Philosophy and the Environment

Given our increasing awareness of anthropogenic climate change, and of the other harms our way of life causes to other inhabitants of Earth, and to the Earth itself, it should not surprise you to learn that many philosophers have something to say about the environment. Even the very earliest philosophers were concerned about the environment, asking questions about how the human being might fit into the order of the cosmos in its supernatural and natural elements. Many Modern philosophers attempted to separate the natural from the supernatural and to provide a scientific account of nature and our relationship to it. Today, philosophers are showing a renewed interest in thinking about the place of the human and non-human animal in regard to nature.

Contemporary environmental philosophy has been an academic discipline since the 1970s. It fosters discussion of the appropriate ways to understand and deal with our relationship to the environment. Many different approaches have been developed including environmental ethics, environmental justice, ecofeminism, environmental aesthetics, environmental theology, and ecophenomenology. Here at UWG, some of the philosophy faculty are engaged with these debates and have provided brief descriptions here of some key areas of philosophic interest.

Anthropocentrism is the view that only human beings have moral value, and that other things, such as animals, plants, and ecosystems, have value only if human beings need or want them. On this view, human beings have “inherent” value (we are valuable by nature and regardless of whether anyone needs or wants us) while other things have mere “instrumental” value, value only as tools or as means for achieving some human good. Immanuel Kant held a view like this. While many environmental ethicists reject anthropocentrism, and argue that some animals, plants, or even ecosystems have inherent value too, others defend “enlightened” forms of anthropocentrism. As Frederik Kaufman puts it, “nothing in anthropocentrism says we have to be so stupid in pursuit of our well-being.” On his view, anthropocentrism, properly understood, does not portend the destruction of nature, but instead implies that we ought to secure rather far-reaching and robust policies aimed at protecting the natural environmental.

Nevertheless, many environmental philosophers reject even enlightened anthropocentrism. Some non-anthropocentric approaches seek to extend traditional moral boundaries to include some non-human entities. For example, Peter Singer argues that morality is fundamentally about promoting happiness and reducing suffering in the world. Since many animals have the capacity to suffer, he concludes that many animals count too, morally speaking. Others have developed Kantian and Aristotelian/Virtue approaches.

Some environmental philosophers offer more radical approaches to understanding our relationship with the non-human, natural world. Among the more influential alternatives are ecofeminism and deep ecology. Ecofeminists like Karen Warren and Val Plumwood argue that there are deep connections between domination of women and domination of nature. They seek to expose and dismantle the value dualisms—male as opposed to female, human as opposed to nature, mind as opposed to body—that have become culturally institutionalized ways of legitimizing control of “inferior”
by “superior” entities. We must free ourselves from these dualistic thought patterns if we are to relate to each other and to nature in mutually respectful rather than harmful and controlling ways.

Deep ecology, founded by Arne Naess, seeks to overturn traditional value systems and replace them with biological, ecological egalitarianism. Naess’s own brand of deep ecology (Ecosophy T) draws inspiration from Buddhism and the ideas of Dutch philosopher Spinoza (1632-1677). Under the banner of “Self-Realization!”, Naess urges each of us to expand our personal identities until they encompass all life, ultimately breaking down the boundary between “me” and “not me.”

While many trace the roots of our environmental crisis to Judeo-Christian ideals, interest in “green religion” is on the rise. Figures like Wendell Berry have long argued that the fact that God has given the natural world to us to use for our own good does not imply that we can do whatever we want with it. In “The Gift of Good Land” he argues that it is a mistake for us to model our relationship to nature on the story of the giving of the Garden of Eden, because we are fallen people. A better Biblical model, he says, is the story of the giving of the Promised Land to the tribes of Israel. In his words, “such a gift can be given only as a moral predicament: having failed to deserve it beforehand, they must prove worthy of it afterwards; they must use it well, or they will not continue long in it.” This kind of criticism has spurred research into what it means to be a good steward of the natural world for God. Bernard Rollin claims it is no accident that God’s ideal relationship to us is often captured in terms of good animal husbandry. We respect God and what God has given us by responding appropriately to natural needs and characteristic activities of other animals and plants. After all, on this Biblical view, animals and plants have the natures they do because God made them that way. To ignore their natures, or to use them in ways not consistent with their natures, is to ignore God’s will.

Some philosophers are interested in issues in environmental justice. For instance, the Great Ape Project is an international effort to get the United Nations to endorse a “Declaration on Great Apes.” This declaration would extend basic legal rights to gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos and orangutans. Other philosophers ask whether corrective justice requires developed nations to repay the world community, and especially developing nations, in compensation for the damage they caused to the natural environment while they developed. Still other philosophers ask what we owe to future generations. We can leave future generations a planet largely devoid of natural spaces, one filled with parking lots, shopping malls, and housing developments, and these future generations will adapt to what we leave them. But what kind of people do we create when we do this? Do we owe them better than this, even if we have reason to think they won’t complain about what we leave them?

Ecophenomenology is quite a new approach developed initially by Erazim Kohak and Neil Evernden in the 1980s. These two thinkers believe that a phenomenological approach has much to offer in countering the Western tendency to reduce nature to its use value. They draw upon Heidegger in suggesting that if we view nature as simply something there for us to master and put towards human aims, we will find ourselves alienated from nature and unable to understand ourselves as well as nature. As one contemporary ecophenomenologist, Ingrid Stefanovic, suggests, “One of phenomenology’s primary tasks is to articulate essential meanings as they appear to human understanding, . . . to discern underlying patterns of meaning that may not be self-evident but that permeate our efforts to interpret the world in which we find ourselves and to crystallize some essential truths in their historical and cultural rootedness.”

Phenomenological insights can help us to make better decisions on environmental matters. We can use such insights to improve policies and laws as well as the design of the environments in which we dwell and work. Again, Ingrid Stefanovic, claims that phenomenological perspectives may provide a middle way between anthropocentric and ecocentric viewpoints, in which the world is perceived as something to be neither controlled nor revered.

Next fall UWG will be sponsoring a sustainability week hosting an international conference with sustainability and the environment as its theme and promoting activities that draw attention to ways of making our campus and our lives more sustainable. Environmental philosophy will certainly be a part of the discussion. Stay tuned here for information about the activities involved and let’s get thinking about the environment!

**Philosopher’s Wisdom**

“The greatest intellectual capacities are only found in connection with a vehement and passionate will.”

~Arthur Schopenhauer
### Summer 2014 Course Descriptions

#### Session III: June 2-June 24

**Phil 2030-01: Introduction to Ethics**  
MTWR 10:00 a.m.-12:15 p.m. (Pafford 308)  
Dr. Rosemary Kellison

This course serves as an introduction to ethics: philosophical thinking about the question of how humans ought to live. In this course we will engage with ethics on several different levels. We will think about practical moral problems, such as abortion, capital punishment, animal rights, and poverty. To enable critical examination of our own and others’ positions on such moral problems, we will explore various theoretical approaches to ethics, learning the different ways in which individuals and communities justify their moral arguments. Finally, we will consider broader, more theoretical questions regarding the nature and origin of morality itself. Required for philosophy majors. May count for credit in Core Area B1.

#### Session IV: June 30-July 23

**Phil 2010-01: Introduction to Philosophy**  
MTWRF 12:30-2:45 p.m. (Pafford 308)  
Dr. Walter Riker

In this course we will consider several central questions in philosophy. There are good prudential reasons for obeying the law—is there also a moral duty to obey it? Do we ever have a moral duty to break the law? Can we be free or responsible for our actions in a deterministic universe? Does “knowledge” require certainty, that is, that we cannot be wrong? Can we prove that God exists? If God is all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful, then why does evil exist? As we consider answers to these questions, we will think about what is means to take a “philosophical” approach to a problem. Required for philosophy majors. May count for credit in Core Area C2.

**Phil 2010-01: Introduction to Philosophy**  
MTWR 5:30-8:15 p.m. (Newnan Campus)  
Dr. Walter Riker

Same as above.

**Phil 2130-01: Introduction to World Religions**  
MTWRF 3:00-5:15 p.m. (Pafford 308)  
Dr. Mark Tietjen

This course is a comparative study of the beliefs and practices of several world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Students will explore not only the history of these faiths and their early doctrinal and communal development but their place in today’s world. Toward that end, practitioners of several of these religions will make guest presentations to the class.

### Fall 2014 Course Descriptions

**Phil 2010 01: Introduction to Philosophy**  
MWF 10:00-10:52 a.m.  
(TLC 1200)  
Dr. Janet Donohoe

This course takes an historical look at major philosophical questions through the primary texts of such important philosophers as Plato, Aristotle, Boethius, Descartes, Nietzsche, and Camus. Students are exposed to questions of what it means to be a human being, how to live the good life, what we can know, whether there is a God, why there is evil in the world, and whether anything at all has meaning. Through the texts we learn not only the way that philosophers attempt to address these questions, but we also learn what it means to engage in philosophical thought and how the process of thinking philosophically can change our understanding of our own existence. Required for philosophy majors. May count in Core Area C2.

**Phil 2010 02: Introduction to Philosophy**  
TR 11:00 a.m.-12:20 p.m.  
(TLC 1301)  
Staff

This course will survey some of the most important figures in Western philosophy, from the ancient Greeks all the way through the 20th century. Required for philosophy majors. May count in Core Area C2.

**Phil 2010 03: Introduction to Philosophy**  
TR 2:00-3:20 p.m.  
(TLC 1200)  
Staff

Same as above.

**Phil 2010 04: Introduction to Philosophy**  
TR 3:30-4:50 p.m.  
(TLC 1303)  
Staff

Same as above.

**Phil 2020-01: Critical Thinking**  
MW 2:00-3:20 p.m.  
(Pafford 306)  
Staff

Required for philosophy majors. May count for credit in Core Area B1.

**Phil 2020-02: Critical Thinking**  
MW 3:30-4:50 p.m.  
(Pafford 306)  
Staff

Same as above.

**Phil 2020-03: Critical Thinking**  
TR 11:00 a.m.-12:20 p.m.  
(Pafford 306)  
Dr. Walter Riker

Do we mistreat animals when we eat them or use them in experiments? Many philosophers argue that we do. In this class, students will learn to recognize and evaluate different kinds of arguments, and will then apply these skills to assessment of philosophical arguments for and against different uses of animals. This course satisfies the Oral Communication part of Core Area B, so students will discuss these issues both formally and informally. Required for philosophy majors. May count for credit in Core Area B1.
Phil 2020-04: Critical Thinking
TR 2:00-3:20 p.m. (Pafford 306) Dr. Mark Tietjen
This course addresses the basics of how to think critically and how to evaluate arguments. Students will learn to identify both well-known argument forms and well known fallacies in reasoning. They will explore the importance of clear definitions, the role of emotion in argumentation, and how critical thinking skills might be useful in analyzing contemporary issues in politics, science, and religion. Students will apply skills they learn to philosophical texts and also to their particular major fields of study.

Phil 2030-01: Introduction to Ethics
MWF 10:00-10:52 a.m. (TLC 1303) Dr. Robert Lane
Everyone has beliefs about morality, and to some extent we all agree about what actions are right and wrong; for example, we all agree that murder is wrong and that helping those less fortunate than us is right. But there are many moral questions about which people disagree: is abortion immoral? what about physician-assisted suicide? is it wrong to spend money on expensive cars and homes when people in other parts of the world are dying from malnutrition? do non-human animals have rights? This course will enable you critically to evaluate your own beliefs about concrete ethical issues like these. We'll also be dealing with more theoretical questions, such as: where does morality come from? (God? society? or somewhere else?); what makes an ethical argument good or bad? and what general rules or principles ought we to live by? No prior experience in philosophy is necessary, so if you want to start thinking critically about morality, this course is a great place to begin. Required for philosophy majors. May count for credit in Core Area C2.

Phil 2030-02: Introduction to Ethics
MWF 11:00-11:52 p.m. (TLC 1303) Dr. Robert Lane
Same as above. Required for philosophy majors. May count for credit in Core Area C2.

Phil 2130-01: Introduction to World Religions
TR 12:30-1:50 p.m. (Pafford 302) Dr. Rosemary Kellison
This course revolves around two central questions: what is a world religion, and why does the first question matter? To answer these questions, we will begin by discussing the importance of categories and definitions of religion. We then will turn to a survey of some of the world's major religious traditions, including: indigenous religious traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and selected new religious movements. There will be a special focus on contemporary issues facing these traditions as well as on the ways in which these communities have interacted globally in the modern context.

Phil 2130-02: Introduction to World Religions
TR 3:30-5:40 p.m. (TLC 1303) Dr. Rosemary Kellison
Same as above.

Phil 3100-01: Ancient and Medieval Philosophy
TR 3:30-4:50 p.m. (Pafford 308) Dr. Mark Tietjen
This course explores the work of philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas and seeks to make their philosophical thinking relevant to that of their modern and contemporary successors. Required for Philosophy majors.

Phil 4100-01W: Phenomenology
MWF 11:00-11:52 a.m. (Pafford 307) Dr. Janet Donohoe
Phenomenology is a philosophical movement of the twentieth century that focuses on descriptive investigations of the ways in which the world appears to consciousness. In this course we will examine the development of the phenomenological method through primary texts of major phenomenologists including Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Derrida, and Ricoeur. We will address such issues as how the phenomenological method attempts to overcome the subject/object dichotomy, and how it lays the groundwork for such contemporary movements as hermeneutics and deconstruction.

Phil 4115-01: Political Philosophy
TR 9:30-10:50 a.m. (Pafford 307) Dr. Walter Riker
Liberal democracy is centrally important to contemporary political philosophy. We will start this course by considering the three main approaches to defending liberal democracy: Utilitarianism, Liberal Equality (Rawls), and Libertarianism. We will then consider important critical responses or alternatives to these mainstream theories, including Feminist and Communitarian approaches. We will pay particular attention to the ways these mainstream and other approaches understand and evaluate 'equality' (or what it means to treat everyone with 'equal concern and respect') and 'responsibility' (or who is responsible for different needs, costs, or choices in some society).

Phil 4150-01W: Analytic Philosophy
MW 2:00-3:20 p.m. (Pafford 307) Dr. Robert Lane
This course is an historical overview of analytic philosophy, the most widespread and influential movement among Anglo-American philosophers during the 20th century. We will consider how the most important members of this tradition, including Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and W. V. O. Quine, attempted to answer questions within metaphysics, epistemology, meta-ethics, and the philosophy of language.

Phil 4300-01W: Senior Seminar: Political Obligation
TR 10:00 a.m.-12:20 p.m. (Humanities 205) Dr. Walter Riker
This course serves as a capstone to the study of philosophy at UWG. It is required for all graduating seniors in philosophy. This semester's topic is the problem of political obligation, the citizen's (supposed) moral duty to obey the laws of her country, just because they are the laws of her country. This is an old problem in philosophy, one that gets taken up, for instance, in Plato's Crito. We will examine several contemporary approaches to this problem.

Phil 4385-01W: Special Topics: Islamic Thought
TR 11:00 a.m.-12:20 p.m. (Humanities 205) Dr. Rosemary Kellison
In this course, we will examine some of the most important historical developments in Islamic thought, focusing especially on the areas of Islamic theology, jurisprudence and ethics, and political theory. In each case, we will consider premodern and modern thinkers. A major focus of the course will be to draw connections between these theoretical developments and themes and contemporary events in the Islamic world, including the emergence of modern Islamic republics, the rise of Islamism in its political and militant forms, the Arab Spring, and contemporary theological and legal debates between Muslims.
14th Annual Meeting of the Minds
Are Humans Free?

The question of whether or not humans have free will is one that many philosophers still think about. This year, five historical philosophers will discuss this issue in the Meeting of the Minds. Come hear what they have to say.

When: Tuesday, March 11, 2014 at 7:00 p.m.
Where: Kathy Cashen Hall
Why: Because we’re philosophers and we’re interested in whether we are free.

Philosophers will be played by James Butler, Jessie Holloman, Cordero Schalk, Sarah McGee, Josue Pineiro, with Annthony Duffey as the moderator.

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Philosophy Honors Society

The Georgia Iota chapter of Phi Sigma Tau is West Georgia’s philosophical link to the world of honor societies. The chapter consists of students who have demonstrated outstanding academic achievement and a sincere interest in philosophy. Founded to recognize and reward philosophical scholarship, the chapter provides both an academic and a social environment for its members.

Criteria for Membership:

- a 3.0 overall GPA,
- the completion of at least two philosophy courses,
- a GPA higher than 3.0 in all Philosophy courses taken,
- the completion of 45 hours of coursework.

For more information, go to http://www.westga.edu/~pst or contact Dr. Lane (rlane@westga.edu) if you are interested in applying for membership.

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Tuesday, March 11, 2014
7:00 pm
Kathy Cashen Auditorium

Sponsored by The Department of English & Philosophy
Interested in philosophy? Enjoy open discussions on every imaginable topic? Then you should join the Philosophical Society. The Society is a registered student organization that meets every other week for lively discussions of philosophical topics. In the past, discussion topics have ranged from the role of technology in our lives, to the apparent incompatibility between determinism and the belief in human free will, to the question whether man is naturally good or bad. Members of the society have also been involved in canned food drives, bake sales, and trivia nights at local restaurants. All students, regardless of their background or experience, are invited to join. Meetings are typically held every other Friday. If you would like more information about the Society’s meetings or other activities, or to be added to the Society’s email list, contact Dr. Riker (wriker@westga.edu) or check out the Society’s Facebook page.

Upcoming Undergraduate Conferences

Although most of the submission deadlines for the following conferences have passed, students should think about attending one or more of these conferences to see what it is like so that you can present a paper in the future. It’s great experience and gives you feedback from people outside the department. Keep these conferences in mind for next year!

Undergraduate Philosophy Conference on Philosophy in Literature and Film
Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia
Conference date: April 11-12, 2014
Submission deadline: March 1, 2014

Sixth Annual Classic City Undergraduate Philosophy Conference
University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia
Conference dates: April 5, 2014
Submission deadline: February 22, 2014

UNC Undergraduate Philosophy Conference
University of North Carolinga, Chapel Hill, North Carolina
Conference dates: March 29, 2014
Submission deadline: January 31, 2014

10th Annual North Georgia Student Philosophy Conference
Kennesaw State University in Atlanta, Georgia
Conference dates: March 28-29, 2014
Abstract submission deadline: February 21, 2014

Summer Reading Suggestions 2014

Dr. Janet Donohoe
- Simon P. James, The Presence of Nature: A Study in Phenomenology and Environmental Philosophy
- Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch, Phenomenologies of the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality

Dr. Rosemary Kellison
- M. Coetzee, Elizabeth Costello
- Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

Dr. Robert Lane
- C. J. Misak, Verificationism: Its History and Its Prospects
- Eric T. Olson, The Human Animal: Personal Identity Without Psychology

Dr. Walter Riker
- Sarah Conly, Against Autonomy: Justifying Coercive Paternalism.
- Mark Rowlands, Can Animals Be Moral?

Dr. Mark Tietjen
- J. L. Schellenberg, Evolutionary Religion