Ethics and the Environment

STS-360

Section 001	Section 003	Dr. Adam See
KUPF 204	FMH 409	ajs3301@njit.edu
Wed / Fri 1:00 - 2:20	Wed / Fri 10:00 - 11:20	328 Cullimore (by appointment)

This course focuses on an array of questions relevant to environmental and animal ethics, including: what steps are necessary to respond to the climate crisis? What kinds of beings (humans, animals, plants, and ecosystems) have moral worth or morally relevant interests? Should animals have rights? Should we worry about endangered species? If so, why? How should we weigh the interests of our current generation against the interests of future generations? What does sustainable design truly look like? What is Environmental Justice?

All assignments, discussions, and grading will take place on **Canvas** and **Piazza.**

No Required Text. All readings linked below and on Canvas.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

50% PIAZZA POST RECORDS
20% IN CLASS PARTICIPATION
15% MIDTERM
15% QUIZZES

MIDTERM

This class has one in-class midterm (date TBD). The format will be six short-answer questions. Students will be informed of all details within three weeks of the exam.

IN-CLASS PARTICIPATION

Students who are never absent and who speak up often with questions and comments will receive a perfect participation grade. I will update participation grades a few times throughout the semester. Phone use during class will lower participation grades.

Missing Class: If you need to miss class for any reason, you must contact the Office of the Dean of Students and request an **excused absence.** Your absence will be validated once I receive an email from the Dean of Students.

QUIZZES

Expect occasional pop-quizzes (usually one a week). Each quiz contains only one or two questions, designed to be answered in a couple sentences within a 5-7 minute window (you should only need 1-2 minutes, or less than a minute). **Note:** if you are late for class and miss the quiz, your grade will be zero.

PIAZZA PARTICIPATION **(you must sign up here)**

Discussion boards are the most important feature of our class. Each student must make ***at least three*** substantive posts for each forum exercise (submitted via **Piazza**). Since the purpose of this exercise is back-and-forth dialogue, posts should be spread out throughout the week. This course has **4** forum exercises. Take them seriously!

Forum Expectations

- You must make ***at least three substantive posts*** within a seven day period. To receive a high grade, these posts should be somewhat spread out over the week.
- **At least two** of these posts **must be substantive *replies*** to others.
- Your major posts (but not necessarily all of your posts) must be **informed by content from our class readings.**

What is a Substantive Post?

Substantive responses do not have a word limit, but should be generally **300-500 words or longer.** It is very difficult to say anything substantive in less space than that. Use your judgment. These forums are also intended to be big conversations so chat away naturally too! Occasional short responses are strongly encouraged. The tone should always be conversational.

The ultimate point of our forums is to evaluate you on your argumentative skills. If someone says something you disagree with, *respond to them*, get in there! And, if you get responded to, don't just reply like "oh yeah, my bad" -- no, *defend yourself,* or *change your mind*. Regardless of how you approach the forum, I want to see you anticipate strong counter-arguments to your own ideas. And, definitely, I need you to demonstrate familiarity with the assigned material.

How to Start a Great Thread

In Piazza, **always use the "Note" format** rather than the "Question" format.

Your posts are meant to demonstrate that you **(1)** have done the reading, **(2)** have thought closely about some *particular* aspect of the text, and **(3)** that you are willing to discuss the course content with your classmates.

Never just summarize!

I want you to critically analyze the text and engage with the ideas. For inspiration, here's an idea derived from Edward J. Gallagher. One can look at works of philosophy and/or science as if one has "four eyes". Each eye reveals a different perspective, and each one taps into a different level of your own thinking and requires the practice of a different skill. The **"four eyes"** are…

(1) Hypothesize: ask a detailed question and formulate a hypothesis about some element of the reading. Then, hypothesize potential *competing* answers to that question.

(2) Analyze: pick one portion of the text that confuses you and dive deep. What's really going on here? What does this concept really mean? What is the true foundation of this argument?

(3) Synthesize: relate a particular part of this reading to something else we read this semester. Could one idea from somewhere else be *productively* combined with one from this reading?

(4) Criticize: what did you like or not like about a particular part of the reading? Did particular arguments strike you as bad? Why? Create a hypothetical dialogue with a figure from the text.

How to Structure Counter-Argumentation

1) Author X defends idea P in the following way…
2) I disagree with X; P is a weak argument due to the following reasons…
3) The strongest way that author X might *respond to my criticisms* is as follows…
4) Author X's counter-argument would be strong/weak because…

OR:

1) Author X presents argument P in defense of her ideas
2) I find argument P convincing, however it still faces the following issues…
3) The best way that author X might *respond to my criticisms* as follows...
4) Author X's counter-argument would be strong/weak because…

Essentially, think of counter-argumentation in this class as a ***dialogue*** where you engage in a concise 'back-and-forth' with the author/philosopher of the reading. The more engaging the dialogue, the higher your grade will likely be. As a rule of thumb: the stronger you present your opponents arguments, the stronger your *own* position will come across. **High scores are given to students whose responses are nuanced,** *i.e.*, partially critical of *all* sides, including of the strength of one's *own* positions. Be humble!

Citation Format

Every homework assignment and forum post must be professionally cited. For resources cited in the lesson lecture or reading material, the author name in parentheses is sufficient, with page numbers where appropriate. For instance, your essay might read:

> Turing said that the question “can machines think?” was “too meaningless to deserve discussion.” (Winner, 4)

Uploading Your Post Record

After you have completed your participation, copy and paste **all** of your posts from that week (even small ones) into a single document and upload it to the weekly assignment on Canvas with TurnItIn.

To easily collect your posts, **simply search for your own name** in the Piazza search field. Only copy and paste the posts relevant to the current lesson. **Each copied post must have a date and time visible.** Find the time-stamp by hovering your cursor over the section of each post where it says how long ago the post was made.

You can use Canvas to update / resubmit your post record if you decide to post more.

In-Class Technology Policy

Cell phone and laptop use is prohibited during lectures and will lead to a deduction in In-Class Participation points. If you have special circumstances that require you to have your phone out (children, occupation, family issue, etc.) just let me know.

Final grades are calculated on the following scale

- A (90% of total points)
- B+ (87%)
- B (80%)
- C+ (77%)
- C (70%)
- D (50%)
- F (49%)

Grading Policy

Your writing assignments will often be expressions of your own thoughts and beliefs on ethical issues. So I want to be clear that your grade will not depend on whether I agree with you. You are encouraged to think independently and to bring your own values and interests to our discussions. If you disagree with the views being presented or discussed in lecture and readings, you are *encouraged* to respectfully explain why by providing clear reasons and arguments. The grading rubric for this course is designed to be as objective as possible.

Many students struggle with abstract writing assignments, and many students do not have English as their first language. So I also want to be clear that your writing will not be graded on grammar or spelling, unless it makes your writing incomprehensible. The point of this course is not to write the perfect essay or perform extensive high level research. The goal of the course is to introduce you to pressing ethical issues and to provide you with various opportunities for thoughtful philosophical reflection on your *own* prior beliefs.

For this reason, your grade will largely depend on my impression of how seriously you have engaged with the course material in a thoughtful discussion of the issues. Substantive, thoughtful homework will be given more credit than half-baked or last minute homework that are transparent attempts to meet the minimum word count. To do well in class you need to demonstrate that you are thinking critically about the issues, and that you're taking the time to express your thoughts carefully.

Students are expected to attend all lectures, complete all assigned readings, and be active participants in discussions. As this is a philosophy class, much of our time together will be interactive. Missing class weighs *heavily* on your participation grade. Just as regular absences will weigh heavily on a student's final grade, regular and/or provocative contributions to discussion will also be strongly considered as I tally grades at the end of the semester.

Late Policy: Students who fail to hand in an assignment will receive a zero on the assignment. Students who fail to show up for a midterm will fail that exam. **Night-before or day-of excuses are almost never acceptable.** The only excuses that I will accept are those **accompanied by a doctor's note.** Otherwise, late work will be deducted a half-point each day.

Plagiarism: Suspected cases of plagiarism will be given **zero credit** for the assignment and **reported to the Dean** as a violation of the Student Code of Academic Integrity, which carries a maximum penalty of expulsion. Copying and pasting from the web is one form of plagiarism. Failing to provide adequate citations is also a form of plagiarism. **Any suspected ChatGPT use will be reported to the Dean.** If you use any resource in your research (including dictionaries, encyclopedias, and translation tools), ***even if you don't quote it directly***, cite it!

ANY EVIDENCE OF AI WRITTEN WORK (INCL. GRAMMARLY) WILL RECEIVE A ZERO.

AI POLICY

Evidence of **any** use of GPT or AI writing tools (including Grammarly) at **any** stage in the writing process will receive a 0. Canvas's AI detector is highly effective.

If you are unsure whether your essay contains plagiarism, *please just email me.* If you need extra time to complete an assignment, *please just email me.* Do not use AI.

This is a zero tolerance policy.

GRADING RUBRIC (Post Records)

1. OUTPUT / COMMUNITY

3+ (Bonus Point)	**2** (Full Points / Great work)	**1** (Default Grade)	**0.5 / 0**
5+ substantive posts You're a *serious presence* on the forums, but not in a point-grabbing kind of way. Your posts are numerous, spread out, and convey genuine interest in the course-content and our online community. Sometimes you function as an intermediary who clarifies or resolves issues that other students are struggling with.	**~4 substantive posts** Your posts are somewhat spread out over the week. Attempts are genuinely made to reply to those who reply to you. You do not simply agree with others. You either **(1)** disagree with them, **(2)** reveal a potential flaw in their argument, or **(3)** agree with them, but with qualifications, or with a new point of your own.	**3 substantive posts** Your overall output is satisfactory, but feels somewhat rushed in terms of length and content, usually posted all in one session. **At least one post is uploaded within three days of the start of the lesson.**	**Beneath expectations**

2. CLOSE READING / ASSIGNED MATERIALS

4 (Exemplary)	**3** (Close & Focused)	**2** (Surface-level Reading)	**1**
The text is analyzed with the **"FOUR EYES"** method (see syllabus). You demonstrate intellectual humility in the face of challenging material. You raise--and are not afraid to respond to--incisive questions about difficult concepts / arguments.	There is a clear sense of your mind working through hard problems derived from the text. Key terms are defined. Connections are drawn to previous readings.	Posts are either **(1)** not closely related to the readings, or **(2)** focus too much on merely summarizing the content.	**Beneath Expectations**

3. CREATIVITY / CONTENT / CARE

4 (Exemplary)	**3** (Original & Personal)	**2** (Surface-level Analysis)	**1**
Your posts are a real pleasure to read. They are original, creative, and entertaining, *e.g.,* perhaps you construct a ridiculous yet insightful thought experiment. The strongest possible counter-arguments are constructed and considered.	You make an attempt to say something new or insightful about the text. Perhaps you evoke your own experiences. You start your own threads, do research, and aim to be a nuanced thinker by considering counter-arguments to your own views.	Posts are satisfactory in terms of content, but generally adopt an uncritical or non-nuanced perspective on the subject. Little-to-no attempt is made to entertain countervailing perspectives or to provide creative counter-arguments of your own design.	**Beneath Expectations**

Total: 10 pts (w/ option for +1 bonus)

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Identify a wide variety of issues in environmental ethics, animal ethics, conservation biology, climate science, sustainability, evolutionary biology, and politics of energy consumption.
- Evaluate the broader societal and environmental impacts of human activity on the lives and welfare of human and non-human species.
- Develop critical skills at argumentation and counter-argumentation, particularly with respect to fostering intellectual humility in the face of disagreement with others.
- Develop informed political positions on critical environmental issues.

SYLLABUS

1 // What is Ethics?

Schmidtz and Willott, "The Last Man and the Search for Objective Value"
James Rachels, "Subjectivism in Ethics"

2 // Does Moral Progress Exist? (PIAZZA LESSON)

Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle* (Ch.4: Reason)
Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic"
Christopher Stone, "Should Trees Have Standing?"
Eric Katz, Is there a Place for Animals in the Moral Consideration of Nature (recommended)

3 // Do Plants Have Minds?

Amanda Gettler, What Plants are Saying About Us
Umberto Castellio, "Reclaiming Plants in Comparative Psychology"
Florianne Koechlin, Tomatoes talk, birch trees learn – Do plants have dignity?
Suzanne Simard, Mother Trees and the Social Forest (recommended)
Lincoln Taiz, Plants Neither Possess Nor Require Consciousness (recommended)
Brainless slime mold grows in pattern like Tokyo's subway system (recommended)

4 // How Defensible is Human Exceptionalism? (PIAZZA LESSON)

Paul Taylor, "The Ethics of Respect for Nature"
Peter Singer, "All Animals are Equal"
Gruen, *Ethics and Animals,* 40-41 [feminist ethics], 68-80 [vexed comparisons]
Gruen, *Ethics and Animals,* 194-197 [conflict between animals], 56-58 [Hierarchies]
Tom Regan, "How to Worry about Endangered Species" (359-363)
Shayla Love, Do Insects Feel Pain?
Carol Adams, The Sexual Politics of Meat (recommended)
Mikhalevich and Powell, Minds without Spines: Evolutionarily Inclusive Ethics (recommended)

MIDTERM

5 // Animal Agriculture

Lori Gruen, "Eating Animals" (Ch. 3 of *Ethics and Animals [2nd Ed]*)
Lori Gruen, "Dilemmas of Captivity" (Ch. 5 of *Ethics and Animals [2nd Ed]*) (140-156)
Wayne Hsiung, Does a Humane Farm Even Exist?
Andras Fogacs, Leather and Meat Without Killing Animals
From Science Fiction to Reality: No Kill Meat

6 // Politics, Geoengineering, and the Climate Crisis

Geoengineering May Be the Answer to Climate Change
David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth* (Selections)

Required Mini-Chapters: Heat Death, Hunger, Plagues of Warming

Recommended: Disasters No Longer Natural, Economic Collapse

7 // Protection, Rights, and Activism (PIAZZA LESSON)

Lori Gruen, "Action for Animals" (Ch. 7 of *Ethics and Animals 2nd Ed.*) (207–216)
Marina Bolotnikova, "Activists Acquitted in Trial for Taking Piglets from Smithfield" [2]
Steven Wise, "Chimps have feelings and thoughts. They should have rights"
Steven Best and Anthony Nocella, Behind the Mask (recommended)

8 // Environmental Racism and Injustice

Figueroa and Mills, "Environmental Justice"
Hudson and Hudson, "Removing the Veil" (only pages 413-419)
"A Quarter of Humanity Faces Looming Water Crises" (recommended)

9 // Sustainable Design and Future Generations (PIAZZA LESSON)

McDonough and Braungart, *Cradle to Cradle* ("Waste Equals Food")
Wendell Berry, Think Little
Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, Be Tenacious on Behalf of Life on Earth

NO FINAL EXAM