

Dartmouth College
Fall 2014

PHIL 9.02 (11) | Environmental Ethics

Instructor Information

James P. Binkoski
Department of Philosophy
Thornton 208A

Email: james.p.binkoski@dartmouth.edu
Office Hours: Thursday 12:30-3:00 or by appointment

Class: MWF 11:15-12:20
Room: Reed Hall 103

Course Description

A general introduction to ethical problems concerning the environment, focusing on (1) the ethics of food, and (2) the ethics of climate change.

Topics covered will include the moral status of plants, animals, and natural environments; questions concerning population, consumption, and sustainability; worries concerning animal welfare and the environmental impact of large-scale factory farms; issues concerning GMOs and organic food; obligations owed to others concerning the problem of climate change; and difficulties involved in formulating and executing comprehensive climate policy.

In addition to course readings, class discussions, and regular short paper assignments, students will have the opportunity to complete either a service project or a media project. With respect to service projects, one might, for example, write an ethics-based policy paper for a community group, or do research on effective giving and organize a money-raising campaign. With respect to media projects, one might create a website on the environmental impact of factory farms.

We will also get off campus to visit local farms, including Pete and Gerry's organic eggs and the Dartmouth organic farm. In each case, you will get to meet with farmers and businessmen to discuss topics ranging from GMOs and the ethical treatment of animals to economics and sustainability.

No prerequisites; this course is intended as a first course in philosophy.

Required Texts

- Singer, P. and J. Mason. *The Ethics of What we Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter*. Rodale Books.
- Gardiner, S., et al. *Climate Ethics: Essential Readings*. Oxford U. Press.
- Jamieson, D. *Reason in a Dark Time: Why the Struggle Against Climate Change Failed—and What It Means for Our Future*. Oxford U. Press.

[Please note that you have free, online access to the full text of this book through the Dartmouth library system. That said, the formatting of the online copy is so ugly that you might prefer owning a hard copy instead].

Recommended Texts

- Pojman, P. and L. Pojman. *Food Ethics*. Cengage Learning.
- Jamieson, D. *Ethics and the Environment: An Introduction*. Cambridge U. Press.
- Speth, James G. 2005. *Red Sky at Morning: America and the Crisis of the Global Environment*. Yale University Press.

Course Requirements

10% *Present, Explain, Evaluate*

Two short analysis papers (2-3 pages) due on 09.22 and 09.29 in which you present, explain, and evaluate an argument from the reading.

60% *Papers*

Three papers (5-6 pages) due on 10.10, 10.24, and 11.07. Topics will include consumption, GMOs, and climate change.

10% *Homework*

Three short homework assignments (1-2 pages) dealing with course readings due on 10.15, 10.29, and 11.12. These will be graded very leniently. Basically, all that I am looking for is a good-faith effort at engaging with the course reading.

20% *Final project*

Choose one of the following options for a final project, due on 11.21.

- *Service Project*. Partner with a community group on an ethics-based project. Students choosing this option will work with the outside organization to identify a contribution that can be made that is related to the content of this course. A final 6 page report analyzing the experience is due on 11.21. Proposal due by 10.17.

- *Media Project.* Create a pamphlet, a short film, a webpage or some other piece of media in which you (i) introduce a moral question related to a topic covered in class, (ii) present and evaluate some of the standard arguments surrounding the topic, and (iii) draw a conclusion, if possible. Groups of two permitted. Proposal due by 10.31.
- *Final Paper.* A final 10-12 page paper that substantively revises and expands upon one of your earlier papers. Students choosing this option must meet with me by 11.14 to discuss their plans for revising their work.

Attendance

Class attendance is required. New material will be presented during lecture, there will be periodic in-class assignments and group projects, and class discussion will provide an opportunity to (i) further develop your skills at analysis, and (ii) explore course-related topics in greater depth.

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism and cheating are serious academic offenses. I will always do my best to make guidelines on assignments as clear as possible. But if you are ever unsure whether some action would count as an academic offense, please see me and I will help guide you.

You can read the College's Academic Honor Principle [here](#).

Extra Assistance

Dartmouth College is committed to the full inclusion of all students, and so am I. Students with disabilities who may need disability-related academic adjustments and services for this course are encouraged to see me privately as early in the term as possible. Students requiring disability-related academic adjustments and services must contact the Student Accessibility Services Office:

205 Collis Student Center
Phone: 646-9900
Email: student.accessibility.services@dartmouth.edu

Once SAS has authorized services, students must share with me their originally signed SAS Services and Consent Form and/or a letter on SAS letterhead. As a first step, if students have questions about whether they qualify to receive academic adjustments and services, they should contact the SAS office. All inquiries and discussions will remain confidential.

Finally, the writing center at Dartmouth is fantastic; all students are encouraged to take advantage of its services. You can link to the writing center [here](#).

Religious Observances

Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this academic term. If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please meet with me before the end of the second week of the term to discuss appropriate accommodations.

Course Topics at a Glance

Week 1	Moral Philosophy: A Brief Overview
Week 2	Factory Farming & the Standard American Diet
Week 3	Population, Consumption, and Sustainability
Week 4	Fair Trade and Eating Local
Week 5	GMOs and Organic Food
Week 6	Biocentrism, Deep Ecology, and the Land Ethic
Week 7	The Problem of Climate Change
Week 8	Global Justice and Duties to Future Generations
Week 9	Policy Responses to Climate Change

Course Readings (Subject to Change)

- Week 1 **Moral Philosophy: A Brief Overview**
Is morality a matter of fact or opinion? If the former, then what makes an action right or wrong? We look at some of the most important and influential answers that have been given to these questions.
- Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, chapters 9, 11, and 19, covering consequentialism, kantianism, and ethical relativism.
- Week 2 **Factory Farming and the Standard American Diet**
Most of the farming done in America is done on large-scale factory farms. The treatment of animals on such farms can be harsh, and their impact on the environment is considerable. We look at some of the ethical issues surrounding large-scale factory farming, focusing in particular on issues concerning animal welfare and environmental impact.
- Singer & Mason, excerpts from *The Ethics of What We Eat*
 - Singer, "Equality for Animals?"
 - Kant, "Rational Beings Alone Have Moral Worth"
 - Fox, "Vegetarianism and Treading Lightly on the Earth"
 - Francione, "Animal Welfare, Happy Meat, and Veganism as the Moral Baseline"
- Week 3 **Population, Consumption, and Sustainability**
The population is growing, as is our appetite for food, energy, and natural resources. We look at some of the ethical problems that result. Among the questions we'll ask: is affluence morally permissible in the face of global famine and disease?

- McKibben, "The Challenge of Overpopulation and Overconsumption"
- Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"
- Maley, blog post at *The Life You Can Save*. [link]
- Washington Post, "Join Wall Street. Save the World."
- Hardin, "Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor"

Week 4 **Fair Trade and Eating Local**

Recently, there has been push to "eat local." Why? What are the arguments? In some instances, choosing locally grown food means *not* choosing food grown by poorer, third-world farmers. Should we not instead support these poorer farmers?

- Singer & Mason, excerpts from *The Ethics of What We Eat*
- Oxfam grades big food companies. Read about it here.

Week 5 **GMOs and Organic Food**

Some have argued that genetically modified food is seriously problematic and that organic is the way to go. Others have argued that advances in biotech will lead to supercrops which yield more for less. Is GMO food the solution to world hunger or a threat to food security?

- Singer & Mason, excerpts from *The Ethics of What We Eat*
- Rauch, "Can Frankenfood Save the Planet?"
- Comstock, "Ethics and Genetically Modified Food"
- Pence, "Organic or Genetically Modified Food: Which is Better?"
- Shiva, "Genetic Engineering and Food Security"
- Trewavas, "GM Food Is the Best Option We Have"
- Right to farm ammendment in Missouri. Read about it here.

Week 6 **Biocentrism, Deep Ecology, and the Land Ethic**

Much of moral philosophy is concerned with the problem of doing right or wrong by other *people*. This week we study attempts at developing moral philosophies that are more explicitly geared toward the environment; philosophies that can, perhaps, make sense of doing right or wrong by things like *trees*, *rivers*, and *oceans*.

- Taylor, "Biocentric Egalitarianism"
- Leopold, "Ecocentric Ethics: The Land Ethic"
- Stone, "Should Trees Have Standing?"
- Deval and Sessions, "Deep Ecology"
- Guha, "Radical Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique"

Week 7 **The Problem of Climate Change**

Climate change is a multidimensional problem involving issues in economics, politics, and science. But many have argued that climate change is, fundamentally, an ethical problem. We look at some of the ethical challenges posed by climate change.

- Jamieson, excerpts from *Reason in an Age of Darkness*
- Gardiner, "Ethics and Global Climate Change"
- Monbiot, "The Denial Industry"
- Jamieson, "Ethics, Public Policy, and Global Warming"

Week 8 **Global Justice and Duties to Future Generations**

For some, the problem of climate change is a problem of justice: we pollute, others bear the cost, and that's not *fair*. But is this a useful way of framing the problem of climate change?

- Jamieson, excerpts from *Reason in an Age of Darkness*
- Shue, "Global Environment and International Inequality"
- Parfit, "Energy Policy and the Further Future"
- Caney, "Climate Change, Human Rights, and Moral Thresholds"

Week 9 **Policy Responses to Climate Change**

How should we respond to the problems posed by climate change? And what are the risks, challenges, and ethical problems associated with some of the most popular responses?

- Jamieson, excerpts from *Reason in an Age of Darkness*
- Singer, "One Atmosphere"
- Goodin, "Selling Environmental Indulgences"
- Gardiner, "Is Arming the Future with Geoengineering Really the Lesser Evil?"
- Sinnott-Armstrong, "Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations"