

Lingnan University
Department of Philosophy

Course Title	Environmental Ethics
Course Code	PHI3376
Recommended Study Year	NIL
No. of Credits/Term	3
Mode of Tuition	Sectional Approach
Class Contact Hours	3 hours per week
Category	Programme Elective
Discipline	-
Prerequisite(s)	NIL
Co-requisite(s)	NIL
Exclusion(s)	NIL
Exemptions Requirement(s)	NIL

Brief Course Description

Environmental ethics is a sub-field of ethics that focuses primarily on humanity's relationship to the environment. It is concerned with questions such as: what is the moral standing of the natural environment? How important is it to protect biodiversity and ecosystem diversity? What individual responsibilities, if any, do we each have to do something about climate change? And what are the most effective policies we can use to mitigate the harms of climate change? Topics to be covered include: anthropocentrism and ecocentrism; pollution and the environment; the ethics of climate change; the economics and politics of climate change; geoengineering; global environmental risks; and others.

Aims

The aim of this course is to:

1. Provide students with a detailed understanding of several core issues in environmental ethics
2. To help students develop the ability to think critically about issues related to environmental ethics
3. To develop the ability of students to articulate and communicate their own reasoned judgements on the topics to be discussed

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Analyse and explain key theories, arguments and issues in environmental ethics, including their underlying assumptions and implications for environmental decision-making.
2. Critically engage with and evaluate philosophical texts in environmental ethics, identifying central arguments, assessing their strengths and weaknesses, and relating them to concrete environmental controversies.
3. Develop, articulate and defend well-reasoned personal positions on environmental ethical issues, using clear, rigorous argumentation and drawing on relevant theories and evidence.

Indicative Content

1. Anthropocentrism; sentientism; ecocentrism (i.e., competing theories of the ethical value of humanity, sentient life, the natural environment, etc.).
2. Biodiversity and ecosystems (i.e., ethical questions about the importance of preserving diverse biomes, protecting a diversity of flora and fauna, etc.).
3. Pollution and the environment (i.e., potential ethical obligations to avoid pollution, environmental sustainability, balancing the value of the environment with other values, etc.).
4. The ethics of climate change (i.e., personal responsibility, environmental inequality, intergenerational ethics, etc.).
5. The economics and politics of climate change (i.e., collective action problems, market failures, government failures and free market environmentalism, etc.).
6. The ethics of geoengineering (i.e., exploration of risks of intentionally manipulating the environment, debates about alternative ways to address climate issues, etc.).
7. Space ethics (i.e., ethical issues raised by space exploration, extraction of natural resources in space, terraforming, space settlement, etc.).
8. Global environmental catastrophe and existential risk (i.e., theories of human extinction, possible causes of catastrophe and extinction, how to govern global catastrophes, etc.).

Teaching Method

The course will be taught in sectional format.

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

	Attendance and Participation	Debates	Midterm Exam	Final Exam
LO1 Analyse and explain key theories, arguments and issues in environmental ethics, including their underlying assumptions and implications for environmental decision-making.	✓			
LO2 Critically engage with and evaluate philosophical		✓	✓	✓

texts in environmental ethics, identifying central arguments, assessing their strengths and weaknesses, and relating them to concrete environmental controversies.				
LO3 Develop, articulate and defend well-reasoned personal positions on environmental ethical issues, using clear, rigorous argumentation and drawing on relevant theories and evidence.		✓		✓

Assessment

Student progress towards the learning outcomes will be measured by:

1. Attendance and participation - 10%
2. Debates - 20%
3. Midterm exam - 30%
4. Final exam - 40%

Required Readings

Brennan, A. and Lo, N.Y.S. (2024) 'Environmental Ethics', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2024 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2024/entries/ethics-environmental/>.

Budolfson, M., McPherson, T., and Plunkett, D. (2021) *Philosophy and Climate Change*. Oxford University Press (excerpts)

Pojman, L.P., Pojman, P., and McShane, K. (2017) *Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application, 7th Edition*. Cengage Learning (excerpts)

Schmidtz, D. and Shahar, D. (2019) *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works, 3rd Edition*. Oxford University Press (excerpts)

Recommended Readings

Anderson, T.L. and Leal, D.R. (2015) *Free Market Environmentalism for the Next Generation*. Palgrave MacMillan (excerpts)

Broome, J. (2012) *Climate Matters: Ethics in a Warming World*. W.W. Norton & Company (excerpts)

Epstein, A. (2022) *Fossil Future: Why Human Flourishing Requires More Oil, Coal, and Natural Gas—Not Less*. Portfolio (excerpts)

Freiman, C. (2022) 'Picking Our Poison: A Conditional Defense of Geoengineering', *Social Philosophy & Policy* 38 (2): 11-28.

Gardiner, S. (2011) *A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change*. Oxford University Press

Green, B.P. (2022) *Space Ethics*. Rowman & Littlefield (excerpts)

Jamieson, D. (2014) *Reason in a Dark Time: Why the Struggle Against Climate Change Failed—And What it Means for Our Future*. Oxford University Press

Mintz-Woo, K. (2021) ‘Carbon Pricing Ethics’, *Philosophy Compass* 17 (1): e12803

Important Notes

1. Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e., 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
2. Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations and Course Work. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is “the presentation of another person’s work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarized ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student’s own work”. Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
3. Students are required to submit writing assignments using Turnitin.
4. To enhance students’ understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course “Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness” is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>
5. Students must adhere to the University’s guidelines and practices when using Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. The official documents “*Guidelines for Using GAI Tools at Lingnan University*” and “*Best Practices for Ethical and Responsible Use of GAI Tools in Course Assessments*” can be found here: <https://www.ln.edu.hk/cital/generative-artificial-intelligence/gai-guidelines-best-practices>.

Rubrics for Evaluating Class Assessment

For evaluating participation in class discussions:

Excellent (90-100%)	Good (80-89%)	Fair (70-79%)	Pass (60-69%)	Failure (0-59%)
Attempts frequently to answer or raise questions; comments are	Attempts frequently to answer or raise questions; comments are	Attempts sometimes to answer or raise questions; comments are	Seldom attempts to answer or raise questions, but can sometimes offer	Almost never makes cogent or relevant comment, even when asked;
mostly cogent and relevant; full attendance (except absence with prior notice and valid reasons.)	often cogent and relevant; almost full attendance.	sometimes cogent and relevant; skips quite a few classes without notice.	relevant answers when asked; skips many classes.	skips most classes.

For evaluating debates

	Excellent (90-100%)	Good (80-89%)	Fair (70-79%)	Pass (60-69%)	Failure (0-59%)
Communication (Weight: 25%)	Closely engages audience; persuasive and clear delivery, proper use of notes, etc.	Generally holds attention; generally good delivery with only minor flaws.	Delivery is fair, somewhat engaging; makes an attempt to command attention of class.	Delivery is apparently detached; fails to command attention of class; relying too much on notes, phone, etc.	Little or no attempt to communicate with the class; non-existent presentation skills.
Organization (Weight: 25%)	Excellent structure; transitioning from topic to topic is clear and logical	Generally good structure; transitioning from topic to topic is mostly clear	Generally acceptable; some organization skills demonstrated	Lack of organization; jumps from topic to topic without proper signals	Ideas are apparently randomly expressed

Argumentation and use of references (Weight: 25%)	Reasoning is almost impeccable; excellent usage and accreditation of supporting evidence	Reasoning is strong; supporting evidence is demonstrated clearly	Reasoning contains some obvious errors; some usage of supporting evidence	Contains major fallacies in reasoning; scant usage of supporting evidence	Little or no demonstration of reasoning skills; no supporting evidence
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For evaluating exams

	Excellent (90-100%)	Good (80-89%)	Fair (70-79%)	Pass (60-69%)	Failure (0-59%)
Knowledge (Weight: 50%)	Demonstrates knowledge of all the relevant points, with a clear and accurate exposition.	Demonstrates knowledge of most relevant points, with a largely clear and accurate exposition.	Demonstrates knowledge of most relevant points, but the exposition is unclear or inaccurate.	Demonstrates only a limited understanding of the basic points.	Demonstrates very little understanding of even the basic points.
Argumentation (Weight: 50%)	Presents novel, compelling arguments with enough details.	Presents compelling arguments, with less novelty or some gaps.	Presents reasonable arguments that are not novel or very compelling.	Attempts to express an argument, but the result is unclear or messy.	Makes little or no attempt to present arguments.

Mapping from total scores to letter grades:

90-100%: A

80-89%: B

70-79%: C

60-69%: D

0-59%: F