

Environmental Ethics

GPHI 6770, CRN 8456, Spring 2021

Thursdays 1:55 – 3:45

Professor Jay Bernstein, bernstej@newschool.edu
Office Hours: Thursday 4:15–6:00 or by appointment

Professor Alice Crary, crarya@newschool.edu
Office hours: W 2:45-3:45/Th 12:30-1:30 and by appointment

Course Description

This seminar will focus on the ongoing destruction of nature from anthropogenic planetary climate change. This catastrophe poses a problem for which traditional ethical theories have left us ill-prepared, and attempts at dealing with it in the form of “applied ethics” have proved unhelpful. A productive engagement needs to start from a willingness to radically rethink the categories that we use to describe this historical moment and the resources we have to respond to it meaningfully. We will talk about how climate crisis has challenged not only engrained metaphysical understandings of the relation between nature and culture but also received understandings of moral notions such as justice, responsibility and blame. We will also consider how it brings into question familiar conceptions of political institutions such as markets, property, states. We will attempt this kind of transformative approach to climate crisis by reading widely—and in a fully interdisciplinary manner—in the literature. Seminar topics will include the Anthropocene, ecocide, ecofeminism, environmentalism and animal ethics, anthropocentric/biocentric/ecocentric environmental ethics, responsibility (i.e., who is responsible for change?), global justice, justice vis-a-vis future generations and questions of mitigation/adaptation/celebration of collapse (or collapsology).

Learning outcomes

At the end of this course, you should be able—at a graduate-level—to (1) describe what climate change is and discuss senses in which it represents a moral and political problem, (2) describe and critically assess some of the most influential theoretical approaches to environmental ethics, (3) describe and critically assess some of the most influential accounts of the Anthropocene, (4) discuss practical implications of prominent theoretical approaches to environmental ethics, (5) develop well-grounded, independent views of key issues and problems for environmental ethics in the Anthropocene, and (6) discuss your views clearly orally and in writing.

Required texts

All required and recommended materials for this course will be available either on our seminar Canvas site, in the public domain online or in seminar.

Course requirements

All enrolled students must:

- write three (no longer than) 2-page—ungraded—response papers, and
- write one (no longer than) 15-18-page seminar paper,

Response papers. At our second seminar meeting (January 29th), you’ll be assigned to one of four groups, members of which will be responsible for producing short response papers on three

occasions during the term. Response papers will be due by 8am on the day of the relevant class meeting, available to your professors in time for them to work your ideas into the day's presentation. You will be encouraged to comment further, in seminar, on the themes developed in your response papers. *Seminar papers*. Your seminar paper will be due before the seminar, on the day of our last meeting, Thursday, May 6th. There will be no penalty for late papers, but, if your paper is late, you will have no guarantee of having it commented on, graded and returned to you quickly.

Reaching us

Our contact information is at the top of the first page of the syllabus. Professor Bernstein's regular zoom-office hours are Thursdays 4:15 – 6:00 and by appointment. Professor Crary's regular zoom-office hours are Wednesday 2:45-3:45, Thursday 12:30-1:30 and by appointment. (Links for Professor Bernstein's & Crary's google calendar and zoom meeting places are listed with their contact information, above.) You should feel free to contact us about any course-related issue, no matter how small. We will try to respond to emails as quickly as possible. If you write to us about a substantive issue, we will very likely write back and suggest that we meet to chat over zoom.

Fairness, grading methods and disputes

There is good evidence to suggest that implicit or unconscious bias is a serious issue in academic settings, and that it puts members of underrepresented groups at a substantial disadvantage. One recommended strategy for combating implicit bias is to do anonymous assessment. This is not possible in a relatively small research seminar in which we will be in close conversation with you about your individual writing projects. A second recommended strategy for combating implicit bias is to attend carefully to how one interacts with students (e.g., what form of address is used, how often speaking time is granted and to whom, and how much time individual students spend speaking). Throughout the semester, we will monitor our own practice with an eye to being fair to all. A third strategy is to get anonymous feedback on pedagogy and methods well before the end of the course, and we will arrange for an anonymous survey before midterm with an eye to making improvements in the running of the seminar.

If you believe that there is something amiss with the evaluation of your work, we urge you to let us know. We are open to discussion and willing to re-read papers.

Course policies

This course will adhere to New School academic policies, as appropriate for remote learning. As far as possible we have integrated new policies into what follows:

1. Policy on attendance and lateness

- * Please see the university's new policy here: [Meaningful Participation in Online Courses 2020-2021](#).
- * Absences may justify some grade reduction and a total of four unexcused absences mandate a reduction of one letter grade for the course.
- * More than four absences mandate a failing grade for the course, unless there are extenuating circumstances, such as the following:
 - an extended illness requiring hospitalization or visit to a physician (with documentation)
 - a family emergency, e.g. serious illness (with written explanation)
 - observance of a religious holiday

The attendance and lateness policies are enforced as of the first day of classes for all registered students. If registered during the first week of the add/drop period, the student is responsible for any missed assignments and coursework. For significant lateness, the instructor may consider the tardiness as an absence for the day. Students failing a course due to attendance should consult with an academic advisor to discuss options.

2. Policy on academic honesty and integrity. For details, you should go to the list of New School policies here <https://www.newschool.edu/Components/Wireframes/TwoColumnWireframe.aspx?pageid=591> and click on the link for “Academic Honesty and Integrity”.
3. Of particular importance is the policy on plagiarism, which you can find and click on by following the same link (i.e., <https://www.newschool.edu/Components/Wireframes/TwoColumnWireframe.aspx?pageid=591>). Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's work as one's own in all forms of academic endeavor (such as essays, theses, examinations, research data, creative projects, etc.), intentional or unintentional. Plagiarized material may be derived from a variety of sources, such as books, journals, internet postings, student or faculty papers, etc. This includes the purchase or “outsourcing” of written assignments for a course. A detailed definition of plagiarism in research and writing can be found in the fourth edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, pages 26-29.

Academic resources for students

Please bear in mind that the following information may need to be adjusted for the remote learning situation.

Important resources include the *Learning Center* (66 West 12th Street, 6th floor) and the office for *Student Disability Services*. In keeping with the university's policy of providing equal access for students with disabilities, any student with a disability who needs academic accommodations is welcome to meet with the office staff privately. All conversations will be kept confidential. Students requesting any accommodations will also need to contact Student Disability Service (SDS). SDS will conduct an intake and, if appropriate, the Director will provide an academic accommodation notification letter for you to bring to your instructors. At that point, we will review the letter with you and discuss these accommodations in relation to this course. Student Disability Services is located at 63 Fifth Avenue, room 425. The phone number is (212) 229-5626. Students and faculty are expected to review the Student Disability Services webpage. The webpage can be found at <https://www.newschool.edu/student-disability-services/>, and the office is available to answer any questions or concerns.

Comment on course readings

A great deal is listed on the schedule (below) for many of our seminar meetings. Within the readings listed for each week, we will focus on a smaller selection, identified by asterisk. (We may adjust our focus as the semester proceeds.) Any readings listed as “other resources” for specific seminar meetings represent, as the label suggests, further resources for anyone interested in exploring a particular topic more deeply. If you have questions about any of the course materials or requirements, please reach out and talk to us.

Tentative list of seminars and readings

Week One (Jan 21st)—Course Introduction and Biocides, Ecocides, and Extinctions

Readings

- *Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, Chapters 1, 2 and 17 (“A Fable for Tomorrow,” “The Obligation to Endure” and “The Other Road”)
- *Elizabeth Kolbert, “The Sixth Extinction” (*The New Yorker* 2009)
- Orville Schell and Barry Weisberg, “Ecocide in Indochina,” from Barry Weisberg (ed.), *Ecocide in Indochina: The Ecology of War*
- Natasha Lennard, “Ecocide Should Be Recognized as a Crime Against Humanity, but We Can’t Wait for The Hague to Judge,” *The Intercept* 9/24/2019; <https://theintercept.com/2019/09/24/climate-justice-ecocide-humanity-crime/>

Week Two (January 28th)— Introduction to Climate Ethics: The Deep Inadequacies of Present-day Moral Philosophy

During today’s class, you’ll be assigned to groups for response papers

Readings

- *Dale Jamieson, “Ethics, Public Policy, and Global Warming” (1992) in *Climate Ethics*
- *Stephen Gardiner, “Introduction” and Chapter 1 of *A Perfect Moral Storm* (2006)
- Stephen Gardiner, “Introduction” to *Climate Ethics*
- Jason Kawall, “A History of Environmental Ethics” in *The Oxford Handbook*

Week Three (Feb 4th)—The Idea of the Anthropocene (I)

Readings

- *Paul Crutzen, Eugene F. Stoermer, “The Anthropocene”
- *Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History”
- *Andreas Malm, “The Anthropocene Myth”
- *Will Steffen et. al., “The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?” *Ambio* 36/8 (December 2007)
- Jason W. Moore, *The Capitalocene*, Part I: “On the Nature and Origins of the Ecological Crisis”
- Jeremy Davies, “Versions of the Anthropocene” (Chapter 2 of *The Birth of the Anthropocene*)
- Bruce Smith, Melinda Zeder, “The Onset of the Anthropocene” *Anthropocene* 4 (2013)

Other resources

- Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Human Condition in the Anthropocene”

Week Four (Feb 11th)—Respect for Animals (II)

Readings

- *Peter Singer, Chapter 1 of *Animal Liberation*, “All Animals Are Equal...”
- *Cora Diamond, “Eating Meat and Eating People” in *The Realistic Spirit*
- Peter Singer, “Killing Humans and Killing Animals” *Inquiry* 21 (1978)
- Joel Feinberg, “Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations,” in *Philosophy and Environmental Crisis*, William T. Blackstone (ed.).
- Valerie Plumwood, “On Being Prey”

Other resources

Allen Thompson, "Anthropocentrism: Humanity as Peril and Promise", in *The Oxford Handbook*

Week Five (Feb 18th)—Respect for all Life (III)

Readings

*Kevin Goodpaster, "On Being Morally Considerable"

*Paul Taylor, "Environmental Ethics and Human Ethics," Ch.1 of *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*

Clare Palmer, "Living Individuals: Biocentrism in Environmental Ethics", in *The Oxford Handbook*

J. Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair"

J. Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again", from *In Defense of the Land Ethic*

Week Six (Feb 25th)—Respect for Land (IV)

Today in class we will do a brief, anonymous midterm survey

Readings

*Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (complete), with particular attention to the sections "Thinking Like a Mountain" and "The Land Ethic", "Wisconsin" and "Wilderness."

Other resources

J. Baird Callicott, Chapter 1 of *Thinking Like a Planet*, "A Sand County Almanac"

J. Baird Callicott, "How Ecological Collectives are Morally Considerable," *Oxford Handbook*

Week Seven (Mar 4th)—The Value of Species? (I)

Required reading

*Holmes Rolston, Chapter 4 of *Environmental Ethics*: "Life in Jeopardy: Duties to Endangered Species"

*Ronald Sandler, Chapters 3 and 4 of *The Ethics of Species*

Jeremy Bendik-Keymer and Chris Haufe, "Anthropogenic Mass Extinction: the Sciences, the Ethics and the Civics", in *The Oxford Handbook*

Other resources

Ronald Sandler, Chapter 2 of *The Ethics of Species*

Week Eight (Mar 11th)—Future Generations (II)

Readings

*Edward Page (1999), "Intergenerational Justice and Climate Change" *Political Studies* XLVII (1999)

*Janna Thompson, "Identity and Obligation in a Transgenerational Polity" from *Intergeneration Justice*, Axel Gosseries and Lukas H. Meyer (eds.)

*Stephen Gardiner, "A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics and the Problem of Moral Corruption" in *Climate Ethics*

John Nolt, "Future Generations in Environmental Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook*

Other resources

Samuel Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife* Lecture I

March 15-21 Spring Break—NO SEMINAR MEETING

Week Nine (Mar 25th)—Nature Reconsidered: Mastery and Mechanism (III)

Readings

*Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, “The Concept of Enlightenment” and “Excursus I: Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment” from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

Week Ten (Apr 1st)—Nature Reconsidered: Ecofeminism (IV)

Readings

*Carolyn Merchant, *Death of Nature*, Preface 1990, “Introduction,” Chapter 1, “Nature as Female”

*Valerie Plumwood, Chapter 1 of *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*

*Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern*. Ch 1 “Ecology reframes history”

Carolyn Merchant, *Death of Nature*, Chapter 8, “The Mechanical Order”

Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis”

Linda Vance, “Ecofeminism and the Politics of Reality.” In Greta Gaard, *Ecofeminisms*

Ariel Salleh, “From Metabolic Rift to Metabolic Value: Reflections on Environmental Sociology and the Alternative Globalization Movement,” *Organization & Environment* 23/2 (2010): 205-219.

Johanna Oksala, “Feminism, Capitalism, and Ecology,” *Hypatia* 33, 2 (2018): 216–234.

Other resources

Alan Dordoy and Mary Mellor, “Eco-socialism and Feminism: Deep Materialism or the Contradictions of Capitalism,” *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 11,3 (2000): 41–61 (pdf)

Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, Introduction and chapters 1 and 2, in Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen, *The Subsistence Perspective: Beyond the Globalised Economy* (Zed 2000), pp. 1–64.

Mary Mellor, “Ecofeminist Political Economy and the Politics of Money,” in *Eco-Sufficiency and Global Justice: Women Write Political Ecology*, ed. Ariel Salleh (London: Pluto 2009), pp. 251–267

Maria Mies, “The Need for New Vision,” in Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, second edition (London: Zed Books 2014), pp. 297–324

Week Eleven (Apr 8th)—Ecological Marxism (I)

Readings

*John Bellamy Foster, “Marx’s Theory of Metabolic Rift: Classical Foundations for Environmental Sociology,” *AJS* 105, 2 (1999): 366-405 (pdf)

*Jason W. Moore, “Transcending the metabolic rift: a theory of crises in the capitalist world ecology,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38,1 (2011): 1–46 (pdf)

Daniel Bensaïd, “The Torment of Matter,” in Bensaïd, *Marx for our Times: Adventures and Misadventures of a Critique*, tr. Gregory Elliot (Verso), pp. 312–360 (pdf)

James O’Connor, “The Second Contradiction of Capitalism, with an Addendum on the Two Contradictions of Capitalism,” in O’Connor, *Natural Causes: Essays in Ecological Marxism* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), pp. 158-177 (pdf)

John Bellamy Foster, "Capitalism and Ecology: The Nature of the Contradiction," *Monthly Review* 54,4 (2002): 6–16 (pdf)

Martin O'Connor, "On the Misadventures of Capitalist Nature," in *Is Capitalism Sustainable? Political Economy and the Politics of Ecology*, ed. Martin O'Connor (Guilford 1994), pp. 125-151 (pdf)

Week Twelve (Apr 15th)—Facing Gaia (II)

Readings

*Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic*, Lectures 2 & 3

Andreas Malm, Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2 of *Progress of the Storm*.

Week Thirteen—Climate Change and Global Justice: Adaptation, Mitigation, and Prevention (III)

Readings

*Henry Shue (1992), "The Unavoidability of Justice"

*Stephen M Gardiner, "Geoengineering: Ethical Questions for Deliberate Climate Manipulators."

Dale Jamieson, "Adaptation, Mitigation and Justice"

Other resources

Henry Shue (1993), "Subsistence Emissions and Luxury Emissions"

Larry Lohmann, "Financialization, Commodification And Carbon: The Contradictions Of Neoliberal Climate Policy," *Socialist Register* (2012): 85–107

Week Fourteen (Apr 29th)—Climate Change, Global Justice and Responsibility and the Poor (IV)

Readings

*Simon Caney, "Cosmopolitanism, Justice, Responsibility, and Global Climate Change," in *Climate Ethics*

*Gardiner (2011), "Is no one responsible for global environmental tragedy"

*Steve Vanderheiden, "Human Rights and the Environment" from *The Oxford Handbook*
Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "It's not *my* Fault: Global Warming and Individual Obligations,"

Other resources

Ronald Sandler, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: Value, Normativity and Right Action"

Joan Martinez-Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation* (Edward Elgar 2003), Chapters 1 and 4-6

Week Fifteen (May 6th)—Climate Hope and Politics of Liberation

Readings

*Henry Shue, "Climate Hope: Implementing the Exit Strategy"

*Andre Gorz, "Ecology and Freedom," in Gorz, *Ecology as Politics* (South End Press 1980), pp. 11–50

Other Resources

Michael Watts and Richard Peet, "Liberating Political Ecology," in *Liberation Ecologies: Environment Development and Social Movements*, Second edition, ed. Richard Peet and Michael Watts, (Routledge 2004), pp. 3–47

Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic*, Lecture 1

Alyssa Battistoni, "Red Environmentalism: A Low Carbon Socialist Future is Possible,"
Jacobin

Kate Aronoff, Alyssa Battistoni, Daniel Aldana Cohen, Theo Riofrancos, *A Planet to Win:
Why We Need a Green New Deal*

Final papers due before class today