

# FIL 2390/2393 Environmental Philosophy

## Detailed course description

*Our industrial food system is broken!*

*Humans are causing the sixth extinction!*

*To face the Anthropocene, we need a planetary ethics!*

Statements of this type abound in our daily news, social media and other public fora, forcing us to reflect on our place as humans on earth, from a philosophical perspective. In this course, we take up this challenge, looking specifically at how Western philosophy has conceptualized the relationship between humans, on the one hand, and animals and nature, on the other, and whether it is possible and desirable to move beyond that deep seated dualism.

Firstly, we look at arguments from utilitarianism, deontology, and the capabilities approach for why nonhuman animals should be included in the moral sphere. Secondly, we look at the ethics of respect for nature, which aims to include all living beings as morally considerable, and to ecocentric approaches that do not focus on individuals but on wholes, like ecosystems or the earth itself. Thirdly, we examine the tensions between individualistic and holistic approaches, and whether they can be coherently overcome. Fourthly, we look in detail at a critique of narrow rationalism and how it has led us astray in our relationship to everything that is not human. If we changed our way of understanding that relationship, and we saw nature in ethical terms as much as humans in ecological terms, would that make a difference for the better? Finally, assuming that the answer to the last question is positive, we examine some arguments for why a next step should be to give political representation, domestically and globally, to nonhuman animals and nature.

## Syllabus

Armstrong, Chris. *A Blue New Deal: Why We Need a New Politics for the Ocean*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2022. Chapters 4-5.

Bernard Williams. *Making Sense of Humanity and Other Philosophical Papers, 1982-1993*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Chapter 20.

Callicott, J. Baird. "How Ecological Collectives Are Morally Considerable." In *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics*, with Allen Thompson and Stephen M. Gardiner. Oxford Handbooks. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199941339.013.11>.

Cochrane, Alasdair. *Sentientist Politics: A Theory of Global Inter-Species Justice*. Oxford University Press, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198789802.001.0001>. Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (1996): 7–28. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3985059>.

Diamond, Cora. "Eating Meat and Eating People." *Philosophy* 53, no. 206 (1978): 465–79. <https://doi.org/DOI:%252010.1017/S0031819100026334>.

Goodin, Robert E. "Enfranchising the Earth, and Its Alternatives." *Political Studies* 44, no. 5 (1996): 835–49. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.1996.tb00337.x>.

Guha, Ramachandra. "The Authoritarian Biologist and the Arrogance of Anti-Humanism." *The Ecologist* 27, no. 1 (1997): 14–20.

Jamieson, Dale. "Animal Liberation Is an Environmental Ethic." *Environmental Values*, 1998, 41–57. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30302268>.

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *The Covenant of Reciprocity*. Edited by John Hart. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118465523.ch26>.

Leopold, Aldo. "The Land Ethic." In *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*, Special commemorative edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Mancilla, Alejandra. "Effective Deoccupation: Towards Responsible Guardianship of Nature." *Political Philosophy* 2, no. 2 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.16995/pp.23671>.

Nussbaum, Martha. *Frontiers of Justice*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2006. Chapter 6.

Palmer, Clare. "Harm to Species-Species, Ethics, and Climate Change: The Case of the Polar Bear." *Notre Dame JL Ethics & Pub. Policy* 23 (2009): 587.

Plumwood, Val. *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

Regan, Tom. "Animal Rights, Human Wrongs." *Environmental Ethics* 2, no. 2 (1980): 99–120. <https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics19802225>.

Sagoff, Mark. "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Bad Marriage, Quick Divorce Law and Ecological Ethics Symposium." In *Osgoode Hall Law Journal*, vol. 22. 1984.

Singer, Peter. 'All Animals Are Equal'. In *Ethical Vegetarianism*, edited by Lisa Portmess and Kerry S. Walters. New York: State University of New York Press, 1999.

Stone, Christopher D. *Should Trees Have Standing?: Law, Morality, and the Environment*. Oxford University Press, 2010. Chapter 1.

Taylor, Paul W. "The Ethics of Respect for Nature." *Environmental Ethics* 3, no. 3 (1981): 197–218.

## Learning outcome

When you have completed this course, you are expected to:

- be able to demonstrate a thorough insight in problems of environmental philosophy, and also be able to discuss different views critically in writing

- be able to demonstrate an overview of differences, similarities and connections between different views within environmental philosophy
- demonstrate an overview of the changes in the philosophical way of perceiving nature, from Descartes and up until today
- be able to give critical and independent assessments of the different views

## Admission

Students who are admitted to study programmes at UiO must each semester register which courses and exams they wish to sign up for [in Studentweb](#).

If you are not already enrolled as a student at UiO, please see our information about [admission requirements and procedures](#).

## Prerequisites

### Recommended previous knowledge

Taking FIL1001 and/or FIL1003 before this course is recommended, but not compulsory.

## Teaching

10 double lectures and 4 double seminars. Active participation from the students is expected in both.

**FIL2390:** The course has the following [compulsory tuition activities](#):

- Three one-page critical responses (max. 500 words) to three readings in the syllabus. To be submitted in [Canvas](#).
- Oral group presentation (45 mins including Q&A and discussion, during the seminars).

**FIL2393:** The course has the following [compulsory tuition activities](#):

- A one-page critical response (max. 500 words) to one of the readings in the syllabus. To be submitted in [Canvas](#).

All compulsory tuition activities must be accepted as satisfactory in order for the student to qualify for the final exam.

This is how you apply for a valid absence from compulsory activities/compulsory attendance <<https://www.uio.no/english/studies/examinations/compulsory-activities/hf-oblig.html>>.

## Examination

**FIL2390:** A 4-hours school exam.

**FIL2393:** A 2-hour school exam.

The exam has five questions, one related to each part of the course.

FIL2390 students must answer **four** out of the five, while FIL2393 students must answer **two**. FIL2393 students thus need to read the syllabus of at least two parts of the course, while students of FIL2390 should read the entire syllabus.

### Use of sources and citation

You should familiarize yourself with the rules that apply to [the use of sources and citations](#). If you violate the rules, you may be suspected of [cheating/attempted cheating](#).

### Language of examination

The examination text is given in English, and you submit your response either in English or in Norwegian.

### Grading scale

Grades are awarded on a scale from A to F, where A is the best grade and F is a fail. Read more about [the grading system](#).

### Explanations and appeals

- [Explanation of grades and appeals](#)

### Resit an examination

- [Illness at exams / postponed exams](#)
- [Resitting an examination](#)

### Special examination arrangements

Application form, deadline and requirements for [special examination arrangements](#).

## Important dates

**20 February at 12pm:** Deadline to submit your first obligatory critical response in Canvas.

**20 March at 12 pm:** Deadline to submit your second obligatory critical response in Canvas.

**17 April at 12pm:** Deadline to submit your third obligatory critical response in Canvas.

**6 May at 9am:** Exam. In Silurveien 2, Room 3D.

### Contact details and office hours

Alejandra Mancilla, [alejandra.mancilla@ifikk.uio.no](mailto:alejandra.mancilla@ifikk.uio.no).

Office hours: **Tuesdays from 14 to 16, office 417**, GM Hus and via zoom. Alternatively, you can make an appointment.

## Schedule and reading list

| LECTURE | DATE        | TOPIC                                                                                 | READING LIST                                                                                                                                     |
|---------|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1       | 14 January  | Part I: Utilitarianism and nonhuman animals                                           | Peter Singer, "All animals are equal"                                                                                                            |
| 2       | 21 January  | Deontology and nonhuman animals<br><br>The capabilities approach and nonhuman animals | Regan, "Animal Rights, Human Wrongs"<br><br>Nussbaum, <i>Frontiers of Justice</i> , chapter 6: "Beyond Compassion and Humanity"                  |
| 3       | 28 January  | Part II: Biocentrism                                                                  | Taylor, "The Ethics of Respect for Nature"                                                                                                       |
| 4       | 4 February  | Ecocentrism                                                                           | Leopold, "The Land Ethic"<br><br>Callicott, "How ecological collectives are morally considerable"                                                |
| 5       | 11 February | Can animal ethics and environmental ethics work together?                             | Sagoff, "Animal liberation and Environmental Ethics: Bad marriage, Quick Divorce"<br><br>Jamieson, "Animal liberation is an environmental ethic" |
| 6       | 25 February | The ecological crisis of reason                                                       | Plumwood, <i>Environmental culture</i> , chapters 1-4.                                                                                           |
| 7       | 4 March     | The blindspots of human-centrism                                                      | Plumwood, <i>Environmental culture</i> , chapters 5-7.                                                                                           |
| 8       | 11 March    | Towards an interspecies ethics                                                        | Plumwood, <i>Environmental culture</i> , chapters 8-11.                                                                                          |
| 9       | 8 April     | The political representation of nonhuman animals                                      | Cochrane, <i>Sentientist Politics</i> . Chapters 2, 3 and 4.<br>.                                                                                |
| 10      | 15 April    | The political representation of nature                                                | Stone, <i>Should Trees Have Standing?</i> , chapter 1.<br><br>Mancilla, "Effective deoccupation: Towards Responsible Guardianship of Nature"     |

Lectures take place at **the Arne Næss Auditorium, GM Hus, on Wednesdays, from 14.15 to 16.**

| SEMINAR | DATE    | TOPIC                                                     | READING LIST                                                                                                                         |
|---------|---------|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1       | Week 7  | Nonhuman animals in moral theory and the value of species | Diamond, "Eating meat, eating people"<br>Palmer, "Harm to Species? Species, Ethics, and Climate Change: The Case of the Polar Bear". |
| 2       | Week 10 | Can environmental philosophy be non-anthropocentric?      | Williams, "Must a concern for the environment be centered on human beings?"<br>Cronon, "The trouble with wilderness"                 |

|   |         |                                                                |                                                                                                       |
|---|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 | Week 12 | Non-Western approaches to environmental philosophy             | Wall Kimmerer, "The covenant of reciprocity"<br>Guha, "The Authoritarian biologist"                   |
| 4 | Week 15 | The political representation of nature beyond national borders | Goodin, "Enfranchising the Earth and Its Alternatives"<br>Armstrong, "A Blue New Deal", chapters 4-5. |

Check the times and place for the seminar groups in the course website!