

ENVR 203. Knowledge, Ethics, and the Environment

Winter 2020

10-11:25 AM Tuesdays and Thursdays, Online

Description

The relationship between human societies and the environment is articulated, among other things, by how knowledge about this very same environment is produced and by how this relation is mediated by ethics. This course will introduce mainstream Western approaches to ethics and science, as well as critiques of and alternatives to these approaches inspired by environmental concerns.

The course will be divided into three blocks. The first one, “Ethnographies of Nature”, will analyze a plethora of approaches to the study and/or management of nature, religious to economic, and academic conceptualizations of the environment. We will proceed to a study of the changes that the perception of the environment has experienced in the West in the last century. The focus will be on the manner in which the idea of nature has been constructed in different social and cultural contexts and the consequences of those constructions in the way the environment is managed.

The second block, "Environmental Law", is designed to give students a basic understanding of what a legal system is and how people have gone about using law to protect the environment.

The third block, “Ethics and the Environment”, will introduce a number of competing theories in environmental ethics and critically assess their advantages and disadvantages. We will then proceed to an analysis of the ethical issues related to climate change.

I. Ethnographies of Nature

Introduction to nature as discourse; as agency; as bio-biophysical reality; as non-equilibrium; as politics, as knowledge, as economics.

II. Environmental Law

Introduction to human law; international law; constitutions and the state; private law.

III. Ethics and the Environment

Introduction to ethics; the utilitarian approach to animal welfare; Criticism of Singer’s argument; the Kantian approach to animal welfare; the value of biodiversity; the value of a future person; externality and climate change; geoengineering and scientific knowledge.

Instructors

Dr. Nicholas Dunn

Email: nicholas.dunn2@mcgill.ca

Office hours: by appointment

Prof. Ismael Vaccaro

Email: ismael.vaccaro@mcgill.ca

Office hours: by appointment

Katia Opalka
Email: katia.opalka@mcgill.ca

Teaching assistants

Eric Wilkinson
Email: eric.wilkinson@mail.mcgill.ca
Office hours: TBA

Joshua Sterlin
Email: Joshua.sterlin@mail.mcgill.ca
Office hours: TBA

Evaluation

Mid-term exam 35 points
3 Assignments 30 points (10 points x 3)
Final Exam 35 points

Assignments

There will be three short assignments. Each assignment is max 1,000 words (excluding references and end/footnotes) and submitted through the MyCourses assignment function. The assignment must be double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman. You can use any referencing style (e.g. APA, Harvard, etc) as far as you use it consistently. Late submission will be downgraded at a rate of 2 points per day on their grade for the course (not 2% on the assignment grade), including weekend/holiday days. Requests for extensions will be considered (but not automatically granted) *only when* requested before the assignment is due and substantiated at the time of request by a doctor's note documenting illness. To avoid the late submission penalty, submit WELL BEFORE the due time.

Midterm and final exam

Midterm examination will take place on February 11th. Final examination will take place on the date that the University sets. The exams will consist of a set of short comprehension questions and one essay.

“In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.”

Communication policies

Since enrollment in this course is high, Instructors and TAs **are likely to** receive a large volume of students’ emails and **may** have difficulty responding to each promptly. **Before emailing, you are encouraged to look at the syllabus for the answer to your question. If you still have a question, you are encouraged to** ask the question at the beginning of **class** so other students can receive the same information or on the discussion tab on MyCourses, where you tend to receive information from other students quickly. Substantive questions about course material is often best reserved for office hours.

On weekdays, Instructors and TAs will **do their best to** respond to emails within 48 hours; **this time may be slightly longer if the email is sent over the weekend**. Please wait at least 48 hours before sending a follow-up email.

Emails related to a specific assignment should be directed at the appropriate TA:

Assignment:	Teaching Assistant:
Assignment #1	Joshua Sterlin
Midterm	Joshua Sterlin
Assignment #2	Joshua Sterlin / Eric Wilkinson
Assignment #3	Eric Wilkinson
Final Assignment	Eric Wilkinson

*All queries about assignments submitted in French should be sent to Joshua Sterlin.

****Any questions about possible extensions or accommodations should be directed to the Instructors.**

Regarding Remote Delivery

The remote learning context presents new challenges for all involved, and student engagement is of particular concern. Our hope for this class is that we can experiment together and find ways to build intellectual community despite our physical distance. Let's just remember that this is a complicated time for everyone that takes us out of our so-called zones of comfort.

We will be recording all of our classes, although we strongly urge you to attend "in-person". Students must consent to being recorded if they are attending a lecture or participating in a component of a course that is being recorded. Students will be notified through a 'pop-up' box in Zoom if a lecture is being recorded. If they are not comfortable being in a class that is recorded, students may decide to not take part by logging off Zoom. We will make class video recordings available in MyCourses so that students who log off will be able to later watch the recording. Here is McGill's statement on recording:

Please read the Guidelines on Remote Teaching and Learning [<https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/instructors/class-disruption/strategies/guidelines-remote>]. You will be notified through a 'pop-up' box in Zoom if a lecture or portion of a class is being recorded. By remaining in sessions that are recorded, you agree to the recording, and you understand that your image, voice, and name may be disclosed to classmates. You also understand that recordings will be made available in myCourses to students registered in the course.

To make these sessions more personable, we encourage everyone to enable the video function. This is not a requirement, and you will not be penalized for having your video turned off.

Academic writing in humanities and social sciences

Essays in humanities and social sciences are part of academic writing and, therefore, there is no difference between academic writing in humanities/social sciences and academic writing in science. It is beyond the mandate of this course to teach the general writing skills in humanities. However, through a series of short assignments, you will have a chance to improve your academic writing skills in humanities. Furthermore, we will provide comments and feedback for each assignment. If you do not feel comfortable with academic writing in humanities and social sciences, at the beginning of winter semester, you should consult with [McGill Writing Centre](#), which offers a wide range of professional services to help you to improve the writing skills. Before you start writing an essay, you should also consult with [this webpage](#), which gives you useful practical advice. Instructors and TAs cannot do pre-read of your assignment essay since assignments are part of assessment and instructors are required to comply with the highest standard of fairness and transparency for academic assessment. However, we will help you to improve by providing comments and feedback.

Calendar

January 7 Th

1. Introduction to the class: contents and schedule

I. Ethnographies of Nature

The Western world and the production of nature

- Cronon, W. (1996). The trouble with wilderness: or, getting back to the wrong nature. *Environmental History*, 1(1), 7-28.

January 12 T

2. Ecology and socioecological systems

- Dyson-Hudson, R., & Smith, E. A. (1978). Human territoriality: an ecological reassessment. *American Anthropologist*, 80(1), 21-41.
- Scoones, I. (1999). New ecology and the social sciences: what prospects for a fruitful engagement? *Annual review of anthropology*, 28(1), 479-507.

January 14 Th

3. Nature as Expertise

- Carr, E. S. (2010). Enactments of expertise. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 39, 17-32.
- Fairhead, J., & Leach, M. (1995). False forest history, complicit social analysis: rethinking some West African environmental narratives. *World development*, 23(6), 1023-1035.

January 19 T

4. Nature in danger and the genealogies of environmental conservation

- Wilshusen, P. R., Brechin, S. R., Fortwangler, C. L., & West, P. C. (2002). Reinventing a square wheel: Critique of a resurgent " protection paradigm" in international biodiversity conservation. *Society & Natural Resources*, 15(1), 17-40.
- Neumann, R. P. (1992). Political ecology of wildlife conservation in the Mt. Meru area of Northeast Tanzania. *Land Degradation & Development*, 3(2), 85-98.

January 21 Th

5. Discussion of readings

January 26 T (assignment 1)

6. Nature as property

- Bromley, D. W. (1992). The commons, common property, and environmental policy. *Environmental and resource economics*, 2(1), 1-17.
- Ensminger, J., & Rutten, A. (1991). The political economy of changing property rights: Dismantling a pastoral commons. *American Ethnologist*, 18(4), 683-699.

January 28 Th

7. Nature as culture

- Carney, J., & Watts, M. (1991). Disciplining women? Rice, mechanization, and the evolution of Mandinka gender relations in Senegambia. *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, 16(4), 651-681.
- Posey, D. A. (2002). Commodification of the sacred through intellectual property rights. *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*, 83(1), 3-12.

February 2 T

8. Nature as knowledge and politics

- Berlin, B., Breedlove, D. E., & Raven, P. H. (1973). General principles of classification and nomenclature in folk biology. *American anthropologist*, 75(1), 214-242.
- Blaikie, P. (1989). Environment and access to resources in Africa. *Africa*, 59(1), 18-40.

February 4 Th

9. Hypermodern natures

- Vaccaro, I. 2010. Theorizing impending peripheries: postindustrial landscapes at the edge of hypermodernity's collapse. *Journal of International and Global Studies* 1 (2): 22-44.
- Sivaramakrishnan, K. and Vaccaro, I. 2006. Postindustrial natures: Hyper-mobility and place-attachments. *Journal of Social Anthropology* 14 (3): 301-317.

February 9 T

10. Discussion of Readings

Chronology of concepts. Historical analysis of the emergence of a subset of these concepts. Conclusion: nature is all of them at once. No approach can afford to ignore the others. Static nature versus fluid nature

February 11 Th

11. Mid-term

February 16 T

II. Environmental Law

Objective: give you a basic understanding of the legal system in Canada and the issues that come up when people want to use the law to protect the environment

12. The Legal System

Key concepts: common law, civil law, public law, private law, statute, regulation, code, judicial review, natural law, due process, standing, cause of action, rule of law, rule by law, policy

- You can find definitions for all these concepts online. Read as much about each one as you'd like. Mind your sources. Come to class prepared to listen, ask questions and discuss.

February 18 Th

13. Constitutional Law

Key concepts: if a constitution is the law of the land, then what happened to the law of the land in the Americas when the Europeans arrived? Does it still exist? Is it more respectful of the land than European law? What does the Constitution say about the environment?

- Look up Bartolome de las Casas and Juan de Sepulveda. Read up on the Constitution of Canada and the history of international law. What is public international law? What is private international law? Come to class prepared to discuss the key concepts and tell me what you think about a legal system crossing an ocean.

February 23 T

14. "Environmental" Law

Key concepts: conservation (planning) and pollution control (forbidding and/or regulating); connection between international law, domestic law, federal law, provincial law, and municipal law

- Read up on conservation, land use planning, and pollution control. Get a sense of what each of those activities is about. By now you should feel like you've got a grasp of the basic concepts of a legal system. If someone asks you how we should use the law to protect the environment, you should be able to spot legal issues that pop up depending on what measures we decide to take and how we go about implementing them.

February 25 Th

15. Discussion of readings (assignment 2)

By February 25th you should have a pretty good idea if law is something you'd like to know more about. You should be able to explain, in ordinary language, what a legal system is. You should be able to tell your colleagues about the up and down sides of the law as a tool for achieving environmental objectives.

READING WEEK (March 2 & 4)

III. Ethics

March 9 T

16. Introduction to Ethics

- Mark Timmons, “An Introduction to Moral Theory.” In *Moral Theory: An Introduction*, Second Edition (2012).
- Arne Naess, “Intrinsic Value: will the defenders of nature please rise.” In *Wisdom in the Open Air*, ed. Reed & Rothenberg (1993).
- Paul Boghossian, “The maze of moral relativism.” *New York Times*, 24 July 2011.

March 11 Th

17. Animal ethics: utilitarian v. deontological accounts

- Peter Singer, “All Animals are Equal.” In *Animal Liberation* (New York: Random House, 1975).
- Tom Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights.” In *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

March 16 T

18. Biocentrism: Individualism

- Albert Schweitzer, “Reverence for Life.” In *Civilization and Ethics* (1923).
- Paul Taylor, “The Ethics of Respect for Nature,” *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 3, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 197-218.

March 18 Th

19. Biodiversity, Ecosystems, Species: Holism

- Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic.” In *A Sand County Almanac* (1949)
- Ben Bradley, “Why Leave Nature Alone.” In *Consequentialism and Environmental Ethics* (ed. Kahn, Ilea, and Hiller).
- Lilly-Marlene Russow, “Why Do Species Matter?” *Environmental Ethics* 3 (1981): 101-112.

March 23 T

20. Feminist and Indigenous Perspectives: Reciprocity and Care

- Karen Warren, “The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism, Revisited” (1990)
- Deane Curtin, “Toward an Ecological Ethic of Care,” *Hypatia*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 60-74.
- Kyle Powys Whyte & Chris Cuomo, “Ethics of Caring in Environmental Ethics: Indigenous and Feminist Philosophies.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics* (2017)
- Margaret Robinson, “Animal Personhood in Mi’kmaq Perspective,” *Societies* 4 (2014): 672–688.

March 25 Th

21. The Ethics of Climate Change

- Stephen Gardiner, “A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics and the Problem of Moral Corruption.” In *Climate Ethics: Essential Readings*, ed. Gardiner, Caney, Jamieson, and Shue (Oxford University Press, 2010).
- Clare Palmer, “Does Nature Matter? The Place of the Nonhuman in the Ethics of Climate Change.” In *The Ethics of Global Climate Change*. Edited by Denis G. Arnold, 272-291 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- Katie McShane, “Anthropocentrism in Climate Ethics and Policy,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* (2016): 189-204.

March 30 T

22. Responsibility for Climate Change

- Chris J. Cuomo, “Climate Change, Vulnerability, and Responsibility.” *Hypatia*, vol. 26, no. 4 (Fall 2011): 690-714.
- Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, “It’s Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations,” in Gardiner, et al. (2010): 332-346.

April 1 Th

23. Global Justice: Climate Refugees

- Nicole Marshall, “Forced Environmental Migration: Ethical Considerations for Emerging Migration Policy.” *Ethics, Policy & Environment*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2016): 1-18.

April 6 T

24. Capitalism and the Climate Crisis

- Jonathan T. Park, “Climate Change and Capitalism,” *Consilience* (2015): 189-206.
- David Schweickart, “Is Sustainable Capitalism an Oxymoron?” *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* v. 8, no. 2-3 (2009): 557-78.
 - optional: Naomi Klein, “Capitalism v. the Climate,” from *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal* (2019)

April 8 Th

25. Environmental Justice: Colonialism

- Val Plumwood, “Dualism: the Logic of Colonisation” [chapter 2] from *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 41-60.
- Kyle Powys Whyte, “The Dakota Access Pipeline, Environmental Injustice, and U.S. Colonialism”

April 13 T

26. Concluding lecture: *Covid-19 and Climate Change*

- Andreas Malm, “Corona and Climate” [chapter 1] from *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency* (Verso, 2020), 1-18.

"McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information). (approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)

"L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/)."

"In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded."
(approved by Senate on 21 January 2009 - see also the section in this document on Assignments and evaluation.)

"Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue)."