

# PLPT 3500

## Environmental Political Theory

Spring 2018

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 2 – 3:15pm

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 offers a four-part introduction to important issues and themes in environmental politics. Part one examines works in “deep ecology” and religious environmental thought, including short pieces by Wendell Berry, Aldo Leopold, EF Schumacher, and Pope Francis. Part two approaches global climate change as a problem of justice; we consider whether there is a moral obligation to take action against it and, if so, on whom the obligation falls. Part three raises questions about the moral and political status of nonhuman animals by examining arguments by Peter Singer, Bernard Williams, and Will Kymlicka, among others. Part four examines the justifications and moral limits of environmental activism by closely considering local, national, and global examples of civil disobedience.

## **1. Course Materials**

Students must purchase *Climate Ethics: Essential Readings* (eds. Gardiner, Caney, Shue, Jamieson), or plan to read the book on course reserve at Clemon's Library. All other readings and films will be available to download or watch on the course COLLAB site.

## **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.

### **Recording devices**

Audio and video recording devices are prohibited in the classroom unless required for accessibility purposes. This is to create a safe space where students can feel comfortable expressing their opinions in class without the possibility of their contribution to class being reproduced and replayed without their consent.

### **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 UVa 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%
- Pop Quizzes = 25%
- Mid-term and Final = 50% (25% each)
- Activism Project = 15%

#### Late work

There are very few assignments that have deadlines. For those that do, 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. NOTE: Loss of data (e.g., due to computer problems) does *not* count as an emergency. It is your responsibility to ensure that your work is backed up.

#### Appealing Grades

Any student who feels that their assigned grade does not reflect his or her performance on an assignment can appeal the grade. All appeals must be submitted to the instructor in writing, in the form of a one-page document that clearly explains why you believe that the assigned grade does not reflect your performance. I ask that petitioners wait at least *five days* after the grade is announced before submitting their appeals. All appeals must be submitted no later than two weeks after the grade is announced. Also note 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 just 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 a B 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: work receiving this grade will display a decent understanding of the basic ideas covered in the course, though may nonetheless be 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 such work, 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

### 4.1. Ecocentrism, Biocentrism, and the Roots of Contemporary Ecological Thinking

1/17

- Introductions and syllabus overview

1/22 Exploiting the Environment

- Wendell Berry, “The Unsettling of America,” *The Unsettling of America*
- Wendell Berry, “The Agrarian Standard”
- RECOMMENDED: Donald Worster, “The Empire of Reason,” *Nature’s Economy*

1/24 Cultivating a Land Ethic

- Aldo Leopold, “Foreword,” “The Land Ethic,” and “Thinking Like a Mountain,” *A Sand County Almanac* (1948)
- “What if nature, like corporations, had the rights of a person?” Guardian Article
- RECOMMENDED: Dale Jamieson, *Ethics and the Environment*, pp. 68-75, 145-180

1/29 Religion and the Environment

- Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, paragraphs 1-2, 9, 11, 18-19, 21-22, 30, 32-4, 36, 48, 52, 53-7, 59-61, 66-8, 70, 75, 78, 92-3, 101-116, 123, 128, 196
- Schumacher, “Buddhist economics,” *Small is Beautiful*

1/31 Human Vulnerability

- Zadie Smith, “Elegy for a Country’s Seasons”
- Val Plumwood, “Surviving a Crocodile Attack”

### 4.2. Justice, Precaution, and Climate Change

2/5 Overview

- *Before the Flood* documentary
- Stephen M. Gardiner, “Ethics and Global Climate Change,” CE
- RECOMMENDED: David Weisbach and Eric Posner, “Ethically Relevant Facts and Predictions,” and “Policy Instruments,” *Climate Change Justice*; Cinnamon Carlarne, Kevin R. Gray, and Richard Tarasofsky, “International Climate Change Law,” *The Oxford Handbook of International Climate Change Law*.

## 2/7 International Justice

- Stephen M. Gardiner, “Ethics and Global Climate Change,” CE
- RECOMMENDED: Peter Singer, “One Atmosphere,” CE; Henry Shue, “Subsistence Emissions and Luxury Emissions,” *Law & Policy*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1993.  
(There are many other articles on climate change and global justice; please see me for suggestions.)

## 2/12 Precaution

- World Scientists’ Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice (<https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/bix125>)
- Henry Shue, “Deadly Delays, Saving Opportunities,” in CE
- RECOMMENDED: Jonathan Weiner, “Precaution,” *The Oxford Handbook of International Climate Change Law*; Stephen Gardiner, “A Core Precautionary Principle,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy*: Vol. 14, No. 1, 2006, pp. 33–60; Cass R. Sunstein, “Irreversible and Catastrophic,” *Cornell Law Review*.

## 2/14 Intergenerational Justice

- Steve Vanderheiden, “Climate Change and Intergenerational Justice,” in *Atmospheric Justice*
- David Wallace-Wells, “[The Uninhabitable Earth](#),” *New York Magazine*
- RECOMMENDED: Brian Barry, “Sustainability and Intergenerational Justice,” *Fairness and Futurity* (ed. Andrew Dobson); Simon Caney, “Climate Change and the Future: Discounting for Time, Wealth, and Risk,” *Journal of Social Philosophy*, Vol. 40 No. 2, 2009, pp. 163–186. [ADD LIT ON NON-IDENTITY PROBLEM]  
(Again, I’d be happy to provide additional suggestions—there’s a *ton* of literature on climate change and intergenerational justice.)

## 2/19 Pressing Issues: Climate Refugees

- Robin Eekersley, “The common but differentiated responsibilities of states to assist and receive ‘climate refugees,’” *European Journal of Political Theory*, 2015, Vol. 14(4), pp. 481–500
- <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/nov/02/climate-change-will-create-worlds-biggest-refugee-crisis>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/03/us/resettling-the-first-american-climate-refugees.html>

## 2/21 Pressing Issues: Geo-engineering

- Dale Jamieson, “Some whats, whys, and worries about geo-engineering”
- Stephen Gardiner, “The Desperation Argument for Geo-engineering”
- RECOMMENDED: Clare Heyward, “Situating and Abandoning Geo-engineering: A Typology of Five Responses to Dangerous Climate Change”  
(There’s a lot of new literature on geo-engineering; see me if you’re interested.)

## 2/26 Critical perspectives I

- Dale Jamieson “Ethics, Public Policy, and Global Warming” in CE
- *Conspiracy* documentary
- RECOMMENDED: Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses”

2/28 Critical perspectives II

- Naomi Klein, “Introduction,” *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate*

\*\*\*MIDTERM DUE ON FRIDAY 3/2\*\*\*

3/5 and 3/7 [NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK]

### 4.3. Politics and Animals

3/12

- Tim Flannery, “The Amazing Inner Lives of Animals,” *The New York Review of Books*
- “Chinese City Defends Dog Meat Festival, Despite Scorn,” [New York Times Article](#)
- “Indian Muslim accused of beef smuggling beaten to death,” [The Guardian Article](#)
- Peter Singer and Karen Dawn, “Harambe the Gorilla dies, meat-eaters grieve,” [LA Times article](#)
- Kwame Anthony Appiah, “What will future generations condemn us for?,” [Washington Post op-ed](#)

3/14 Speciesism

- Yuval Noah Harari, “Industrial farming is one of the worst crimes in history,” [The Guardian](#)
- Peter Singer, “Preface to 1975 edition,” *Animal Liberation*
- Peter Singer, Chapter 1: “All Animals Are Equal,” *Animal Liberation*
- Peter Singer, “Open the Cages!” in *The New York Review of Books*

3/19 Contra-Singer I

- Steven Davis, “The Least Harm Principle,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 16, 2003: pp. 387–394.

3/21 Contra-Singer II

- Cora Diamond, “Eating Animals, Eating People,” *Philosophy*, Vol. 53, No. 206, 1978: pp. 465-479.
- RECOMMENDED: Bernard Williams, “The Human Prejudice,” *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline*.

3/26 Animal Rights I

- Robert Nozick, “Animals and Constraints” in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*
- John Connor Cleveland, “Why Animal Welfare Is A Conservative Cause,” [National Review](#)
- RECOMMENDED: Matthew Scully, “Unthinkable Today, Obvious Tomorrow: The Moral Case for the Abolition of Cruelty to Animals,” [National Review](#)

3/28 [NO CLASS – WPSA Conference]

4/2 Animal Rights II

- Will Kymlicka, “Animal Rights, Multiculturalism, and the Left” [PDF on collab or [lecture version](#)]
- Edward O. Wilson, “The 8 Million Species We Don’t Know,” [The New York Times](#).

4/4 Zoos

- Jamieson, “Against Zoos”
- *Blackfish* documentary

4/9 Critical Perspectives I

- Franz Kafka, “A Report to an Academy”
- J.M. Coetzee, “The Philosophers and the Animals,” in *Elizabeth Costello*
- “Meat and the H-word” [Current Affairs article](#)
- RECOMMENDED: David Foster Wallace, “Consider the Lobster”; Frans de Waal, *Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?*

4/11 Critical Perspectives II

- *Carnage: Swallowing the Past* [watch in class]
- RECOMMENDED: Carole Adams, “The Sexual Politics of Meat”

#### 4.4. Environmental Activism and Civil Disobedience

4/16 [CLASS CANCELLED]

4/18 Justifying Civil Disobedience / A Brief History of Environmental Activism

- MLK, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”
- Peter Singer, Preface to 1990 edition in *Animal Liberation*
- *Fierce Green Fire* documentary
- RECOMMENDED: Hugo Bedau, “On Civil Disobedience,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 58, No. 21, 1961: pp. 653-665.

4/23 Working Inside and Outside the System

- I.M. Young, “Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy”
- Michelle Nijhuis, “I’m Just More Afraid of Climate Change Than I Am of Prison,” [NY Times](#).
- RECOMMENDED: *If A Tree Falls* documentary
- RECOMMENDED: (only read to p.404) Carol Booth, “Bystanding and Climate Change,” *Environmental Values*, Vol. 21 (2012).

4/25

- Guest presentations [details TBA]

4/30 What’s Unique about Environmental Activism?

- Tim DeChristopher [speech](#)
- “I shut down an oil pipeline – because climate change is a ticking bomb,” [Guardian Article](#)
- *Disobedience*, [short documentary](#)
- RECOMMENDED: *Bidder 70* documentary

**\*\*\*FINAL EXAM DUE ON WEDNESDAY, 5/2\*\*\***

## 5. Assignments

### Pop Quizzes

- 2-3 questions (responses should not exceed 5 sentences each)
- 12 all semester; only the top 10 count

### Mid-term and Final Exam

- 3 questions each
- Take at home, submit to collab
- Open-book/open-note, but no collaboration!

### Segment 4 Activism Project

- Proposal due 4/11
- Final report due 5/4

## 6. Extra Credit Opportunities

### Cultivating a Green Thumb

If your seed sprouts and the sprout survives by:

- the end of segment 2, you will receive 1 extra point on the midterm;
- the end of segment 3, you will receive an additional 2 points on the midterm;
- the end of segment 4, you will receive 3 extra points on the final exam.

### Letter Writing

Write a respectful letter contesting some event, action, statement, or practice, planned or recently undertaken by any person or entity affiliated with UVa, Charlottesville (including local businesses and Charlottesville's City Council), or the state of Virginia, that will negatively impact the natural environment. Provide me a copy of the letter after (e)mailing it and receive extra credit equivalent to 2 points on your lowest pop quiz score. Must be longer than 300 words. Can be done twice.

### IPCC Report

Read the executive summary of the most recent IPCC report (posted on collab). Identify an issue or claim that you find surprising and/or interesting. Write 2-3 paragraphs describing that issue in layperson's terms—i.e., as if you were explaining it to someone with no special knowledge of climate change—and receive 2 extra points on your midterm. Must be done before segment 3 begins.

### Films

Write a 200-300 word response to any of the following films or documentaries and receive extra credit equivalent to 1 point on your lowest pop quiz score. Responses should not simply summarize films, but work

to connect them up with course readings and themes. Note that the response must be completed before the end of the segment to which the film corresponds.

#### *Segment 2*

- How to Let Go of the World and Love All of the Things That Climate Can't Change
- Gasland
- Chasing Ice
- Chasing Coral
- Tomorrow (Demain)
- Inconvenient Sequel
- Climate Refugees (2010)

#### *Segment 3*

- The Cove
- Okja
- Never Let Me Go
- Food, Inc.
- Vegucated

#### *Segment 4*

- Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock
- The East
- Night Moves
- If A Tree Falls
- Bidder 70

**\*\*Additional extra credit opportunities will be made available throughout the semester.**

## **7. Omitted Topics**

Unfortunately, there are many areas of environmental politics and political theory that we will be unable to cover deeply, if at all, in this course—including, e.g., eco-feminism, environmental racism, energy justice, population issues, eco-citizenship, sustainability, eco-socialism, personal responsibility, and future discounting. Should you be interested in pursuing research in one or more of these areas, please let me know—I would be very happy to recommend readings.

## 8. Climate Change News Sources

For those who are interested in staying abreast of climate change news, I would recommend subscribing to the following newsletters and websites:

- [Inside Climate News](#)
- [Carbon Brief](#)
- [Climate Nexus Energy Desk](#)
- [Unearthed](#)
- [Climate News Network](#)
- [CoalWire](#)