Philosophy 3530: Environmental Ethics

117 Old Main  |  MWF 9:30 – 10:20

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Office Hours: Monday 10:45 – 12:00, or by appointment

Course Website: phil3530.posthaven.com

I. Course Description: As the human population grows, transforming ecosystems and consuming the Earth’s resources at increasing rates, various conflicts arise over our use of the environment and our relationship with nature and nonhuman species. Such conflicts stem from divergent understandings of values and responsibilities—i.e. conflicting views about what is good and right, and how we should live. In this course, we will examine a wide range of arguments and positions concerning the ethical dimensions of our relationship to the natural world, to animals, and to future generations of human beings, etc. Students will be introduced to some major perspectives in normative ethics (i.e. utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics). These perspectives will provide the necessary insight as we explore philosophical debates over wilderness, pollution, overpopulation, biodiversity preservation, animal rights, climate change, and so on.

II. Required Texts:


- Several additional readings will be posted on the course website phil3530.posthaven.com

III. Requirements:

(1) Attendance and Participation—10% of course grade.

(2) Quiz One—15% of course grade

(3) Paper One—20% of course grade (3-4 pages, due Tuesday, February 20th)

(4) Quiz Two—15% of course grade

(5) Paper Two—20% of course grade (3-4 pages, due Friday, April 13th)

(6) Quiz Three—20% of course grade

Evaluation of papers and written exams will be based on three criteria: (a) the clarity and organization of your written work, (b) the degree of understanding demonstrated, and (c) the depth of personal engagement and argumentation.

The purpose of a response paper is two-fold—(i) response papers are assigned to get you to engage individual readings at a deeper level, and (ii) response papers are assigned in order to enhance discussion in the classroom. For this reason, response papers must be turned in during class, and only by students who attended the lecture(s) in which that particular reading was discussed. That said, you get to decide for yourself which assigned readings you will write responses to.
Late work will not be accepted. Do not use the work of another student, and do not use anything from the web when writing your papers. If you must use the web (although I urge you not to), quote and cite everything you have used. If you do not quote and cite material that you have used, it is plagiarism. Any student caught plagiarizing will certainly fail the class, and will potentially be expelled from the university.

Handouts will be made available on all topics; they will not be posted on the website or emailed to you. Handouts are to be treated as lecture notes, acquired by attending class or office hours.

IV. Tentative Schedule:

Topic 1: A Philosophical Introduction to Ethics and Logic

Readings: [1] Perry and Bratman, “The Logical Toolkit”

Topic 2: Anthropocentrism: Religion and Nature


Topic 3: Non-Anthropocentrism and the Value in Nature


Topic 4: Utilitarianism, Pleasure, and Economic Valuation


* Quiz 1: Friday, February 2nd (in class)

Topic 5: Tragedy of the Commons: Limits for Self-Interest


**Topic 6: Kantian Principles and the Respect for Nature**


*Paper One: Due Tuesday February 20th*


*Quiz Two: Monday, March 26th (in class)*

**Topic 7: Environmental Virtue Ethics**


*Paper Two: Due Friday, April 13th*

**Topic 8: Science, Technology, and the Land Ethic**


**Topic 9: Environmental Aesthetics and Environmental Justice**


*Quiz Three: Friday April 27th (in class)*