

Environmental Ethics

Fall 2024

James Blair 201

MWF 9am

Syllabus

Instructor

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Office Hours

James Blair 124
Wed, Fri noon-1pm
(and by appointment)

What Is This Class About?

You're pretty special, sure. But, there's this whole other world beyond yourself; and it's filled with all these other people, and things like whales and chimps, pigs and cows, owls and turtles, pines and chestnuts, swamps and tundra, mountains and rivers, land, water and air. Are any of these things special too? And do we have any moral duties toward any of them? Heck yes! But *how* special? And what sorts of duties? Well, that's exactly what we'll be trying to figure out this semester! Along the way, we'll also ask:

- What is morality? Is it just something that we made up?
- Is morality purely about consequences? Or does it also matter *how* we achieve them?
- Is it morally wrong to kill animals? How about plants?
- What things are good and worth preserving? Life? Nature? Diversity? Or what?
- Do future people matter just as much, morally, as present people?
- If humans are the #1 contributor to climate change, is it wrong to create more of us?
- Do I have a duty to reduce my individual greenhouse gas emissions?
- Do my individual actions even make a difference? Does it matter?
- How ought the burden of mitigating climate change to be distributed globally?
- Should we fill the stratosphere with aerosols in order to cool the Earth?
- And many more...

Throughout our investigation of these questions, our primary goal will be to shape you into a better moral thinker. That is, ultimately I hope to help you to be able to (i) think more carefully and critically, (ii) supply clear and persuasive *reasons* for your ethical beliefs, and (iii) acquire some of the necessary tools that will enable you to further investigate moral issues on your own – hopefully, for the rest of your life.

Course Requirements

1. Exams (35%). You will take a mid-term exam (15%) and a final exam (20%).

2. Papers (30%). You will write two papers. The first (10%) will be a short diagnostic paper of 700-1000 words (i.e., roughly 3 pages), and the second (20%) will be a longer paper of 1400-2000 words in length (i.e., roughly 6 pages).

3. Quizzes (10%). You will take a total of 11 short pop reading quizzes. Your lowest quiz score will be dropped; i.e., your 10 best scores will constitute your quiz grade (1% each).

4. Discussion Days (10%). In groups of five, you will become informed about one of seven controversial environmental issues. Your team will write a short report about it, and then guide an informal in-class discussion on that issue.

5. Environmental Change Project (5%). You will make one change to your personal life that positively affects your relation to the environment, and write about your experience.

6. Class Participation (10%). A portion of your grade will depend on your ability to come to class (on time and prepared), participate in class discussion, abide by COVID policies, and refrain from being disruptive or disengaged, or falling asleep, texting, using the internet, etc.

Assigned Readings

There is no textbook for this course. Assigned readings will be provided electronically, accessible under "Assigned Readings" on our course website, here:

<http://rintintin.colorado.edu/~vancecd/phil308/phil308.html>

Course Policies

Frequently Asked Questions

Answers to frequently asked questions can be found here: <https://rintintin.colorado.edu/~vancecd/faq.pdf>

Two notes: (1) You are responsible for reading the FAQ by the end of the first week of class. (2) Please consult this syllabus and the FAQ first, whenever you have a question about the course.

COVID Policy

University policy: All students are expected to follow W&M COVID policies and guidelines, found here:

https://www.wm.edu/about/administration/emergency/current_issues/coronavirus/students/index.php

Classroom policy:

- (1) If you have tested positive: Do not come to class. You must isolate for 5 days, or until you have tested negative.
- (2) If you have symptoms consistent with COVID: Take a test. If it is positive, refer to (1), above. If negative, then you may attend class only if you wear an N95 or KN95 mask. Test & mask daily until you no longer have symptoms.
- (3) If you have come into close contact with someone who has tested positive: Take a test. If the test is positive, refer to (1), above. If negative, then you may attend class only if you wear an N95 or KN95 mask. Test and mask daily for at least 5 days after your last contact with the individual(s) who were positive with COVID.

NOTE: *These policies will be enforced, with zero tolerance for violators. Students found to be in violation will be sent home, and a portion of their participation grade will be deducted.*

Academic Integrity

All students of the William & Mary are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity honor code policy of this institution. Violations of this policy include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, and stealing. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Council. More honor code info at: wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentconduct/studenthandbook/honor_system/index.php

NOTE: *The honor code will be enforced, with zero tolerance for violators. Any student found to be in violation of this code will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member (i.e., the student will automatically receive an F for the course) as well as non-academic sanctions (which include academic probation, suspension, or expulsion).*

Student Conduct

Students and faculty each have a responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to the code of conduct may be subject to discipline. More information at:

wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentconduct/studenthandbook/student_code_of_conduct/index.php

Student Accessibility Services

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability or any issue affecting accessibility, please submit to me a letter from Accessibility Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. More info can be found in the Campus Center (room 109), 757-221-2510, or at: wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentaccessibilityservices/

Religious Observances

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments, or required attendance. Please let me know by the end of the drop/add period about any such conflicts, so that we can resolve them. More information at: wm.edu/about/administration/provost/forfacstaff/holidays/religiousguidelines/index.php

Discrimination and Harassment

William & Mary policies on Discrimination and Sexual Harassment apply to all students, staff, and faculty. Any student, staff, or faculty member who believes that they have been the subject of sexual harassment and/or discrimination based upon race, sex, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, religious belief, political belief, disability, veteran status, age, or any other category protected by the Commonwealth or by federal law should contact the Office of Compliance & Equity in James Blair Hall. More Info: <https://www.wm.edu/offices/ce/equity/discrimination-harassment/>

Course Schedule

Below is a schedule of the topics that we will cover, along with a list of the reading(s) which you should complete before each class meeting. Please note the **paper due dates** and **exam dates** in bold, and *discussion days* in italics.

Unit One	Moral Duties, Rights, Values & the Environment	
Week 1	Introduction	
Wed 8/28	Intro/Syllabus/Arguments	• Optional: Sober, "Philosophical Problems for Environmentalism"
Fri 8/30	Ethical Relativism	• Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"
Week 2	On Morality, and Moral Duty	
Wed 9/4	Utilitarianism	• Dupré, "Utilitarianism" • Rachels, "Debate Over Utilitarianism"
Fri 9/6	Deontology	• Dupré, "Kantian Ethics" & "Prima Facie Duties" • Ross, "What Makes Right Actions Right?"
Week 3	Duties to Humans vs. Animals	
Mon 9/9	Anthropocentrism DUE: Project Proposal	• Baxter, "People or Penguins?"
Wed 9/11	Against Animal Rights	• Cohen, "The Case for the Use of Animals ..."
Fri 9/13	Animal Welfare	• Singer, "All Animals Are Equal"
Week 4	Animal Ethics	
Mon 9/16	Animal Rights	• Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights" • Warren, "Difficulties With the Strong Animal Rights Position"
Wed 9/18	Moderate Speciesism	• Anderson, "Animal Rights and the Values of Non-Human Life"
Fri 9/20	Against Factory-Farming	• Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs, and People"
Week 5	The Ethics of Non-Sentient Life	
Mon 9/23	Animal Death	• Norcross, "The Significance of Death for Animals" • Harman, "The Moral Significance of Animal Pain and Animal Death"
Wed 9/25	Biocentrism	• Taylor, "The Ethics of Respect for Nature"
Fri 9/27	Biocentrism	• Schmidtz, "Are All Species Equal?"
Week 6	Dominion and the Land	
Mon 9/30	<i>Discussion: Killing as Conservation</i>	No readings
Wed 10/2	Ecocentrism	• Leopold, "The Land Ethic" • Hill, "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving the Natural Environment"
Fri 10/4	Ecofeminism	• Warren, "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism"
Week 7	Value and Nature	
Mon 10/7	<i>Discussion: Terraforming Mars</i>	No readings
Wed 10/9	Restoring Nature DUE: Progress Report	• Elliott, "Faking Nature"
Week 8	Value and Species	
Mon 10/14	Against Zoos	• Jamieson, "Against Zoos"
Wed 10/16	The Value of a Species DUE: Paper 1	• Russow, "Why Do Species Matter?"
Fri 10/18	<i>Discussion: De-Extinction</i>	No readings

Unit Two	The Ethics of Climate Change	
Week 9	Intro	
Mon 10/21	Review: Mid-Term Exam	No readings
Wed 10/23	Mid-Term Exam	No readings
Fri 10/25	Intro to Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broome, "Introduction to Climate Ethics" • Gardiner, "The Problem of Political Inertia"
Week 10	Some Moral Complications	
Mon 10/28	The Non-Identity Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broome, "Who Suffers the Injustice?" (ch. 4 excerpt) • Parfit, "The Non-Identity Problem"
Wed 10/30	Uncertainty, Risk, & Precaution	• Broome, <i>Climate Matters</i> , chapter 7
Fri 11/1	The Discount Rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broome, "The Social Discount Rate" • Parfit, "Energy Policy and the Further Future"
Week 11	Individual Duties: Procreation	
Mon 11/4	<i>Discussion: Climate Change Denial</i>	No readings
Wed 11/6	Procreation	• Young, "Overconsumption & Procreation: Are They Morally Equivalent?"
Fri 11/8	Procreation	• Vance, "Procreation is Immoral on Environmental Grounds" (§§1-4)
Week 12	The Collective Action Problem	
Mon 11/11	<i>Discussion: Climate Activism</i>	No readings
Wed 11/13	Individual Causal Impotence	• Sinnott-Armstrong, "It's Not My Fault: Global Warming & Individual Moral Obligations"
Fri 11/15	A Reply to Sinnott-Armstrong	• Vance, "Climate Change, Individual Emissions, and Foreseeing Harm"
Week 13	Procreation, part 2	
Mon 11/18	<i>Discussion: Waste Exportation</i>	No readings
Wed 11/20	Procreation Revisited	• Vance, "Procreation is Immoral on Environmental Grounds" (§§5-6)
Fri 11/22	<i>Discussion: Climate Refugees</i>	No readings
Week 14	Geoengineering	
Mon 11/25 (remote instruction)	Geo-Engineering	• Gardiner, "Is Arming the Future With Geoengineering Really the Lesser Evil?"
Week 15	Global Justice	
Mon 12/2	Group Responsibility DUE: Project Report	• Singer, "One Atmosphere"
Wed 12/4	Group Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traxler, "Fair Chore Division for Climate Change" • Gardiner, "Ethics and Global Climate Change"
Fri 12/6	Review: Final Exam DUE: Paper 2	No readings
Final Exam		
Mon 12/9	Final Exam: 9am – noon	No readings