

PHIL 3170: Environmental Ethics

Instructor

Ian Everitt

[Click to email](#) (best way to contact me)

Office Hours: By appointment (email me to set up a time to meet over Webex)

Course Overview

Focus I

If confronted with the question “what is ethics?”, we might respond by stating it’s the study of how we, humans, ought to act towards other humans. However, we should not be satisfied with this response. On this view, it becomes difficult to understand and defend stances on animal and environmental rights. Statements like “it is wrong to abuse your pet” seem to amount to some social norm or mere law if morality only concerns how humans should interact with each other.

So, I propose we approach this class with the following assumption: non-human animals and the environment are the sorts of things that *could* deserve moral consideration. Taking this as our starting place, we will be exploring the extent to which we may have moral obligations to non-human animals, the environment, and future generations of humans and non-human animals.

Focus II

Ethical questions are everywhere. They permeate our social and political discussions, and they even pop up when we consider whether we should get a good night of rest or watch “one” more episode (I too often opt for the latter).

Although this course primarily focuses on environmental ethics, it also serves as an introduction to ethical theorizing more broadly. Upon completing this course, you will have cultivated a deeper understanding of both environmental ethics and ethics more generally, and you will be able to produce and defend ethical arguments.

To this extent, our investigation will focus on four central puzzles in environmental ethics:

- Is it morally wrong to eat non-human animals?
- Do things like non-human animals, lakes, and trees have moral status?
- Do we have moral obligations towards future generations of humans and non-human animals?
- How can we reasonably expect to see large-scale changes in the ways humans treat the environment and non-human animals?

As we will soon see, there are no settled answers to the ethical questions we will be exploring. So, in order to sort out which proposals might be better, we will need to investigate the arguments. What answers have philosophers and scientists given to these questions, and what reasons do they give to support their answers? Is their reasoning plausible? Asking critical questions like these is crucial; if we don't understand the reasoning given to defend some stance, we will be unable to understand whether that stance is any good.

Texts

Selected readings available on Elearning.

Assignments and Grading

This course will have four graded components:

- **Participation (35%).** You are expected to participate in weekly discussions on Elearning. Each week, you will be tasked with writing a very brief reflection (around 250 words) on the reading for the week. This reflection should consist of what you learned and/or what you found particularly interesting about the reading. You will then post your reflection to the relevant discussion forum on the day the assigned reading should be completed. Lastly, you will be asked to briefly reply (around 150 words) to reflections offered by two other students. A more detailed explanation of these weekly discussions can be found in the "Weekly Discussions" section on Elearning.
- **Engaged Reading Exercises (15%).** You will be asked to turn in five Engaged Reading Exercises (each worth 3%) over the course of the semester. You may turn in **one ERE per week**, and it must be turned in on the day of the assigned reading. You may not do an ERE on Jim Pryor's "How to Read a Philosophy Paper" or John Corvino's "The Fact/Opinion Distinction."

To complete an ERE, you will need to be able to edit pdf files. You should be able to do so using whatever pdf reader you are using on your computer already. If not, there are plenty of free pdf editors online. As you are reading, highlight what you take to be the important bits, note words you are unfamiliar with, write out questions you have about the material, write your own thoughts, etc. The guidelines are not too strict here. The goal of these exercises is to give me insight into how I can help you to become a better analytic reader and thinker. So, you should try to complete these EREs in whatever way comes naturally. Once you have completed an ERE, you should turn it in to the relevant dropbox in the "Engaged Reading Exercises" module on Elearning.

- **Short Writing Assignments (20%).** You will be asked to complete two short writing assignments (approximately three double-spaced pages each) throughout the semester. These assignments are designed to allow you to critically engage with the readings and our class discussions. These short papers will be combined to determine your performance for this portion of the course (so it's 10% for each paper).
- **Long writing assignment (30%).** You will be asked to complete one long writing assignment (approximately six double-spaced pages). This assignment will give you the opportunity to not only use the skills you cultivated from the short writing assignments, but you will have the option to do more expansive research and the freedom to argue for your own philosophical position.

Important Assignment Information: To the extent that it's possible, I aim to grade the short and long writing assignments anonymously. So please put only your WIN/Student ID number—not your name—on your papers (see the assignment prompts for further details). Furthermore, I only accept Word documents. If you submit a pdf file or a Pages file, I will not grade your assignment. The details for the writing assignments (including instructions and grading rubrics) will be made available through Elearning.

Grading Scale:

- A: 93-100% (Excellent)
- BA: 88-92% (Highly proficient)
- B: 83-87% (Proficient)
- CB: 78-82% (Highly competent)
- C: 73-77% (Competent)
- DC: 68-72% (Developing)
- D: 60-67% (Weak)
- E: 0-59% (Did not meet assignment criteria)

Advice and Resources

Doing philosophy. Many of the reading assignments for this course are short. But don't let that fool you—philosophy is hard. How do you deal with this? Well, here are some suggestions: (i) Read the material more than once. (ii) After reading an essay, try and summarize the main claims and arguments in your own words—this will help you come up with questions and objections. (iii) Start the written assignments early (doing this will help you review your answers with a clear head). (iv) Most importantly, if you're puzzled about something, you can attend the optional online meetings to talk through your questions, or I'd be happy to meet with you individually on Webex. For more resources on doing philosophy, see:

- Jim Pryor, "[How to Read a Philosophy Paper](#)" and "[How to Write a Philosophy Paper](#)"

Academic resources. The [Academic Resource Center](#) provides valuable academic resources including College Success Seminars, Academic Coaching, and Supplemental Instruction. The [Writing Center](#) provides students with help on papers and writing assignments.

Accommodations for disabilities. I am happy to make accommodations to assist students with documented disabilities (e.g., physical, learning, psychiatric, vision, hearing, etc.). Those wishing to arrange accommodations must contact Disability Services for Students. A disability determination must be made by this office before we can provide any accommodations. More information can be found [here](#).

Sexual Harassment, Assault, Contact, Exploitation. Federal law and [WMU policy](#) prohibit sexual harassment, sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual exploitation, harm to others, stalking, intimate partner violence and retaliation. By law, when campus officials are aware that such behavior occurs, they must investigate and take action to protect students' safety. According to WMU's new sexual assault policy, most WMU employees are not confidential resources, which

means that information you reveal may be shared with campus investigators, whether you want this to happen or not. Many victims/survivors prefer to seek confidential support and services. The [YWCA](#) offers 24/7, free support, which will inform and empower you to decide what options to pursue—emotional support, evidence collection (rape kit), pregnancy and STI tests, emergency contraception, counseling, filing a police report, seeking a protection order, initiating criminal prosecution, and/or reporting to WMU. The YWCA crisis line, available 24 hours, is (269) 385-3587. If you've experienced sexual or gender-based violence, and wish to have WMU investigate and take action, you may contact the Office of Institutional Equity directly at (269) 387-6316 or ask someone (preferably someone you trust) to report on your behalf.

Mental Health. WMU's [Mental Health Services](#)' professional staff members work with students to resolve personal and interpersonal difficulties, many of which can affect the academic experience. These include conflicts with or worry about friends or family, concerns about eating or drinking patterns, and feelings of anxiety and depression.

Course Policies

In order to help ensure a successful class, please heed the following rules and policies:

- **Due Dates & Late Papers.** Barring unusual circumstances, the due dates on the syllabus are non-negotiable. If you need to miss an assignment (for religious observances, illness, etc.), it is best to inform me in advance. Late papers will be subject to a grade penalty.
- **Religious Observances.** The University is a diverse, multicultural enterprise and—as a community—we jointly embrace both individual responsibility and dignified respect for our differences. It is our general policy to permit students to fulfill obligations set aside by their faith. It is our intent that students who must be absent from scheduled classes to fulfill religious obligations or observe practices associated with their faith not be disadvantaged. However, it is the student's responsibility to make arrangements with his or her instructors in advance. It is in the student's best interests to approach each instructor expeditiously and with sufficient notice that the rights and responsibilities of the instructor are not disrupted.
- **Civility Policy.** Each member of our academic community is encouraged to be thoughtful and sensitive in their choice of words and behaviors. We should be aware of how our behavior affects others. Furthermore, we carry a responsibility to challenge those who communicate intolerance, hatred, and bigotry. Words and actions matter. Everyone is asked to do their part in creating a healthy and positive university community and a culture that truly values each member's uniqueness, experiences, and perspectives.
- **Classroom Environment.** In order to maintain a classroom environment that promotes learning and discussion, I ask that you arrive to class on time. Additionally, [research](#) indicates that the use of computers, tablets, cell phones, and the like *undermine* attention, note taking, and learning. Despite these findings, I will allow the use of electronic devices for the purpose of referencing the readings. I will, however, advise you against the use of electronics as a reference tool and urge you to bring hard copies of the readings to class. If you decide to use a laptop, tablet, or phone in class and it becomes a distraction to you or your classmates, I may ask you to refrain from using it further.
- **Cheating & Academic Honesty.** As a student at WMU, you are responsible for making yourself aware of the University policies that pertain to Academic Honesty. These policies include cheating, fabrication, falsification and forgery, multiple submission, plagiarism, complicity, and computer

misuse. In this class, you will be expected to abide by these obligations. This means that all work presented as original must, in fact, be original; the ideas and contributions of others (be they quotes, summaries, or paraphrases) must be appropriately acknowledged. More information about the WMU Academic Honesty rules, as well as the rights of accused students, can be found [here](#).

Class Topics, Schedule, and Due Dates

Week	Date	Readings, Deadlines, & Reminders
1	Sep 3	No Readings: Course Introduction
How should I approach studying and thinking about philosophy?		
2	Sep 8	Read: Jim Pryor, "How to Read a Philosophy Paper" Read: John Corvino, "The Fact/Opinion Distinction" Reflection due by 5:00 pm: John Corvino, "The Fact/Opinion Distinction"
2	Sep 10	Responses to reflections due by 5:00 pm
1. Is it morally wrong to eat non-human animals?		
3	Sep 15	Read: Timothy Hsiao, "In Defense of Eating Meat" Reflection due by 5:00 pm
3	Sep 17	Responses to reflections due by 5:00 pm
4	Sep 22	Read: Jeff McMahan, "Eating Animals the Nice Way" Reflection due by 5:00 pm
4	Sep 24	Responses to reflections due by 5:00 pm
5	Sep 29	Read: Tristram McPherson, "Why I am a vegan (and you should be one too)" Reflection due by 5:00 pm
5	Oct 1	Responses to reflections due by 5:00 pm
5	Oct 3	First Short Writing Assignment due by 11:59 pm
2. Do things like animals, lakes, and trees have moral status?		
6	Oct 6	Read: Michel Dion, "The Moral Status of Non-Human Beings and Their Ecosystems" Reflection due by 5:00 pm
6	Oct 8	Responses to reflections due by 5:00 pm
7	Oct 13	Read: Thaddeus Metz, "An African Theory of Moral Status" Reflection due by 5:00 pm
7	Oct 15	Responses to reflections due by 5:00 pm

8	Oct 20	Read: James S. J. Schwartz, "On the Moral Permissibility of Terraforming" Reflection due by 5:00 pm
8	Oct 22	Responses to reflections due by 5:00 pm
3. Do we have moral obligations towards future generations?		
9	Oct 27	Read: Kristian Skagen Ekeli, "Environmental Risks, Uncertainty and Intergenerational Ethics" Reflection due by 5:00 pm
9	Oct 29	Responses to reflections due by 5:00 pm
9	Nov 1	Second Short Writing Assignment due by 11:59 pm
10	Nov 3	Read: James Sterba, "The Welfare Rights of Distant Peoples and Future Generations" Reflection due by 5:00 pm
10	Nov 5	Responses to reflections due by 5:00 pm
11	Nov 10	Read: Matthew Humphrey, "Mapping the Moral Future: Environmental Problems and What We Owe to Future Generations" Reflection due by 5:00 pm
11	Nov 12	Responses to reflections due by 5:00 pm
4. How can we reasonably expect to see changes in human behavior towards the environment and non-human animals?		
12	Nov 17	Read: David Havlick, "Reconsidering Wilderness: Prospective Ethics for Nature, Technology, and Society" Reflection due by 5:00 pm
12	Nov 19	Responses to reflections due by 5:00 pm
12	Nov 21	Rough draft of Final Paper due by 11:59 pm.
13	Nov 24	No Reading: Peer review of Research Paper rough drafts.
13	Nov 26	Thanksgiving Break
14	Dec 1	Read: Simon P. James, "How Should One Live?" from <i>Environmental Philosophy: An Introduction</i> Reflection due by 5:00 pm
14	Dec 3	Responses to reflections due by 5:00 pm
15	Dec 8	Read: Patrick D. Hopkins and Austin Dacey, "Vegetarian Meat: Could Technology Save Animals and Satisfy Meat Eaters?" Reflection due by 5:00 pm
15	Dec 10	Responses to reflections due by 5:00 pm

15	Dec 12	Final Draft of Final Paper due by 11:59 pm
16	Dec 15	No class: Finals week
16	Dec 17	No class: Finals week