

INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS



PHI 205

CLASS OVERVIEW

INSTRUCTOR

Taylor R. Genovese, Ph.D.

(he/him/his)

Email: taylor.genovese@sunydutchess.edu

Web: taylorgenovese.com

Office Hours: Virtual, by appointment only. Schedule an appointment [on Calendly](#).

Note on communication: I will make every effort to respond to emails within 24 hours. However, please note that I only check and respond to email between 8am and 5pm, Monday through Friday.

DETAILED COURSE INFORMATION

PHI 205 – Introduction to Ethics

CRN #: 2188

3 credit hours / Face-to-Face

Instructional Hours: 2.5 per week

Minimum Expected Hours Out-of-Class: 5 per week

MEETING INFORMATION

Spring 2024

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 11:00am–12:15pm

SUNY – Dutchess Community College

Hudson Hall 523

COURSE INFORMATION

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to introduce students to the study of ethics and the nature of morality. A wide range of ethical issues is considered, including moral relativism, the principle of utility, duty-based ethics, and natural law theory. Additionally, the course will focus on problems of applied morality, examining and discussing alternative positions on such issues as abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, economic justice, etc.

COURSE THEME

In order to pragmatically investigate these ethical positions, we will explore them through the lens of *environmental ethics*. Environmental ethics is the study of ethical relationships between humans and other entities—primarily, other-than-human life. Along with studying a variety of normative ethical positions, we will also investigate *theories of value*—and how these theories apply to the moral relationships we construct between human and non-human life—manifested in ideas like holism and deep ecology. Finally, the study of ethics benefits strongly from the application of these theories to real world situations, so a significant portion of the course will focus on applying the ethical positions we discuss to key debates in environmental ethics, including subjects such as sustainability, animal rights, environmental justice, climate change, ecosabotage, and technological innovation.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of the course, students will:

1. Demonstrate a recognition and understanding of core concepts and vocabulary utilized in analysis of moral problems.
2. Distinguish key moral theories, analyzing the positions of significant moral philosophers.
3. Identify preconceptions underlying major contemporary moral issues, and critical difficulties with various positions on those issues.
4. Demonstrate active and critical reading skills through the analysis of challenging philosophical texts.

REQUIRED TEXTS

There are no required textbooks for this class. PDFs of all readings will be provided by the instructor and can be accessed on Brightspace. However, there are several films that must be watched in this course. You may have to rent them if you're unable to find them in the library or on a streaming service.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Exams (30%) There will be a total of two exams: a midterm and a final. Exams are taken on Brightspace. Each exam is worth 15% of your grade and will mainly cover the material presented in each half of the semester, although students will be expected to remember some moral and ethical concepts from all parts of the course for the final. If you miss an exam without it being an excused absence, you will receive a 0 for that exam.
2. Paper or Project (20%) You will write a paper arguing for a specific policy conclusion based on one of the ethical frameworks discussed. The paper will have components turned in incrementally throughout the semester and the specific requirements for the paper will be explained in greater detail during class. It will be turned in at the end of the semester and must be between 1200–1500 words. Alternatively, you can choose to work on a multimodal project (combining writing with another form of communication, such as photography, drawing, painting, film, podcasting, dance, etc.). If you are interested in a multimodal project, please see me so we can discuss specifics.
3. Provocation Responses (20%) At the end of most weeks, you will write a short response to a question related to that week's topics. They are due on Sunday at 5:00pm. These responses are an opportunity to explore your own ideas about the topics—criticisms, questions, and/or other reflections—and may include creative works (such as photo essays, illustrations, etc.). They should be *at least* one substantial paragraph (150–300 words). In addition to the responses, you will have Film Responses due after watching assigned films in which you will be asked to answer a question that relates the film to the topics that we are studying.
4. Participation (30%) All students are expected to arrive to class on time having read assigned readings ahead of our meeting and attend the entirety of class sessions. Students must bring in a handwritten précis to class that consists of a 1-5 sentence summary of the readings being discussed that day and may include any questions you had while reading. Additionally, each class (except for exam days), we'll do some kind of in-class assignment. This might come in the form of group activities, a pop quiz, free writing, or something else. The reading précis and the in-class assignment cannot be made up (except in the case of an excused absence). These participation assignments are given a point value of 10, 8, or 5 out of 10 depending on the quality of the answers.



COURSE POLICIES

GRADING & LATE ASSIGNMENT POLICY

As a general rule, late assignments are not accepted. However, if an extenuating, documentable circumstance has prevented you from turning in an assignment on-time, you may lose up to a letter grade every 24 hours that the assignment is late. No late assignments will be accepted in the last two weeks of the semester. Additionally, late assignments from the first half of the semester will only be accepted prior to the Midterm Exam.

Grading Scheme

| Grade | Percentage | Rubric |
|-------|------------|--|
| A | (95–100) | Work exceeds expectations and exhibits exceptional clarity, insight, or brilliance. |
| A- | (90–94) | Work shows only the most minor errors or omissions. |
| B+ | (87–89) | Work has a few but major flaws, such as a misinterpretation, failure to address an important issue, triviality, glossing over difficulties, weak argument(s), lack of clarity or coherence. Plus/minus grading will be used accordingly. |
| B | (83–86) | |
| B- | (80–82) | |
| C+ | (77–79) | |
| C | (73–76) | Work has a number of major flaws but still displays a broadly correct understanding of the material. Plus/minus grading will be used accordingly. |
| C- | (70–72) | |
| D+ | (67–69) | Work shows that the student has not understood a significant portion of the material (or is not able to convey such understanding), but is still more right than wrong. Plus grading will be used accordingly. |
| D | (60–66) | |
| F | (0–59) | Work exhibits poor structure, an entire lack of theme or focus, a wholly inadequate understanding of the material, or is plagiarized. |

Once assignments are graded, you should promptly go over them to catch possible errors—in addition to incorrect point calculations or disputable evaluation of answers. **It is your responsibility to detect such errors and bring them to my attention within one week after they are graded.** Do not wait until the end of the term to address potential errors in grading as it may be too late to adjust the grade. Grades will be updated regularly on Brightspace.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Dutchess Community College is committed to the principles of honesty, integrity, and ethical behavior. It is expected that students will recognize these values and adhere to all aspects of student conduct and academic honesty inside and outside of the classroom.

Academic dishonesty in any form is regarded by the College as a breach of academic ethics and may result in disciplinary action.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Cheating on examinations
- Plagiarism: the representation of another's ideas or writing as one's own. Examples include:
 - presenting all or part of another person's published work as something one has written;
 - paraphrasing or summarizing another's writing without proper acknowledgement (citation);
 - representing another's artistic or technical work or creation as one's own.
- Willingly collaborating with others in any of the above actions which result(s) in work being submitted which is not the student's own.
- Submitting work containing any content that was generated by an Artificial Intelligence bot or website when not explicitly directed to do so by the instructor.
- Stealing examinations, taking electronic images, falsifying academic records and other such offenses.
- Knowingly permitting another student to use one's work or cheat from one's examination.
- Submitting work previously presented in another course without permission of instructor.
- Unauthorized duplication of computer software.
- Unauthorized use of copyrighted or published material.

If, based on substantial evidence, an instructor deems that a student is responsible for a violation of the Academic Integrity Policy, the instructor may take the following actions:

- The instructor may require that the student repeat the assignment or examination, or
- The instructor may give the student a failing grade for the assignment or examination, or
- The instructor may give the student a failing grade for the course.

As an institution of higher education, it is incumbent on the College to ensure that students understand and uphold the highest standards of academic honesty and that there be accountability in cases where students repeatedly violate those principles. In order to build an intellectual culture of academic integrity and ensure that students learn appropriate behavior in their academic endeavors, faculty and staff who judge that a student intentionally violates the Academic Integrity Policy shall report said violation to the Office of Instruction & Learning.

Students' right to privacy will be upheld, and all students shall have the right to appeal any action that results from this process.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance and participation is required for this class. Students are responsible for managing the usual range of events that life throws at all of us. That said, I understand that some events are out of our control—especially in our era of multiple concurrent pandemics and anthropogenic climate catastrophes—so unless it becomes habitual, I will try and work with you to make up participation points. That said, my policy for missed classes is that students who are absent are responsible for finding out **from their classmates** what they have missed. I do not post or share slides or notes. As a courtesy, if you know you have to miss a class period, please let me know as far ahead of time as possible.

IN-CLASS POLICIES

Please refrain from comments and side conversations during class time—even whispering in the back of the room can bother both myself and your fellow students. If you have a question or a comment, please direct it to me and we can either open a discussion or return to it at a later time.

Please silence all electronic devices while you are in class. I do allow computers **for note-taking purposes only**. If you begin using your computer/device for anything other than note-taking or in-class activities, you will be asked to put it away. Repeated violations may result in you being required to leave class and you will lose participation points for the day.

During class, please do not engage in any of the following (or similarly distracting) activities: sleeping, text messaging, tweeting, working on assignments for another class, putting on make-up, combing hair, making TikToks, or any other activities unrelated to the matter at hand in our classroom. If you must engage in any of these activities, please leave the classroom. However, if leaving the classroom becomes a disruptive pattern, you may lose your participation points for the day.

SYLLABUS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

I anticipate that we will follow the course outline as presented at the end of this syllabus, but I may make adjustments based on your interests and the interests of your fellow classmates. Be sure to check with a classmate after an absence to see if assignments have changed. I may also change the basis for the course grade; if I do so, I will inform you in-person and through Brightspace. Remaining in the course after reading this syllabus will signal that you accept the possibility of changes as well as the responsibility for making yourself aware of them.



STUDENT SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Dutchess Community College makes reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students requesting accommodations must first register with the Office of Accommodative Services (OAS) to verify their eligibility. IEPs from high school do not carry over to college. After documentation review and meeting with the student, OAS staff will provide eligible students with accommodation letters for their professors. Students must obtain a new letter each semester and discuss their accommodation plan with their instructors as soon as possible to ensure timely accommodations. The Office of Accommodative Services is located in the Orcutt Student Services Building, Room 103, phone: (845) 431-8055.

TITLE IX

Dutchess Community College is committed to maintaining a positive campus climate and will not tolerate any form of sexual harassment including sexual assault, sexual violence, and sexual misconduct. It is the responsibility and obligation of all members of the College community to report and/or to assist others in reporting incidents of sexual harassment.

Please direct all Inquiries and reports related to sexual harassment and sexual violence to:

Title IX Coordinator: TitleIX@sunydutchess.edu.

For information regarding the DCC sexual harassment and sexual violence policy and resources go to: https://dutchess.open.suny.edu/webapps/portal/execute/tabs/tabAction?tab_tab_group_id=_1_1.

For anonymous reports go to Share at DCC: <https://www2.sunydutchess.edu/cgi-bin/share-at-dcc/index.php>.

COURSE OUTLINE

(Note: this outline may change as the semester progresses. I will announce all changes in class and on Brightspace.)

| Class Meeting | Topic / Readings | What's Due? |
|---------------|---|-------------------------------|
| T January 23 | <u>Introduction to the Course</u> No Reading | |
| R January 25 | <u>What is Ethics?</u> ►Katie McShane, "What is Ethics?" (8 pp.) | Response #1 due 1/28 @ 5:00pm |
| T January 30 | <u>What is Environmental Ethics?</u> ►Clare Palmer, "Contested Frameworks in Environmental Ethics" (9 pp.) | |
| R February 1 | <u>Theories of Value</u> ►David Graeber, "Anthropological Theories of Value" (15 pp.) | Response #2 due 2/4 @ 5:00pm |
| T February 6 | <u>Applying Utilitarianism</u> ►Peter Singer, "A Utilitarian Defense of Animal Liberation" (10 pp.) ►Madeline Gressel and Sunaura Taylor, "Bookforum talks with Sunaura Taylor" (8 pp.) | |
| R February 8 | <u>Applying Deontology</u> ►Mary Anne Warren, "A Critique of Regan's Animal Rights Theory" (7 pp.) | Response #3 due 2/11 @ 5:00pm |
| T February 13 | <u>Applying Virtue Ethics</u> ►Thomas E. Hill, Jr., "Ideal of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments" (9 pp.) | |
| R February 15 | <u>Applying Social Justice Theories</u> ►Henry Shue, "Global Environment and International Inequality" (10 pp.) | Response #4 due 2/18 @ 5:00pm |
| T February 20 | <u>Anthropocentrism</u> ►Immanuel Kant, "Rational Beings Alone Have Moral Worth" (3 pp.) ►Holly L. Wilson, "The Green Kant: Kant's Treatment of Animals" (8 pp.) | |
| R February 22 | <u>Biocentrism</u> ►Clare Palmer, "Living Individuals: Biocentrism in Environmental Ethics" (10 pp.) | Response #5 due 2/25 @ 5:00pm |

| Class Meeting | Topic / Readings | What's Due? |
|---------------|--|--------------------------------|
| T February 27 | <u>Ecocentrism/Deep Ecology</u> ►Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecological Movement" (4 pp.) ►Andrew McLaughlin, "The Heart of Deep Ecology" (6 pp.) | |
| R February 29 | <u>Critique of Deep Ecology</u> ►Ramachandra Guha, "Radical Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique" (7 pp.) | Response #6 due 3/3 @ 5:00pm |
| T March 5 | <u>The Ethics of Advertising</u> ►Alan Thein Durning, "An Ecological Critique of Global Advertising" (8 pp.) | |
| R March 7 | <u>Rights for Natural Entities</u> ►Christopher D. Stone, "Should Trees Have Standing? Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects" (10 pp.) | Response #7 due 3/10 @ 5:00pm |
| T March 12 | <u>Midterm Exam Review</u> Catch up on readings | |
| R March 14 | Midterm Exam | |
| T March 19 | NO CLASS – Spring Break | |
| R March 21 | NO CLASS – Spring Break | |
| T March 26 | <u>The Paradox of Perpetual Expansion</u> ►Fred Magdoff and John Bellamy Foster, "What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know about Capitalism" (19 pp.) | |
| R March 28 | <u>Which ἀνθρώποι are Responsible for the Anthropocene?</u> ►Jan Zalasiewicz et al., "Are we now living in the Anthropocene?" (4 pp.) ►Andreas Malm, "The Anthropocene Myth" (6 pp.) | Paper thesis due 3/31 @ 5:00pm |
| T April 2 | <u>Ethics of Care</u> ►Kyle Powys Whyte and Chris J. Cuomo, "Ethics of Caring in Environmental Ethics: Indigenous and Feminist Philosophies" (11 pp.) | |
| R April 4 | <u>Will GMOs Save or Destroy the World?</u> ►Jonathan Rauch, "Can Frankenfood Save the Planet?" (7 pp.) ►Mae-Wan Ho, "The Unholy Alliance" (10 pp.) | Response #8 due 4/7 @ 5:00pm |

| Class Meeting | Topic / Readings | What's Due? |
|---------------|---|--|
| T April 9 | <p><u>The Ethical Debate over Geoengineering</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Stefan Schäfer, Harald Stelzer, Achim Maas, and Mark G. Lawrence, "Earth's Future in the Anthropocene: Technological interventions between piecemeal and utopian social engineering" (5 pp.) ➤ Tina Sikka, "Activism and Neoliberalism: Two Sides of Geoengineering Discourse" (15 pp.) | |
| R April 11 | <p><u>The Ethical Debate over Ecosabotage</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Thomas Young, "The Morality of Ecosabotage" (9 pp.) ➤ Andreas Malm and Daniel Sherrell, "Should Environmental Activists Sabotage Fossil Fuel Infrastructure?" (2 pp.) | Outline or Rough Draft due 4/14 @ 5:00pm |
| T April 16 | <p>NO CLASS – Taylor is out of town for a conference.</p> <p>[Alternative: Watch <i>If a Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front</i> (2011)]</p> | Film Response #1 due 4/21 @ 5:00pm |
| R April 18 | <p>NO CLASS – Taylor is out of town for a conference.</p> <p>[Alternative: Watch <i>How to Blow Up a Pipeline</i> (2022)]</p> | Film Response #2 due 4/21 @ 5:00pm |
| T April 23 | <p><u>Social Ecology</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Murray Bookchin, "What is Social Ecology?" (17 pp.) | |
| R April 25 | <p><u>Abolition Ecologies</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Nik Heynen and Megan Ybarra, "On Abolition Ecologies and Making 'Freedom as a Place'" (11 pp.) | Response #9 due 4/28 @ 5:00pm |
| T April 30 | <p><u>Flex Day</u></p> <p>This day will be used to talk about whatever you, the students, want to discuss further or it can be used in order to shift things around throughout the semester.</p> | |
| R May 2 | <p><u>Final Exam Review</u></p> <p>Catch up on readings</p> | |
| T May 7 | <p>Final Exam</p> <p>Exam can be taken any day of the week on Brightspace, but you must take it in a single two-hour session. The exam will go live on Monday at noon and the portal will close at 5:00pm on Friday.</p> | Paper due 5/13 @ 5:00pm |
| R May 9 | | |

Image credits: Cover—Taylor R. Genovese, "Border Wall," Coronado National Memorial, Arizona (2020); Page 4—Taylor R. Genovese, "GDR Roads," Fehrbellin, Germany (2023); Page 7—Taylor R. Genovese "The Red Forest," Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, Ukraine (2021).