

EUC/ENVS 5191 [earlier:5599H] Ethics and Spirit: Philosophy, Religions, and the Environment

A proposed schedule of topics and readings is attached, which will be discussed at the first class meeting.

Course Director: Peter Timmerman
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Prerequisite: None. Course enrolment is limited.

Time and Location: Time: Tuesdays 2:30–5:30; Rm TBD. There will be an online eClass page for this class linking to assignments.

Objectives and Organization:

This course is designed in part as an introduction to graduate level work in environmental philosophy, with a special focus on religious and spiritual traditions. No previous experience in philosophy is required. The main emphasis will be on the major ethical traditions including environmental ethics, but concepts of Nature, power, the body, and animal/human relations will also be of concern. After a general overview of historic approaches to considerations of environment and nature, the first few sessions will explore standard philosophical approaches to epistemological and ethical issues in general, including: rights-based theories; utilitarianism; virtue ethics; Deep Ecology; phenomenological approaches; ecofeminism; and aspects of cosmology/ontology. Special reference will be made to case studies/issues such as animal rights, responsibilities for future generations, and the resolution of environmental conflicts such as waste management and climate change. Students will be encouraged to consider their own “threaded theme” to which they might wish to apply or develop concepts emerging from the course.

While there will be introductory lectures on each theme, students will be expected to be involved in discussions and debate throughout the course. **Students will examine through argument and close reading: a selection of issues, texts and ideas in environmental philosophy (especially phenomenology, animal rights; two Eastern religions (Buddhism/Taoism), and a thematic study of Female Mystical/Spiritual Writers from the world’s religious traditions.** Material from many tradi-

tions, as well as relevant poems and other arts will be referenced.

Course Requirements:

There will be weekly short study papers (1 page or more of reflections/questions) required through the course to spark/guide discussion; students will be able to revise and hand in 6 of these as their “portfolio” of reflections (for 30%; there will also be a final long essay on a philosophical theme or an aspect of a particular religious/spiritual tradition’s approach to nature and the environment. The essay should be approximately 10–15 pages in length, and will also be worth 30% of the course grade. The rest of the grade will be made up of class participation, which will also include an occasional one-on-one personal tutorial on the student’s theme or topic of interest through the term, and in preparation for their final paper. As an independent study, each student will be evaluated on her or his own contribution to the course, but is expected to be a full participant in the classwork.

The main readings to be studied will be found on line, or will be handed out in class. They are subject to minor change depending on library acquisition and other access points.

Texts used in class:

These are available in the bookstore (good idea to have them on hand) —

Spearing, Elizabeth (ed.). Medieval Writings on Female Spirituality (Penguin Edition, 2002).

Spinoza, The Ethics, trans. Edwin Curley (Penguin Edition, 1996)

Lao Tse. Tao Te Ching trans. D.C. Lau (Penguin Edition, Various dates)

Other texts we will be looking at:

Hull, John M. 2017. Notes on Blindness [also published as Touching the Rock] (England: Wellcome). <https://youtube.com/watch?v=OwYb-UI1f6ro> [available in the library]

Miligan, Tony. 2015. Animal Ethics: The Basics. (Taylor & Francis Group) library online.

Hallisey, Charles (ed.). 2021. Poems of The First Buddhist Women (Cambridge: Harvard University Press. library online

Week 1: Introduction: Themes and Orientation

Philosophical/Religious Approaches to Nature: Historical Sources

Readings: Short Excerpts from: Heraclitus, Plato (Phaedrus), Stoics, Plotinus, Hildegard of Bingen, First Buddhist Women, Chuang Tzu, Bhagavad Gita, etc. (accessed online)

Knepper, Steven. 2020. <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/problem-mystery>. Commonweal Magazine.

Timmerman, Peter. 2020. "Learning To Live on A Finite World". Symmetry Films. (Youtube).

Week 2: Modern Philosophical Approaches I

Readings: Leopold, Aldo. 1949. "The Land Ethic" from The Sand County Almanac. Oxford: University Press. <https://www.uky.edu/~rsand1/china2017/library/Leopold1.pdf>

Brennan, Andrew. "Environmental Ethics" <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-environmental/>

Week 3: Modern Philosophical Approaches II

Selected Readings from this list (online access):

Matheny, Gaverick. 2006. "Utilitarianism and Animals" in In Defence of Animals: The Second Wave. (Oxford: Blackwell).

Sandler, Ronald. 2005. "Environmental Virtue Ethics", from Environmental Virtue Ethics (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield).

Toadvine, Ted. 2009. "Introduction: Renewing the Philosophy of Nature" in Merleau Ponty's Philosophy of Nature. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press).

Braidotti, Rosi. 2003. "Feminist Philosophies" in A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory, ed. Mary Eagleton. (Oxford: Blackwell).

Figueroa, Robert Melchior. 2022. "Environmental Justice" in The Routledge Companion to Environmental Ethics. (<https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315768090-75/environmental-justice-robert-melchior-figueroa?context=ubx&refId=e360dc11-36ae-4592-8ecd-4ca2d2a2608f>)

Week 4: Case Studies: Nuclear Waste/Not-In-My-Backyard Conflicts (e.g. Wind Turbines)

Selected Readings from this list (online access):

Current press coverage of the proposed burial site in western Ontario;
"Timmerman, Peter. 2009. "The Long Haul: Ethics in the Canadian Nuclear Waste Debate" in Nuclear Waste Management in Canada: Critical Issues, Critical Perspectives. (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press).

Been, Vicki. 1992–3. 78 “What's Fairness Got to Do with It? Environmental Justice and the Siting of Locally Undesirable Land Uses” Cornell Law. Review. 1001.<http://www.temple.edu/lawschool/iilpp/Environmental-RoundtableResearchDocs/Been%20-%20Whats%20Fairness.pdf>

Week 5: Case Study: Animal Rights

Selected Readings from this list (online access):

Miligan, Tony. 2015. Animal Ethics: The Basics (London: Taylor & Francis Group). [basic class text]

Singer, Peter. 2006. “Introduction: In Defence of Animals, the Second Wave” in In Defence of Animals: The Second Wave. (Oxford: Blackwell). (Library online)

Sterba, James P. 2005. “Kantians and Utilitarians and the Moral Status of Nonhuman Life” (from: The Triumph of Practice over Theory in Ethics (Oxford: University Press).

Nussbaum, Martha C. “Animal Rights: The Need for a Theoretical Basis”, Harvard Law Review. Vol. 114, No. 5 (Mar., 2001), pp. 1506–154 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1342686>

Grandin, Temple. 2003. “Thinking Like Animals, A Major Change” pp. 184–189, Animal Ethics Reader, ed. Susan J. Armstrong and Richard J. Botzler. (London: Routledge) [possible extra: Grandin, Temple. 2005. Animals in Translation. New York, NY: Scribners.]

Week 6: Case Study: Global Climate Change/Justice

Readings: material from COP 29 UN Climate Conference — Azerbaijan —, and other readings.

Week 7: Phenomenology/The Bodily/Force

Readings: Hull, John [2017] Notes on Blindness (VIDEO)

Baldwin, Thomas. 2004. Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings, Phenomenology of Perception (pp. 62–126). (London: Routledge). (Library online)

Haas, Lawrence. 2008. “Later Developments: Ecart, Reversibility and the Flesh of the World,” in Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy. (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press.

Surin, K. 2005. 'Force'. In C.J. Stivale (ed.), Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts. Chesham: Acumen, pp. 19–30. (Library online)

Week 8: Spinoza, Ethics

Readings: Spinoza, The Ethics (Books I and II);

Jonas, Hans. 1965. “Spinoza and the Theory of the Organism” (library online: Journal of the History of Philosophy, Vol.3, No.2, April, pp. 43–57.)

Supplementary: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza/>

Week 9: Introduction to Religion and the Environment

Readings: Timmerman, Peter. various dates. Probe Post Series: "Religion and the Environment";

Week 10: Buddhism

Readings: TBA.

Hallisey, Charles. 2021. The First Buddhist Women (Cambridge: Harvard University Press. [online]

Timmerman, Peter. 2022. "Daigidan: The Great Ball of Doubt".

Religions 13: 382. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050382>

Week 11: Taoism

Reading: The Tao Te Ching (Lau translation)

Week 12: Great Women Teachers of Mystic Spirituality

Selected Readings: Excerpts from various traditions including Spearing, Elizabeth (see text suggestions):

Enheduanna, <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.4.07.3#>

Rabia: Sayings: https://www.azquotes.com/author/22996-Rabia_Basri

Hildegard of Bingen: https://www.academia.edu/3597758/Hildegard_of_Bingen_Book_of_Divine_Works_Part_I_Vision_1

Mirabai: Poems: https://www.poemhunter.com/i/ebooks/pdf/mirabai_2012_7.pdf

Etty Hillesum. 1993. Letters from Westerbork (New York: Pantheon).

[Possible extra class:]

Week 13: Philosophy/Deep Ecology/Apocalypse/Catastrophe

Readings: Naess, Arne. 2003. "The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects" in Environmental Ethics: An Anthology ed. Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III. (Oxford: Blackwell).

Macy, Joanna. <http://www.joannamacy.net/deepecology.html>

Plumwood, Val. 2000. "Deep Ecology, Deep Pockets, and Deep Problems: A Feminist Ecosocialist Analysis" in Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays in the Philosophy of Deep Ecology. Boston, Mass: MIT Press.

Zizek, Slavoj. 2008. Lectures on Ecological Destruction and Capitalism

(YouTube excerpts) <http://kasamaproject.org/2008/02/19/zizek-ecological-destruction-and-capitalism/>

Student Conduct

Students, course instructors and staff have a joint responsibility to create and maintain a welcoming and inclusive learning environment. All students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#). Whether online or in-person, students and course instructors are expected to cultivate and sustain a professional relationship characterized by mutual respect and courtesy. In all classrooms, any [disruptive and/or harassing behaviour](#) will not be tolerated. To ensure that you adhere to the rules of the virtual classroom, please review what counts as proper 'netiquette' (the basic rules for communicating with others in online spaces) by consulting the [student guide to e-learning](#).

Important Course information

All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the following information, available on the Senate Committee on Academic Standards, Curriculum & Pedagogy webpage

§ Senate Policy on Academic Honesty and the Academic Integrity Website

§ Ethics Review Process for research involving human participants

§ Course requirement accommodation for students with disabilities, including physical, medical, systemic, learning and psychiatric disabilities

§ Student Conduct Standards

§ Religious Observance Accommodation
