

**MHB 559 / PHIL 543: PHILOSOPHICAL AND ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON  
HUMAN WELL-BEING AND THE ENVIRONMENT  
SYLLABUS (REVISED)  
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**A. ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

Professor: Robert Streiffer

Class: 1:00 - 2:15; Tuesday, Thursday; B231 Van Vleck

Office Hours: Tuesday 2:30 - 3:30 in my philosophy office, and also by appointment

Philosophy Office: 5101 Helen C. White Hall; 263-9479

Bioethics Office: 1411 Medical Sciences Center; 262-7490

E-mail: [rstreiffer@wisc.edu](mailto:rstreiffer@wisc.edu); please begin the subject line with “[Health and Environment S11]”

Home page: <https://mywebspace.wisc.edu/rstreiffer/web/>

**B. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This is a course for upper-level undergraduates. Much of the environmental ethics literature focuses on the related questions of whether nature has intrinsic value and whether humans have direct moral obligations to non-human entities, including plants, animals, species, ecosystems, and the biosphere as a whole. Indeed, some have argued that for an ethic to truly be an *environmental* ethic just is for it to answer those questions in the affirmative. But a growing number of philosophers are arguing that an anthropocentric (human-centered) ethic can justify environmental protections substantially equivalent to those justified by non-anthropocentric theories. This course focuses on anthropocentric environmental ethics approaches, with an emphasis on the connections between human well-being and the natural environment. We will study representative examples and defenses of these perspectives, consider the extent to which they overlap and converge with nonanthropocentric views on a practical agenda, and explore several related areas of applied ethics, including: environmental justice, sustainability and intergenerational justice, and global climate change.

**C. MATERIALS**

- Reading packet which will be available for purchase at Bob’s Copy Shop at the intersection of Charter and Dayton (208 N. Charter St., 251-2936). I will send out an e-mail to the class once it is ready.
- Ronald Sandler, *Character and the Environment: A Virtue-Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), available from Amazon.com (\$26).
- Handouts and news articles distributed in class
- For additional environmental ethics materials on the web, some good sources are:  
<http://www.cep.unt.edu/>  
<http://ethics.sandiego.edu/Applied/Environment/index.asp>  
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-environmental/>

**D. CLASS REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING PLAN**

1. Read all of the assignments prior to the day for which they are assigned. Read them carefully and read them critically.

2. Attend all the classes and actively participate in the discussions. Attendance will count as 5% of your final grade. You are entitled to one free unexcused absence. Any excused absences for reasons other than an emergency must be cleared in advance of the class missed. For all excused absences, you must send me an e-mail stating the date and the reason so that I will have a record of it when it comes time to calculate your final grade. Any unexcused absence above your free one will affect your attendance grade as follows:

1 absence	B
2 absences	BC
3 absences	C
4 absences	D
5 absences	F
6 absences	Fail the class

3. Several short, in-class, unannounced quizzes, cumulatively worth 20% of your grade. These will be on the readings assigned for that day, and possibly include short-answer, multiple choice, and true/false questions. The grade for the quizzes will be determined as follows:  
 $\% = \text{total \# of correct answers on all the quizzes} / \text{total \# of questions on all the quizzes}$   
 (“Select all that apply” questions can count as more than one answer);

Grade	A	AB	B	BC	C	D	F
%	100-93	92.9-87	86.9-81	80.9-75	74.9-69	68.9-60	0-59.9

4. Papers: two 8 page papers (2,400 words, +/- 75 words), per the schedule below. The first is worth 35% of your grade, the second is worth 40%. You must hand in both papers in order to pass this course. You may not elect to opt out of a paper and receive an F on it. Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date. Papers handed in during class but after the beginning of class will be bumped to the next letter grade or half-letter grade down (e.g., from an A to an AB, from a C to a D.) After that, the penalty is one full letter grade per 24 hours. Any non-emergency extensions must be requested prior to the due date, and will be granted only in rare circumstances. Although you are encouraged to discuss your papers with friends and classmates, no group work is allowed.

#### **E. ADDITIONAL CLASS POLICIES**

Plagiarism and other kinds of academic misconduct: You must cite all of the sources you use for your papers, except that you need not cite my lectures or my handouts. Instead, cite to the original source, if there is one. The UW Writing Center has helpful guidelines for appropriate quotation and citation at <http://students.wisc.edu/saja/pdf/Plagiarism.pdf>. Please note that the imposition of any penalty for any kind of academic misconduct (e.g., plagiarism, trying to get credit for a class you didn't attend, etc.) can result in a permanent note that goes into your academic file, and that UW can disclose the fact that you were penalized for academic misconduct to interested parties who request that information. I reserve the right to fail any papers not in compliance with the UW rules governing academic misconduct, which you can find at <http://students.wisc.edu/saja/misconduct/UWS14.html>. Other penalties may also be used, if appropriate.

Feedback on Final Papers: Because many students do not bother to pick up their final papers after the class is over, I do not automatically provide comments on them. If you are interested in comments, you can e-mail me after the grades are in and I will be more than happy to meet with you about your paper.

Exceptions to the rules: I will not grant anyone an exception to the rules outlined in this syllabus unless that exception is granted to everyone. This means, for example, that since I can't commit to allowing everyone the option of rewriting their paper, I can't allow anyone the option of rewriting their paper.

Incompletes: I think incompletes are almost invariably a bad idea both for the student and the professor, and they will only be granted in rare cases of truly extenuating circumstances

Classroom Etiquette: You are expected to behave in ways that are appropriate and respectful to the professor and the other students. This includes, but is not limited to

1. Some of the topics in this class are controversial and some students may already have passionate views about them. While we want to strive for a critical approach to our own views and the views of others, we must ensure that we are polite and respectful at all times.
2. Arriving on time. Students who walk into the classroom late create a distraction.
3. Refraining from private conversations with classmates during lecture or discussion.
4. Expressing disagreement with the comments of others in a respectful manner.
5. Removing sunglasses and hats.
6. Staying awake.
7. Refraining from reading any non-course-related material.
8. Refraining from packing up until class is completely over.
9. Turning any cell phones off when entering class.

#### **F. OUTSIDE RESOURCES FOR HELP**

The Writing Center: they offer several classes and numerous handouts on academic writing. They will also provide individual writing instruction. Appointments can be made by stopping in at 6171 Helen C. White or calling 263-1992. Their web site is [www.wisc.edu/writing](http://www.wisc.edu/writing). They can be much more effective if you approach them early in the writing process.

Study Skills: UW, as well as many other universities, have on-line materials available on how to improve your study skills as an undergraduate, and I encourage you to take a look at the URLs below and try to benefit from them.

<http://guts.studentorg.wisc.edu/SS/sshome.htm>

[http://www.stanford.edu/dept/undergrad/uac/resources/study\\_skills.html](http://www.stanford.edu/dept/undergrad/uac/resources/study_skills.html).

Students who need accommodations should notify me by the end of the second week of the semester so that appropriate accommodations can be made. Please bring your documentation from the McBurney Center (<http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/>).

Jim Pryor has a very helpful page on how to read philosophy papers at <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>.

### G. REVISED READING SCHEDULE

The reading schedule is tentative and will be adjusted to accommodate the pace of the class discussion.

#	Date	Topic	Readings
1	Jan 18	Syllabus; Intro Ethical Reasoning	-----
2	Jan 20	Intro Ethical Reasoning; Logic	-----
3	Jan 25	Environmental Ethics Overview	Callicott, "The Search for an Environmental Ethic"
4	Jan 27	Anthropocentrism vs. Holism	Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic"
5	Feb 1		Feinberg, "Duties to Animals and Future Generations"
6	Feb 3		Varner, "Ch 1A Critique of Environmental Holism"
7	Feb 8		Varner, "Ch 4 The Principle of Inclusiveness"
8	Feb 10		Varner, "Ch 6 Justifying the Environmentalist Agenda"; "Conclusion"
9	Feb 15	Overflow / PT 1 Distributed	-----
10	Feb 17	Sources and Bearers of Value	O'Neill, "Varieties of Intrinsic Value"
11	Feb 22		-----
12	Feb 24		-----
13	March 1	Environmental Virtue Ethics	Norton, "Env. Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism"
14	March 3	PT 1 Due	-----
15	March 8	Environmental Virtue Ethics	Sandler: Introduction, Ch. 1
16	March 10		Sandler: Ch. 2
---	March 15	Spring Break	-----
---	March 17	Spring Break	-----
17	March 22		Sandler: Ch. 3
18	March 24		Sandler: Ch. 4
19	March 29		Sandler: Ch. 5
20	March 31		Sandler: Ch. 6, Conclusion
21	April 5	Environmental Justice	Hartley, "Environmental Justice"
22	April 7		Payne, "Environmental Injustice"; Wigley, "Environmental Justice-A Louisiana Case Study:"
23	April 12		
24	April 14	PT 2 Distributed	
25	April 19		
26	April 21		Claimore Debate Prep
27	April 26		Claimore Debate
28	April 28	Sustainability	Scherer, "The Ethics of Sustainable Resources"
29	May 3	PT 2 Due	Barry, "Sustainability and Intergenerational Justice"
30	May 5	Global Climate Change	Gardiner, "Ethics and Global Climate Change"