

## PHIL333 Environmental Ethics Course Outline

**Instructor:** Doug Al-Maini

**Office:** Lane Hall 'A' Wing 127

**Classroom:** SNP 100

**Office Hours:** Mon 10:15-11:00, Tues 2:15-3:00, Thurs 11:15-12:00, 1:15-2:00

**Class Hours:** Tues 3:45-5:00, Thurs 2:15-3:30 **E-mail:** dalmaini@stfx.ca

### Course Description:

The goal of this course is to provide students with an opportunity to embark on an in-depth study of their own ethical identity when they consider themselves as part of the natural world. In order to develop an understanding of the moral problems inherent in this topic, the class will engage in discussion based on various readings outlined below. The readings begin by looking at some of the more theoretical attitudes and perspectives that may have contributed to the environmental conditions that we face today. With this background in place we shall move on to assess normative models governing our continued presence as a part of the environment, including deep ecology, a theory of stewardship, ecofeminism, and environmental aesthetics. Finally, we shall use these perspectives to confront some of the more applied ethical concerns facing environmentalists today.

### Readings Schedule:

Week	Readings
1 Jan 8	Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis"
2 Jan 15	Jan Narveson, "Resources and Environmental Policy"
3 Jan 22	N. Hettinger, "The Problem of Finding a Positive Role for Humans in the Natural World"
4 Jan 29	M. Smith, "What is Said and (to be) Done?"
5 Feb 5	K. Warren, "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism"
6 Feb 12	Robert Elliot, "Faking Nature" (1 <sup>st</sup> essay outline due)
7 Feb 26	H. Rolston III, "From Beauty to Duty: Aesthetics of Nature and Environmental Ethics"
8 Mar 5	Wells, <i>The Island of Dr. Moreau</i> , Intro-ch. 11 (1 <sup>st</sup> essay due)
9 Mar 12	Wells, <i>The Island of Dr. Moreau</i> , ch. 12-22
10 Mar 19	O. Horta, "Animal Suffering in Nature: The Case for Intervention" (2 <sup>nd</sup> essay outline due)
11 Mar 26	J. Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair"
12 Apr 2	Ned Hettinger & Bill Throop, "Refocusing Ecocentrism" (2 <sup>nd</sup> essay due)

### Method of Evaluation:

Students will be required to complete 3 assignments:

- 1) Six argument outlines, each of which summarizes the argument put forward in one of the articles listed in the assigned readings. These argument outlines are due at the start of Tuesday's class on the week in which the readings are assigned. These outlines must be filled out according to the format outlined in "The Logic of Essays". Each outline is worth 5% of the final mark, and, if completed according to format indicated, will be marked holistically out of ten based on how well I think you have captured what the author is arguing. Outlines **MUST** be handed in at the beginning of class on Tuesday.
- 2) Two essays, each of which responds to one of the "Response Questions" listed below. The first essay should be 2450 words in length (at least seven full pages) and will be worth 25% of the final mark, the second essay 1750 words (at least five full pages) and will be worth 15%. Each essay requires its own argument outline to be handed in two weeks prior to the essay deadline. Due dates are listed in the class schedule.
- 3) A final exam worth 30% of the final mark.

## Response Questions:

### First Essay:

- 1) Are humans the only bearers of intrinsic value, or are other elements of the environment inherently valuable? To answer this question, students must provide arguments for both sides of the issue, and then provide some reasoning that decides the issue. If you wish to argue that humans are not the only inherently valuable things there are, then you may want to deal with how far inherent value extends. For example, are only other animals inherently valuable, or are plants also deserving of this label? What about a waterfall? A sand dune?
- 2) Can we depend upon technological progress to alleviate the concerns we have about the current state of the environment? To answer this question, students must provide their explanation of the relationship between ethics and value.
- 3) Should there be spaces on the earth that are void of any kind of direct human influence (such as habitation or economic use)? In order to answer this question, students must define what it means to be wild and the arguments surrounding the misanthropic principle.
- 4) How does an environmentalism based in feminism differ from other brands of environmentalism? How would acting as an ecofeminist result in different outcomes from those accomplished by other environmentalists?
- 5) Does an ecosystem's beauty have a role to play in its value? In answering this question, students must also confront the issue of what to do with ecosystems deemed "ugly" and explain how entities such as eagles, deadly viruses like AIDS and Ebola, and swamps are evaluated in terms of beauty.

### Second Essay:

- 1) The word "vivisection" (from the latin *vivi* meaning 'life' and *sectio* meaning 'a cutting' or 'part') refers to the practice of subjecting living things to cutting operations, especially in order to advance physiological and pathological knowledge. To what extent is science the vivisection of our environment? Is vivisection an acceptable practice? Why would anyone argue against it? If we accept that science is a form of vivisection, how would this impact our understanding of the limits of scientific investigation?
- 2) In this course we have attempted to uncover some different attitudes towards nature. How well does Wells' novel fit into this interpretive rubric? Especially in the chapter entitled "The Thing in the Forest", Prendick encounters creatures both familiar and alien to him; how does this chapter provide a compass point for human conduct in the natural world? How well does it defuse the tension that we have seen operating between nature and civilization?
- 3) After the catastrophe, Prendick dismisses Moreau's investigations because, in Prendick's words, they are "aimless". Does Prendick remain convinced of his beliefs for the rest of his novel? Why does teleology play such an important part in his understanding of nature? Is he right in his attitude towards nature? In responding to this question, students must make use of the Aristotle readings for this course.
- 4) In justifying himself to Prendick, Moreau states, "To this day I have never troubled about the ethics of the matter. The study of Nature makes a man at last as remorseless as Nature." Is it true that the study of Nature inevitably leads to Moreau's callousness? What metaphysical assumptions are necessary to refuting Moreau's position?

### Required Text:

*The Island of Dr. Moreau*, H. G. Wells. Penguin Classics, 2005. ISBN 014144102X

### Technical Considerations for Written Assignments:

- 1) All written assignments must be typed (black ink, please) and double-spaced on pages with at most 1 inch margins. No extra line spaces between paragraphs. Indent the first line of a paragraph. Printing on both sides of a sheet of paper is quite acceptable.

- 2) Please no title pages. Also no “Works Cited” or “Bibliography” pages referring to one work; do bibliographic references in a footnote if you must. Please no enormously large-fonted things like titles, names, dates, course numbers, student numbers, phone numbers, or due dates that take up half a page of space. Your title, name, and student number at the top of the first page is quite sufficient. Please visibly number any multiple-page assignments. If for some reason you must hand in the assignment to the office, please include my name at the top of the assignment as well.
- 3) No duo-tangs, folders, binders, or paperclips. Loose sheets are acceptable, but do remember to number them.
- 4) Under no circumstances will emailed assignments be accepted. Please hand in your assignments at the start of class on the day they are due.
- 6) The final page of this outline is the evaluation form that will be used in the assessment of your writing. This evaluation form provides the clearest explanation of my requirements for an essay. Please, study it carefully before you write your work.
- 7) The late policy is a deduction of 3% per day that the assignment is handed in late. This course outline lets you know when assignments are due, and you have been given plenty of time to complete them. Consequently last minute excuses for not completing assignments on time will be met with skepticism.
- 7) Many of the above requirements are arbitrary demands on my part, but they really do facilitate the assessment of your work. If you do not follow these guidelines, **YOUR MARK FOR ORGANIZATION ON THE EVALUATION FORM WILL SUFFER DRASTICALLY.**
- 8) Plagiarism is completely unacceptable. If you make use of an idea that is not of your own devising, you must cite the source of that idea. Failure to properly cite sources may result from removal from the course and expulsion from the school.

**EVALUATION FORM**  
**(Late assignments will not receive comments)**

Style:

- Grammar: Are the sentences understandable? Are there any spelling mistakes? Is the diction clear and concise? Can the thought behind each sentence easily be grasped? /10
- Organization: Do the ideas logically follow each other, or were they haphazardly strewn together? Is there evidence of the student having constructed an argumentative outline? Is the structure of the argumentation explicitly stated and easily perceived? /10

Content:

- Argument Outline: /10
- Thesis: Do the assignment give an answer to a question or problem put forward? Is the answer more than a simple “yes” or “no”? Is the answer insightful, being an interpretive idea itself? Is the thesis explicitly stated? /10
- Arguments: Are there arguments presented in the paper? Are the arguments interesting or banal? Are the arguments incisive or superficial? Do the arguments explicitly outline broad premises that act as guides to understanding and reveal the unquestioned perspectives adopted in the paper? /20
- Originality: Does the student provide input into the conceptual debates the text engages in? Is there evidence of insight on the student’s part into the topic? Are there any new ideas being explored in the assignment? Is the student able to go beyond ideas raised in class discussion? /20
- Evaluation: Does the student give a fair summation of the ideas contained in the texts used? Are passages from the text cited? Does the use of these ideas meaningfully contribute to the thesis of the essay, or is the use of material a mere addenda to the main arguments of the paper? /20
- /100**