



Syllabus for Environmental Ethics

Course Information

Semester & Year: Fall 2023

Course ID & Section #: ENVSC-11-E5597

Instructor's name: Austin Roberts

Day/Time: W, 11:40am-1:05pm (Hybrid)

Location: SC208

Course units: 3

Instructor Contact Information

Zoom Office hours or chats by arrangement through email request.

Email address: austin-roberts@redwoods.edu

Catalog Description

An examination of issues arising out of ethical considerations related to the general environment and specific ecosystems, life forms, and places. Students will engage scientific, philosophical, and cultural concepts of nature and explore the social and personal ramifications for current ethical choices regarding local, regional, national, and global issues.

Course Student Learning Outcomes *(from course outline of record)*

- Apply methods of inquiry to shape useful questions regarding current environmental problems, claims, arguments, and/or cultural values.
- Analyze questions of ethics to arrive at reasoned responses to environmental issues and how they impact a diverse global community.

Prerequisites/co-requisites/ recommended preparation

None

Educational Accessibility

College of the Redwoods is committed to making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. If you have a disability or believe you might benefit from disability-related services and accommodations, please contact your instructor or [Disability Services and Programs for Students](#) (DSPS). Students may make requests for alternative media by contacting DSPS based on their campus location:

- Eureka: 707-476-4280, student services building, 1st floor
- Del Norte: 707-465-2324, main building near library
- Klamath-Trinity: 530-625-4821 Ext 103

If you are taking online classes DSPS will email approved accommodations for distance education classes to your instructor. In the case of face-to-face instruction, please present your written accommodation request to your instructor at least one week before the needed accommodation so that necessary arrangements can be made. Last minute arrangements or post-test adjustments usually cannot be accommodated.

Environmental Ethics

We—all of us on Terra—live in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times. The task is to become capable, with each other in all of our bumptious kinds, of response. Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places.

—Donna Haraway

Hybrid Course Information

Course Number:

ENVSC 11

Course Units:

3

Year and Semester:

Fall 2023

Prerequisites:

None

Meeting Day/Time:

W, 11:40am-1:05pm

Classroom Location:

SC208

(and weekly Canvas activities)

Instructor Information

Instructor:

Dr. Austin Roberts

Email:

austin-roberts@redwoods.edu

Zoom Office Hours: By appointment

Course Materials

Required Textbook:

A New Environmental Ethics: The Next Millennium For Life On Earth, 2nd edition (ISBN: 978-0367477998)

Holmes Rolston III, Routledge, 2020.

Rental/purchase options: [CR](#) bookstore (\$27-49); [Redshelf](#)

eBook rental (\$33); [Kindle](#) rental (\$22).



Additional Required Readings: available on Canvas

Computer Requirements:

Internet access and MS Word compatible software

Students can obtain a free Office 365 license with a valid CR

email: <https://www.redwoods.edu/Services/Office365>

Canvas Information:

Log in to Canvas at <https://redwoods.instructure.com>

Password is your 8-digit birth date

For tech help, email its@redwoods.edu or call 707-476-4160

Canvas Help for students:

<https://www.redwoods.edu/online/Help-Student>

Instructor's Course Description:

This course is designed to introduce you to a variety of perspectives on environmental ethics, which is a recent area of philosophical study that emerged in the 1970s. Philosophy asks 'big questions' about values, life's meaning, personal identity, social justice, and other issues that cannot be answered in an exclusively scientific manner. Ethics is one among several branches of philosophy. What, then, is *environmental ethics*? Since 'ethics,' broadly conceived, is the study of how we ought to live, and the 'environment' refers to the natural world of living and non-living things, we can define environmental ethics as *the study of how we ought to live in relation to natural environments*. Here's another way to think about this subject: while science focuses on *facts* about nature, environmental ethics reflects on *values* within nature. This distinction is helpful, but not absolute, since scientists are motivated by certain *values* in their efforts to uncover *facts*, and environmental ethicists rely on scientific *facts* in their considerations of *values*.

As such, environmental ethics tries to answer questions like: what are our moral obligations to animals, plants, species, and ecosystems? Are *all* living things intrinsically valuable? Why should we value nature? Are humans superior to other forms of life? Should you eat animals? Why should we care about species extinctions? How concerned should we be about global population growth? What is the relationship between capitalist consumption and ecological breakdown? What sorts of worldviews have supported human destruction of environments? What worldviews might inspire greater respect and care for the Earth? Who has responsibilities to address climate change? What climate responsibilities do current generations have to future generations? To what extent should societies try to control, manipulate, and exploit nature for their own benefit? Is it ever moral to break the law to protest environmental harm?

Based on the preceding list of questions, it should be clear to you that we will consider a wide range of complex issues in this course. Indeed, as philosopher Holmes Rolston comments, "*environmental ethics spills over into almost everything that goes on in the world.*" With this comment in mind, you should expect to be challenged by this course. Yet if environmental issues like climate change, deforestation, and mass extinctions are troubling to you—as indeed they should be—then this course will be an invaluable part of your education. We will study the writings of ecological philosophers, scientists, activists, historians, feminists, theologians, journalists, economists, and anthropologists. We will watch environment-related films. We will learn about the revolutionary concept of the Anthropocene. And we will consider, as fellow earth citizens, how we might imagine and work toward an ecological civilization. I look forward to getting to know all of you, and to thinking with you about some of the most significant issues of our time.

Methods of Instruction:

This is a hybrid course that combines classroom meetings with online activities. We will meet on campus once a week for discussions/lectures, and also engage in weekly online (asynchronous) activities on Canvas. Online activities include discussion forums and short quizzes based on selected readings, videos, podcasts, and other content that I will share with you on Canvas.

Hybrid Course Schedule

This schedule may change depending on time and other factors. Dates for ‘Canvas’ indicate *due dates* for online assignments (unless otherwise indicated). Dates for ‘Classroom’ indicate *in-person* meetings. For some weeks, there are separate (but thematically related) readings for Canvas activities *and* for Classroom meetings. Beyond the required book by Rolston, additional readings (e.g., chapter excerpts, short articles) are available on Canvas.

WEEK 1: *Course Introduction*

Canvas (August 21):

- Read the syllabus before attending class on August 23

Classroom (August 23):

- Introductions

WEEK 2: *Introduction to Environmental Ethics*

Canvas (August 28):

- Calculate your [ecological footprint](#)
- Submit student survey: *due by Monday, August 28*
- Quiz 1: *due Wednesday, August 30 by 11:30am*

Classroom (August 30):

- Whole-Class Discussion — Environmental Ethics: Key Issues and Ideas
- Reading — Rolston, Preface & Chapter 1

WEEK 3: *The Anthropocene*

Canvas (September 5):

- Topic — What is ‘the Anthropocene’? Why is this term *ethically* controversial?
- Video — “[The Anthropocene: Where on Earth are We Going?](#)”
- Reading — Ellis, “Debating the Anthropocene”

Classroom (September 6):

- Whole-Class Discussion — Anthropocene Ethics: Are we ‘the god species’?
- Reading — Rolston, Chapter 2 (*sections 1-4 & 7*)

WEEK 4: *Ideological Roots of the Anthropocene*

Canvas (September 11):

- Topic — Religion & Ecology: What are the connections?
- Readings — White, “Roots of our Ecological Crisis”; Bassham, “Religion and the Environment”
- Reflection #1 — Ecological footprint reflection (*due 9/12*)
- Quiz 2: *due Wednesday, September 13 by 11:30am*

Classroom (September 13):

- Whole-Class Discussion — Worldviews & the Death of Nature
- Readings — Merchant, “Science and Worldviews”; Schwartz, “[Philosophical Roots](#)”

WEEK 5: Ecological Worldviews in Science & Spirituality**Canvas (September 18):**

- Topic — What is the Universe Story? Can it inspire ecological ways of thinking/living?
- Video — “[Journey of the Universe](#)”
- Reading — Ruether, “Does Science Have a New Creation Story?”

Classroom (September 20):

- Whole-Class Discussion — Ecotheology & Native American Spirituality
- Readings — Kimmerer, “Braiding Sweetgrass”; McDaniel, “Ecotheology and World Religions”

WEEK 6: Animal Ethics**Canvas (September 25):**

- Reflection #2 — Ecological worldviews reflection (*due 9/25*)

Classroom (September 27):

- Whole-Class Discussion — What are our moral responsibilities to nonhuman animals?
- Reading — Rolston, Chapter 3

WEEK 7: Animal Ethics (cont.)**Canvas (October 2):**

- Topic — Are all animals morally considerable? Is ‘speciesism’ unethical?
- Video — “[Animal Liberation: 40 Years On](#)”
- Reading — Singer, “All Animals Are Equal”
- Quiz 3: due Wednesday, October 4 by 11:30am

Classroom (October 4):

- Whole-Class Discussion — Should you eat animals?
- Reading — Rachels, “The Basic Argument for Vegetarianism”

WEEK 8: Biocentric Ethics**Canvas (October 9):**

- Topic — Are plants ‘intelligent’? What are the ethical implications of this theory?
- Video — “[Intelligent Trees](#)”
- Reading — Pollan, “The Intelligent Plant”

Classroom (October 11):

- Whole-Class Discussion — Are *all* living beings morally considerable?
- Reading — Rolston, Chapter 4 (*sections 1-2 & 6-7*)

WEEK 9: Holistic Environmental Ethics**Canvas (October 16):**

- ESSAY PROPOSALS (due by 10/16)
- Quiz 4: due Wednesday, October 18 by 11:30am

Classroom (October 18):

- Whole-Class Discussion — What is the land ethic? What is deep ecology?
- Readings — Leopold, “The Land Ethic”; Devall & Sessions, “Deep Ecology”

WEEK 10: *Social Justice & the Environment***Canvas (October 23):**

- Reflection #3 — Response to the film, “[Awake: A Dream at Standing Rock](#)” (due 10/23)

Classroom (October 25):

- Whole-Class Discussion — What is ecofeminism? What is environmental justice?
- Readings — Hourdequin, “Social Dimensions of Environmental Problems”; Gaw, “[Ecofeminism](#)”

WEEK 11: *Ethics for a Time of Climate Change***Canvas (October 30):**

- Topic — How bad is climate change? What should we do about it?
- Video — “[Before the Flood](#)”
- Reading — Malm, “[The Moral Case for Destroying Fossil Fuel Infrastructure](#)”

Classroom (November 1):

- Whole-Class Discussion — Planetary Ethics
- Reading — Rolston, Chapter 7

WEEK 12: *The Ethics of Geoengineering***Canvas (November 6):**

- Topic — What is geoengineering? Why is it ethically controversial?
- Video — “[Can We Cool the Planet?](#)” (PBS)
- Reading — Klein, “Dimming the Sun”

Classroom (November 8):

- STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

WEEK 13: *The Sixth Extinction***Canvas (November 13):**

- Video — “[Extinction: The Facts](#)”
- Readings — Wilson, “Why Extinction Is Accelerating”; Bassham, “The Extinction Crisis”

Classroom (November 15):

- STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

WEEK 14: *FALL BREAK (November 20-25)***WEEK 15:** *Capitalism vs. the Planet?***Canvas (November 27):**

- Topic — Is global capitalism unsustainable?
- Video — “[Fairy Tales of Growth](#)”
- Reading — Hickel, “Rise of the Juggernaut”

Classroom (November 29):

- STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

WEEK 16: *The Planetary Future***Canvas (December 4):**

- ESSAYS DUE (12/4)
- Topic — How should we think about the future? What can we hope for?
- Audio — EcoCiv Podcast, “[Deep Adaptation or Deep Transformation?](#)”
- Reading — Lent, “[What Will You Say To Your Grandchildren?](#)”

Classroom (December 6):

- STUDENT PRESENTATIONS
- Concluding Discussion

WEEK 17: *Finals Week*

- Reflection #4 — End-of-semester reflection (due by Wednesday, Dec. 13th)
- NOTE: If necessary, we will have one final meeting on Wednesday (12/13) to wrap up presentations and/or course material. However, if we wrap up presentations and course material on time during week 16, we will not meet on campus during finals week.

Course Requirements and Grading

Requirements:

- *Participation:* 15%
- *Notecard responses:* 20% (10 x 2%)
- *Canvas activities:* 33% (9 x 3%) + (3 x 2%)
- *Reflections:* 12% (4 x 3%)
- *Essay/Presentation:* 20%

Grading Scale: 95%—100% = A; 90—94% = A-; 87%—89% = B+; 84%—86% = B; 80%—83% = B-; 75%—79% = C+; 70%—74% = C; 60%—69% = D; 59% or below = F

Assignment Details

-Participation: The participation portion of your grade includes attending weekly classes, actively listening, contributing to discussions, taking notes, etc. It also includes four very short (5 question) multiple choice quizzes, based on readings, which will be submitted on Canvas. Anyone who distinguishes themselves by contributing significantly to class discussions with thoughtful questions and comments on the readings (and other course material) may receive extra points for doing so. Note that being consistently late or leaving classes early will affect your participation grade. You are allowed *one* unexcused classroom absence during the semester, beyond which your participation grade will be negatively impacted. Officially documented medical or legal absences are of course excused. Excused absences allow you to make up missed work.

-Notecard Responses: At classroom meetings, you need to turn in one 3x5 notecard reading response (~4-8 complete sentences). On the first day of classes, I will provide everyone with notecards. This assignment allows you to *briefly* demonstrate two things: first, that you have engaged the assigned readings; and second, that you are prepared to discuss something about those readings in class. *I will read every notecard that you turn in in order to see which issues or ideas stand out to you, whether you are engaging the assigned readings, and which issues raise questions for you.* Each notecard should include: (a) *your name* on the top left corner, (b) *two* key points that stood out to you in the reading (~3-5 sentences in total), and (c) *one* discussion question or critical comment based on the reading (~1-3 sentences). Your *two* key points and *one* question/comment should be listed numerically (1., 2., 3.). If you meet these requirements and write in a

clear and thoughtful manner, you will receive full credit for notecards that are turned in on time. Typically, you will not receive feedback from me on notecards *unless* you are marked down for not meeting basic requirements. If your question or comment on your notecard is particularly substantive, you may receive a response from me on Canvas. Notecards can only be turned in during class, in person, and on the week they are due. *I will not accept late and/or scanned notecards over email or Canvas without officially documented medical, legal, or bereavement absences.*

Extra Credit: By the end of the semester, you will need to have turned in *10* notecards, and you will have *13* opportunities to do so. Every additional notecard that you submit counts as extra credit. As such, while you need to submit 10 notecards for full credit, you can submit *up to 3 additional cards* for extra credit.

-Canvas Activities: Since this is a hybrid course, some weekly activities will take place on Canvas. There are 12 weeks of graded Canvas Activities, based on readings and/or videos. Activities will mainly include text-based discussions about the assigned readings and videos. In discussion forums, I will provide you with specific questions that require you to respond to an aspect of the readings/videos, and then to reply to a post from one of your peers. All posts should be thoughtful, well-written, and at least 50 words. Canvas assignments will typically be available on Wednesday afternoons of each week. Normally, you will then have until Monday (11:59pm) of the following week to complete online assignments. Discussions will remain open through Tuesdays so that you have extra time to reply to one of your peers. I will typically respond to a few (but not all) posts each week. If you do the required work for discussions, you will receive full credit. If you post late and/or neglect to reply to peers, you will receive only partial credit.

-Reflections: Students will submit four short (~1 page) reflections on specified topics through Canvas. Writing prompts are provided for all topics, which include reflections on your ecological footprint, your ecological worldview, a film about environmental justice issues, and an end-of-semester reflection. Reflection due dates are listed in the course schedule and on Canvas. Reflections should be thoughtful, well-written, and have the word count listed at the top of the page.

-Essay/Presentation (essay due December 4th): Each student will compose a 1500–2500-word essay that develops an ethical analysis of an environment-related issue. Each student will also give a 5-8 minute presentation on their essay topic during one of the last few weeks of the semester. Essays should integrate your own research with references to some course materials. We will cover a lot of ground this semester, so this is an opportunity for you to focus on a topic that is especially interesting to you. For your presentations, I strongly recommend (but do not require) the use of a PowerPoint slideshow, or other visual aid. I understand that many students are nervous about giving presentations. However, I encourage you to view this as an opportunity to practice crucial public speaking skills in a supportive environment. Topic ideas:

Ethical justifications/critiques of vegetarianism or veganism; ethics of factory farming; environmental ethics of fast fashion; ethics of zoos; ethics of population control; recreational ethics for hunters/hikers; ethics of research uses of animals; climate justice (e.g., who has responsibilities to address global climate change?); ethics of geoengineering; ethics of plant-based milks or meats; ethical critiques/justifications of the Anthropocene concept; ethical analysis of a particular environmental justice issue (e.g., oil pipelines on or near Native American tribal lands, the Flint water crisis); comparison/evaluation of two religious perspectives on environmental ethics; ethical analysis of the Universe Story; comparison/evaluation of anthropocentric ethics vs. one non-anthropocentric framework (e.g., sentientism, biocentrism, holism, ecofeminism); ethical analysis of commercial whaling/fishing; rivers or forests as legal persons; ecofeminist approach to a particular environmental issue; ethics of eco-sabotage; environmental ethics of organic vs. conventional food

(e.g., is organic agriculture really better for the environment than conventional agriculture?); ethical analysis of a particular environmental problem (e.g., wildfires, governmental agency action/position); environmental justice between regions allocating scarce resources (e.g., water); environmental ethics of GM crops (e.g., are genetically modified crops bad for the environment?); animism or panpsychism as a framework for environmental ethics; climate refugees and international responsibilities; critique/application of a specific ethicist's approach to an environmental issue; ethical analysis of alternative energy (e.g., wind, nuclear).

***Essay Format:** 12-point font, double spaced, 1-inch margins, 1500-2500 words (~6-10 pages). Part of your paper grade will depend on whether you follow these instructions. When you cite sources, I will accept any professional format (e.g., Harvard, APA, Chicago, MLA). You must include a bibliography (which does not count toward your essay's final word count), and you must cite at least 1 of the course readings & 3 additional scholarly sources. Wikipedia *cannot* be used as a source (but it is often a great research tool!). University press publications and academic journal articles are generally good sources.

Disclaimer Regarding Changes: The instructor reserves the right to change or alter this syllabus as necessary.

Course Policies

Attendance:

Students are expected to be punctual and attend all courses in which they are enrolled. Regular attendance is important for satisfactory academic progress. If you are not regularly attending class, this will have an impact on your participation grade. You may be dropped from the class as a result of frequent unexcused absences.

Late Work:

Late work will receive point reductions, and only be accepted from students who have requested to turn work in late *prior* to its due date. Work turned in more than a week late will not be accepted unless the student and instructor have come to an agreement beforehand in verifiable communication. Late *essays* are immediately lowered 10%. For each successive 24-hour period that they are late, essays will continue to be lowered 10%. Late *reflections* and *Canvas discussions* are lowered one point. I will read late essays and reflections when possible, but students will receive limited feedback on late work. If you turn work in late, know that I might not be able to read and grade it until much later in the term, perhaps even the last week of the semester. The only assignments that cannot be submitted late are notecards and quizzes. *Exceptions to this late work policy will of course be made for officially documented medical or legal absences.*

Student Conduct:

Our classroom should be a safe learning environment. Students are expected to treat the instructor and each other with respect. Please avoid making sarcastic comments in class, which tend to shut down otherwise productive discussions. Student behavior or speech that disrupts the instructional setting will not be tolerated. Disruptive conduct may include, but is not limited to: unwarranted interruptions; failure to adhere to instructor's directions; obscene language; slurs or other forms of intimidation; and physically or verbally abusive behavior. In such cases where the instructor determines that a student has disrupted the educational process, a disruptive student may be temporarily removed from class.

Nondiscrimination Statement:

In accordance with College of the Redwoods Board Policy AP3410, discrimination or harassment based on national origin, religion, age, gender, gender identity, race or ethnicity, color, medical condition, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, or marital status is prohibited in any form. All individuals are to be

respected and treated with dignity and civility. Students are encouraged to participate fully in class discussions and to engage other students and the instructor in a professional and respectful manner.

Academic Dishonesty:

In the academic community, the high value placed on truth implies a corresponding intolerance of scholastic dishonesty. Acts of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to, cheating, tampering, fabricating, plagiarizing, or assisting others in an act of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is defined as representing someone else's words, ideas, artistry, or data as one's own, including copying another person's work without appropriate referencing; presenting someone else's opinions and theories as one's own; or working jointly on a project, then submitting it as one's own. Submitting work that is generated by AI technology (e.g., ChatGPT) is also considered an act of academic dishonesty. In cases involving academic dishonesty, determination of the grade and of the student's status in the course is left primarily to the discretion of the faculty member. In such cases, where the instructor determines that a student has demonstrated academic dishonesty, the student may receive a failing grade for the assignment and may be reported to the Chief Student Services Officer.

Special accommodations statement:

If you have a disability or believe you might benefit from disability-related services and accommodations, please email me or contact Disability Services and Programs for Students. Students may make requests for alternative media by contacting DSPS at 707-476-4280. All information and documentation are confidential.

Fall 2023 Dates:

- *August 18th: Last day to register for classes (day before the first class meeting)*
- *August 19th: Classes begin*
- *August 25th: Last day to add a class*
- *September 1st: Last day to drop without a "W" and receive a refund*
- *September 4th: Labor Day Holiday (All Campuses Closed)*
- *September 5th: Census Date (20% of class)*
- *October 26th: Last day to petition to graduate*
- *October 27th: Last day for student initiated withdrawal (62.5% of class)*
- *October 27th: Last day for faculty initiated withdrawal (62.5% of class)*
- *November 11th: Veterans Day (All Campuses Closed)*
- *November 20th-25th: Thanksgiving break (no classes)*
- *November 22nd-24th: No Classes, all campuses closed*
- *December 9th-15th: Final Examinations*
- *December 15th: Last day to file for P/NP option*
- *December 15th: Semester Ends*
- *December 22nd: Grades due*
- *January 5th: Grades available*

Technology and Recording Policies:

Please turn your cell phones off (or to silent mode) during class. The use of headphones or earbuds during class is also prohibited (unless you have received instructor approval). Use of a cell phone, smart phone, headphones, or similar devices during class can be considered a classroom disruption and may result in the student being dismissed from the class for the day. If there is an urgent need to have a cell phone or messaging device turned on during class (such as for a medical, family, or child-care emergency), set the device to vibrate and step outside of the classroom to answer the call with a minimum of disturbance to the class. Audio/video recording of lectures is only permitted for students with proper DSPS forms, and for the student's *individual use only*. Recordings may *not* be shared online. Cameras may not be used during classroom meetings without instructor approval.

Essay Submission Policy:

Essays must be submitted over Canvas. In general, I do not accept printed essays.

Course Withdrawal:

In order to be dropped from the class, it is the student's responsibility to drop online through WebAdvisor or through the Admissions and Records Office. Do not assume you will be dropped if you stop participating in class. If you stop participating and fail to drop the class by the last drop date (9/1/23), it is possible that you will receive an F in the course.

Community College Student Health and Wellness

Resources, tools, and trainings regarding health, mental health, wellness, basic needs and more designed for California community college students, faculty and staff are available on the California Community Colleges [Health & Wellness website](#). [Wellness Central](#) is a free online health and wellness resource that is available 24/7 in your space at your pace. Students seeking to request a counseling appointment for academic advising or general counseling can email counseling@redwoods.edu