

# Environmental Ethics

Phil 124 - Fall 2015  
TR 3:30 - 4:45 - Healy 103



Professor: James C. Olsen (jco34@georgetown.edu)  
Office Hours: Tues & Thurs 5-6, Car Barn 314

## Course Description:

When Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring* in 1962, the environmental movement was itself relatively silent. Today, however, environmentalism is among the most pressing and prominent issues in public discourse—both local and global. Greenland’s lightning fast melt, air pollution in Beijing going literally off the chart, and the consumption practices of ordinary folks like you and me receive sustained public attention. Businesses scramble to cash in on the new appeal of being green. Mainstream religions compete with the new eco-centric religions to captivate our spiritual sensitivities and re-enchant our religious experience. The global community is caught up in the debates that inevitably precede significant social change as we wrestle with complex moral, scientific, economic, and political issues revolving around humanity’s relationship with the environment.

This course will focus on the moral dimension. We will read authors foundational to the environmental movement including John Muir and Aldo Leopold, as well as provocative contemporary moral philosophers such as Peter Singer and John Rolston Holmes. In each of these, we will explore the questions, whose interests are at stake? Is “value” something that belongs only within the human sphere? What responsibilities—on both the individual and

collective level—do humans have to one another and to plants, animals, and ecosystems? What is ‘nature’? Who is most wronged by environmental degradation, and how are we to address such issues in the face of limited cooperation and other problems of collective action?

### **Learning Goals:**

1. Understand the history and major animating themes of environmental ethics in the 20th and 21st centuries, demonstrating a reflective grasp of the readings.
2. Significantly improve one’s ability to perceive, analyze, and grapple with the ethical implications of concrete human actions and the various environmental challenges confronting contemporary society.
  - a. Tangentially, develop a more comprehensive and sophisticated grasp of the concrete environmental challenges we face.
3. Gain a greater recognition of oneself as a moral participant in unsustainable environmental degradation - both as an individual and also as part of a collective.
4. Substantively improve one’s ability to write argumentatively and present one’s ideas in a publicly accessible manner.

### **Key Questions:**

1. How ought we to think about and value ecosystems and other species?
2. With regard to the environment, what are my personal obligations to both humans and non-human species and ecosystems?
3. How do my values, my relationships with others and with the environment affect my own well-being?

### **Required Text:**

- David R. Keller *Environmental Ethics: The Big Questions* published by Wiley-Blackwell
- An environmental news source. I recommend subscribing on FB or email to a reputable news source focused on the environment. It must be delivered to you at least weekly.

All other texts are available on the internet or through Blackboard

### **Engelhard Course:**

This course is part of the network of Engelhard courses offered at Georgetown with an explicit focus on well-being and *cura personalis*. Throughout the semester we will discuss issues of well-being as they relate both to Georgetown University and to the condition of the environments in which we live. In particular we will discuss our responsibility to help design and shape our own environment, and how much intentional action in this area can impact our wellbeing. This will include the opportunity to hear from guest speakers, reflect on your own well-being, and complete an Engelhard survey.

### **Course Requirements:**

You will be evaluated on the basis of **writing assignments** and **class participation**, both of which will be captured on our **course website**.

#### **1. Writing Assignments:**

- a. Writing analyses** (5 total): you are responsible to post an analysis of a piece of environmental journalism from a major news outlet (e.g., BBC, Al-Jazeera, NYT, etc.; *not* a blog or company website) or a major budget documentary (at least 50 min in length) or a reading from any current or previous class. At least two of the analyses must be on a documentary. These news analyses are meant to be stepping stones and practice for your term paper. Each analysis must meet the following requirements:
- i. 300-800 words
  - ii. *Briefly* summarize the article/documentary (and include bibliographic info)
  - iii. **Spend the bulk of your writing** on the following two things:
    1. **Synthesis:** Relate a specific issue or argument in the article/documentary to a specific reading or set of readings from class (appropriately cited). The goal here is to identify and highlight the *specific* moral relevance of whatever the article addresses, connecting theoretical course readings to real world events. That is, use the theoretical frameworks for our reading as a means to illuminate the moral texture of the scenario under consideration.
    2. **Argument:** Make a *specific, narrow* argument (e.g., give a specific argument that the Greater Canyonlands area should be declared a national monument; do *not* argue that national monuments are important). **As a rule of thumb, your argument ought to be close to half your paper.**
- b. Graded writing analyses:** you will re-write two of your five writing analyses and hand them in for a conventional grade. **I strongly encourage you to select an analysis that will then be re-written again for the final term paper.** The first of these graded analyses is due October 17<sup>th</sup>, and the other before Thanksgiving.
- c. Term Paper:** Building off of one or more of your analyses, you will write an ~2000 word term paper analyzing a concrete issue from within a moral framework with a policy orientation. In this paper you will be required both to argue for a given ethical position and also provide an argument for the specific implications that this ethical position has vis-a-vis the policy you're advocating.
- d. Reflection papers** (5 total): You will write a total of five reflection papers, and each paper will be 500-800 words. One of these will be on the Engelhard portion of this class. More information on each assignment will be forthcoming. The first and last reflection count as just one reflection, weighted as 1% and 3% of your final grade. The others are worth 4% each. Your reflections will be on the following:
- i. An initial reflection on what environmental ethics is and what you expect to get out of this class. As part of this you must calculate and record your carbon footprint. This initial reflection is due Saturday, Sept 5 (or two days after your first class if you register late). You will later write an end of term reflection on the initial reflection.
  - ii. A reflection in the wake of your performing two lifestyle experiments (details below)
  - iii. A reflection in the wake of your first field trips - one to a "natural site" (details below)
  - iv. A reflection in the wake of your second field trip - one to an institution (details below)
  - v. A reflection on the Engelhard themes of this class.
- 2. Class Participation:** Your class participation will be graded in the following ways:
- a. In addition to writing five analyses, **you must comment on** at least two of your peers' analyses each time. These comments must be at least 100 words, one of them must be a "first response" comment (i.e., you must be the first person responding to the post; and



2-graded analyses	15%
Reflection papers (5)	20%
Term paper	30%
<i>Participation:</i>	
Peer comments	5%
Small group participation	10%

#### *Personal Lifestyle Projects:*

You will be required to do a personal project twice during the semester. If any of these are a normal part of your life, please choose something else. After completing the second project, you will write a reflection paper as outlined above. **You must do both a 7-day and a 3-day project.**

Here are the projects:

1. Go vegetarian for one week
2. Walk or bike everywhere for one week
3. Do not use any disposable items for 3 days
4. Carry any trash you produce with you for 3 days
5. Create your own project (must get approval)

**You are also required to watch *No Impact Man***, which is available for streaming on Blackboard, Netflix, and other internet sites. You may use your viewing of the film to also write a News Analysis, but do not need to. You must, however, discuss it in your Reflection.

#### *Field Trips:*

You are required to take two field trips during the course of the semester and are welcome to do so individually or as groups. You will write a reflection paper for each. One field trip must be to **a location that you consider natural**, and you must spend at least an hour at this location. The second must be to an institution. I am only placing two constraints on the type of institution you visit: first, you must justify your decision to visit this institution vis-a-vis the goals and content of the course; and second, it must be an institution you have not visited recently. As part of this visit **you must interview a representative** concerning their understanding of the role they play and their obligations with regard to sustainability. See me if you have questions.

### **Course Policies:**

1. **All papers are due at 11:59pm** on the listed date. Late papers are automatically reduced to a B. Note: because submissions are electronic, I can tell if your submission is even 1 minute late.
2. My intentions are to make this a tech-savvy course, but one that respects the need for face to face, unconnected discussion. Consequently, **ALL ELECTRONICS ARE STRICTLY PROHIBITED IN CLASS**, unless I call for them. This includes using your laptop to take notes. **THIS ALSO INCLUDES USING YOUR SMART PHONE UNDER THE TABLE.**
3. Eating and drinking are welcome, but **YOU MAY NOT HAVE DISPOSABLE FOOD PACKAGING OR DRINK CONTAINERS IN CLASS.**
4. In the happy event of a campus closure (e.g., on account of snow) or other cancellation (there are a few days this semester that I may have to miss class), I will make a case-by-case decision on what we will do to maintain instructional continuity. It is likely that during such events I will put a Lecture Capture up on Blackboard, which you can view at your own

convenience and **THEN SUBMIT WRITTEN FEEDBACK ON THE BLOG**. I may also require an extra small group meeting, and pose specific questions for you to answer.

### **Academic Integrity**

I care a great deal about increasing your intellectual capacities and general knowledge base and am concerned overall with helping you to flourish as a human being. That means I also care very much about your academic integrity and very little about how the grade you receive in this one class impacts your future. Hence I won't hesitate to fail students caught plagiarizing on their papers and will not tolerate dishonesty in any form. I highly encourage students to review Georgetown's Honor System policies (found at <http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/>), and want you to note that plagiarism can be unintentional. We will discuss this more in class. If you have any questions please visit with me or the Writing Center.

### **Campus Resources:**

**Academic Resource Center** (<http://academicsupport.georgetown.edu/>): Students seeking tutoring, study tips, helps with writing, concerns over what constitutes plagiarism, or students requiring services on account of disabilities or athletic or other sponsored activity accommodation should visit ARC. In particular, all students might benefit from the academic skills workshops offered (schedule available on-line).

**Counseling and Psychiatric Services** (CAPS: <http://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/mental-health/>): Your mental health is just as real and important as your physical health. And just as in the normal course of things several of you will likely benefit from our medical services this semester, so also some of you will likely benefit from our psychiatric services. There is a wide range of services offered, from group to individual care, including types of care for those who cannot afford normal counseling services. Please take advantage of these as needed to maintain your optimal health.

**Title IX:** Rape and other forms of sexual misconduct are tragically common in our society. Please note that there are services available for students who have been exploited in any way (<http://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/crisis-counseling/sexualassault-relationship-violence>). Also, please note that I am required by federal law to report any indication I receive of sexual misconduct to Georgetown's Title IX coordinator. If you are looking for confidential guidance I recommend contacting Jen Schweer (Associate Director, Health Education Services, Sexual Assault Response and Prevention ) at [jls242@georgetown.edu](mailto:jls242@georgetown.edu) or 202.687.0323.

**Your Dean:** Students tend to forget that the main function of their dean is to ensure the success and well-being of university students. They are completely informed not only about the resources on campus but also the policies and ways in which the university can assist students struggling in any way.

**For additional services related to health and well-being of any kind on campus, please see "GU Safety Net Contacts" under "Documents" on Blackboard.**

## Course Plan:

Unit 1: Historical Milestones and Cultural Issues		
R 9/3	Introduction: The state of things – just how bad is it? • Read Kolbert: “Enter the Anthropocene – Age of Man” • Watch Fineburg <a href="#">“Are we ready for neo-evolution?”</a>	Due Saturday: • Reflection 1 • Email me your news source subscription
T 9/8	Thoreau: “Walking” EE Muir: “The Wild Parks and Forest Reservations...” EE Stegner <a href="#">“The Wilderness Letter”</a> <a href="#">The EPA and Parks</a> <a href="#">Parks Forward for All</a> <a href="#">Addressing Equity in Park Use</a>	Bring a hometown issue to class
R 9/10	Carson selections from <i>The Silent Spring</i> BB Rosner & Markowitz <a href="#">“Your Body is a Corporate Test tube”</a> Halden & Lawrence: <a href="#">“Making Chemistry Green”</a>	Writing Analysis 1 (WA1) due WA1 comments due Sat
T 9/15	World Bank: <a href="#">Turn Down the Heat - Executive Summary</a> UN Gap Report <a href="#">Forward &amp; Executive Summary</a> • <a href="#">Everything You Need to Know About [COP 21]</a>	
R 9/17	Schrader-Frchette: <a href="#">“Renewable Technologies and Environmental Injustice”</a> Wenz: “Just Garbage” The Hill: <a href="#">“Diversify and Win”</a>	Reflection 2 (on field trip 1) due Sat
T 9/22	Leopold: “The Land Ethic” EE White: “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis” (JSTOR) “Is the Environment a Moral Cause?” (NYT)	

### Optional Readings:

- ✦ Whitney: “Lynn White, Ecotheology, and History”
- ✦ Routley: “Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?”

Unit 2: Anthropocentrism, Biocentrism, Religion		
R 9/24	Callicott: “The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic” EE Op-ed: <a href="#">Our Lonely Home in Nature</a>	
T 9/29	Singer: “All Animals are Equal” EE	WA2 due WA2 comments due Sat
R 10/1	Taylor: “The Ethics of Respect for Nature” EE	Recommend project 1 completed by Sat
T 10/6	Hill: “Ideals of Human Excellence” BB Sandler: “Character & Environment” BB	
R 10/8	O’Neill: “The Varieties of Intrinsic Value” EE	WA3 due WA3 comments due

		Sat
T 10/13	Rolston: “Challenges in Environmental Ethics” BB	
R 10/15	Read one of the following (not of your tradition) (BB): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Katz “Judaism”</li> <li>• Attfield “Christianity”</li> <li>• Haq “Islam”</li> <li>• Sahni “In Search of an EE in Early Buddhism”</li> <li>• Chan “Ecosystem Sustainability: A Daoist Approach”</li> </ul>	Revised WA for a grade #1 due Sat

*Optional Readings:*

- ✦ More on the centrism debate:
  - ✦ Zimmerman: “The Threat of Ecofascism”
  - ✦ Norton: “Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism”
  - ✦ Schmidz: “Are All Animals Equal?”
  - ✦ Rolston: “Value in Nature and the Nature of Value”
- ✦ Stewardship debate:
  - ✦ Palmer: “Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics”
  - ✦ Attfield: “Environmental Sensitivity and Critiques of Stewardship”
  - ✦ Welchman: “A Defense of Environmental Stewardship”
- ✦ Do an additional religion reading

Unit 3: Responsibility & Economics		
T 10/20	Sinnott-Armstrong: “It’s Not My Fault” BB <b>3:30 Guest Speaker: Rachel Yancey – Georgetown Environmental Initiative</b>	
R 10/22	Jamieson: “When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists” BB	WA4 due WA4 comments due Sat
T 10/27	Keller book: Direct Action (327-336) EE Recommended film: The Yes Men are in Revolt	
R 10/29	Young: Ch 4 & 5 BB	Field trip 2 and Reflection 3 due Sat
T 11/3	Elkington: “Making Capitalism Sustainable” EE Wagner: “ <a href="#">Going Green but Getting Nowhere</a> ” Klein, film trailer: “ <a href="#">This Changes Everything</a> ” Bittman: “ <a href="#">We Can Finally Treat Food Workers Fairly</a> ”	
R 11/5	McDonough: “A Boat for Thoreau” BB <a href="#">The Big Idea of Creating Shared Value</a> <a href="#">Greening DC Interview</a>	WA5 due WA5 comments due Sat
T 11/10	Madison Powers: Draft talk Grist: “ <a href="#">UN deal to stop deforestation</a> ” <a href="#">Interview with Herman Daly</a>	

*Optional Readings:*

- ✦ Schmidtz: “On the Value and Limits of Cost-Benefit Analysis”

- ✦ Daly: “The Economics of Value Added and the Ethics of Value Distributed”
- ✦ Woolliams: “Designing Cities and Buildings as if They Were Ethical Choices”

Unit 4: Food & Animals		
R 11/12	Read at least one (BB): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Korsgaard: “Interacting With Animals”</li> <li>• Hursthouse: “Virtue Ethics and the Treatment of Animals”</li> </ul>	
T 11/17	Rachels: “Vegetarianism” BB	
R 11/19	Jackson: “Nature as the Measure for a Sustainable Agriculture” EE Keller & Brummer: “Putting Food Production in Context” EE Foley: <a href="#">Feeding 9 Billion</a> Gimenez: <a href="#">Five Steps to the Wrong Solution</a> Bittman Op-ed: <a href="#">Don’t Ask How to Feed 9 Billion</a> Gaeb Brown (watch 20 min) <a href="#">Keys to Building a Healthy Soil</a> NYT’s No Til Agriculture	Project 2 and reflection due Sat
T 11/24	Savulescu: “Genetically Modified Animals” BB <b>Guest Speaker: Meghan Hanlon</b>	Revised WA for a grade #2 due
R 11/26	THANKSGIVING—NO CLASS	

*Optional Readings:*

- ✦ Another reading for 3/26
- ✦ DeGrazia: “Ethics of Confining Animals”
- ✦ Powell: “On the Nature of Species and the Moral Significance of Their Extinction”
- ✦ Greely: “Human/Nonhuman Chimeras: Assessing the Issues”
- ✦ Streiffer and Basl: “Ethical Issues in the Application of Biotechnology to Animals in Agriculture”
- ✦ Bok: “Keeping Pets”
- ✦ Varner: “Environmental Ethics, Hunting, and the Place of Animals”

Unit 5: Wilderness and the Future		
T 12/1	Katz: “The Big Lie” BB Light: “Ecological Restoration and the Culture of Nature” BB Op-ed: <a href="#">How to Mend the Conservation Divide</a>	
R 12/3	Callicott: “A Critique of and Alternative to the Wilderness Idea” BB Noss: “Wilderness - Now More than Ever” BB	Engelhard reflection due
T 12/8	Rolston: “The Future of Environmental Ethics” EE	Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small group log</li> <li>• Re-Reflection on Reflection 1 due Sat</li> </ul>

*Optional Readings:*

- ✦ Rolston: “Feeding People vs. Saving Nature?”
- ✦ Attfield: “Saving Nature, Feeding People, and Ethics”

✦ Nelson: “An Amalgamation of Wilderness Preservation Arguments”

**FINAL PAPER IS DUE ON THE DAY OF THE REGISTRAR’S SCHEDULED FINAL**