

PHILOSOPHY 329

Environmental Ethics

Spring 2026

Term Paper Assignment

Due Tuesday, May 12 (6:10 PM)

The term paper assignment is to write a 7-10 page philosophical reflection on this environmental crisis we are facing. You can use any of the texts we have covered in this course. I would like to see evidence that you have read some of the texts (at least more than one) we have covered in this course. An A paper will be well-written, have a good exposition of the main points of the readings, some thoughtful reflection, and a list of the works cited (either in notes or a bibliography). Upload your essay to Lamakū by the end of the final exam period as stated above. You can turn it in earlier at the end of the course. Please label your file with the following format: last name, Phil 329 final. Here are some suggestions for your final paper:

Deep Ecology

What did Arne Naess mean by “Deep Ecology” and what are the eight principles he suggests for tentatively framing the deep ecology movement? To what extent would you agree or disagree with these principles. Since he suggests one of the principles involves a profound, or deep, transformation of our “economic, technological, and ideological structures” many different philosophers are included in the conversation regarding deep ecology. Reflect on how some of the philosophies we have covered might be included within the deep ecology movement.

Environmental Ethics and Asian Philosophy

Towards the end of his essay, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” Lynn White Jr. suggests that the “beatniks, who are the basic revolutionaries of our time, show a sound instinct for their affinity for Zen Buddhism.” Zen Buddhism developed in China and Japan with the coming together of Mahāyāna Buddhism from India with Daoism from China. What is it about these Asian philosophies that provides a different understanding of the relationship between human beings and nature from the dominant Western tradition? How might these Asian traditions of philosophy be helpful in overcoming the environmental crisis today? Can these Asian philosophies ever be influential enough in the world today to make a difference?

Nietzsche and Environmental Philosophy

How did Nietzsche anticipate in some ways Lynn White's thesis in, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," that Christianity bears a significant responsibility for the environmental crisis today? How does Nietzsche's perspectivism, his understanding of the philosopher as artist, challenge the traditional conception of *nature as origin*? If Nietzsche was right in the ‘hard truth’ that life is *will to power*, how can we possibly “remain loyal to the earth” as he implores us to do in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*? How is the strange thought of the eternal recurrence crucial to the task of overcoming the values of Western culture and becoming capable of remaining loyal to the earth? Is it necessary to overcome the longing for eternal life in another world in order to overcome the environmental crisis we are facing?

Heidegger and the Environmental Crisis

What does Heidegger, in “The Question Concerning Technology,” consider to be the main problem with the development of modern technology, and how does he trace this problem back to a way of thinking that began with the ancient Greeks? What does Heidegger mean by the “enframing” (*Ge-Stell*) that makes overcoming the problem of technology so difficult? Toward the end of the essay, Heidegger turns to a line in a poem by the Romantic poet Hölderlin, “poetically man dwells on this earth,” to suggest a different way of being-in-the-world than that determined by the “enframing” determined by the history of Western thought. How might the examples Heidegger considers, the contrast, for example between an old wooden bridge and a modern hydroelectric powerplant, suggest about a more poetic dwelling upon the earth that may save us from the dangers of modern technology? Is it possible that humanity can break through this enframing and change the way we live upon the earth? You might also include some reflection on how the films of Terrence Malick’s films suggest something about the importance of Heidegger’s attempt to reopen the question concerning the meaning of Being in dealing with the environmental crisis we face.

Food and the Ecological Crisis

Reflect on some of the readings in the text on agriculture and the environment. Why is the ecological crisis a crisis of agriculture as Wendell Berry observes? How does the eating of animals contribute to the ecological crisis? What are the implications that result from the ecological crisis upon the ethics of what we eat? To what extent are human beings going to be able to make the necessary changes in agriculture and in the food we eat in order to overcome the ecological crisis? Does the awareness of this problem lead you to consider changing your choice of food?

Population Growth

To what extent is there a problem with human overpopulation? Does the Earth have a finite carrying capacity for human population growth or is it just a matter of more efficient food production and distribution? How can the problem of human overpopulation be addressed in a way that is consistent with respect for human rights? Does the awareness of this problem lead you to consider how many children you would have?

The Economy and Climate Change

Reflect on some of the readings in the online readings. Can Capitalism become sustainable or is it necessary to change the economic system to something like the “steady-state” economy proposed by Herman Daly? In her book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate*, Naomi Klein contends that the problem of climate change cannot be solved without transitioning from the global economy based on deregulated capitalism. What evidence does she provide to make this case and to what extent do you find her argument convincing?

The Mālama Honua Worldwide Voyage of the Hōkūleʻa

How does the Hawaiian understanding of the relationship between human beings and the *ʻāina* contrast with the dominant Western view inherited from philosophers such as Plato and Descartes? How might the Hawaiian view open a way of being-in-the-world radically different from the dominant view? How might the Hawaiian view of the kinship relationship between humans and the *ʻāina* compare with the Land Ethic or Deep Ecology? Here you could bring some reflection on the film *Aloha ʻĀina* featuring Kanaka Maoli poet and activist Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio. Nainoa Thompson, the noted navigator of the Hōkūleʻa, once summed up the problem with our modern civilization when he said: "The sail plan we're on is not sustainable." Doug Herman, a geographer and specialist in cultural knowledge of Hawaiʻi and the Pacific Islands, emphasizes that it may be difficult to make the transition to a sustainable civilization, but it might be possible, he suggests, if we realize that "we are all in the same boat." We might indeed be on the same boat, but unfortunately, if we pay attention to the seriousness of the problem of climate change, it is not the Hōkūleʻa, but the Titanic. Can we get off the Titanic and on board the Hōkūleʻa?