

# PHIL 079: Environmental Ethics

Karen Kovaka

Fall 2016

E-mail: [kkovaka@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:kkovaka@sas.upenn.edu)  
Office Hours: Tues 3-4:30pm  
Office: Cohen 401

Web: [karenkovaka.com](http://karenkovaka.com)  
Class Hours: Mon/Wed 3:30pm  
Class Room: Cohen 237

---

## Course Description

How should we use, preserve, and enjoy the environment? Our course will investigate this question. We will confront basic issues about what nature is, what it means to value something, and the proper way to respect the rights and preferences of our planet's entire population. We will consider the role of science in guiding our environmental ethics and policy, and then discuss ways of responding to real-life ethics and policy issues including climate change, geoengineering, biodiversity conservation, wildfire management and prevention, and the unjust distribution of environmental hazards.

## Evaluation

1. Paper (+ peer review): 25%
2. Advocacy project: 25%
3. Participation: 25%
  - Discussion questions: 10%
  - Other forms of participation: 15%
4. Final exam: 25%

## Course Participation

Part of your grade is determined by participation, because active participation is one of the single best ways to grow as a thinker and communicator. We also learn as much from one another's insights, disagreements, questions, and responses as we do from the course readings. I think of

participation very broadly: not only do your comments in-class count, so do office hour visits, emails, and creative connections between the course material and issues/media/conversations you encounter outside our seminar room. I will ask all of you to submit discussion questions based on the readings several times during the semester, and we will use these to guide our in-class discussions.

## Assignments

In addition to course participation and discussion questions, I will ask you to complete three assignments this semester.

First, there will be a traditional philosophy paper (1500-2000 words, **due Monday, 10/24**) in which you will develop and defend a thesis comparing or contrasting an important point from any two authors you have read in the course. If you've never written a philosophy paper before, don't worry! I will walk you through the whole process and give you opportunities to check in with me as you write. We will also go through a peer review process where you read each other's papers and offer comments on them.

Second, you will write a brief letter or position article on an environmental issue of your choosing (1-3 pages, depending on the medium you choose; **due Monday, 12/5**). You may write this as a letter to the editor of a newspaper, a blog post, an op-ed, or a letter to one of your political representatives. I hope you will actually send your writing to its intended audience once it's finished!

Third, you will complete a take-home final exam which I will make available on the last day of class (**Monday, 12/12**) and which you will submit to me (via Canvas) on the day of our scheduled final exam (**Friday, 12/16**).

Discussion questions on a particular reading should be submitted 5 times during the semester. You can choose whichever 5 dates work best for you. Email me your questions by midnight the evening before the class in which we will discuss them. Be prepared to explain your question to the rest of the class.

## Fine Print

You are responsible for knowing and upholding Penn's [Academic Honesty Policy](#). Plagiarism, cheating, or any other instance of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct, and can result in failing the relevant assignment, failing the course, or other disciplinary action.

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodations must register with the Office of Student Disability Services (SDS), who will inform me of your needs. All such requests need to be made during the first two weeks of the semester, to arrange reasonable accommodations.

## Texts

All the readings for this course are available on our Blackboard site.

## Other resources

The [Standard Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) provides comprehensive overviews of many philosophical topics as well as suggestions for further reading. You may be interested in the entries on Ecology, Biodiversity, Environmental Ethics, the Moral Status of Animals, Intergenerational Justice, and Global Justice.

There are many internet resources that offer guidelines for writing philosophy papers. Here are some of my favorites:

- <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>
- <http://www.philosopherstoolkit.com>
- [https://prezi.com/z4h1\\_fwilbxj/a-sample-philosophy-paper/](https://prezi.com/z4h1_fwilbxj/a-sample-philosophy-paper/)

# Reading Schedule

## 1 Introduction

Date	Content
Wed. 8/31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Whalers, wildfires, and Judas goats</li> <li>• Reading: none</li> </ul>
Wed. 9/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Crash course</li> <li>• Reading: Katie McShane (2009), "Environmental ethics: an overview."</li> </ul>

## 2 Is there any such thing as nature?

Date	Content
Mon 9/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Traditional conceptions of wilderness and nature</li> <li>• Reading: John Muir (1912), "Hetch hetchy valley."</li> <li>• Reading: Roderick Nash (1963), "The American wilderness in historical perspective."</li> <li>• Reading: Wallace Stegner (1960), "Wilderness letter."</li> <li>• Reading: Wendell Berry (1977), <i>The Unsettling of America</i>. (chapter 1)</li> </ul>
Wed. 9/14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Wilderness skepticism</li> <li>• Reading: William Cronon (1995), "The trouble with wilderness."</li> <li>• Reading: J. Baird Callicott (2000), "Contemporary criticisms of the received wilderness ideal."</li> </ul>
Mon 9/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Nature skepticism</li> <li>• Reading: Holmes Rolston III (1997), "Nature for real."</li> <li>• Reading: Helena Siipi (2004), Naturalness in biological conservation."</li> </ul>
Wed. 9/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: GMO case study</li> <li>• Reading: David Freeman (2013), "The truth about genetically modified food."</li> <li>• Reading: Natasha Gilbert (2013), "A hard look at GM crops."</li> <li>• Reading: Stefaan Blancke et al. (2015), "Fatal attraction."</li> </ul>

### 3 The environment is valuable...but how?

Date	Content
Mon. 9/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Intrinsic and instrumental value 1</li> <li>• Reading: Douglas McCauley (2006), "Selling out on nature."</li> <li>• Reading: James Justus et al. (2008), "Buying into conservation."</li> <li>• Reading: Mark Sagoff (2009), "Intrinsic value: a reply."</li> <li>• Reading: James Justus et al. (2009), "Response to Sagoff."</li> </ul>
Wed. 9/28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: The case for anthropocentrism</li> <li>• Reading: Andrew Light (2003), "Contemporary environmental ethics from metaethics to public policy."</li> </ul>
Mon. 10/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: The value of intrinsic value</li> <li>• Reading: Katie McShane (2007), "Why environmental ethics shouldn't give up on intrinsic value."</li> </ul>
Wed. 10/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Value across cultures</li> <li>• Reading: Ramachandra Guha (1989), "Radical American environmentalism and wilderness preservation."</li> </ul>

### 4 Should science guide our ethical choices?

Date	Content
Mon. 10/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Science, ethics, and policy entangled</li> <li>• Reading: Naomi Oreskes (2004), "Science and public policy."</li> <li>• Reading: Daniel Sarewitz (2004), "How science makes environmental controversies worse."</li> </ul>
Wed. 10/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Public understanding of environmental issues</li> <li>• Reading: Ding Ding et al. (2011), "Support for climate policy and societal action are linked to perceptions about scientific disagreement."</li> <li>• Reading: Dan Kahan (2015), "Climate science communication and the measurement problem."</li> </ul>
Mon. 10/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: The dark side of science</li> <li>• Reading: Donna Haraway (1988), "Situated knowledges."</li> <li>• Reading: Vandana Shiva (1993), "Reductionism and regeneration."</li> </ul>
Wed. 10/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Citizen science</li> <li>• Reading: Philip Kitcher (2011), <i>Science in a Democratic Society</i>. Excerpts.</li> <li>• Reading: Cathy Conrad and Krista Hilchey (2011), "A review of citizen science and community-based environmental monitoring."</li> </ul>

## 5 What do we owe non-human animals?

Date	Content
Mon. 10/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Animal rights</li> <li>• Reading: Peter Singer (1989), "All animals are equal."</li> <li>• Reading: Martha Nussbaum (2004), "Beyond 'Compassion and Humanity'."</li> </ul>
Wed. 10/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Animal physiology and cognition</li> <li>• Reading: Robert Jones (2013), "Science, sentience, and animal welfare."</li> </ul>
Mon. 10/31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Eating animals</li> <li>• Reading: Tom Regan (1980), "Utilitarianism, vegetarianism, and animal rights."</li> <li>• G. Owen Schaeffer and Julian Savulescu (2014), "The ethics of producing in vitro meat."</li> </ul>
Wed. 11/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Animal Research</li> <li>• Reading: Philip Kitcher (2015), "Experimental animals."</li> </ul>

## 6 Ethics in practice: how do we save the planet?

Date	Content
Mon. 11/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Climate change</li> <li>• Reading: Simon Caney (2012), "Just emissions."</li> </ul>
Wed. 11/9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Geoengineering</li> <li>• Reading: Jane Long et al. (2015), "Policy: start research on climate engineering."</li> <li>• Christopher Preston (2011), "Rethinking the un-thinkable."</li> </ul>
Mon. 11/14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Biodiversity conservation</li> <li>• Reading: Sahotra Sarker (2002), "Defining biodiversity."</li> </ul>
Wed. 11/16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Invasive species</li> <li>• Reading: Mark Sagoff (2005), "Do non-native species threaten the natural environment?"</li> <li>• Reading: David Lodge and Kristin Shrader-Frechette (2002), "Non-indigenous species."</li> </ul>

Date	Content
Mon. 11/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Extinction</li> <li>• Reading: Jonathan Pugh (2016), "Driven to extinction."</li> </ul>
Mon. 11/28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Wildfire</li> <li>• Reading: Matt Richtel and Fernando Santos (2016), "Wildfires, once confined to a season, burn earlier and longer."</li> <li>• Reading: George Busenber (2004), "Wildfire management in the United States."</li> <li>• Reading: M.P. North et al. 2015, "Reform forest fire management."</li> </ul>
Wed. 11/30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Agriculture</li> <li>• Reading: Wes Jackson and John Piper (1980), "The necessary marriage between ecology and agriculture."</li> <li>• Reading: David Keller and Charles Brummer (2000), "Putting food production in context."</li> </ul>
Mon. 12/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Environmental justice</li> <li>• Reading: Robert D. Bullard (2006), "Environmental justice for all."</li> <li>• Reading: Robert J. Brulle and David N. Pellow (2006), "Environmental Justice."</li> </ul>
Wed. 12/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Interventionism</li> <li>• Reading: Ben Minteer and James Collins (2014), "Ecosystems unbound."</li> <li>• Reading: Clare Palmer and Brendon Larson (2014), "Should we move the whitebark pine?"</li> </ul>
Mon. 12/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic: Review</li> <li>• Reading: None</li> </ul>