

PHIL 2500

Environment and Society

University of North Texas | Spring 2026

INSTRUCTOR:

Muhammad Jalil Arif

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Office Hours: Online/in-Person, By Appointment

CLASS SCHEDULE

- 2500.004 Tue-Thurs 11:00AM to 12:20PM - Lang 318

COURSE OVERVIEW

Questions about the environment and society cut to the heart of perennial philosophical concerns: the nature of human beings, our place in the world, and the ethical frameworks that guide our choices. In the modern age, these questions take on new urgency as industrialization, technological innovation, and ecological degradation force us to rethink the boundaries between humans, nature, and machines.

In the late 19th and 20th centuries, philosophical reflection on nature was transformed by recognition of the growing human impact on the environment. In the post–World War II era, these reflections expanded into organized movements, producing both the field of environmental ethics and new interdisciplinary conversations around science, technology, and society. This course situates students at the intersection of these developments. We will explore the evolving dialogue between environmental philosophy, ethics of technology, and broader cultural debates about human responsibility in shaping our shared world.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Understand the major philosophical approaches to environmental problems.
- Critically assess the ethical and philosophical dimensions of technological innovation in ecological context.
- Explore the entangled relationships of culture, science, and nature.
- Develop skills to evaluate contemporary debates about climate change, biodiversity, biotechnology, and sustainability.
- Reflect on their own responsibilities as participants in shaping the future of environment and society.

LAPTOPS/COMPUTERS/HEADPHONES:

Due to the tendency of students to use laptops for purposes outside of classwork, laptops will not be allowed in class (permissible only on legitimate request). All material from the textbook that you will need to refer to will be provided by me, either through projection of the material in-class, or verbal indication of where to find the material being discussed.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE:

Students are expected to show respect to the instructor as well as to their fellow classmates. In coming to study ethics and philosophy we may not always agree. Disagreement, however, should never invite disrespect or hostility.

GRADE ASSESSMENT:

Your performance in the Ethics in Science course will be assessed using various dimensions, each contributing to your final grade as follows:

Attendance (10%): Attendance will be taken every class session. Students are allowed three unexcused absences. After three unexcused absences, students will lose 5 points (out of 10) of their attendance grade for every further unexcused absence. UNT policy defines an excused absence as an absence due to a university-sponsored event, passing of a family member, religious holiday, or documented illness. Documentation is required.

Class participation (20%): Philosophy is a field of study that requires constant engagement with our peers. Students will be expected to participate and voice their understanding of the course readings, as well as their assessments of the arguments. Students are expected to come to class having read the material and prepared to discuss the readings. Class participation is an essential component of this course and includes active, informed, and respectful engagement *during* class sessions. Participation is not limited to speaking frequently; rather, it involves demonstrating preparedness, attentiveness, and thoughtful engagement with course materials and of course your own insight. Quality of contribution is the key!

Quiz/Assignment (20%): There will be Four quizzes, and ONE assignment posted to Canvas. None of the Quiz/assignment are meant to be exhaustive, but rather to ensure that students are keeping pace with the course and doing the assigned readings. Quizzes are multiple choice and true/false questions taken directly from the readings.

Mid-Term Exam (20%): The mid-term exam will cover the assigned content, readings, and lectures from the first seven weeks of the semester. The examination will consist of multiple choice, true/false questions, short answer questions - write a cogent, well-organized, and thoughtful response.

Class Group Presentation (15%): Students will give 10-12 mins presentation on an ethical problem followed by QnA. This presentation will be in groups of 2-3 students.

More information regarding the format of the presentation and the exact requirements will come before the mid-term.

Final Paper (15%): The personal & social responsibility assignment requires you to write a 1500-2000 words research paper in academic format. For this paper, you basically are writing about an ethical issue/problem that you see in your field. Students can choose their topic with consultation with the instructor by synthesizing some of the key concepts discussed during the course. Be sure to incorporate each question listed in the grading rubric. Late and non-compliant work will not be accepted.

Note that this course will require a lot of careful reading each week. There will be continual assessment of the readings by way of quizzes and assignments. Students are highly encouraged to keep to the pace of the course. We will do our best to maintain the schedule below, but course schedules change. Continual attendance and participation are necessary to do well in this course. **Late work will not be accepted.** The final grade distribution is as follows:

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|-----------|---|
| 100 – 90% | A |
| 89 – 80% | B |
| 79 – 70% | C |
| 69 – 60% | D |
| 60% > | F |

Prerequisite(s): None

Reading Material:

- All of our course readings are available for free (you're welcome!) via UNT library reserves or as links from each week's respective "Resources" page right here in Canvas as a PDF

Course Schedule:

This schedule is subject to change. Any changes will be announced in-class or on **Canvas. It is your responsibility to obtain the amended schedule provided by instructor.*

(NOTE: The reading assigned for each day/week is discussed that day/week and should be read before the class meets).

| Weeks | Topics | Checkpoint / Assignment |
|--------|---|--------------------------|
| Week 1 | <p>Course Introduction: Environment, Society and Philosophy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction to the course - What does <i>Doing Philosophy</i> mean? - Why Environmental Ethics <p>Reading(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Doing Philosophy” | Syllabus & Course Review |
| Week 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environment and Worldview - Philosophical Roots of Environmental Crisis <p>Reading(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” Lynn White, Jr. • “Philosophical Roots of the Ecological Crisis”, Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam | |
| Week 3 | <p>Human Relation to Nature and Environment</p> <p>Reading(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Excerpts from “A Sand County Almanac”, Aldo Leopold • “Human Values in Environmental Ethics, Environmental Ethics”, Clare Palmer | Quiz 1 |
| Week 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Affliction of Human Supremacy - Crist, Eileen. 2017. • “Pathologies of Environmental Crisis – Theories and Empirical Research”, Andrew Brennan • “Anthropocentrism: More than Just a Misunderstood Problem”, Kopnina | |
| Week 5 | <p>Ethics and Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Situatedness of Ethics - Psychological, Social and Historical Dimension of Ethics - Role of Ethical Theories <p>Reading(s):</p> | Quiz 2 |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Environmental Ethics: From Theory to Practice” (p. 29-56), Marion Hourdequin | |
| Week 6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ethical Theories: Consequentialism (Cost-Benefit Analysis), Deontology, Virtue ethics - Classical Ethical Theories and Environmental Ethics <p>Reading(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Environmental Ethics: From Theory to Practice” (p. 29-56), Marion Hourdequin | Quiz 3 |
| Week 6 | <p>Science, Nature, and Technology</p> <p>Reading(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “The Mechanized World Picture”, Lewis Mumford ▪ “Setting Science Free”, Rupert Sheldrake | |
| Week 7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Artificial vs. Natural”, Frederick Ferre • “What Is Technology? Defining or Characterizing Technology” Dusek, Val. • “The Question Concerning Technology”, Martin Heidegger | |
| Week 8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Climate change isn't a tech problem so we need more than a tech solution." Boucher, Martin J and Philip Loring. • "Excuse Us While We Fix the Sky: WEIRD Supermen and Climate Engineering." Fleming, Jim. • “Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?” Maniates, Michael. | Quiz 4 |
| Week 9 | <p style="text-align: center;">SPRING BREAK</p> | |
| Week 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Midterm Week • Concluding Module: Science, Nature, and Technology (No new readings) | Midterm |
| Week 11 | <p>Reading(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Tragedy of the Commons”, Garrett Hardin • “Lifeboat Ethics: the Case Against Helping the Poor”, Garrett Hardin, • “Needs”, Ivan Illich • “Way Beyond the Lifeboat: An Indigenous Allegory of Climate Justice”, Whyte | |

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|---------|--|-----------------------------|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A Controversial Technology is Creating a Rift Among Climate Scientists” De La Garza, Alejandro. | |
| Week 12 | <p>Objects of Concern (Case Studies)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity • Trees <p>Reading(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Environment and Society: A Critical Introduction”, Paul Robbins, John G. Hintz, Sarah A. Moore | Group Presentation Assigned |
| Week 13 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wolves • Uranium <p>Reading(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Yellow Stone Park – Case Study • “Environment and Society: A Critical Introduction”, Paul Robbins, John G. Hintz, Sarah A. Moore • Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident - Case Study | Group Presentation Assigned |
| Week 14 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Bottles/Plastics • Tuna • Lawn <p>Reading(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Environment and Society: A Critical Introduction”, Paul Robbins, John G. Hintz, Sarah A. Moore • “How you’re recycling plastics wrong from coffee cups to toothpaste.” Simmonds, Charlotte. • . “Why Recycling Won’t Solve Plastic Pollution.” Wilkins, Matt. | Group Presentation Assigned |
| Week 15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • French Fries • E-waste <p>Reading(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The McDonalization of Society”, George Ritzer • “Environment and Society: A Critical Introduction”, Paul Robbins, John G. Hintz, Sarah A. Moore | Group Presentation Assigned |
| Week 16 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Technology and Responsibility”, <i>Hans Jonas</i> • “Disenchanted the Rhetoric: Human Uniqueness and Human Responsibility”, Holmes Rolston III | Course Wrap-up |
| | Final Paper | Final Essay Due |

Policies:

Netiquette Guidelines

You are expected to maintain reasonable etiquette in your online interactions. Please remember to remain respectful of your instructor. More info

here: <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html> Links to an external site.

Academic Integrity

Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with UNT's policy on Academic Integrity: <https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>.

“The University of North Texas promotes the integrity of learning and embraces the core values of trust and honesty. Academic integrity is based on educational principles and procedures that protect the rights of all participants in the educational process and validate the legitimacy of degrees awarded by the University. In the investigation and resolution of allegations of student academic dishonesty, the University's actions are intended to be corrective, educationally sound, fundamentally fair, and based on reliable evidence.”

A finding of academic dishonesty may result in academic penalties or sanctions ranging from failing an assignment to expulsion from the University.

Disability Accommodations

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodations for students with disabilities. If you require accommodations for disabilities, please register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) and communicate with the instructor as soon as possible. For additional information, see the ODA website at disability.unt.edu Links to an external site.

Emergency Notifications & Procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Blackboard for contingency plans for covering course materials.