

**Humanities 3330-004**  
**Environmental Ethics**  
SPRING 2020

**Instructor:** Daniel Skibra

**Time and Location:** Thursday, 1:00 – 4:00PM, Spertus 314

**Contact:** email: [dskibra@saic.edu](mailto:dskibra@saic.edu)

**Office Hours:** Thursday, 11:45 - 12:45pm Lakeview building, 10th Floor, or by appointment

## Course Description

This course explores ethical questions pertaining to the environment. Do we have any obligations to the environment; if so, what kinds of obligations are these and to what exactly are they owed? Can traditional ethical theory appropriately account for these obligations, or is some new kind of ethic called for due to these questions? We will look at different attempts at posing these questions and the various answers philosophers have offered. We will also be spending some time studying two difficult topics related to the environment; population ethics and climate change. Readings will include work by Dale Jamieson and John Broome, is likely to include essays by Peter Singer, J Baird Callicott, Lori Gruen, Elizabeth Anderson, and more. Assignments are varied, but will include weekly reading responses, two short (5 page) essay assignments, in-class mid-term and final exams, and a class presentation leading discussion on an assigned essay.

## Course Objectives

Students will:

- learn to understand philosophical arguments
- develop their own informed views on the topics of study
- present the arguments of the philosophers and theorists as well their own views in clear prose
- subject both the views studied as well as their own to critical scrutiny.

# Course Requirements

## Assignments

Assignment 1 (due by Feb 21): 10%  
Assignment 2 (due by March 27): 15%  
Assignment 3 (due by April 30): 15%  
Assignment 4 (due by May 15): 10%  
Mid Term Exam (March 12): 15%  
Final Exam (May 14): 15%  
Presentation/ Discussion: 5%  
Class discussion/ participation: 5%  
Miscellaneous Small Assignments: 10%

**You need at least a 70% to get credit for this course.** There are no extra credit opportunities associated with this course. All assignments for course credit are required as stated in this syllabus, and students should fully utilize all these assignments in order to successfully complete the course. Students requesting individual extra credit opportunities will be referred back to their copy of the syllabus and this course policy.

## Notes on assignments

Resources for writing a philosophy paper:

- <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>
- <http://www.public.asu.edu/~dportmor/tips.pdf>
- [https://prezi.com/z4h1\\_fwilbxj/a-sample-philosophy-paper/](https://prezi.com/z4h1_fwilbxj/a-sample-philosophy-paper/)

## Course Policies

### Attendance

You are required to attend the class meetings; attendance will be taken. However, I understand that emergencies arise, people get sick, and other factors may legitimately prevent you from coming to a particular class. Therefore, I will adopt the following attendance policy. Your grade will not be affected by up to **2** absences. You do not need to provide any kind of written excuse or justification for these absences (although you are welcome to provide them). Importantly, you are responsible for the material covered in class. Any slides presented in class will be made available on Canvas, but class time will often not be devoted to lecture, and material will not always be on the slides. There is simply no substitute for being in class.

If you miss a *third* class, your cumulative class average will drop by 8 percentage points. For more than 3 absences, I adhere to SAIC's recommended policy. SAIC's recommended institutional policy is as follows: If a student misses MORE than three classes, whether or

not for a reasonable cause, the student will fail the class, if the student does not withdraw from the class prior to the deadline for withdrawal with a grade of “W.” **Deadline for withdrawal: Spring semester: Tuesday, October 29, 2020.** Reasonable cause to miss a class might include:

- Illness or hospitalization (the student should also contact Health Services or their academic advisor, who will relay information to the faculty in whose class the student is enrolled)
- Family illness or death (the student should also contact their academic advisor, who can relay information to all faculty)
- Observation of a religious holiday (students are expected to notify their instructors in advance to discuss reasonable accommodations for holidays they might observe).

## Audit Policy

Per SAIC’s policy on non-credit enrollment, auditing this course is possible, space permitting and provided the student proposes an acceptable audit arrangement. Interested students should review SAIC’s policy on non-credit enrollment to review options and process, and then contact me to discuss specifics.

“Unofficial” auditing of this or any course i.e. “sitting in” is prohibited. Participation in specific class activities by non-enrolled students is prohibited without advance, specific consent from the instructor.

## Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

SAIC is committed to full compliance with all laws regarding equal opportunities for students with disabilities. Students with known or suspected disabilities, such as a Reading/Writing Disorder, ADD/ADHD, and/or a mental health condition who think they would benefit from assistance or accommodations should first contact the Disability and Learning Resource Center (DLRC) to schedule an appointment. DLRC staff will review your disability documentation and work with you to determine reasonable accommodations. They will then provide you with a letter outlining the approved accommodations for you to deliver to your instructors. This letter must be presented before any accommodations will be implemented. You should contact the DLRC as early in the semester as possible. The DLRC is located within the Wellness Center on the 13th floor of 116 S Michigan Ave. and can be reached via phone at 312.499.4278 or email at [dlrc@saic.edu](mailto:dlrc@saic.edu).

## Writing Center Resources

### Writing Center

Lakeview Building, 116 S. Michigan Ave., 10th Floor

[writingcenter@saic.edu](mailto:writingcenter@saic.edu)

312.499.4138

<http://www.saic.edu/academics/academicresources/writingcenter/>

## **Appointments**

Schedule in advance: <https://www.supersaas.com/schedule/saic/WritingCenter>

Short-notice: Call 312.499.4138 to see if there are any openings

## **Hours**

Monday - Thursday: 9:00 AM - 7:15 PM

Friday: 9:00 AM - 5:15 PM

Walk-in hours: Monday - Thursday: 4:15 - 7:15 PM

## **Email/ Communication**

The best way to reach me outside class is via email. However, give me 24 hours to respond during the week. If you email me after 5pm on Friday, don't expect a response until Monday morning. Most of the time, I will be able to respond to you sooner than this, but When there is a paper due, get all of your questions to be 48 hours before the due date.

I will answer *simple, specific* questions over email pertaining to the course material or the logistics of the course. I can also address simple interpretive questions you have with the material, or arguments you are trying out for your papers. To address anything more involved, you'll need to meet with me in office hours. (I highly encourage you to come to office hours in any event.)

## **Technology & Digital Devices**

In this class, we will regularly engage in small group instruction and activities, as well as discussions with the whole class. Technology such as cell phones, tablets, and laptops easily become a distraction and create an obstacle to engagement during class time. For this reason, the policy of the class will be as follows. Do not use these devices during class time. Any lecture slides will be made available on the online course site, and any notes you might need to make should be taken by hand. There are two exceptions. First, if you have the need for such a device as an accommodation. (If you have a need for such a device, please consult the instructor.) Second, for class time that is dedicated to revising, editing, or peer reviewing assignments for this class, laptops and such devices will be allowed. I will make clear in advance when class time will be devoted to such tasks.

## **Participation**

Participation in class discussion constitutes a significant part of your grade. You will be expected to attend class having done the readings and thought about them enough to discuss the arguments they make, to ask informed questions about them, and to engage with the other members of the class on these matters. Two expectations in service of these aims are worth making explicit. First, you'll need to be well-prepared, having read and thought about the assigned readings before class. Secondly, we will all need to foster a respectful, open environment where we can clarify, interpret and critically engage the philosophical

issues dealt with in readings. Maintaining a respectful classroom atmosphere is crucial, and part of your responsibility.

## Academic Misconduct

From the SAIC Student Handbook: “Academic misconduct includes both plagiarism and cheating, and may consist of: the submission of the work of another as one’s own; unauthorized assistance on a test or assignment; submission of the same work for more than one class without the knowledge and consent of all instructors; or the failure to properly cite texts or ideas from other sources. Academic misconduct extends to all spaces on campus, including satellite locations and online education. Academic integrity is expected in all coursework, including online learning. It is assumed that the person receiving the credit for the course is the person completing the work. SAIC has processes in place that protect student privacy and uses LDAP authentication to verify student identity.”

Specific procedures for faculty to follow in the case of academic misconduct are detailed in the Student Handbook.

Additional resources for students:

- Read “Plagiarism: How to Recognize It and Avoid It” - a short guide prepared by the Faculty Senate Student Life Subcommittee in 2004.
- Read the Flaxman Library’s quick guide titled “AVOID PLAGIARISM.”

## Extra Credit Policy

There are no extra credit opportunities associated with this course. All assignments for course credit are required as stated in this syllabus, and students should fully utilize all these assignments in order to successfully complete the course.

## Required Texts

- Dale Jamieson - *Ethics and the Environment: An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, 2008 (ISBN:9780521682848)
- John Broome - *Climate Matters*, Norton, 2012 (ISBN:9780393937961)
- Other texts will be posted to the course’s Canvas site.

## Course Outline

\*Readings are due on the dates they are listed for. The optional readings are not strictly required, but they either contain helpful background material or overviews, touch on noteworthy debates, or they are classics you should read at some point, if you don’t do so for the class listed.

Date	Reading Assignment	Length
<b>Course Introduction</b>		
<b>Jan 23</b>	Jamieson - <i>the Environment as an Ethical Question</i> ( <b>EATE</b> , Chapter 1)	21 pages
	Broome - <i>Introduction</i> ( <b>CM</b> , Ch. 1)	15 pages
<b>Ethical Foundations</b>		
<b>Jan 30</b>	Jamieson - <i>Foundational Issues</i> ( <b>EATE</b> , Ch. 4)	25 pages
	Amartya Sen - <i>Property and Hunger</i>	6 pages
	Garett Hardin - <i>Lifeboat Ethics</i>	6 pages
<b>Climate Change</b>		
<b>Feb 6</b>	Broome - <i>Science</i> ( <b>CM</b> , Ch. 2)	21 pages
	Broome - <i>Economics</i> ( <b>CM</b> , Ch. 3)	12 pages
<b>Feb 13</b>	Broome - <i>Justice and Fairness</i> ( <b>CM</b> , Ch. 4)	24 pages
	Gregory Kavka - <i>the Paradox of Future Individuals</i>	20 pages
<b>Feb 20</b>	Broome - <i>Private Morality</i> ( <b>CM</b> , Ch. 5)	24 pages
	Broome - <i>Goodness</i> ( <b>CM</b> , Ch. 6)	20 pages
	David Leonhardt - <i>A Battle Over the Costs of Climate Change</i> (NYT editorial)	4 pages
	Naomi Oreskes and Nicholas Stern - <i>Climate Change Will Cost Us Even More Than We Think</i> (NYT editorial)	2 pages
	<b>In class: Film Screening: <i>Six Degrees Could Change the World</i></b> <b>*Assignment 1 due Feb 21</b>	
<b>Feb 27</b>	Broome - <i>Uncertainty</i> ( <b>CM</b> , Ch. 7)	16 pages
	Walter Sinnott-Armstrong - <i>It's Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations</i>	15 pages
	Bjorn Lomborg - <i>Let's Keep Our Cool About Global Warming</i>	7 pages
<b>March 5</b>	Broome - <i>the Future versus the Present</i> ( <b>CM</b> , Ch. 8)	23 pages
	Broome - <i>Lives</i> ( <b>CM</b> , Ch. 9)	13 pages
<b>March 12</b>	<b>Mid Term</b>	
	Broome - <i>Population</i> ( <b>CM</b> , Ch. 10)	18 pages
	Derek Parfit - <i>the Repugnant Conclusion</i>	10 pages
<b>The Future</b>		
<b>March 19</b>	<b>Spring Break - No Class</b>	
<b>March 26</b>	Jamieson - <i>Nature's Future</i> ( <b>EATE</b> , Ch. 7)	23 pages
	S. Matthew Liao et al. - <i>Human Engineering and Climate Change</i>	16 pages
	Clive Hamilton - <i>Ethical Anxieties About Geoengineering*</i> (recommended, not required)	18 pages
	<b>*Assignment 2 due March 27</b>	
<b>April 2</b>	No Class – Critique Week	
<b>Going Beyond Human-centered Values</b>		
<b>April 9</b>	Elizabeth Anderson - <i>Cost-Benefit Analysis</i>	27 pages
<b>April 16</b>	Jamieson - <i>Humans and Other Animals</i> - sections 5.1 and 5.2 ( <b>EATE</b> , Ch. 5)	19 pages
	Peter Singer - <i>Animals</i>	10 pages
	Carl Cohen - <i>Do Animals Have Rights?</i>	8 pages

<b>Date</b>	<b>Reading Assignment</b>	<b>Length</b>
<b>April 23</b>	Jamieson - <i>Humans and Other Animals</i> - sections 5.3 and 5.4 ( <b>EATE</b> , Ch. 5) Alasdair Norcross - <i>Puppies, Pigs, and People</i>	24 pages 17 pages
<b>April 30</b>	Jamieson - <i>the Value of Nature</i> ( <b>EATE</b> , Ch. 6) Richard Routley - <i>Is There Need for a New, An Environmental, Ethic?</i> Lori Gruen - <i>Refocusing Environmental Ethics: From Intrinsic Value to Endorsable Valuations</i> <b>*Assignment 3 due May 1</b>	23 pages 6 pages 13 pages
<b>May 7</b>	Additional approaches to Environmental Ethics We'll decide what to cover as a class	
<b>May 14</b>	<b>Final Exam</b> <b>*Assignment 4 due May 15</b>	

**HUM3330-004 Environmental Ethics**  
**Daniel Skibra**  
**Spring 2020**  
**Last 5 weeks of class – online format**

The following syllabus and schedule supersedes the previous syllabus for everything after the March 12<sup>th</sup> meeting. For revised assignment schedule, see “**Assignments**” below.

**Presentations:** We'll proceed with the presentations as planned, though with some necessary amendments. You will need to record your presentations and send them to me. You can use whatever method you like to record, as long as it produces a format that you can email to me. (It is entirely acceptable, for example, to record yourself with your phone and send me this. Lo-tech is fine. Screw-ups are OK. If you get tripped up while you're talking, you don't need to restart the recording. Don't sweat this at all.) You'll need to send me the thing you're presenting (whether it's a link or an image, or whatever) so that I can post it. It will be due by the Thursday of the week we have this reading assigned. Your recording should just explain what the thing is you're presenting, and explain the relevance of this to the reading. Check the sheet explaining the presentations for a reminder of what you should discuss. These will likely be a little shorter than the in-class presentations, and that's fine. Aim for around 5 minutes or thereabouts.

**Lectures:** I will post these as videos online. Because having videos excludes the possibility of any interaction during a lecture, I will try to keep these lectures short and to-the-point, only focusing on the essentials.

**Assignments:** The assignments will be amended in the following way. We will no longer do Assignment #4. Rather than doing two more essays (Assignment #2 and Assignment #3), you only have to do **one** of these. You choose which one you'd like to write on – it is now due by Wednesday, May 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Discussions:** We need to figure out a way for you to 1) engage with the questions/ material, and 2) engage with each other a little bit, that nonetheless 3) doesn't pose any big time or technology constraints, given all of the other stuff you'll need to do. I think it's unlikely to introduce anything that approximates the classroom in this short amount of time. Here's an imperfect compromise – every week, you'll be give a prompt. Answer the prompt as completely as you can in 1 – 2 paragraphs in the discussion forum that is opened for this purpose.

This is a fairly low-stakes writing assignment. Your response should reflect your having done the reading/ digested the material for that week, and done some thinking about the topic. You should write in complete sentences and try to articulate, defend, and justify a position of your own. But it doesn't need to be terribly polished. It doesn't need to reflect your completely settled opinion (you can respond without having a completely settled view on the matter). You don't need to write very formally—just clearly enough that it can be read by your classmates. The responses for the week are due by Thursday at noon.

Then, pick one of your classmates' contributions, and write a response to them. (Try to pick one that someone else hasn't already responded to.) Some ways you might respond to your classmates's contribution: say what you agree with/ disagree with; discuss an example that further supports your



classmate's claim; describe a related point or claim that your classmate's contribution reminded you of; take a claim that your classmate makes and develop it further. Your response should be about one paragraph in length. Your response to a classmate is due by Monday of the following week.

Each week you earn up to 5 points for your post, and up to 3 points for your response, based mostly on how thorough and thoughtful they are. If you don't do one of these, you'd get zero points. This will come out to 40 points total over the 5 weeks. This is enough that, if something comes up at some point, and you can't submit the discussion response or a response to a classmate, it's not a big deal.

**Final Exam:** the final exam will be the same format as the mid term. But instead of giving you 90 minutes to complete the exam, I will just post the exam on a designated day and you will have to send me your answers by the end of the day (5pm). So you have the whole day to complete the exam. Also – it'll be open book/ open note. Use whatever source you want, but if you use a source from outside the class materials you must cite it. (I don't care about the citation format. You just need to indicate what you've used.) *Don't copy* anything. The answers you submit should be entirely your own. Copying/ plagiarism will result in a zero for the question. Copying on more than two questions results in a zero on the exam.

Here's what the modified class assignments look like, at a glance:

Assignment 1: 10% (20 points) ALREADY DONE  
Mid Term 15% (30 points) ALREADY DONE  
Assignment 2 **OR** Assignment 3: 25% (**now due by Wed 5/6**) (50 points)  
Final Exam 20% (40 points) (**now on Friday, 5/8**)  
Presentation 5% (10 points) MANY OF YOU HAVE DONE THIS  
Class participation 5% (10 points) CONGRATULATIONS, YOU ALL GET 10 POINTS.  
Online discussion: 20% (40 points)  
(8 points per week: 5 points for your post, 3 points for your response to a classmate)

= 100% / 200 points

**Office hours:** I won't have real-time office hours, because my availability will likely change from day to day, and I doubt that things will go back to normal very quickly. But I will be active on the discussion forums, and I will be checking/ responding to email daily. Additionally, I can video-conference with any of you should you want to discuss something in more detail. We just need to coordinate the time together, but that's not a problem.

### **Updated schedule:**

#### **Week 1: April 6- April 10<sup>th</sup>**

##### **Readings:**

Jamieson - Nature's Future (EATE, Ch. 7)

S. Matthew Liao et al. - Human Engineering and Climate Change Clive

Hamilton - Ethical Anxieties About Geoengineering (this last one is not required reading)

**Prompt:** Earlier in the class, we discussed a number of the ways climate change and the treatment of the environment more broadly raise ethical problems. Some of the discussion also suggested some ways these problems might be addressed (through purchasing offsets, through cap and trade schemes, etc.). Some of these ways involved action on the part of individuals, and some of them involve collective social action of the kind that is typically the result of a political process. Though we haven't talked about it much, we also mentioned the possibility that *technology* of some kind can help combat climate change. More extreme versions of this involve geoengineering (or even, as the Liao et al. article suggests, *human engineering* – changing humans in some way). Pick such a proposal (whether a proposal for geoengineering or human engineering), and ethically evaluate it. Do you think this is a reasonable and ethical proposal to pursue for combatting climate change? Explain why or why not. Try to appeal to some of the literature and concepts we discussed over the course of the term so far to help make your point.

Also: consult your notes and re-write 2-3 of the questions from your mid term exam to get extra credit for these questions to earn up to the 3 point maximum for the question.

## **Week 2: April 13 – April 17<sup>th</sup>**

### **Readings:**

Elizabeth Anderson - Cost-Benefit Analysis (this article is very difficult. If you are struggling with reading – focus on sections 9.2 and 9.3)

Jamieson - Humans and Other Animals - sections 5.1 and 5.2 (EATE, Ch. 5)

Peter Singer - Animals

Carl Cohen - Do Animals Have Rights?

(Accommodation on the reading: you can read either the Jamieson chapter and one of the Singer and Cohen articles or both of the Singer and Cohen articles. So, in a pinch, you can get away without reading all three.)

**Prompt:** Cost-benefit analysis presumes that the various outcomes (the *good outcomes and the bad outcomes*) we might get as a result of an action or policy can be compared. We saw that this assumption is necessary in order to properly assess the cost and benefit of adopting that policy. In our discussions, we saw that we needed to find a common unit of value for things, even if that seems strange. (For example, we'd need to find a common unit of value that would allow us to compare the value of *human lives* with the value of, say, oranges, or the value of property.) This kind of cost-benefit analysis also puts humans, their concerns, and their interests as the central and decisive factor in deciding what to do. The value that we are calculating in such an analysis is the value *to humans*. Do you think that cost-benefit analysis can provide guidance for all courses of action that matter to us? If so, explain why you think it can do this. I suspect that many of you will think it cannot. If not, then *give an example* of a problem or issue where you think that cost-benefit analysis will not adequately be able to give us guidance, and explain why not.

### **Week 3: April 20<sup>th</sup> – April 24**

#### **Readings:**

Jamieson - Humans and Other Animals - sections 5.3 and 5.4 (EATE, Ch. 5)

Alasdair Norcross - Puppies, Pigs, and People

**Prompt:** Humans use non-human animals for a wide variety of reasons. We use them for food, we use their labor, we use them extensively in various medical tests, and for many, many reasons beyond that. It is undoubtable that we benefit from a lot of these uses. Think of (and write about) one of the ways that we use animals for our own benefit. (Try to think of a way that we use animals that I didn't just mention above.) Then consider whether and to what extent this use is justified if we give non-human animals some kind of ethical consideration. To give a good answer to this, you should say something about what kind of ethical consideration you think non-human animals are actually due, and whether this differs from the kind of consideration other humans are due. If it is justified (e.g., can we still use some animals for food/ eat them?), then why and under what conditions? And if it is not justified, how would we have to change our lives in order not to extract this unearned and unjustified benefit from animals?

### **Week 4: April 27<sup>th</sup> – May 1<sup>st</sup>**

#### **Readings:**

Jamieson - the Value of Nature (EATE, Ch. 6)

Richard Routley - Is There Need for a New, An Environmental, Ethic?

Lori Gruen - Refocusing Environmental Ethics: From Intrinsic Value to Endorsable Valuations

(Accommodation on the reading: read only two of the three articles.)

**Prompt:** We spent a lot of time in the class investigating the ethical problems raised by environment and the way we as humans interact with it. We also spent a large amount of time focussing on the issue of climate change specifically. (This isn't a feature of all environmental ethics courses – I just think it's a particularly important problem to consider closely.) And we studied proposals to extend our ethical consideration to non-human animals, as opposed to just humans. But throughout the course, we stayed pretty close to traditional ethical frameworks. An important question in environmental ethics is whether the traditional ethical frameworks are even up to the task of describing the value of the environment and the things in it, conceptualizing our obligations to the environment, and giving any kind of normative guidance for how we should interact with it. Using the readings for this week, consider whether the way we've been looking at things is missing the broader point about our relationship to the environment. Does considering the environment and the problems we encounter as a result of our relationship to it show evidence of the need to change our ethical perspective (if at all). How should we change our perspective? And why?

## **Week 5: May 4th – May 8th**

This week: final exam, catching up, wrapping up the class. No reading assignments. Finish your paper if you haven't done so by now, and study for the test. (Yes, it's open book, but you don't want to spend the day of the exam trying to teach yourself the material.)

**Prompt:** Over the course of the term, we learned about and discussed a number of ethical concepts and ethical frameworks – some of them pretty abstract. Which of the concepts or frameworks did you find the most important to learn about? Which do you think are the most useful for thinking about our place in the world and the environment? Explain your answer and justify it.

This prompt isn't meant for you to shower me with praise for the wonderful things I taught you about the repugnant conclusion or the futurity problem, for example. So, if you thought that some of the concepts, issues, and frameworks we learned about are not important or helpful at all, you can use this prompt to argue for this and explain that position. This is a fair response as well.

Rather than just giving a list of the concepts you thought were good, pick just one or two, and explain why you thought that they were so important. What's the benefit of thinking about things like this (if any)? Or, if it's all just bullshit, say why.