PHIL 3301: Environmental Philosophy

Spring 2026 | Mon/Wed 9:20 – 11 am | Blegen 240

Instructor:

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Office hours: Thurs 11:30 am – 12:55 pm

Course Description:

Are human beings special? Are they so special that they deserve dominion over the natural world? If so, does "dominion" entail domination, or does it instead imply a special and demanding responsibility to protect? If human beings are not at the center of the natural world, or are not special in these ways, then what do they owe to the world around them? Is it permissible to eat animals? To treat the land as a mere resource? Or is the natural world full of value that we ought to respect in some way or other? Can we even understand the intrinsic value of the natural world apart from our all-too-limited human point of view?

We will address these questions and many others. Along the way, we will survey a wide range of environmental philosophies—general frameworks for understanding the relationship between humanity and nature. Through various activities, students will be required to discuss these issues with their peers and with colleagues, friends, and loved ones outside the classroom.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Students in the course **can identify, define, and solve problems**.

Addressing the outcome

In this course, students will grapple with major problems in environmental philosophy. By studying a wide variety of perspectives on our ethical relation to nature, students will be given an opportunity to investigate these problems and offer solutions.

Assessment of learning related to the outcome

The learning related to this outcome will be evaluated through participation in class activities, regular discussion posts, a critical paper, and two assignments in which students will be required to communicate fundamental ideas in environmental philosophy to the broader public.

Required Texts: There are no required textbooks for this course. All readings will be provided on Canvas.

Course Requirements

1. Weekly Discussion Posts (10 total) 10%
2. Critical Interview 1 (pass/fail) 5%
3. Critical Interview 2 10%
4. Critical Interview 3 10%
5. PSA Group Presentation 15%
6. Participation 50%
    a. Attendance
    b. Class Discussion
    c. Quality of Discussion Posts

Major Deadlines:

Discussion Posts	Tuesdays before midnight
Interview 1	Sat Feb 14 by midnight
Interview 2	Sat March 14 by midnight
Interview 3	Sat April 18 by midnight
Group Presentation	April 27 – May 4

Description of Requirements

1. Weekly Discussion Posts (10%): Weekly posts in which students will either respond to a prompt assigned by the instructor or raise a thoughtful question about the course material in preparation for class discussion.

Students are allowed to skip 2 of the assigned discussion posts. Since 12 discussion posts are assigned, students are required to complete 10 discussion posts throughout the semester.

2. Interview 1 (5%): Students are required to record and submit an audio or audio-video interview with someone outside class on the topic, "Does religion teach us to protect the environment?" (The first assigned will be graded pass/fail for completion, with a mock grade and comments.)

3. Interview 2 (10%): Students are required to record and submit an audio or audio-video interview with someone outside class on the topic, "Is it OK to eat animals?"

4. Interview 3 (10%): Students are required to record and submit an audio or audio-video interview with someone outside class on the topic, "Our planet is being destroyed. What should we as individuals do about it? How must our society change to address these issues?"

5. PSA Group Presentation (15%): Students are required to complete a group "public service announcement" that aims to teach a public audience about an important environmental issue and provide guidance about how we as individuals, or our society as a whole, ought to address it. Other group members are required to raise questions about each presentation in a Q&A session.

4. Participation (50%): Students are expected to attend all class meetings and actively participate in discussions. Participation grades are based on attendance, thoughtful contributions to discussions, and the quality of discussion posts. To succeed, students must complete assigned readings before each class. The instructor will provide participation grade estimates twice during the semester.

Electronic devices are not permitted in class unless the student has received special permission from the University and the instructor has been formally notified. You must bring a notebook and writing utensil to every class.

Course Schedule

* Schedule is subject to change. * Complete readings prior to class.

Wed Jan 21
Syllabus

Mon Jan 26
Selections from *Prometheus Bound, The Bible,* and *The Qur'an*
& (*optional*) Gregory Bassham, "Religion and the Environment"

Wed Jan 28
John Muir, "Anthropocentrism and Predation"
& Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis"

Mon Feb 2
Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic"
(*optional*) Gregory Bassham, "Ecocentrism"

Wed Feb 4
Kiss the Ground (film shown in class)

Mon Feb 9
David Foster Wallace, "Consider the Lobster"

Wed Feb 11
Andrews et al, "Evaluating Animal Consciousness",
& Maximilian Elder, "The Fish Pain Debate: Broadening Humanity's Moral Horizon"

Sat Feb 14
Critical Interview 1 due by midnight

Mon Feb 16
Peter Singer, "All Animals are Equal"
& (*optional*) Gregory Bassham, "Animal Rights"

Wed Feb 18
Cora Diamond, "Eating Meat and Eating People"

Mon Feb 23
Peter Godfrey-Smith, "On Being an Octopus"
& *My Octopus Teacher* (film shown in class)

Wed Feb 25
Kenneth Goodpaster, "On Being Morally Considerable"
(*optional*) Gregory Bassham, "Biocentrism"

Mon March 2
Miguel Segundo-Ortin et al, "Plant Cognition—Evidence, Implications and Ethics"

Wed March 4 NO CLASS

Mon March 9 SPRING BREAK

Wed March 11 SPRING BREAK

Sat March 14
Critical Interview 2 due by midnight

Mon March 16
Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense"

Wed March 18
Bernard Williams, "Must a concern for the environment be centered on human beings?"

Mon March 23
Val Plumwood, "Being Prey"

Wed March 25
Val Plumwood, "Nature, Self, and Gender"
& (*optional*) Gregory Bassham, "Deep Ecology and Ecofeminism"

Mon March 30
Thich Nhat Hanh, "Emptiness as Fullness"
& (*optional*) John Koller, "Buddhism: The Basic Teachings"

Wed April 1
Daodejing (selections)
& (*optional*) Bryan Van-Norden, "The Daodejing and Mysticism"

Mon April 6
Kyle Whyte, "Indigenous Environmental Justice"
& Deborah McGregor, "*Mino-Mnaamodzawin*: Achieving Indigenous Environmental Justice"

Wed April 8
Inhabitants (film shown in class)

Mon April 13
Walter Sinnott-Armonstrong, "It's not my fault: Global warming and individual obligations"
& (*optional*) Gregory Bassham, "Climate Change"

Wed April 15
Greta (film shown in class)
& (optional) Gregory Bassham, "Environmental Disobedience"

Sat April 18
Critical Interview 3 due by midnight

Mon April 20
Public Service Announcement: Preparation 1

Wed April 22
Public Service Announcement: Preparation 2

Mon April 27
PSA Student Presentations (2 groups)

Wed April 29
PSA Student Presentations (2 groups)

Mon May 4
PSA Student Presentations (2 groups)

Course Policies

1. **No Technology in Class:** Students may not use electronic devices during class unless they have received special permission from the University and the instructor has been formally notified.

2. **Late Work:** Late work will be penalized unless permission has been granted from the instructor.

3. **Grading:** Final grades will be calculated as follows.

Letter Grades are translated to the following numerical scores.

A+ = 100	**C+** = 78
A = 95	**C** = 75
A- = 92	**C-** = 72
B+ = 88	**D+** = 68
B = 85	**D** = 65
B- = 82	**F** = 50

Final letter grades will be calculated using the following scale.

97-100 = **A+**	77-79 = **C+**
93-96 = **A**	73-76 = **C**
90-92 = **A-**	70-72 = **C-**
87-89 = **B+**	67-69 = **D+**
83-86 = **B**	60-66 = **D**
80-82 = **B-**	50 = **F**

Below is a list of general criteria that will be used to evaluate your writing assignments.

- Quality of ideas (50%)
  - *Range and depth of argument; fair representation of philosopher's position; logic of argument; quality and/or originality of thought; appropriate sense of the complexity of the topic; appropriate awareness of opposing views.*

- Organization and Argumentation (40%)
  - *Clarity of thesis statement in the introduction; logical and clear arrangement of ideas; effective use of transitions; unity and coherence of paragraphs; good development of arguments through supporting details and evidence.*

- Clarity, style, and grammar (10%)
  - *Ease of readability; appropriate voice, tone, and style for the assignment; clarity of sentence structure; grammatically correct sentences; accurate spelling; careful proofreading.*

4. **Plagiarism:** Plagiarism will result in a final grade of F for the course. If you have any questions about plagiarism or how to properly cite sources, do not hesitate to ask. According to the UMN Student Conduct Code: "Plagiarism shall mean representing the words, creative work, or ideas of another person as one's own without providing proper documentation of source."

5. **Use of AI:** Students are strongly discouraged from using AI platforms to complete any writing assignments.

6. **Disability Accommodations:** If you have, or think you have, a disability that would affect your performance in this course, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) https://ars.unc.edu/ to arrange confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.

7. **Sexual Misconduct.** Sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, and relationship violence) includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such behavior is prohibited in the University setting.

   Per the U of M policy on sexual harassment, *I am required to share information that I learn about possible sexual misconduct* with the campus Title IX office. Within the requirements of my job, I will be as responsive as possible to your requests for confidentiality and support. You can also, or alternately, choose to talk with a confidential resource that will not share information that they learn about sexual misconduct. Confidential resources include:

   - The Aurora Center 24hr Helpline (612-626-9111)
   - Boynton Mental Health (612-624-1444)

- Student Counseling Services (612-624-3323)

8. **Other Useful Resources:**
   - Technology resources for remote learning: https://it.umn.edu/working-learning-campus/get-internet-access-campus
   - University Policies: https://policy.umn.edu/
   - Student Writing Support: http://writing.umn.edu/sws/
   - Disability Resource Center: https://disability.umn.edu/
   - Student Counseling Center: https://counseling.umn.edu/
   - The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: https://plato.stanford.edu