

PHIL 3293: ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Spring, 2014: Environmental Ethics in the Anthropocene

Syllabus

1. General Information

Instructor: Dr. Zev Trachtenberg	T.A.: Ms. Stephanie Nordby
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Meeting Times: T, R: 3:00 - 4:15 PM

Meeting Place: GLCH 130

This class is offered as a Presidential Dream Course. It will include visits from four prominent scholars. Each scholar will give a public lecture, which students in the class are required to attend.

2. Course website

The main website for this class will NOT be on D2L, but rather on a trial system, "Canvas." You can get to the Canvas site by selecting this class in D2L, or, go to the address below, and log in with your 4x4 and password.

<https://ou.instructure.com>

The site will have the day-to-day schedule, course readings and other materials, discussion boards, and grades. You should check the course site regularly.

3. Goals

Environmental Ethics is the branch of Philosophy that examines the moral dimension of human beings' actions regarding the natural environment. It faces a huge challenge, raised by the scientific proposal that the Earth has entered into the "Anthropocene:" a new geological era, in which the main driver of the planet's natural systems is human activity. The idea of the Anthropocene suggests that human societies and the natural world are inextricably interrelated—and Environmental Ethics must view nature in a way that focuses on its interrelationship with society. In turn, that means that Environmental Ethics must rely on both natural and social science, to provide knowledge about the way the complex systems that couple nature and society.

In this class we will learn about approaches taken by four different disciplines (Earth Science, Ecology, Anthropology, Geography) to the Anthropocene,

including the ways they each study human transformations of natural systems. And we will reflect on how coming to see society and its environment as part of a complex system can help or hinder the effort to understand what is right for human beings to do as they inhabit the Anthropocene.

In addition, in this class students will gain experience in using the web as a platform for serious intellectual work. We will search the web for valuable sources of information on the Anthropocene—drawing on papers by scholars, articles by journalists, talks, documentaries, websites, and whatever else can inform our understanding. We will compare sources to evaluate which are the most useful. And students will contribute to the on-line discussion of the Anthropocene by posting to a blog, and by creating an on-line report that links to other web based sources.

4. Readings

The main readings for the class are works by (or chosen by) the visiting scholars. The are available on the Canvas site. In addition, students will read internet sources found by other students, and also other students' blog posts.

5. Course Work

- The work in this class combines individual assignments and group projects.
- Early in the semester I will assign you to a group, with which you will collaborate for the remainder of the term.
- For group work you will receive a percentage of the group grade determined by the amount of work you contributed to group efforts, your attendance at group meetings, and a peer evaluation of your involvement.

Individual work - 76%		Group work - 24%	
Graded		Graded	
Term project	30%	Term project	10%
Final exam	10%		
Initial blog post	5%		
Pass/Fail		Pass/Fail	
Sources (6)	3%	Evaluation of sources (3)	6%
Questions (8)	4%	Revised questions (4)	8%
Blog posts (2)	6%	This table shows the percentage each task contributes to your final grade. The assignments are summarized below.	
Blog comments (6)	3%		
Art paper (1)	2%		
Attendance (lectures/visits)	5%		
Attendance (24 classes)	8%		

Term project

- Individual: Your main work for the class will be a term project which examines the ethical significance of the Anthropocene idea. In your project you will respond to a number of sources you find on the web. Your project will be presented in an electronic format, so that you can include links to those sources.
- Group: Your own project will be part of an “anthology” composed of the projects produced by the members of your group. You will work with your group to coordinate all the “chapters” in the group project. You will have time in class during the last few weeks of the term to work on the group project, but you will also need to meet outside of class to do well on this assignment. During the last week of the semester groups will present their projects to the class.

Final exam

- For the final you will select a project done by one of the other groups, and write a review of it according to criteria I will provide.
- The final exam is scheduled for Friday, May 9, at 4:30 PM.

Sources

- Individual: For the first three of the main units in the course (see the schedule below) you will find and comment on two web-based sources that help you understand the unit readings or general topic.
- Group: In class your group will discuss all of the sources group members found, and evaluate them. Your group will post the set of sources and its evaluation on line.

Questions

- Individual: To prepare for the lectures and the classes taught by the Dream Course visiting scholars, in each of the four main units you will write two questions you would like the scholar to answer. Your questions can reflect the information you have learned from the sources your group has assembled.
- Group: In class your group will review all its members’ questions, and then it will select and revise two to be submitted to the scholar for a response.

Blog posts and comments

- I will set up three blogs for the class to use; you will be assigned to post to one of them. These blogs will be public, so that you will enter into the public discussion of the Anthropocene with your posts.
- At the end of each of the first three units of the class you will write a brief (~300 word) reflection on the unit, in which you indicate what you think is ethically significant in something you have read, or heard from the visiting scholar. You will discuss drafts of your post with your group to get comments you can use to revise what you say before you post it.
- Graded post: You will submit your first post to be graded (on the basis of the quality of your writing, and the extent to which you engage with a source) prior to publishing it on the class blog. You may revise your post in light of my comments before you publish it.

- Ungraded posts: At the end of the second and third units you will again post reflections on what you have read and heard. You will work with your group to revise drafts of your posts prior to publication.
- Comments: For the first three units of the class, after everyone has posted you will write brief comments on posts by two other students—one on your own blog and one on another class blog.

Art paper

- Between the third and fourth units of the class, we will have a week on the way ideas related to the Anthropocene are conveyed in art. We will meet that week (see the schedule) at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, to hear lectures on art, and to look at works in the galleries.
- During that week you will write a brief paper about an art work, following guidelines you will be given.

Attendance

- I will take attendance, you will be unable to do well in the course without attending class. Attendance is particularly important so that you can participate fully in the activities of your group, which will have assignments for parts of many class meetings. Attendance will affect your grade in two ways: as a component of your individual score, and as a factor determining your share of your group's score.
- Because this is a Dream Course, the public lectures and classes taught by the visiting scholars are especially important. Attendance at these events (eight in total) is given extra weight.
- The remainder of your individual attendance score is based on your attending 24 out of the 26 "non-visitor" classes—i.e. you have two "free" absences over the term. HOWEVER, if you are absent for a group activity, that will count against your share of the group score on that activity.
- LATENESS: I will take attendance at the beginning of class, and if you are late you will be counted absent. Please inform me if you must arrive to class late, e.g. if your previous class is a long distance away. Otherwise, I expect you to be present by the beginning of classtime.

6. Classroom environment

Respectful discussion. Discussion is a key part of this course—both in the groups, and among the class as a whole. This means that you are responsible for contributing to your own leaning experience, and to the learning experience of all the other students in the class. The value of open, free discussion is that any student's contribution can play a vital a role in everyone's learning: you never know whose comment will provide the key to your own understanding of the material. For this reason, I will not tolerate any behavior that makes any student feel uncomfortable in his or her learning environment. This includes (but is not limited to) interrupting others, carrying on conversations separate from the class discussion, responding to others in a snide or dismissive way, and making comments that could reasonably be perceived as expressing disrespect based on others' race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, or other characteristic.

Cell phones and computers. You are encouraged to bring a laptop, tablet, or smart phone to class, to look at web based sources we might discuss, and to take notes.

However, electronic devices increase the temptation to try to multi-task during class—in particular on unrelated activities (e.g. Facebook). This typically results in poor work on all the tasks involved, so is self-defeating. More importantly, it is distracting to other students, and disrespectful to whoever is speaking (me, or another student). Therefore, if I notice you using your devices in an inappropriate way (i.e. for purposes not related to the class) I will call you out, and if you do this repeatedly I will lower your attendance score.

I understand that it is important to keep your phone with you. But please set it to ring silently during class. If you must take a call, you may excuse yourself to the hallway.

7. Various policies

Rounding up final grade. I will use my evaluation of the quality of your ungraded work, and of your participation in class discussions, to decide whether or not to round up your final grade if your point total is close to a borderline.

Late work. I will accept late work only at my discretion, and with the option of imposing a substantial grade penalty. Exceptions to this policy will be granted only if arranged in advance (except in case of emergency) on the basis of a substantial and verified hardship (e.g. conflict due to a medical, family, or job-related problem).

Re-writes. I will not accept re-writes of your work.

E-mail. I will send messages regarding the class to your OU e-mail address. You should check this account regularly, or else have mail sent to your OU address forwarded to the account that you use on a daily basis. Your performance in the class may suffer if you miss messages regarding work for the course because you do not check your OU e-mail.

Office hours. If you would like individual help with anything in the course (e.g. making sense of readings, or how to approach the writing assignments) please come to my or the T.A.'s regularly scheduled office hours: you do not need to make an appointment. If the times listed are not convenient for you, we are both very happy to set up special appointments. I am also happy to discuss other any other matters you think I can help you with.

- Please note that I am a Sooner Ally: a resource and support person for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning members of the OU community. You are welcome to approach me with any needs or concerns, and to refer your friends to me. All discussions are completely confidential.

Religious observances. It is the policy of the University to excuse the absences of students that result from religious observances and to provide without penalty for the rescheduling of examinations and additional required classwork that may

fall on religious holidays. If any assignment in this class conflicts with your religious observance, or if you have any questions on this matter, please contact me.

Reasonable accommodation. Any student who has a disability that may prevent him or her from fully demonstrating his or her understanding of the material in this course should contact me personally as soon as possible so we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure your full participation and to facilitate your educational opportunities.

Academic honesty. I will rigorously enforce the University's policies on academic honesty. In written work *you must cite all the sources you consult*. To help identify cases where papers use uncredited sources, written work will be submitted to TurnItIn for plagiarism detection. I will report all cases of academic dishonesty to the Provost's Office.

However, academic honesty does *not* mean you should not make use of ideas you receive from other students—in or out of class. Indeed I urge you to discuss the issues of the course outside of class—but you must do your written work on your own, and must cite any assistance you receive from others. Please ask me if you have any questions about academic honesty in general, or about specific situations that might arise during this course.

8. Note to Philosophy majors

In order to aid in the assessment of its program, the Philosophy Department has a specific requirement for majors in Philosophy and in Ethics and Religion. Majors will be required to assemble a portfolio of written philosophical work--typically papers or exams written for philosophy classes--produced over several semesters. Majors will NOT be graded on their portfolios. Instead, portfolios will be sent, anonymously, to outside readers, to help them evaluate the quality of the Philosophy Department's teaching. Majors will discuss the progress of their portfolios with their advisors.

Your term project for this course will go into your portfolio. I will make use of the on-line document you create—you do not have to submit a separate Portfolio copy of your project.

9. Schedule

This is an initial schedule; further details of class topics and assigned readings will appear in Canvas.

Week of Jan. 13: Introduction to the course

Weeks of Jan. 20, 27, Feb. 3: Unit 1 - Geological perspectives on the Anthropocene

January 29: Michael Ellis lecture (8 PM, Gaylord Hall 1140)

Weeks of Feb. 10, 17, 24: Unit 2 - Ecological perspectives on the Anthropocene

February 19: Michelle Marvier lecture (8 PM, Gaylord Hall 1140)

Weeks of March 3, 10, 24: Unit 3 - Anthropological perspectives on the Anthropocene

March 12: William Balée lecture (8 PM, Gaylord Hall 1140)

Week of March 31: The Anthropocene in Art (meet at Art Museum)

Weeks of April 7, 14, 21: Unit 4 - Geographical perspectives on the Anthropocene

April 16: Diana Liverman lecture (8 PM, Gaylord Hall 1140)

Week of April 28: Presentations of term projects

Friday, May 9, 4:30 PM: Final exam