

PHILOSOPHY 329

Environmental Ethics

Spring 2025 *Mid-term Essay Exam*

Due Monday, March 10

Write a 4-5 page essay on one of the following topics. The paper should be double-spaced with proper 1 inch margins and then uploaded to Lamakū by the due date.

Environmental Crisis

In the paper “Can a Collapse of Global Civilization be Avoided?” biologists Paul and Anne Ehrlich explain how our civilization is facing an unprecedented global crisis due to a “perfect storm” of environmental problems. Explain what these multiple environmental problems are and what the authors think must be done in order to avoid the collapse of our global civilization. How has your awareness of the crisis affected you? Has it changed the way you think about the human relationship to nature?

Religion and the Environmental Crisis

In the paper “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” why does historian Lynn White Jr. think that “Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt” for the environmental crisis? Why does he praise the “beatniks” for their affinity for Zen Buddhism? How does the Buddhist view about our relationship to the natural world differ from the traditional Christian view? How does he suggest Christianity might develop in a more ecologically responsible direction following the example set by Saint Francis of Assisi?

Anthropocentrism vs Nonanthropocentrism

Many environmental philosophers consider the underlying cause of the ecological crisis we are facing to be the result of the anthropocentric world-view that is part of the legacy of the Western tradition. Review some of the main influences that shaped that anthropocentric view as well as some of the critiques of anthropocentrism that are presented in the readings we have covered. To what extent do you think the modern world today can overcome this anthropocentric view?

The Sphere of Moral Consideration

It is generally accepted among environmental philosophers that the sphere of moral consideration must be expanded to include more than human beings. Take up this issue while reflecting on some of the readings we have covered. How wide should the sphere of moral consideration be extended? Should it include only some animals or all of them, or all living things, or even non-living features of the natural world such as rivers and streams, rocks and mountains?

Biocentrism

Explain the four key beliefs of the biocentric outlook as proposed by Paul Taylor and then the four basic rules of conduct that he thinks follows from this biocentric view. Explain also how Taylor’s view is an example of a deontological approach to environmental ethics. How does Taylor’s view differ from the view put forth by Frederick Ferré? To what extent would you agree with Taylor or Ferré’s biocentrism?

The Land Ethic

Explain what Aldo Leopold meant by the “Land Ethic” and how this ‘holistic’ approach challenges the traditional Western approach to ethics. What problem does Frederick Ferré find with this holistic approach and how does Baird Callicott attempt to meet this objection? To what extent would you agree with the “Land Ethic” as proposed by Leopold and developed by Callicott?

Grading Rubric

- 1) **Writing** (20%): An A paper will be well-written.
- 2) **Content** (50%): An A paper will reflect a good understanding of the texts and include some citations from the texts.
- 3) **Reflection** (30%): An A paper will include some thoughtful reflection on the topic.