

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value. By value, I of course mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense.

—Aldo Leopold



None of us lives to the fullest who does not study the natural order, and more than that, none is wise who does not ultimately make peace with it.

—Holmes Rolston, III

Environmental philosophers address a wide variety of distinctly philosophical questions dealing with humans and our relationship to the natural world. Is there any reason for us to cultivate a different sort of relationship to nature, or to attempt to treat non-human beings, the Earth, any differently than we currently do? If such an “environmental ethic” is desirable, what form should it take? What sorts of principles could guide us in making the practical decisions that we must make, and that inevitably impact the natural world? What is the value of “nature”? Is it simply a means to human ends, or might it have value apart from the uses humans may have for it? Of course, responding to these questions requires an awareness of various empirical realities, but it should be clear that simply knowing of those realities will not always settle such matters. In this class, then, we will examine the writing of people who have worked through these problems in an effort to prepare ourselves to do the same.

Objectives

In this course you will learn to identify and distinguish a wide variety of positions that people take on the subject of environmental ethics, including several variants of anthropocentrism, Judeo-Christian “stewardship” ethics, animal welfare views, holistic or “ecosystem” ethics, and deep ecology. You will also become familiar with and develop an understanding of the most important philosophical and practical disagreements between the various proponents of these viewpoints, and of some of the social, political, and economic dimensions of environmental issues. Along the way, you will learn to define many of the key concepts that philosophers use to address the unique questions raised by environmental ethics, as well as many key concepts associated with environmentalism in general. Specific goals related to this course’s GEP designations include:

- Learning to recognize several key areas of interaction between society and the environment.
- Identifying various individual, social, cultural, and ecological factors that influence environmental sustainability.
- Evaluating various scientific claims that inform environmental debates.
- Identifying and analyzing how beliefs and values shape our relationships with the natural world.
- Reading closely, thinking critically, and writing effectively about perennial questions of justice and morality.
- Investigating and thoughtfully responding to a variety of values that in some cases will be significantly different than your own.

My over-riding hope is that you leave the course more ecologically literate and considerate than you may have been when you entered it, and that the work you will do will help prepare you to make more informed and careful decisions in your dealings with the natural world, whether those dealings be as someone working directly with wildlife and natural resources, as an environmental educator, a member of the general work-force, or plain member and citizen of your community.

Requirements

Quizzes

I will give unannounced quizzes frequently. These will take place IN CLASS, deal directly with the daily readings, and contain 2 multiple choice questions, each of which is worth 2.5 points (for a maximum of 5 points). As long as you have read, you should do fairly well on quizzes even if you have not fully understood the reading. These are DATE-SPECIFIC CLASSROOM ASSIGNMENTS, which are partly intended to gauge if you are IN CLASS AND PREPARED FOR THE DAY. This means that missed quizzes cannot be taken outside of the class periods in which they are given. I will drop your lowest score before calculating your quiz grade. Cumulatively, quizzes are worth 40% of your grade.

Papers

Two papers are due during the course of the semester. These should be 2 pages long (approximately 600 words typed and double-spaced, with standard fonts and margins) and they will be based on topics I distribute in advance. Due dates will vary depending on the paper-writing group to which you are assigned (check Canvas for the list of Paper Writing Groups, and due dates are provided in the reading list). Each paper is worth 15% of your grade, making papers worth a total of 30%.

Paper topics will be posted electronically on Canvas on Thursdays. The topics will pertain to course material, and will require you to *reflect on* and *react to* topics we've covered (that is, not simply to repeat information or summarize the views of others). Paper writing guidelines are posted in Canvas, and include a PDF file and a power-point that explain how to format and write a good philosophy paper. It is *very strongly recommended* that you consult these resources as part of your paper writing process.

Grades for papers will be based on three criteria:

- (1) *Meeting the terms of the Assignment*—includes addressing the topic questions, proper formatting and length, and submitted on time.
- (2) *Writing*—includes writing that is clear, organized, and free from grammatical or spelling mistakes.
- (3) *Content*—includes content that is reflective, creative, and shows an accurate understanding of the course material.

In my comments, I will use the following codes to give you feedback in the body of your papers:

Circled items indicate spelling or technical errors.

Parentheses around items will have one or more of the letters below next to them to indicate...

- A = awkward grammar or phrasing
- V = vague or imprecise meaning
- U = unclear meaning
- I = incorrect or mistaken statement of an idea

Based on the criteria above, papers will receive one of the following grades:

15 (100%, excellent) = excellent in all aspects	9.8 (65%, poor) = weak in all or most aspects; or very poor in some while good in others
13.5 (90%)	9 (60%)
12.8 (85%, above average) = good in all or most aspects; or excellent in some but weak in others	7.5 (50%, failing) = very poor in all or most aspects; or weak in some and failing in others
12 (80%)	3.8 (25%, failing) = paper fails to meet minimum standards in all 3 areas
11.3 (75%, good) = average in all or most aspects; or good in some but weak in others	0 = no submission
10.5 (70%)	

* Note that I may, in some instances, give grades that fall in between the numbers in the above scale (e.g. 13, or 11, etc.). This will be a relatively rare exception, however, and not the general rule.

Finally, all paper assignments are required to be submitted in Canvas, and will go through an “originality check” performed by “Turnitin.com.”

Tests

There will be two tests, the second of which is your final exam. Each test will cover the material presented in the preceding section of the course. Much of the material builds off of what preceded it, so older material may appear in the second exam in the form of comparative questions, etc. The format of the tests will be multiple choice. Be aware that you will be asked to do more than repeat information in exams: answers will require the application of ideas and the use of critical thinking skills. Each test is worth 15% of the final grade, making this requirement worth a total of 30%.

Work Completion Policy

This course has four “major,” or increased point value, requirements: the two papers and the two tests. You must complete all four of these assignments to receive a passing grade for the course, regardless of the point total you have earned through other coursework.

Missed/Late Work

Missed or late work sometimes can be made up on the condition that you either inform me prior to an upcoming absence, or provide me with a formal, written excuse. Late work will be penalized according to the following policy: **IF YOU’VE CONTACTED ME** beforehand to authorize a late submission, your work will be penalized by a 2% grade reduction for every day that it’s late. **IF YOU HAVE NOT CONTACTED ME** beforehand to authorize a late submission, your work will be penalized by a 5% grade reduction for every day that it’s late.

Attendance

You should attend class regularly. Failure to attend will almost certainly result in missed quizzes and in you missing information that is important for exams. Much of the material covered in class will not be available from the readings, and you are responsible for *all* material covered. Also, remember that this is an upper-division philosophy class with readings that can be complex/confusing. PLEASE NOTE: if you are absent, it is your responsibility to get missed information/notes/etc. I prepare lecture notes, which are not type-written manuscripts and which therefore cannot substitute for class notes. In addition, any handouts or power-point presentations I may use will be outlines of what we will cover in class, so these also cannot substitute for class notes. If you plan on being absent, you should make sure you have a reliable classmate to contact for notes.

Academic Integrity Policy

I adhere to a strict policy on academic integrity. All questions you have regarding academic integrity should be resolved before you turn course materials in to me. Information can be found in UWSP Chapter 14, available at: “<http://www.uwsp.edu/admin/stuaffairs/rights/rightsChap14.pdf>”. The minimum penalty for a violation of academic integrity is a failure (zero) for the assignment. In addition, all infractions will be reported to the university.

Grading

Final grades will be calculated according to the following scale:

93-100 = A	90-92.9 = A-	87-89.9 = B+	83-86.9 = B
80-82.9 = B-	77-79.9 = C+	73-76.9 = C	70-72.9 = C-
67-69.9 = D+	60-66.9 = D below 60 = F		

TWO NOTES ABOUT GRADES:

1. I’m happy to discuss any questions about the grades you receive, but grades are not “negotiable” in the sense that you can simply request to have a higher grade, or request to do extra work, just to receive a grade would

prefer. If you want to get higher grades, you should put in the additional effort *before* submitting your work, such that your grade is the highest possible the first time you receive it.

2. I do not “round” grades up or down for any assignments, or for your final course grade. If you finish the semester with, for example, an 89.9, your grade will be recorded as a “B+”. I do this because there is no justification for changing a grade simply because it provides a preferable outcome. While I understand that people often like to have grades rounded up, I regard that as being just as arbitrary as rounding them down, and therefore, to avoid all of that, I let your numerical grade stand as the final determinant of your letter grade.

Class Conduct

While you are in class, my expectation is that you will conduct yourself appropriately. This includes being attentive, and having cell phones turned off and put away. There is nothing appropriate to this course about texting friends, doing work for other classes, or sleeping, and if you are doing any of these things, I will ask you to leave the room for the remainder of the class period (that is, if you are asked to leave, you should not return until the next class period, since coming back into the room only creates a further disruption).

Required Texts

Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application, Pojman, ed. (text rental)

Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World, Holmes Rolston, III (text rental)

A Sand County Almanac, Aldo Leopold—NOTE: this text is accessible through UWSP Libraries as an ebook, available at <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uwsp/detail.action?docID=430351>. There are also copies of this book available for purchase at the book store.

Reserve Reading

Many of the readings for this course are on reserve in Canvas in the weekly modules. These are marked as “(reserve)” on the reading list. It is your responsibility to get all assignments on time and to be aware of when they are being read.

General Education Program

This course satisfies both the Humanities and Environmental Responsibility components of the university’s general education (GEP) requirements.

Accommodations Information

Students with disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services as soon as possible. Religious beliefs will be accommodated according to UWS 22.03 provided that you have notified me of any possible conflicts with the class.

E-mail Notice

When you send me e-mail informing me of upcoming absences, I typically save the message without initially replying to it. I review my e-mails after class meetings, and reply to them at that point, so that I can inform you of anything unusual that may have gone on in class, share ppt.s (which are often being developed or adjusted just prior to class meetings), etc. This way you receive the most accurate information I can provide, even though you may not receive an immediate reply to your message.

Personal Information

Office—Collins Classroom Center (CCC) #416

Office Hours—Tuesday and Thursday 12:00-1:50 p.m. Other days and times by appointment.

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