

## **PHILOSOPHY 329**

### ***Environmental Ethics***

Spring 2026 *Mid-term Essay*

Due Tuesday, March 24

Write a 4-6 page essay on one of the following topics. The paper should be double-spaced with proper 1 inch margins. Turn in by uploading to Lamakū as a pdf file by the due date. Use the following format to title your file: lastname 329 Midterm.

#### *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 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?

#### *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?

#### *Justice and the Environment*

Write a reflection on one or more of the following: Peter Singer’s argument in “Famine, Affluence and Morality,” Brian Barry’s argument in “Sustainability and Intergenerational Justice,” or Sheila Foster and Luke Cole’s argument in “Environmental Racism.” To what extent do you find the arguments persuasive?

#### *Animals and the Environment*

Explain the difference between the argument for animal rights put forth by Tom Regan and the utilitarian argument put forth by Peter Singer for the ethical consideration of animals. Which position do you find more persuasive? What problems do you see for these arguments? Is it important to reexamine our treatment of animals today?

#### *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 with these principles? What might be the consequences of the deep transformation of our “economic, technological, and ideological structures” that he calls for?

**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.