

# PHIL/STV 20641-01 – Ethics of Sustainability

T-R 2-3:15pm, DeBartolo Hall 225

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**Office Hours:** R 3:20-5:20 pm, 2nd Floor of Decio Hall (or by appointment)

*You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.*

–Jane Goodall

**Course Description:** This course introduces philosophical ethics through an engagement with sustainability issues, which are at the intersection of environmentalism, social justice, and economic equality. We will cover issues such as the value of the environment, non-human animal welfare, food ethics, environmental justice, sustainable economy, and human-made global climate change. There are two central goals of this course. First, to engage students into ethical reflection regarding environmental and sustainability issues, and how these issues intersect with their lives and local communities. Second, to provide students with a sophisticated conceptual vocabulary to evaluate and generate ethical arguments both in general and applied to specific situations. This course will be heavily based on student participation, with an emphasis on class discussions. Students will also develop specific projects targeted to apply the conceptual tools presented in the course to specific issues salient in the local community. No prior experience with philosophy or environmental science is required.

**Text(s):** all the required readings will be made available online.

## Learning Goals:

- Be familiar with the main positions in normative ethics and meta-ethics.
- Have a realistic and critical perspective on central contemporary sustainability issues and environmental challenges.
- Understand the prospects and challenges of living a sustainable life and contributing to a sustainable society.
- Be able to critically assess the underlying ethical implications of public debates regarding sustainability enterprises and environmental problems.

## Requirements:

- Participation and Attendance (25%)

*Everyone is expected to carefully read the article or book chapter assigned for each day and come prepared to discuss it and raise questions. Please note that many of these readings are very dense and may require you to re-read them and take careful notes of the main points while reading them. You should come to class ready to engage in active discussion of the main ideas and arguments in the text(s). At the end of this session*

*(the last minute!), you will be asked to write a very short reflection on the discussion we had that day. These 1-minute papers will not be graded.*

- Short Assignments (30%)

*There will be six written assignments (one for each unit) in the form of short papers (about 1 page) responding to a specific question or reacting to a short reading. The aim of these assignments is to develop the ideas discussed in class and apply them in different contexts, connecting them to your own experience and contemporary debates.*

- Midterm Project Proposal (15%)

*Short project proposal (around 2000 words) with a detailed description of the sustainability issue you plan to address in your final project (see description below) and an outline of the project. **Due Friday, October 13th.***

- Final Project (30%)

*The final project for this course is a report (around 5000 words) on a sustainability issue that you will choose in consultation with the instructor. The report will include a detailed description of the issue, an ethical and practical assessment of the main current and proposed solutions, and a proposal based on the students own ethical commitments (a more detailed description will be posted online). The final project is expected to be developed throughout the whole course, and will build up on the work done in different assignments including the project proposal. **Due December 12th, 10:30am (the officially scheduled day and time for the final exam).***

## Course Policies:

- **General**

- You are expected to behave ethically. You are encouraged to ask questions, respond to other students points, and raise issues for discussion. Everyone is expected to treat their fellow students and professor critically but respectfully.
- You are expected to attend class on a regular basis. Every unexcused absence after the first one will be penalized with half a letter grade of your participation grade.
- You are expected to have done the assigned readings prior to each class meeting (see below for the list of readings). I also expect each of you to make frequent, quality contributions to class discussion.

- **Assignments**

- You are expected to work independently on the essays and assignments. Discussion amongst students is encouraged, but when in doubt, direct your questions to me.
- Late assignments will be penalized with half a letter grade per day. In case there are special circumstances, please come talk to me preferably before the deadline.

- **Technology in the Classroom**

- Laptops and tablets are neither necessary nor recommended, but they are allowed. Class sessions will be heavily discussion based and there will be no need to take

notes (also handouts with important points will be provided and posted online). Further, research suggests that using electronics in the classroom (including laptops) decreases focus and knowledge absorption.

- Cell phones and other electronics are not allowed in the classroom.

- **Academic Integrity**

- As a member of the Notre Dame community, I will not participate in or tolerate academic dishonesty. Please take advantage of the aid I can give you rather than resorting to academic dishonesty.
- It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the Academic Honor Code (<http://fys.nd.edu/current-students/honor-code/>).

**Tentative Course Outline:** The weekly coverage might change as it depends on the progress of the class. However, you must keep up with the reading assignments.

<b>Unit 0: Introduction</b>
<p><b>Ethics, Sustainability, and Ethics of Sustainability</b>  <i>Aug 22nd</i> – Introduction and welcome to philosophy! Recommended reading: Kilbert et al., “The Sustainability Framework”</p>
<b>Unit 1: Ethical Framework</b>
<p><b>Ethics and the Environment</b>  <i>Aug 24th</i> – Jamieson, “The Environment as an Ethical Question”  <i>Aug 29th</i> – Kilbert et al., “The Technology Challenge”</p>
<p><b>Meta-ethics and Normative Ethics</b>  <i>Aug 31st</i> – Jamieson, “Human Morality”  <i>Sep 5th</i> – Jamieson, “Meta-ethics”  <i>Sep 7th</i> – Jamieson, “Normative Ethics”</p>
<b>Unit 2: Beyond Humans</b>
<p><b>Non-human Animals and Specism</b>  <i>Sep 12th</i> – Jamieson, “Humans and Other Animals”, sec. 5.1-5.2 &amp; Williams “The Human Prejudice”  <i>Sep 14th</i> – Singer, “All Animals Are Equal”</p>
<p><b>Biocentrism and Ecocentrism</b>  <i>Sep 19th</i> – Jamieson, “The Value of Nature”, sec. 6.1-6.2 &amp; Stone, “Should Trees Have Standing?”  <i>Sep 21st</i> – Leopold, “Ecocentrism: The Land Ethic”</p>

<b>Unit 3: Food and Sustainability</b>
<p><b>Hunger and the Environment</b>  <i>Sep 26th</i> – Engel, “Taking Hunger Seriously”  <i>Sep 28th</i> – Rolston, “Feeding People versus Saving Nature?”</p>
<p><b>Industrial Food Production</b>  <i>Oct 3rd</i> – Guptill et al., “Industrialization: The High Costs of Cheap Food”  <i>Oct 5th</i> – In Class Film Screening: <i>Food Inc.</i></p>
<b>Unit 4: Economics and Sustainability</b>
<p><b>Sustainable Development</b>  <i>Oct 10th</i> – Sagoff, “At the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima, or Why Political Questions are not all Economic”  <i>Oct 12th</i> – Rees, “Sustainable Development: Economic Myths and Global Realities”</p>
<p><i>Oct 17th</i> – *Fall Break – No Class*  <i>Oct 19th</i> – *Fall Break – No Class*</p>
<p><b>Capitalism and Sustainability</b>  <i>Oct 24th</i> – Kilbert et al., “Sustainable Economics”  <i>Oct 26th</i> – Magdoff and Foster, “The Growth Imperative of Capitalism”</p>
<b>Unit 5: Social Justice and Sustainability</b>
<p><b>Environmental (In)Justice</b>  <i>Oct 31st</i> – Shrader-Frechette, <i>Environmental Justice: Creating Equality, Reclaiming Democracy</i> (excerpts from Introduction and Ch. 1)  <i>Nov 2nd</i> – Wenz, “Just Garbage”</p>
<p><b>Sustainable Institutions and Social Justice</b>  <i>Nov 7th</i> – Shrader-Frechette, <i>Environmental Justice: Creating Equality, Reclaiming Democracy</i> (excerpts from Ch. 9)  <i>Nov 9th</i> – de-Shalit, “Democracy and the Environment: A Radical Theory of Participation”</p>
<b>Unit 6: Global Climate Change</b>
<p><b>The Nature of the Problem</b>  <i>Nov 14th</i> – Stern, “The Economics of Climate Change”  <i>Nov 16th</i> – Gardiner, “A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics, and the Problem of Corruption”</p>
<p><i>Nov 21st</i> – In Class Film Screening: <i>Merchants of Doubt</i>  <i>Nov 23rd</i> – *Thanksgiving – No Class*</p>

**Towards a Sustainable Solution**

*Nov 28th* – Gardiner, “Is “Arming the Future” with Geoengineering Really the Lesser Evil?”

*Nov 30th* – Jamieson, “Adaptation, Mitigation, and Justice”

*Dec 5th* – Sinnott-Armstrong, “Its Not *My* Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations”

**Unit 00: The Future of Sustainability****What can (should) we do?**

*Dec 7th* – Kilbert et al., “Personal and Planetary Sustainability”

*This syllabus was last updated September 6, 2017*