

Ryerson University
Department of Philosophy

PHL 500: Philosophy of the Natural Environment

Fall 2004

Instructor: Dr. Glenn Parsons
Location: SHE549 (Mondays) and POD 363 (Wednesdays)
Time: Monday 11– 1/Wednesday 9-10.
Office Hours: Monday 3-5/Wednesday 1-2
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This course is an upper level Liberal Studies Elective.

Calendar Description

The rise of environmental philosophy challenges the ‘anthropocentric paradigm’ that has dominated Western thought. This course explores the implications of this challenge for our conception of ourselves, the basis for both human and natural values, and our obligations within the human and biotic communities. Topics include: traditional philosophical attitudes towards nature, obligations to future generations, ‘animal rights’, individual versus holistic models of value in relation to ecosystems, species and wilderness, and conflicts between human and natural values.

Course Synopsis

This course is an introduction to recent philosophical thought about the natural environment and our relationship with it. We will begin by tracing some ways in which the environmental movement of the later twentieth century has prompted philosophers to reconsider the moral dimensions of our relations with nature. We will then examine the three most important theories that this reconsideration has produced: animal liberation/animal rights, life-based ethics, and ecosystem-based ethics. In the second half of the semester, we will turn to various problems and challenges generated by these views, and consider some important criticisms of them. In doing so, we will take up questions like: Is it wrong to eat animals? Do the three different theories conflict with one another? Does wilderness have some sort of ‘intrinsic value’, regardless of how we feel about it? Would it even be possible to live according to a truly environmental ethic? Do theories of environmental ethics suffer from a male gender bias? Is the notion of wilderness really a meaningful one? Can environmental ethics shed any light on urban issues?

Note About Course Content: This course is *not* intended as a primer on the extent or importance of specific environmental concerns, such as pollution, global warming, or overpopulation. Although they will come up in our discussions, in general we will not be concerned with assessing empirical evidence regarding these issues. Rather, we will focus on the more philosophical issue of the nature of morally permissible behaviour with respect to nature. The aim of this focus is to impart to students an appreciation of the broad ways in which contemporary philosophers have tried to re-envision our relationship with nature. It also will help students to develop the conceptual, analytic, and argumentative skills that are required in reading, writing and thinking about the general issues of philosophy.

Texts

There are two required texts for this course, both available at the bookstore. The first is *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, edited by M. Zimmerman et al. (fourth edition; Prentice Hall, 2001). The second is a small coursepack, containing three articles that we will read towards the end of the term.

Evaluation

Grades will be calculated as follows:

	Date	Value
Mid-Term Exam	Wednesday October 20 th (Week 7)	30%
Essay (5- 8 pages, double spaced)	Wednesday November 24 th (Week 12)	35%
Final Exam	tba	35%

- The essay for this course is to be a *philosophical* essay; I will discuss what exactly this means in class; resources on writing a philosophical essay will also be posted on the class website.
- Essays are due at the start of class on the dates indicated; essays received after this time are considered late. The penalty for late submission is one grade per day (e.g. an A+ paper submitted one day late receives an A, a C- paper two days late receives a D, and so on) up to a maximum of seven days. Papers that are more than seven days late will *not* be accepted without a valid excuse (see below).
- Note that, unless students make alternative arrangements with me by the end of the second week of classes, all essays must be submitted through Turnitin.com (see ‘Course Policies’ below for further information). Instructions on submitting work through Turnitin.com will be provided on the course webpage.
- Grades for work during the term may be posted, listed by student number (minus the first two digits) on the instructor’s door, on the course webpage. Students who do not wish to have their grades posted in this manner must contact the instructor in writing.

Course Web Page

This course has a web page at: www.ryerson.ca/~g2parson/PHL500 Various announcements and news will be posted there periodically, along with certain class material. Also, from the website you can access a list of resources for researching in environmental philosophy, as well as suggestions for further reading.

A Note About Contacting Me

Feel free to email me at the address indicated above, but be aware that I set aside a specific day of the week to answer student emails, so depending on when you email me you may not get an instantaneous response. Email is fine for quick logistical questions, but if you have a substantial question, such as “What should I write my essay on?”, or “What the heck were you talking about yesterday?”, then it’s much more productive for you to come talk to me in person. It’s much easier for me to understand what information you need, and so to be of help, if we can speak face to face. I encourage you to drop by during my office hours if you have any questions about the course, or wish to discuss any of the course material.

Course Policies

Alternate Arrangements

- Essay extensions and make up examinations will be granted only if there are *documented* medical or compassionate grounds. In the case of medical reasons, the student must provide a completed Ryerson Medical Certificate or a letter from a physician (on letterhead) with the student declaration portion of the Ryerson Medical Certificate attached. The nature of the alternate arrangement for making up the missing grade is left to the discretion of the instructor.
- Note that extensions and/or make up examinations will not normally be granted on the basis of other reasons: *e.g.*, computer failure, social engagements, multiple deadlines.

Academic Misconduct

- Students are reminded that they are required to adhere to all relevant University policies, such as the Student Code of Academic Conduct. This code treats plagiarism (the misrepresentation of somebody else's work as your own) as a form of academic misconduct. For detailed information concerning academic misconduct and the relevant penalties, see the Student Code.
- Ryerson University subscribes to Turnitin.com, an on-line service that evaluates the originality of written work. Students agree that by taking this course, they are aware that all required papers will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin reference database, solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Detailed instructions on submitting written work to Turnitin will be provided. In accordance with Academic Council Policy #145 (Section 4.3.a.i), students who do not want their work submitted to Turnitin must, by the end of the second week of class, consult with the instructor to make alternate arrangements. Also, students should be aware that "when an instructor has a reason to suspect that an individual piece of work has been plagiarized, the instructor shall be permitted to submit that work to any plagiarism detection service." (www.ryerson.ca/acadcouncil/current/poll45.pdf, Section 4.3.a)
- Students should be aware that the instructor reserves the right to conduct an oral examination on the contents of any submitted assignment.

PHL500: Tentative Weekly Schedule of Topics (subject to change!)

	Topic	Readings (Required readings are in bold)	Events
1	Introductory Meeting	-----	1 hour only
2	Background: What is Environmental Philosophy?	Zimmerman, “General Introduction to the Fourth Edition” Sylvan, “Is there a need for a new, an environmental, Ethic?”	
3	Do We Need a New Ethical Theory?/ Animals	Singer, “All Animals are Equal”	
4	Animals (continued)	Regan, “Animals Rights, Human Wrongs”	
5	Life Principle Ethics	Taylor, “The Ethics of Respect for Nature; Goodpaster, “On Being Morally Considerable”	
6	Ecosystem-based Ethics	Leopold, “The Land Ethic”; Callicott, “The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic” (on reserve)	
7	Ecosystem Ethics in Practice: The Deep Ecology Movement	Naess, “The Deep Ecological Movement” (handout)	Midterm Exam (30%)
8	Problems with Ecosystem Ethics	Rolston, “Challenges in Environmental Ethics”; Zimmerman, “The Problem of Ecofascism”	
9	Feminist Critiques of Traditional Environmental Ethics	Warren, “The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism Revisted”; Merchant, “The Death of Nature” (on reserve)	
10	Third World Critiques of Traditional Environmental Ethics	Guha, “Radical American Environmentalism” (Coursepack)	
11	Is There any Wilderness to Save?	Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness” (Coursepack)	
12	What About Cities Then?	Light, “The Urban Blindspot” (Coursepack)	Essay due (35%)
13	Cities (continued)	“ “ “ “	
14	Review Class for Final Exam	Tba	2 hour class only