

Environmental Philosophy

PHIL 20603 02

T/Th 2:00–3:15

246 DeBartolo

Peter Finocchiaro

pfinocch@nd.edu

<https://sites.google.com/site/peterwfinocchiaro/home/teaching/environmentalphilosophy>

Office: 300 Malloy

Office Hours: T 3:30–4:45 & W 2:00–3:15

Course Description: Imagine you are a member of a city council faced with a decision. Currently, there is a large track of land on the outskirts of the city limits. A company has offered to buy the land from the city to turn into a golfing facility. A group of community activists wants to retain the land for public access and conservation. The city would financially benefit from the sale. Local wildlife would benefit from conservation. The proposed golf facility would create new jobs. But it would also prevent future generations from freely accessing the preserved land. How do you vote?

In this course, we will confront dilemmas concerning our engagement with the environment. To do so, we will anchor ourselves around contemporary “case studies” (for example, the Paris Agreement on climate change). The primary goal of the course is to develop our ability to competently explain our positions on the case studies, as well as on related issues in environmental philosophy. To meet this goal, we will first identify the relevant philosophical issues at stake. We will then familiarize ourselves with the philosophical concepts necessary to understand these issues. Finally, we will synthesize all of this material to justify our own conclusions about what we ought to do and why we ought to do it.

Texts: There is no textbook for this class, nor is there a set reading list. For each case study, we will – as a class – determine what sort of material we would benefit from consuming. I will then generate a short “reading list” for that case study. Unless otherwise noted, I expect you to have worked through this material enough so as to constructively discuss it in class.

Grade Distribution:

Participation	25%
Podcasts	30%
Paper	40%
Salon	5%

Letter Grade Distribution: In this course I will use the following scale:

>= 93.00	A	73.00 - 76.99	C
90.00 - 92.99	A-	70.00 - 72.99	C-
87.00 - 89.99	B+	67.00 - 69.99	D+
83.00 - 86.99	B	63.00 - 66.99	D
80.00 - 82.99	B-	60.00 - 62.99	D-
77.00 - 79.99	C+	<= 59.99	F

Honor Code:

Students are responsible for compliance with the University's honor code at all times. Notre Dame has extensive guidelines on the honor code. Additionally, the philosophy department has a document explaining how Notre Dame's honor code applies to writing philosophy papers. Links to both of these can be found on the course website.

I take academic integrity very seriously. Cheating of any kind will be reported, will result in a failing grade on the assignment, and might lead to even stronger penalties. Any particular questions about the honor code should be directed to me.

Accessibility:

Notre Dame and I are committed to making this course accessible to all students. Students who have (or think they may have) a disability, or who have questions about disability, are invited to talk to me or to contact the Office of Disability Services for a confidential discussion in the Sara Bea Learning Center for Students with Disabilities, or by phone at 574-631-7157. All information given to Disability Services is confidential and is shared only with your consent. Students who believe they may need an accommodation for this course should contact the Office of Disability Services at their earliest opportunity to ensure there is time to complete the process before accommodations are actually needed. Additional information about Disability Services and the process for requesting accommodations can be found at disabilityservices.nd.edu.

Further, there are other support services available on campus. I especially encourage students to take advantage of the Writing Center.

Assignments:

Attendance: It is impossible for a student to participate if she does not attend class. It is also difficult to learn the material without attending and participating. Students who have more than two unexcused absence will have points deducted from their overall grade.

In part to assist me in tracking attendance, students will write small reflections at the end of most class sessions. In these reflections, students will answer two questions: (1) what was the most memorable thing you learned today? (2) what are you still confused about or would like to hear more on? I will use these reflections to guide future class sessions.

Participation: Philosophy is an activity that we do, and active participation in philosophy is the best way to learn to do philosophy. Each student is expected to interact with me and with other students inside and outside of class. It's important to note, though, that active participation is more than just being vocal; it requires carefully thinking through issues and engaging with peers, often by listening to, supporting, clarifying, or justifying their comments. Doing philosophy is not just about expressing your own ideas, but is just as much about engaging with the ideas of others. Metaphorically speaking, the ideal philosophical discussion is less like a tennis match and more like a volleyball game.

To develop these oft-neglected skills, students will work in a changing arrangement of groups throughout the semester. These groups will be the main source of accountability for a student's participation grade.

Podcasts: For each case study, students will collaborate with their groups to produce 10 minutes of philosophical conversation. These conversations will be recorded, sent to me, and graded on the extent to which they demonstrate (i) mastery of the material discussed, (ii) ability to prioritize material, and (iii) skill in active participation. Students will be guided through the first of these podcasts.

Paper: Students will write one paper (≈ 8 pages) for this course on a topic of their choice. In these papers, students will present a case study and defend their position. We will treat the writing of this paper as a weeks-long project and not as an overnight binge. Accordingly, students are expected to meet with me one-on-one to discuss their topic. Altogether this assignment is worth 30% of students' overall grade.

The paper will be due the day after the final exam date, **Thursday, May 11**, by **11:59PM EST**. We will spend time in class discussing how to write these papers. Late papers will be deducted two-thirds of a grade for each day late (A to B+, B+ to B-, etc.).

Salon: In lieu of a final exam, we will have a "salon" session. Each student will be required to make a poster (broadly construed) presenting the case study of their paper. During the final exam period, students will be divided into two halves. These halves will alternate between presenting and mingling. Students will be graded on the extent to which they demonstrate (in both phases of the salon) mastery of the material covered and creativity in how that material is conveyed.

Material:

Here are the case studies we will be covering over the course of the semester:

Whole Foods	The Potawatomi Zoo
Fracking in Upstate New York	Dakota Access Pipeline
China's One-Child Policy	Urban Outfitters
Paris Agreement on Climate Change	Elbel for Everyone