

Environmental Ethics

Last Updated: Mon, 12/29/2025

Course prefix: PHIL

Course number: 4176

Section: RK

CRN (you may add up to five):
35603

Instructor First Name: Cayla

Instructor Last Name: Clinkenbeard

Semester: Spring

Academic year: 2026

Course description:

Conceptual and normative foundations of environmental attitudes and values. Impacts of traditional and modern beliefs that shape human attitudes toward nature on creating a more compatible relationship between humans and their environment. Credit not allowed for both PHIL 4176 and PST 4176.

Course learning outcomes:

Students will be able to:

1. Identify and explain key concepts and theoretical frameworks within environmental ethics.
2. Describe different perspectives on particular problems in environmental ethics and explain the values that motivate these perspectives.
3. Explain their own points of view and judgments about complex ethical questions.
4. Participate in public discussions about environmental problems by thinking creatively with others to propose mutually beneficial solutions and by responding to criticisms to those proposals.

Required course materials:

All readings will be available through Canvas. No textbooks or other course materials need to be purchased.

Grading policy:

The final grade will be based on:
Exam 1: 25%

Exam 2: 25%

Reflections (10 total, lowest 2 dropped): 16% (2% each)

Group Proposal: 34%

Letter grades will be assigned according to the following scheme:

- A > 90% Excellent
- B 80-90% Above Average
- C 70-79% Average
- D 60-69% Below Average
- F < 59% Unacceptable

Assignments:

There are three kinds of assignments in the course.

Exams are in-class, handwritten tests with both short-answer (2-3 sentences) and long-answer (1-2 pages) questions. The short-answer questions will ask you to define terms or explain concepts. The long-answer questions ask you to analyze a scenario from different perspectives or to explain an argument and counterargument. There will be 5 short-answer questions (10 points each), and you may choose 1 long-answer question from a small selection (50 points). You may not use books, notes, or electronic devices. There are two exams for the class.

Reflections are short (3-5 sentence) in-class writing assignments in which you may ask a well-developed question about a “muddy” (unclear) idea discussed in class or explain an idea from class that you found particularly helpful or insightful. Your reflections help me see which ideas need further explanation or which ideas would be most interesting for us to explore further. They also help you process the class discussion. These are graded as incomplete (0), complete (1), or sufficient (2). Doing the assignment gets you a point, but the extra point is earned with good support for your questions or claims from the texts or from real-world examples. There are 10 reflections in the course, and the lowest two grades will be dropped. This means that there are 16 possible points for 8 reflections.

The *Group Proposal* is an opportunity for you to practice democratic discussions aimed at creative solutions to pressing real-world problems. Environmental policies are almost always group decisions, not individual ones. The goal is for you to work together by including different perspectives and interest groups rather than by arguing against opponents. In the last few weeks of class, you will choose one of the 5 problem studies that we discuss as a class to think about more carefully in a smaller group. The team will come up with a proposal for a solution to the problem and then present this proposal to the class. The teams will be assessed based on their consideration of different perspectives, use of ethical principles from the course to evaluate the problem, demonstration of how the proposal mitigates harm to different stakeholders, and response to questions and concerns. Individuals within the team will be assessed based on an anonymous peer evaluation of

each member's contributions, cooperation, role fulfillment, communication, and accuracy. Peer evaluations count for 20 points of the total grade, and the proposal and presentation count for 80 points of the total grade.

Attendance policy:

Attendance is not graded, but it is necessary to succeed in the course. Every component of your grade requires your presence in class. This means that you will lose points if you are not in class on the days we work on those assignments. The points for in-class activities cannot be made up in case of absence, except for a few instances (pre-arranged religious obligations, exam conflicts, or illnesses/emergencies documented through the Office of Student Life).

Academic honesty/integrity statement:

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. All work submitted must be original and properly cited. Plagiarism, cheating, or any form of academic dishonesty will result in immediate consequences as outlined in the university's academic integrity policy.

Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):

Core IMPACTS: Humanities

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

- How do I interpret the human experience through creative, linguistic, and philosophical works?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:

- Students will effectively analyze and interpret the meaning, cultural significance, and ethical implications of literary/philosophical texts or of works in the visual/performing arts.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help student develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Ethical Reasoning
- Informational Literacy
- Intercultural Competence

Ethics Requirement:

Students should come away with:

- An ability to recognize ethical and professional responsibilities in real-world contexts.
- An ability to assess actions or decisions based on established ethical principles and theories, or through deliberative processes.
- An ability to consider the implications of actions, both broadly (e.g., global, economic,

environmental, or societal) and for individuals.