

## PHIL 349: Environmental Philosophy

Fall 2024  
Survey of Fundamental Ideas & Issues in  
Environmental Thought

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**Territorial acknowledgement:** McGill University (Tiohtiá:ke/Montreal) is situated on the traditional territory of the Kanien'kehà:ka, a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst many First Nations including the Kanien'kehá:ka of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, Huron/Wendat, Abenaki, and Anishinaabeg. This class will strive to acknowledge these nations as the traditional stewards of the lands and waters on which we meet today.

### Description:

How should we understand the relationship between humanity and the rest of nature? Is there an ecological rationality with distinct norms, principles, and concepts? Are dominant philosophical and moral traditions in western culture anathema to ecological insight? Do critical theories and alternative traditions offer resources for different ways of seeing and being? Do we need to change our minds to change the world? Or change the world to change our minds? What are the philosophical, intellectual, and cultural resources needed to reckon with ecological crisis?

This course will survey foundational issues in environmental philosophy. We will read several "classics" in environmental philosophy, acquaint ourselves with ecofeminism, some Indigenous perspectives, and ecopolitical thought. We will reflect on specific issues, such as: relationships with land and earth, nonhuman animals, climate change, and environmental activism. Although the range of our readings is broad, the focus of the course will be on *value theory* as it relates to the environment, ecology, and the extra-human world (rather than, for example, environmental philosophy of science).

There are **no pre-requisites** for this course other than a willingness to read, reflect on diverse perspectives, and share your thoughts in writing. The professor will present overviews of the material, but active participation is crucial to a successful class and to ecological citizenship. The most fundamental course objective is to facilitate the development of our collective intellectual resources to better navigate our shared existential and political predicament.

### Texts:

Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*. ("The Word" Bookstore, 469 Milton Street)  
All other texts available on *My Courses*.

### Technology Policy:

In order to help us all preserve our focus for the duration of the class, I ask everyone to silence their phones and put away all electronic devices. If you must use your laptop to take notes, please close all applications other than the one needed for notetaking and sit at the edge or the back to minimize screen visibility for others.

## Requirements:

Evaluations will be based upon (i) contributions to the discussion board, (ii) in-class mid-term, and (iii) a take-home final.

Reading: The most important commitment of this class is to practice an active relationship to the reading. Please be aware that some days will involve heavier reading than others, so be sure to look ahead in order to manage your time. You will have ample opportunity to discuss and reflect on the reading in class, through discussion on My Courses, and in office hours. Assignments and exams aim to develop your exegetical and analytic skills, which demands careful attention to the words and ideas of the authors.

Attendance and in-class participation: Attendance and participation are necessary ingredients of a good class. Please come to class prepared to discuss the readings. There will be a penalty of 2/3 of a letter grade if you miss 10, or more (70%+) of the classes following the drop/add period (e.g., A → B+).

Discussion Board: You must submit questions – firmly anchored in the reading (and without the assistance of LLM technology) – to the discussion board **6 times** during the term. You must also to respond to your peers on the discussion board **6 times** during the term. Of the **12 total contributions**, you must make **at least 5 prior to Fall break**. You may contribute more often if you like.

You may post one question and reply per reading assignment (if there are two essays assigned in one week, you may post up to two questions and two replies that day). Contributions have a due date & time (questions & replies are due at the same time). Contributions more than 24 hours late will not be accepted.

Mid-term & Finals: Your mid-term will be an in-person exam. The (cumulative) final exam will be take-home. Submission of a rough draft with your final exam is mandatory.

## Assessment Values:

Discussion Board	25%
Mid-Term	30%
Final	45%

Discussion board grades will be both quantitative (i.e., meeting the required number of contributions) and qualitative (i.e., contributions reflect having read and thought about the material). Quality engagement is not necessarily correct, but it is sincere and informed. Please **see the FAQ** on the discussion board for more information.

Exams will be graded according to the rubric below. Late final exams will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade per calendar day. If you require accommodation or miss an exam, please be in touch prior to the due date.

*Use of Artificial Intelligence and LLM technology is not permitted in this class. My aspiration as a teacher is to help you to develop and enjoy your own powers of thinking and writing (though I recognize that is sometimes arduous and not enjoyable in the moment). Note also that the carbon footprint of LLM technology (such as Chat GPT) is tremendous and growing.*

**Evaluation Criteria:**

<b>Exam Grading Rubric</b>				
	<b>A (Excellent)</b>	<b>B (Good)</b>	<b>C (Adequate)</b>	<b>D (Inadequate)</b>
<b>Understanding</b>	Accurate (or well-justified), non-superficial grasp of core ideas; consideration of implications, significance, stakes.	Solid understanding of the assigned readings, of the lectures, and of the specific task of the assignment.	A limited or superficial understanding of concepts and texts. Some errors; may misconstrue implications.	Significant errors and/ or misunderstanding of the assignment.
<b>Argument (if applicable)</b>	Non-obvious, clear, interesting, plausible, and contestable thesis.	Clear and plausible thesis; may be unsurprising or too easy to defend.	Thesis is confusing, vague, or especially obvious.	Thesis is missing, difficult to identify, or evinces significant misunderstanding of course material.
<b>Evidence</b>	Cites and analyses assigned texts in a thoughtful, skillful, or original manner. Demonstrates depth of engagement with ideas from the course.	Cites and explains relevant textual evidence.	Insufficient, unhelpful, and/ or unexplained use of textual evidence. Some misunderstandings of concepts, texts, or arguments.	Irrelevant, inappropriate, and/ or missing evidence.
<b>Reasoning</b>	Develops argument in an organized and focused way; explains textual evidence; justifies claims.	Can identify argument and follow paper, but justification of claims, organization, or focus needs improvement.	Reasoning and justification is incomplete, unclear, or underdeveloped. Lacks focus and/ or organization; may be disjointed and somewhat difficult to follow.	Incoherent, confused, and unfocused. Difficult to read. May be off-topic and not sufficiently related to the course material.
<b>Mechanics (least important)</b>	Clear and concise; easy to follow; correct grammar, punctuation, spelling, and citation.	Coherent, readable, and proof-read. Would benefit from some editing and polish.	Problems with word choice, grammar, spelling, and coherence. *Rough* draft.	Significant problems with presentation, organization, clarity.

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 apply the course material.

## Grading Scale

All work in this course will be graded on the standard letter grade scale (A to F), equivalent to the 4-point GPA scale. An A on a course component is worth 4 points, an A- is worth 3.7 points, etc. To calculate your final grade, the grade points you earn on each course component will be multiplied by the relative weight of that component, and then the scores will be added to get your final grade-point average. That average will determine your final letter grade for the course. The table below sets out the official scheme used by McGill to convert letter grades to grade points. For example, if your overall grade-point average is a 3.4, you would earn a B+ in the course. Do not rely on the calculator in MyCourses for computing your final grade, as that calculator by default aggregates grades according to the 0-100% scale and will not display the accurate final grade you have earned in this course.

Grade	Grade Points	Grade Range
A	4.0	3.85-4.00
A-	3.7	3.50-3.84
B+	3.3	3.15-3.49
B	3.0	2.85-3.14
B-	2.7	2.50-2.84
C+	2.3	2.15-2.49
C	2.0	1.85-2.14
D	1.0	1.0-1.86
F	0.0	0.00-0.99

## 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 and pronoun you indicate.