

# Climate Change: Politics, Policy, and Political Theory

Instructor: Ross Mittiga  
Office: TBD  
Office Hours: TBD  
Email: rmittiga@virignia.edu

\*\*\*

Principle 21 of the Rio Declaration: “The creativity, ideals and courage of the youth of the world should be mobilized to forge a global partnership in order to achieve sustainable development and ensure a better future for all.”

Principle 19 of the Stockholm Declaration: “Education in environmental matters, for the younger generation as well as adults...is essential in order to broaden the basis for an enlightened opinion and responsible conduct by individuals, enterprises and communities in protecting and improving the environment in its full human dimension.”

This course begins with a brief overview of the science and economics of climate change, and the history of climate policy. From this staging ground, we examine climate change through three normative frameworks: precaution, intergenerational justice, and global justice. Finally, we apply these frameworks to think through several important climate policies and proposals, including the deployment of “climate engineering” technologies, the maintenance of global carbon sinks, and the hosting of climate refugees.

## 1. Required Texts

*Climate Ethics: Essential Readings*. Ed. Stephen M. Gardiner, et al. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Steve Vanderheiden, *Atmospheric Justice: A Political Theory of Climate Change*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

Eric A. Posner and David Weisbach, *Climate Change Justice*. Princeton University Press, 2010.

\*\*All other material will be posted online.

## **2. Rules and Requirements**

### **Attendance**

Attendance at all classes and sections is a requirement of the course. Persistent unexplained absences constitute grounds for failing the class, regardless performance in other course requirements.

### **Participation**

The more students actively participate in class discussion, the better. I encourage questions and discussion during all meetings. Participation will count in my assessment of your final grade.

### **Laptops and portable electronic devices**

Texting, browsing, emailing, etc., during class are distracting to you and others, and so I respectfully ask that all laptops, phones, and other electronic devices be switched off and stowed away during class. Students are likely to retain more of the information covered in class if they take handwritten notes, so I encourage bringing a notebook and pen.

### **Readings/Viewings**

Students are expected to complete the reading and viewing assignments in accordance with the schedule. If you have trouble understanding what you have read or watched, don't be shy about visiting office hours for help. Learning to navigate through complex material is one of the most valuable skills a college degree can impart and I am happy to offer pointers on how best to develop that skill.

### **Academic Integrity**

Students must comply with all provisions of the honor code. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are surprisingly easy to detect and very easy to avoid. Collaboration on tests and quizzes is strictly forbidden.

## **3. Grading Policies**

### **Grade breakdown**

- In-class Participation = 10%
- Quizzes = 22%
- Segment Tests = 48% (12% each)
- Final Project = 20%

### **Late work**

Requests for extensions must be received in writing, by email, at least one week prior to the deadline. No extensions will be granted after that date. To request an extension, please send an email to me. Outside of approved extensions, late work will be penalized at a rate of a third of a grade per 24-hour period. These penalties may be waived in cases of documented emergency. NB: Loss of data (e.g., due

to computer problems) will *not* count as an emergency. It is your responsibility to ensure that your work is backed up.

### **Grading procedures**

Every effort will be made to return graded assignments within one week of submission. Students who wish to query their grades can submit a written grade appeal beginning five days after the assignment is returned. Students should understand, however, that grades may be adjusted up or down upon review.

### **Grade explanation**

Here is a rough guide to interpreting the grades assigned to work in the class:

- A grade of A, in any flavor, signifies (varying degrees of) excellence: to earn a grade in this region, students must show genuine insight into (as opposed to a basic grasp of) the material, and successfully develop cogent, convincing and original responses to it.
- A grade of B+ signifies superior command of the course material: to earn it, students must show a good understanding of the leading arguments covered in the course, and demonstrate the ability to assess them critically on their own terms without necessarily achieving responses to them that are fully cogent or convincing.
- A grade of B signifies good performance: students receiving this grade will have shown a firm understanding of the course material and made plausible, if not fully developed, critical responses to it.
- A grade of B- indicates solid performance: B- work shows a decent basic understanding of the leading ideas covered in the course nonetheless marred by (e.g.) unclear or vague writing, omissions of relevant ideas, ambiguous formulations, conceptual muddle, or unsophisticated argumentation.
- C grades indicate performance of mixed quality: in work receiving C grades competence, understanding and insight will sit alongside error, misunderstanding, cliché, simplification and confusion.
- A grade of D, in any flavor, indicates work that is in some respect (and in varying degrees) radically inadequate: such grades are symptoms of (e.g.) unfamiliarity with, failure to understand, or half-hearted engagement with, the course materials.

## 4. Schedule

### Part 1. Introduction

- “Before the Flood” [documentary]
- Posner and Weisbach, chapters 1 and 2
- Vanderheiden, chapter 1
- Nicholas Stern, “The Economics of Climate Change,” in CE
- Cinnamon Carlarne, Kevin R. Gray, and Richard Tarasofsky, “International Climate Change Law,” *The Oxford Handbook of International Climate Change Law*.
- Stephen Gardiner, “Ethics and Global Climate Change,” in CE
- Melissa Lane, “Political Theory and Climate Change”

### Part 2. Precautionary Principles

- Jonathan B. Wiener, “Precaution and Climate Change,” in *The Oxford Handbook of International Climate Change Law*. Ed. Cinnamon P. Carlarne, Kevin R. Gray and Richard Tarasofsky. New York: Oxford University Press (2016): 163-184.
- Gardiner, “A Core Precautionary Principle,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* (2006), Vol. 14(1), 33–60.
- Cass R. Sunstein, “Irreversible and Catastrophic,” *Cornell Law Review* 91 (2006)
- Shue, “Deadly Delays, Saving Opportunities: Creating a More Dangerous World?,” in CE
- Caney, “Climate Change and the Future: Discounting for Time, Wealth, and Risk,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* (2009), Vol. 40, No. 2, 163-186. [\*\*only read section 3\*\*]

### Part 3. Intergenerational Justice

- Brian Barry, “Sustainability and Intergenerational Justice,” in Andrew Dobson, ed., *Fairness and Futurity: Essays on Environmental Sustainability and Social Justice*, Oxford University Press.
- Vanderheiden, chapter 4
- Derek Parfit, “Energy Policy and the Further Future: The Identity Problem” in CE
- Ed Page, “Intergenerational Justice and Climate Change,” *Political Studies* (1999), XLVII, 53–66
- Posner and Weisbach, chapter 7

### Part 4. Global Justice

- Vanderheiden, chapter 3
- Caney, “Just Emissions,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (2012), Vol. 40(4), 255–300.
- Henry Shue, “Subsistence Emissions and Luxury Emissions,” in CE
- Peter Singer, “One Atmosphere,” in CE
- Dale Jamieson, “Adaptation, Mitigation, and Justice” in CE
- Posner and Weisbach, chapter 8

- Mathias Frisch, “Climate Change Justice,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (2012), Vol. 40(3), 225-253.

## Part 5. Emerging Issues

### *Emissions Permits*

- Bob Goodin, “Selling Environmental Indulgences”
- Michael Sandel, “It’s Immoral to Buy the Right to Pollute” and “Tradable Pollution Permits”

### *Climate Refugees*

- Robin Eckersley, “The common but differentiated responsibilities of states to assist and receive ‘climate refugees,’” *European Journal of Political Theory* 14.4 (2015): 481-500

### *Carbon Sinks*

- Chris Armstrong, “Fairness, free-riding and rainforest protection,” *Political Theory* 44(1), 106-130.
- Page, “Qui bono? Justice in the Distribution of the Benefits and Burdens of Avoided Deforestation,” *Res Publica* 22 (2016): 83–97
- Megan Blomfield, “Historical Use of the Climate Sink,” *Res Publica* 22 (2016): 67-81

### *Geoengineering*

- Jamieson, “Some Whats, Whys and Worries of Geoengineering,” *Climatic Change* (2016)
- Gardiner, “The Desperation Argument for Geo-engineering”
- Clare Heyward, “Situating and Abandoning Geo-engineering: A Typology of Five Responses to Dangerous Climate Change”
- Megan Blomfield, “Geoengineering in a climate of uncertainty,” in *Climate Change and Justice*, Cambridge University Press
- Selections from *Climate Change Geoengineering: Philosophical Perspectives, Legal Issues, and Governance Frameworks*, Wil C. G. Burns and Andrew L. Strauss, eds., 2013, Cambridge University Press.

### *Discounting*

- Simon Caney, “Climate Change and the Future: Discounting for Time, Wealth, and Risk,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* (2009), 40 (2), 163–86.
- Dale Jamieson, “The Limits of Economics,” *Reason in a Dark Time*
- Simon Caney, “Climate change, intergenerational equity and the social discount rate,” *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*, 2014, Vol. 13(4) 320–342
- Tyler Cowen and Derek Parfit, “Against the Social Discount Rate”
- Joseph Heath, “Justifying a Positive Social Time Preference,” *Journal of Moral Philosophy*

## 5. Assignments

### Tests

- Conducted at the end of parts 1, 2, 3, and 4
- 5 questions long (responses should not exceed 400 words each)

### Quizzes

- Conducted at random, but at least once a week
- 2-3 questions long (responses should be approximately 3-5 sentences each)
- Graded on a scale of 1-10
- Only the top 11 (out of 15) count

### Part 5 Paper

Write a paper 2,500 to 3,000 words in length on one of the emerging issues (e.g., “*Carbon Sinks*” or “*Geoengineering*”), structured as follows:

- Introduce a claim relevant to that module that you propose to defend (e.g., “Under ‘x’ conditions, geoengineering is morally permissible”)
- Three to four paragraphs outlining some of the strongest reasons to reject the view you are defending.
- Three to four paragraphs rebutting those objections.
- Conclude the paper by explaining whether or not you still accept the view you have defended. If so, explain why; if not, why not.

A strong paper will engage deeply with the relevant literature, and offer sophisticated and thoughtful argumentation.