

**Philosophy 237: Contemporary Moral Issues**  
**“Expanding the Moral Circle” (Summer 2018)**  
MTWR, 11:05 AM - 1:25 PM (BURN 1B39)

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### **Course description**

This is an introductory course in moral philosophy. Instead of approaching moral issues theoretically (which is to say, by taking up questions of a rather abstract nature—such as, what is it that makes certain actions morally required or impermissible, what kinds of things in the world have intrinsic value, and the like), we will explore a set of current social and political issues with an eye towards the salient moral questions that emerge from them. Our focus will be on non-human entities (i.e., animals and the environment)—their moral status, the kinds of moral relations we might stand in *with* them and the potential duties we have *to* them. We will begin with a consideration of animals (e.g., speciesism and rights-based arguments) and then turn to ecological and climate issues (e.g., anthropocentrism versus biocentrism/holism; individual responsibility). After this, we will consider these matters within two particular frameworks: feminism (both eco-feminism and care ethics) and indigenous perspectives. We will then turn to some global justice issues, such as climate refugees and future generations, as a way of seeing how our duties to the human and non-human are related. We will conclude with some reflections on the normative questions and concerns that emerge throughout the course, such as: the intrinsic value of things like species and ecosystems, as well as the importance of virtue.

### **Course objectives**

1. Introduce you to the philosophical literature on ethical issues pertaining to animals, the environment, climate change, and global justice, as well as some feminist and indigenous perspectives on these topics;
2. Help sharpen your critical thinking skills, such as your ability to identify, evaluate, and formulate philosophical arguments;
3. Engage your ethical reasoning so that you can deepen and develop your views on these issues;
4. Express your ideas in a clear and precise way;
5. Learn how to debate and discuss controversial issues in a public setting and in a respectful manner.

## Grading scheme

- Papers (2): **50%**

You will write two (2) papers, one short and one long. I will provide you with a list of topics from which to choose.

Paper 1 (2-2.5 pages): 15%

*Due Thursday, 6/14*

This paper is entirely expository, the purpose of which is to demonstrate your grasp of the structure of a philosophical argument. In other words, you will be explicating in your own words the central argument of a text we have read—*not* introducing your own arguments or any other evaluative claims.

Paper 2 (5-6 pages): 35%

First version: *Due Thursday, 6/28*      Final version: *Due Thursday, 7/05*

You must take a position and defend it, making use only of the required or recommended texts from the course. This topic will involve engaging with a couple of papers not read for directly for class sessions.

- Participation: **25%**

Attendance: 5%

You are allowed two ‘free’ absences—i.e., no excuse needed. After this, your absences will negatively impact your mark. Additionally, perfect or near perfect attendance may positively impact border grades.

Discussion items (10): 10%

You must submit two (2) discussion items on one of the readings by 8 PM the night before the class for which we will discuss this reading. You will do this ten times throughout the course. There are no rules regarding which days you choose to submit; however, it is your responsibility to ensure that you submit questions for ten distinct class sessions (e.g., you may not double up because there are nine or fewer class sessions left). Guidelines for these are posted on MyCourses under the ‘Discussion’ tab.

Quiz: 5%

You will be given a quiz on the *Writing Philosophy* style guide some time during Week 2. It will cover chapters 3, 4, 6, and 7 (I will be lecturing on chapters 1 and 5).

Peer Review: 5%

*Due Tuesday, 7/03*

I will make available a form for providing commentary on two other students’ papers. You will be graded on how thorough you are in your feedback on others’ papers. The final version of *your* paper should include the two sets of feedback you received, as well as a brief paragraph about how you incorporated this feedback into your final version.

- Final exam (Thursday, 7/05): **25%**

The final exam is cumulative. It will consist of essay questions. You will receive a list of questions at the time of the exam, from which you will choose a subset to answer.

## Course Materials

### Required texts

1. I will make all of the philosophical texts available for you on MyCourses, as well as those I have listed as recommended. The case studies will be assigned to each group individually. In the spirit of McGill's policies on sustainability, paper use, and other initiatives (and because this course deals with environmental ethics!), I am encouraging you to refrain from printing the readings and instead use an electronic device.

2. You will be required to purchase the following style guide. Copies are available at The Word bookstore (469 Milton Street) for \$31.50. Note: you must pay in cash or cheque; the store does not accept cards.

Lewis Vaughn and Jillian Scott McIntosh, *Writing Philosophy: A Guide for Canadian Students*, Second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

### Recommended

The following are texts in applied ethics, which contain units (i.e., collections of papers) on the topics we are considering in this course.

1. *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics*, Edited by Tom L. Beauchamp and R.G. Frey (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
2. *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics*, Edited by Stephen M. Gardiner and Allen Thomson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

The following are single/co-authored manuscripts; at times, my lectures will make use of content from these.

1. Lori Gruen, *Ethics and Animals: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2011).
2. Angus Taylor, *Animals & Ethics: An Overview of the Philosophical Debate*, 3rd Edition (Toronto: Broadview, 2009).
3. John Broome, *Climate Matters: Ethics in a Warming World* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2011).
4. Paul W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*, 25th Anniversary Edition. With a new foreword by Dale Jamieson (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011).
5. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, Second edition. With a foreword by Ariel Salleh (New York and London: Zed Books, 2014).
6. Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, Second Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Within each unit on the course schedule, I also list texts that are specific to the issue we are addressing.

Documentaries and Films (optional): There will be several optional film screenings related to topics we are covering in the course.

**\*I am currently waiting to confirm a venue, so the date/time/location of these is TBD**

week 1: *At the Fork* (2016), 89 minutes

week 2: *Before the Flood* (2016), 96 minutes

week 3: *Princess Mononoke* (1997), 134 minutes

week 4: *Climate Refugees* (2010), 89 minutes

## **Policies**

Emails: I will do my best to reply to emails with 24 hours, during weekdays; I cannot promise to answer emails over the weekend. Inquiries regarding assignments should be directed to your TA.

Attendance and Participation: Because the content of this course is condensed, it is extremely important that you attend all class sessions. Arriving late can be very disruptive, so please be on time. It is also important that you come prepared, having done the readings for the day and are prepared to discuss them.

Late Penalty and Extensions: The late penalty on written assignments (i.e., papers) shall be 1/3 of a letter grade per day, including weekends. The penalty for not submitting a set of reading questions on time is that you will receive no credit. Extensions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances, and will require the presence of documentation (e.g., a medical note).

Electronic devices: Laptops, tablets, etc., may be used *only* to access course material, which is to say, the readings. I reserve the right at any point to restrict the use of such devices if I feel that they are being misused and/or becoming a distraction.

As the instructor of this course I endeavour to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and/or the Office for Students with Disabilities (514-398-6009).

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/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).

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.

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

## Course Schedule

### **6/04: Introduction to Applied Ethics: Global Poverty and Hunger: Singer and his Critics**

Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Spring 1972): 229-243. [14 pages]

John Arthur, "World Hunger and Moral Obligation: The Case Against Singer." In *What's Wrong?: Applied Ethicists and their Critics*, Second Edition. Edited by David Boonin and Graham Oddie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 142-145. [4 pages]

#### Further reading:

Michael Slote, "Famine, Affluence, and Empathy." In Boonin & Oddie, 146-154.

### **Unit 1—Non-Human Animals**

#### **6/05: Speciesism and Utilitarian Accounts**

Peter Singer, "All Animals are Equal." Excerpts from *Animal Liberation* (New York: Random House, 1975). [9 pages]

Bonnie Steinbock, "Speciesism and the Idea of Equality," *Philosophy*, vol. 53, no. 204 (April 1978): 247-56. [4 pages]

#### Further reading:

Peter Singer, "Speciesism and Moral Status." *Metaphilosophy*, vol. 40, no. 3-4 (July 2009): 567-581.

Shelly Kagan, "What's Wrong with Speciesism?" *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, vol. 33, no. 1 (February 2016): 1-21.

#### **6/06: Rights-Based Accounts**

Tom Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights." Excerpts from *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983). [8 pages]

Mary Anne Warren, "A Critique of Regan's Animal Rights Theory." *Between the Species*, vol. 2, no. 4 (Fall 1987): 331-333. [6 pages]

Carl Cohen, "Reply to Tom Regan." In *The Animal Ethics Reader*, Fourth edition. Edited by Susan J. Armstrong and Richard G. Botzler, (New York and London: Routledge, 2017). pp. 22-25. [5 pages]

Case Study #1

Further reading:

Elizabeth Anderson, "Animal Rights and the Value of Nonhuman Life." In *Animal Rights: Current Debates and New Directions*. Edited by Cass R. Sunstein and Martha C. Nussbaum (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004): 277-297.

Christine Korsgaard, "A Kantian Case for Animal Rights." In *The Ethics of Killing Animals*. Edited by Tatjana Visak and Robert Garner, 154-177 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

**6/07: Ethical Theory and the Project of Ethics**

Mark Timmons, "An Introduction to Moral Theory." From *Moral Theory: An Introduction*, Second Edition (Rowman & Littlefield, 2012). [8 pages]

James Rachels, "Subjectivism in Ethics." From *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, Seventh edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2012). [11 pages]

Vaughn & McIntosh, *Writing Philosophy*, chapters 1 & 2 (selections) [21 pages]

Further reading:

Mark Timmons, "Consequentialism 1: Classical Utilitarianism," "Consequentialism 2: Contemporary Developments," and "Kant's Moral Theory" in *Moral Theory: An Introduction*.

James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism," from *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*.

James Rachels, "Can Ethics Provide Answers?" from *Can Ethics Provide Answers? And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997).

## **Unit 2—The Environment**

### **6/11: The Ethics of Climate Change**

John Broome, “The Ethics of Climate Change.” *Scientific American* (June 2008): 96-102.  
[5 pages]

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 Arnold, 272-291 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). [19 pages]

Vaughn & McIntosh, chapter 5 (selections) [11 pages]

#### Further reading:

Clare Palmer, Katie McShane, and Ronald Sandler, “Environmental Ethics.” *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, vol. 39 (2014): 419-442.

### **6/12: Individual Responsibility**

Chris J. Cuomo, “Climate Change, Vulnerability, and Responsibility.” *Hypatia*, vol. 26, no. 4 (Fall 2011): 690-714. [20 pages]

#### Further reading:

Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, “It’s Not *My* Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations,” in Gardiner, et al., 332-346.

Marion Hourdequin, “Climate, Collective Action and Individual Ethical Obligations.” *Environmental Values*, vol. 19, no. 4 (November 2010): 443-464.

### **6/13: Biocentrism & Individualism**

Albert Schweitzer, “Reverence for Life.” Excerpts from *Civilization and Ethics* (1923). [8 pages]

Paul Taylor, “The Ethics of Respect for Nature,” *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 3, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 197-281. [19 pages]

## 6/14: **The Land Ethic: Ecocentrism & Holism**

Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic.” In *A Sand County Almanac: and sketches here and there* (1949). [20 pages]

### Case Study #2

#### Further reading:

J. Baird Callicott, “Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again.” *Between the Species*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1988): 163-169.

## **Unit 3—Feminist and Indigenous Perspectives**

### 6/18: **Ecofeminism and the Logic of Dominance**

Karen J. Warren, “The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism, Revisited” [7 pages]

#### Further reading:

Gail Stenstad, “Challenges to Ecofeminism: from ‘Should’ to ‘Can’.”

### 6/19: **Feminist Ethics of Care**

Deane Curtin, “Toward an Ecological Ethic of Care,” *Hypatia*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 60-74. [12 pages]

#### Further reading:

Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, 20th anniversary edition (London and New York: Continuum, 2010).

Donovan, Josephine. “Feminism and the Treatment of Animals: From Care to Dialogue”/*The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics: A Reader*. Edited by Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams, 198-226 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).



## 6/20: Reciprocity and Caring

Kyle Powys Whyte and Chris Cuomo. "Ethics of Caring in Environmental Ethics: Indigenous and Feminist Philosophies." In *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics*. Edited by Stephen M. Gardiner and Allen Thompson, 234-247. [12 pages]

Margaret Robinson, "Animal Personhood in Mi'kmaq Perspective." *Societies*, vol. 4 (2014): 672-688. [7 pages]

### Further reading:

Margaret Robinson, "Veganism and Mi'kmaq Legends." *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2013): 189-196.

Laurie Anne Whitt, Mere Roberts, Waerete Norman, And Vicki Greives. "Indigenous Perspectives." In *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*. Edited by Dale Jamieson.

Whyte, Kyle. "How Similar are Indigenous North American and Leopoldian Ethics?"

## 6/21: Indigenous People and the Environment

*National Indigenous Peoples Day/Journée nationale des Autochtones*

Sarah Krakoff, "American Indians, Climate Change, and Ethics for a Warming World." *Denver University Law Review*, 865, 85 (2008) [16 pages]

Whyte, Kyle Powys. "Indigenous Women, Climate Change Impacts, and Collective Action."

### Further reading:

Rebecca Tsosie, "Indigenous People and Environmental Justice: The Impact of Climate Change." *University of Colorado Law Review*, vol. 78 (2007): 1625-1677.

Anna L. Peterson, "Person and Nature in Native American Worldviews." In *Being Human: Ethics, Environment, and Our Place in the World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

Peter Knudtson and David Suzuki, *Wisdom of the Elders: Native and Scientific Ways of Knowing about Nature*, Second edition (Vancouver, BC: Greystone Books, 2006).

## **Unit 4—Issues of Global Justice**

6/25: *St-Jean-Baptiste Day - No class*

### **6/26: Climate Migration and Climate Refugees**

Raphael J. Nawrotzki, “Climate Migration and Moral Responsibility.” *Ethics, Policy & Environment*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2014): 69-87. [15 pages]

Further reading:

Peter Penz, “International Ethical Responsibilities to ‘Climate Change Refugees’.” In *Climate Change and Displacement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Edited by Jane McAdam (2012). [22 pages]

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

### **6/27: What we Owe to Future Generations**

Simon Caney, “Cosmopolitan Justice, Responsibility and Global Climate Change,” in Gardiner, et al. [24 pages]

Further reading:

Henry Shue, “Global Environment and International Inequality.” In Gardiner, et al.

Edward Page, “Intergenerational Justice and Climate Change.” *Political Studies* 47 (1999): 53-66.

### **6/28: The Capabilities Approach**

Martha Nussbaum, “‘Beyond Compassion and Humanity’: Justice for Nonhuman Animals.” In Sunstein & Nussbaum, 299-320. [15 pages]

Case Study #3

Further reading:

David Schlosberg and David Carruthers, “Indigenous Struggles, Environmental Justice, and Community Capabilities.” *Global Environmental Politics*, vol. 10, no. 4 (November 2010): 12-35.

Martha Nussbaum, “Climate Change: Why Theories of Justice Matter.” *Chicago Journal of International Law*, vol. 13 (2013): 469-488.

**Unit 5—What Matters?: Reflections & Conclusions**

7/02: *Canada Day - No class*

**7/03: Part 1: Intrinsic Value in Nature (Species? Ecosystems?)**

Holmes Rolston III, “Value in Nature and the Nature of Value.” [8 pages]

Case Study #4

Further reading:

Kenneth Goodpaster, “On Being Morally Considerable,” *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 75, no. 6 (1978): 308-325.

Holmes Rolston III, “Feeding People versus Saving Nature?”

**7/04: Part 2: Virtue**

Rosalind Hursthouse, “Virtue Ethics and the Treatment of Animals.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics*. Edited by Tom L. Beauchamp and R.G. Frey. [13 pages]

Thomas E. Hill Jr., “Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving the Natural Environment.” *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 5 (1982): 211-224. [10 pages]

Further reading:

Dale Jamieson, “When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists,” in Gardiner, et al., 315-331.