

## PHIL 349: Environmental Philosophy

Winter 2023, T/Th 11h35 – 12h55  
ENGTR 0060  
Prof. Hasana Sharp

Office Hours: Friday 12h00-14h00,  
& by appointment  
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**Territorial acknowledgement:** McGill University is on land which is the traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk), a place that has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst nations.

### Description:

How should we understand the relationship between humanity and the rest of nature? Are humans the exclusive sources and primary objects of value? How should we understand our responsibility to nonhuman nature? Future generations? Ecosystems? Nonhuman animals? What does taking nonhuman nature seriously imply for philosophy? For ethics and politics? Does ecological precarity demand that we radically revise our self-understanding? How do we reckon intellectually, ethically, and politically with the human signature on the earth's systems? Anthropogenic climate change and disruption? Extinction? If radical change is required, what can move us to live differently?

This course will be a broad survey of diverse approaches to environmental philosophy and to ecological thought. We will examine foundational philosophical concepts and problems, along with efforts to engage with contemporary ecological crises. In order to understand our place in a changing and ailing environment, will explore intellectual and practical resources from different traditions and disciplines.

There are no re-requisites for this course other than a willingness to read, reflect on diverse perspectives, and share your thoughts. The professor will present overviews of the material, but the aim of the course is to activate our collective intellectual resources to make sense of our shared predicament.

### Texts:

Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*.

Other texts available on *My Courses*.

Available at "The Word" Bookstore at 469 Milton Street.

This Class is supported by *MyCourses*.

### Requirements:

Evaluations will be based upon weekly questions posted on MyCourses (30%); one take-home late in the mid-term (30%); and one take-home final (40%). Attendance and participation are expected.

Attendance and Participation: The biggest commitment of this class will be keeping up with the reading and practicing an active relationship to the ideas in the texts. This course concerns one of the most pressing questions of our age. Our task is to listen to diverse voices among the authors, reflect on their ideas, and develop ways of speaking to each other about environmental problems and thinking. You will be expected to read carefully, come up with questions about the reading, attend class, ask questions, and contribute to discussion.

Weekly questions (x10)/ responses (x4): You must submit a weekly question (150 words maximum) to the discussion board about the reading **10 times** during the term (you are very welcome to post more). They can be clarificatory questions/ requests (what did the author mean by X? I did not follow argument Y, please help), or they can concern implications (if the author is right about A, what does it mean for B?), or they can be solicitations of others' responses (I was worried about claim Z for the following reasons. Do others share these concerns?). I expect everyone to respond on the discussion board to the questions of your peers at least **4 times** (200 words maximum) during the term. More responses are strongly encouraged.

I will occasionally provide brief responses online. I will regularly draw upon your questions and invite you voice them to support our in-class discussion. Thus, please post questions in advance of class and no later than 12h00 on Monday or Wednesday concerning the reading for the following class. Your mark will be based primarily upon weekly questions and responses, but active attendance and participation will benefit your mark. I will communicate with you before reading week to let you know how you are doing.

Mid-Term and Final: These take-home, open book exams will be opportunities to reflect on the philosophical questions and to bring environmental thought to bear upon the practical problems that arise in our readings. You only need to read carefully and give yourself time to craft and revise your written responses to do reasonably well. You will not be expected to do supplementary research.

### General Grading Criteria:

An "A" indicates that all of the expectations and requirements have been met, but the work goes beyond them in significant ways. For instance, a paper of this quality may do one or more of the following: demonstrate an exceptional understanding of the wider questions and philosophical significance of the issues; offer a creative and insightful interpretation of the text; be exceptionally well-composed and well-argued.

A "B" reflects having fully met all of the expectations and requirements with regard to deadlines, length, content, argumentation, and so forth. It demonstrates full and adequate understanding of the assigned readings, of the lectures, and of the specific task of the assignment. A "B" paper may, for example, propose a well-defined thesis and argument, yet it is not particularly original, challenging, or subtle. It may also ignore counter-evidence from the text, or reasonable objections to the argument.

Work that earns a "C" generally meets the expectations of the assignment and demonstrates adequate understanding of the course material, but falls short in crucial respects. For example, the work is too short, key concepts or aspects are not mentioned, the thesis statement of a paper is especially obvious, the argument lacks coherence or logical structure, it does not consider obvious objections or abundant counter-evidence, the work is not well written and/or displays too many grammar and spelling errors, and so on.

A "D" assignment does not meet the general expectations and requirements of the assignment. While it endeavours to meet the specific criteria, it shows flaws and gaps in the understanding of the course material that prevent it from being coherent or from taking into account the relevant sources, ideas, and arguments.

Work that receives an "F" is absent, incomplete, or makes no serious attempt to meet the formal and substantial requirements. The flaws and gaps in understanding are so grave that the reader cannot detect a concerted effort to appropriate and use the course material.

### Academic Integrity:

McGill University values academic integrity. All students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity> for more information).

### Other Notes:

- In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.
- In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.
- As instructor of this course, I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. If you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009.
- I will gladly honor your request to address you by the name or gender pronoun you indicate. Please be in touch to advise me.