

ETHICS, JUSTICE, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

TBD

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Course description: Climate change raises a number of ethical questions. For one, there are questions about how we should value nature and the natural world. Are the ecosystems that we live in valuable for their own sake, or are they simply valuable because humans rely on them for our lives and livelihoods? For another, there are questions of justice: what is the fairest way to divide up the cost of addressing climate change given that neither the causes nor the harms of climate change are equally distributed? And there are also questions of efficacy: how can we—and how should we—put general environmental principles into practice, particularly where effective change requires widespread buy-in from voters and/or political actors?

The area of philosophy concerned with these questions is known as “climate ethics” and this course will serve as an introduction to the most important questions, problems, and arguments considered there. No prior experience with ethics, philosophy, or climate science will be assumed.

Course Aims:

- To develop the ability to critically engage with ethical claims relating to nature and the environment.
- To develop familiarity with the type of questions asked by ethicists and the methods used to answer these questions.
- To develop an appreciation for the prospects and difficulties of applying philosophical tools to real-world problems.
- To develop an appreciation for the place of science within a broader ethical context.

Texts: All readings will be posted on the class website.

Grades: The grading scale will be as follows: A (94+), A- (90-93), B+ (87-89), B (84-86), B- (80-83), C+ (77-79), C (74-76), C- (70-73), D (60-69), F (59-)

Assignments:

Final grades in the class will be divided into the following categories (detailed rubrics for the assignments will be given as we approach the due dates):

30% In-class participation. Students will be expected to regularly attend class and contribute to the discussion in ways that respectfully engage with their fellow classmates. Participation will be evaluated according to the following scale:

- 3 - Attended class and took a major role in class discussion.
- 2 - Attended class and participated.
- 1 - Attended class.
- 0 - Did not attend class.

20% Op-ed. A short paper in which students present an argument for a particular ethical or social position relating to climate change. This paper should be tailored to a more general audience—though students should feel free to identify smaller “general” audiences (e.g., local politicians, business leaders, etc.) that they are particularly interested in convincing. A more detailed rubric can be found on the website.

50% Papers. Students will have the option of either writing two approximately 8 page evaluation papers throughout the course of the semester (25% each), in which they discuss and break down one of the arguments presented in the course, or writing a final research paper on a subject of their choosing due at the end of the semester. A more detailed rubric for both options can be found on the website.

Course policies: In addition to the honor code (<http://firstyear.nd.edu/current-students/honor-code/>), which students are expected to learn and follow, I will expect students to (a) be respectful of their fellow students, (b) turn their assignments in on time, and (c) behave ethically both in class and in fulfilling their assignments.

Schedule:

Unit 1: Introducing Climate Ethics ([TBD]-[TBD])

Reading:

Day 1 Brennan and Lo, *Understanding Environmental Philosophy* (ch. 1)

Day 2 Rachels and Rachels, *Elements of Moral Philosophy* (ch. 1)

Day 3 Singer, *One World Now* (selections from ch. 2)

Key discussion questions:

What are the major questions in climate ethics? What is ethics, anyway? How should we answer ethical questions? How much do differences in ethical views really matter in the climate context?

Some suggested further readings:

Cripps, *What Climate Justice Means and Why We Should Care* (ch. 1); Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm* (Introduction), *Climate Ethics* (Introduction); Gardiner and Thompson, *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics* (Introduction); Jamieson, *Ethics and the Environment* (ch. 1-4); Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time* (ch. 2); Parker, “Environmental Science: Empirical Claims in Environmental Ethics”

Unit 2: Justice ([TBD]-[TBD])

Reading:

Day 4 Miller, “Justice” (§§1-2)

Day 5 Cripps, *What Climate Justice Means and Why We Should Care* (ch. 2)

Day 6 Shoe, “Global Environment and International Inequality”

Day 7 Whyte, “The Dakota Access Pipeline, Environmental Injustice, and US Colonialism”

Day 8 Táíwò, *Reconsidering Reparations* (ch. 5)

Day 9 McKinnon, “Epistemic Injustice”

Day 10 Berrang-Ford et al., “Systematic Mapping of Global Research on Climate and Health”

Key discussion questions:

What is justice? What does it mean in the context of climate change? Are there other aspects to justice besides the distribution of goods? Does facing up to climate change mean changing our concept of justice?

Some suggested further readings:

Caney, *Justice Beyond Borders*, “Cosmopolitan Justice, Responsibility, and Global Climate Change,” “Justice and the Distribution of Greenhouse Gas Emissions”; Cripps, *What Climate Justice Means and Why We Should Care* (ch. 4-5); Dotson, “A Cautionary Tale”; Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, Jamieson, “Adaptation, Mitigation, and Justice”; Rawls, “Justice as Fairness”; Robinson, *Climate Justice*

Unit 3: Future Generations ([TBD]-[TBD])

Reading:

Day 11 Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time* (ch. 4)

Day 12 Nordhaus, *The Climate Casino* (ch. 16)

****Op-ed Due!****

Day 13 Gardiner, “Is ‘Arming the Future’ with Geoengineering Really the Lesser Evil?”

Day 14 Heyward, “Ethics and Climate Adaptation”

Day 15 Cripps, “Population and Environment”

Day 16 Roebyns, “Why Limitarianism?”

Key discussion questions:

How should we account for future generations when making decisions? Is it always better to leave the future with more choices, or should we sometimes make choices for them? In practical terms, what can we actually do to best prepare the future to deal with climate change?

Some suggested further readings:

Aldred, “Risk and Precaution in Decision Making about Nature”; Brennan and Lo, *Understanding Environmental Philosophy* (ch. 2); Caney, “Climate Change and the Future,” “Climate Change, Intergenerational Equity and the Social Discount Rate”; Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm* (ch. 5-6); Greaves, “Discounting for Public Policy”; Nolt, “Future Generations in Environmental Ethics”; Mintz-Woo, “A Philosopher’s Guide to Discounting”; Norton, “Sustainability as the Multigenerational Public Interest”; Rendall, “Discounting, Climate Change, and the Ecological Fallacy”; Shue, “Deadly Delays, Saving Opportunities”; Steel, *Philosophy and the Precautionary Principle*

Unit 4: Beyond Humans? ([TBD]-[TBD])

Reading:

Day 17 McShane, “Anthropocentrism in Climate Ethics and Policy”

Day 18 Palmer, *Animal Ethics in Context* (ch. 6)

Day 19 Norton, *Towards Unity Among Environmentalists* (ch. 10)

Day 20 Plumwood, *Environmental Culture* (ch. 6)

****First Essay Due!****

Day 21 Nordgren, “Ethical Issues in Mitigation of Climate Change”

Day 22 Pepper, “Adapting to Climate Change”

Key discussion questions:

Does justice require us to consider the interests of non-humans? If so, which non-humans? What, if any, are the broader implications of thinking about justice for non-humans?

Some suggested further readings:

Cripps, *What Climate Justice Means and Why We Should Care* (ch. 3); Garner, *A Theory of Justice for Animals*; Jamieson, *Ethics and the Environment* (ch. 5-7); Palmer, "Living Individuals"; Thompson, "Anthropocentrism: Humanity as Peril and Promise"; Stone, "Should Trees have Standing?"

Unit 5: Individuals ([TBD]-[TBD])**Reading:**

Day 23 Hyman, "Who's Really Responsible for Climate Change?"; Barros and Wilk, "The Outsized Carbon Footprints of the Super-rich"

Day 24 Hormio, "Can Corporations Have (Moral) Responsibility Regarding Climate Change Mitigation?"

Day 25 Sinnott-Armstrong, "It's not *My* Fault"

Day 26 Vance, "Climate Change, Individual Emissions, and Foreseeing Harm"

Day 27 Young, "Responsibility and Global Justice"

Day 28 *no reading*

****Final Essay Due!****

Key discussion questions:

Who is responsible for climate change? What obligations do individuals have? What about corporations?

Some suggested further readings:

Cripps, *Climate Change and the Moral Agent*; Isaacs, *Moral Responsibility in Collective Contexts*; Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time* (ch. 6); Schwenkenbecher, "Why Business Firms Have Moral Obligations to Mitigate Climate Change"; Vanderheiden, "Climate Change and the Challenge of Moral Responsibility"