ed. Joerg Chet Tremmel. Cheltenham:

- Edward Elgar, 2006. 53-71.
- Berman, Morris. *The Reenchantment of the World*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981. 25-46.
- Bertram, Christopher. "Exploitation and Intergenerational Justice." *Intergenerational Justice*. Ed. Axel Gosseries & Lukas H. Meyer. OUP 2009. 147-166.
- Caney, Simon. "Climate Change, Human Rights, and Moral Thresholds." *Human Rights and Climate Change*. Ed. Stephen Humphreys. Cambridge UP, 2010. 69-90.
- Cohen, Carl. "The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research." *New England Journal of Medicine*. 315 (1986): 865-70.
- Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*. Trans. Donald Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. 31-33.
- . "Correspondence." *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. II. Ed. & trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985. 302-04, 365-67.
- Feinberg, Joel. "Nature and Value of Rights." *Journal of Value Inquiry*. 4.4 (1970): 243-58.
- Goodin, Robert. "Selling Environmental Indulgences." *Kyklos*. 47 (1994): 573-596.
- Nussbaum, Martha. "'Beyond Compassion and Humanity': Justice for Nonhuman Animals." *Animal Rights: Current Debates and New Directions*. Ed. Cass Sunstein and Martha Nussbaum. Oxford: OUP, 2005. 299-320.
- . "Climate Change: Why Theories of Justice Matter." *Chicago Journal of International Law*. 13.2 (2013): 469-488
- Posner, Eric A & David Weisbach. *Climate Change Justice*. OUP, 2010.
- Regan, Tom. *The Case for Animal Rights*. Berkeley: U of Cal P, 1983, 1985, 2004. 243-50, 276-80, 363-94.
- Regan, Tom. "The Case for Animal Rights." *Contemporary Moral Problems*. Ed. James E. White. Wadsworth Publishing, 2009. 336-44.
- Rolston, Holmes III. "Naturalizing Values: Organisms and Species." *Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application*. Ed. Louis P. Pojman. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing/Thomson Learning, 2001. 76-86.
- Sandel, Michael. "It's Immoral to Buy the Right to Pollute" *New York Times*, 1997.
- Shafer-Landau, Russ. *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. New York: OUP, 2010. Selections.
- Shue, Henry. "Global Environment and International Inequality." *International Affairs*. 75.3(1999): 531-45.
- Singer, Peter. *Animal Liberation*. New York: Harper Collins, 1975. 1-23 & 159-183.
- . "One Atmosphere." *One World: the Ethics of Globalization*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2002. 14-50.
- Steinbock, Bonnie. "Specieism and the Idea of Equality." *Philosophy*. 53 (1978): 247-56.
- Taylor, Paul W. "The Ethics of Respect for Nature." *Environmental Ethics*. 3 (1981): 197-218.
- . *Respect for Nature*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986.

Warren, Mary Anne. “Difficulties with the Strong Animal Rights Position.” *Contemporary Moral Problems*. Ed. James E. White. Wadsworth Publishing, 2009. 345-349.

White, Lynn Jr. “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis.” *Science*. New Series. 155.3767 (1967): 1203-07.

### **Additional Notes**

If you have any questions at any point in the semester, please feel free to come see me or email me. Please be precise and concise in your email, and give me twenty-four hours to respond. If you would like to speak with me in person, please write to me and make an appointment in advance. Do not just stop by. I may not be in my office.