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PHL 323.01: Ethics of Climate Change

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The Ethics of Climate Change Philosophy 323 Spring 2022

Tu/Th 11-12:20

DHC #120

Pat Burke

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Department of Philosophy L.A. 155

Office Hours: Tu/Th 12:45-1:50 p.m. or by appt.

Office Hours Zoom Link: <https://umontana.zoom.us/j/95798562675>

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Course Description:

The climate crisis is the greatest challenge facing our contemporary world and our response to it will decisively shape the future. Often, it is naively assumed that it is only a scientific and technological challenge. However, it is fundamentally a complex ethical challenge that must be faced if we are to act appropriately and effectively. In this course we will begin by briefly examining the status of climate change science and our actions. We will then discuss critically the dominant “western” ethical traditions (virtue, deontological and utilitarian ethics) to evaluate whether they provide adequate guidance for our actions in response to the crisis. We will then look to alternative ethical approaches. Specifically, we will discuss intrinsic value theory, “non-western” cultural ways of understanding, kinship ethics and the “new animism” to see if a radically new approach to our relationship with the natural world might provide a foundation for appropriate action. Throughout the course key recurring questions will include: How has our modern culture led us to the current crisis? Why have we failed to act effectively despite the overwhelming scientific evidence of the existential threat posed by the climate crisis? The roles played by our anthropocentric ethical traditions, modern technology, language, economics and our understanding of the “more-than-human world” will be among the possibilities we will examine. A constant theme of the course will be our attempt to envision a just and truly sustainable/reciprocal future. To aid in understanding how we have gone wrong and to begin to develop this vision of the future we will read Richard Powers recent novel, *The Overstory*.

This is a discussion-based seminar that requires your active engagement during class!

Please come to every class having carefully read the material assigned for that day and with at least one question or issue you want to discuss related to the reading. I will generally introduce the readings and then we will have a discussion about the issues that they raise. I will call upon individuals to answer questions and give their thoughts. The issues we will be discussing are complex and difficult. All of our attempts to reflect upon them (including mine) will be imperfect. The only way our thinking will improve is if we engage each other on a continuing basis in a respectful way. So, don't be shy; we are all interested in what you have to say.

Required Texts:

Kathleen Dean Moore, *Great Tide Rising*, Counterpoint 2016.

Richard Powers, *The Overstory*, W.W. Norton & Co. 2018

****Note that these are available at Shakespeare & Co., 103 S. 3rd Street, 549-9010.**

Readings on the Course Moodle Site are designated in the Course Schedule by an “M”

PROPOSED SCHEDULE: This schedule is only approximate and may change depending on class discussion of the readings and their application to contemporary issues. I will update you in class regarding changes to the schedule.

January 18 (Tuesday): **Hope, a Poetic Prelude and Course Introduction:** Vaclav Havel, “Hope” (M); Jane Hirschfield, “Global Warming” (M) and “Cataclysm” (M); William Heyen, “Fast Food” (M); W.S. Merwin, “For A Coming Extinction” (M).

January 20 (Thursday): **Climate Science:** The Great Acceleration (M); The Keeling Curve (M); Carbon Emissions and our Carbon Budget (M)

January 25 (Tuesday): **Feedback Loops and Tipping Points:** Steffen, Rockstrom, Richardson, et al., “Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene” (M); Pearce, “Why ‘Carbon-Cycle Feedback Loops’ Could Drive Temperatures Even Higher.” (M)

January 27 (Thursday): “IPCC 1.5 Degree Report—Summary for Policy Makers”

February 1 (Tuesday): Gardiner, “The Perfect Moral Storm” ***Response Paper Due**

February 3 (Thursday): Gardiner, “The Perfect Moral Storm” (cont.)

February 8 (Tuesday): Hourdequin, “Climate, Collective Action and Individual Ethical Obligations” (M) ***Response Paper Due**

February 10 (Thursday): Klein, *This Changes Everything* “Introduction” pp. 1-28 (M)

February 15 (Tuesday): Klein, *This Changes Everything*, “Beyond Extractivism” pp. 161-187 (M); Guardian, “Deep Sea Mining Could Start After Nauru Gives UN Ultimatum” (M) ***Response Paper Due**

February 17 (Thursday): Moore, *Great Tide Rising* pp.1-61

February 22 (Tuesday): Moore, *Great Tide Rising* pp 65-150 ***Response Paper Due**

February 24 (Thursday): Moore, *Great Tide Rising* pp. 151-228

March 1 (Tuesday): Moore, *Great Tide Rising* pp. 229-275 ***Response Paper Due**

March 3 (Thursday): Moore, *Great Tide Rising* pp. 279-326 *Paper Topics Distributed.

March 8 (Tuesday): White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis” (M) ***Response Paper Due**

March 10 (Thursday): Pope Francis, *On Care for Our Common Home* (selections) (M)

March 15 (Tuesday): Borgmann, “Reality and Technology” (M) ***Response Paper Due**

March 17(Thursday): Borgmann, “Reality and Technology” (cont.) (M)

March 22 (Tuesday): Spring BREAK—No Classes

March 24 (Thursday): Spring Break—No Classes

March 29 (Tuesday): Kimmerer, “Restoration and Reciprocity: The Contributions of Traditional Ecological Knowledge” (M) ***Response Paper Due**

March 31 (Thursday): Kemmerer, “Speaking of Nature”

April 5 (Tuesday): Kemmerer, “The Grammar of Animacy” (M); Kujawinski, “Guardians of a Vast Lake, and a Refuge for Humanity” (M) ***Response Paper Due**

April 7 (Thursday): Abram, “Reciprocity and the Salmon” (M)

April 12 (Tuesday): Powers, “A Little More Than Kin” (M)***Response Paper Due**

April 14 (Thursday): Safina, *Beyond Words: What Animals Think and Feel* pp. 295-335 (M)

April 19 (Tuesday): Safina, *Beyond Words: What Animals Think and Feel* pp. 336-374 (M) ***Response Paper Due**

April 21 (Thursday): Wash. Post, “What is a Tree Worth?” (M); Powers, *The Overstory* pp. 1-152

April 26 (Tuesday): Powers, *The Overstory* pp. 155-303 ***Term Paper Due**

April 28 (Thursday): Powers, *The Overstory* pp. 304-405

May 3 (Tuesday): Powers, *The Overstory* pp. 405-502

May 5 (Thursday): Borgmann, “The Setting of the Scene” (M)

May 13 (Friday) 8:00-10:00 FINAL EXAM PERIOD

Requirements and Grading:

A two-page double-spaced weekly response paper to the prior week’s readings and discussions will be due every Tuesday beginning on 2/1. These response papers should be your reflections on what we have read and our discussions, not an exposition of the readings nor what you think my position is on the issues. I will return these response papers on the subsequent Tuesday. There will also be one 6-8 page (10-12 page for Honors students) term paper due Thursday, April 26th on a topic selected from several options that will be distributed on Thursday, March 3rd. The Final Exam period will be used for 5-8 minute oral presentations of your term papers.

Assignment of grades will reflect the following criteria:

- F: Failure to meet minimum requirements
- D: Unsatisfactory, but some effort to meet minimum requirements
- C: Satisfactory; meets minimum requirements of assignment but not much more
- B: Good to Very Good; thoughtful reflection, good analysis, clear writing style
- A: Excellent depth of critical analysis, thoughtfulness of reflection, and writing style; demonstrates creativity and mature analytical skills in going beyond the primary requirements of the assignment

Final grades will be determined based on the following weighting of assignments.

- Weekly response papers: There are 11 response papers. I will drop the lowest grade and average the remaining ten grades. They are worth a total of 35% of your course grade. Note that on the response papers I will only assign grades of A,B,C and F
- The 6-8 (Honors 10-12) page term paper will be worth 25% of your final grade.
- Your active engagement in our discussions is critical to the success of this class and will be worth a total of 25% of your final grade.
- The Final Exam period oral presentations will be 15% of your final grade in the class.

Late Work: Assignments are due in class on the date listed in the syllabus. Unless you have a legitimate medical excuse, official university business or a genuine emergency no late papers will be accepted.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is representing another’s work as one’s own, a serious violation of academic integrity. Please review the University’s plagiarism definition and policy in the catalog; “Students who plagiarize may fail the course and may be remanded to Academic Court for possible suspension or expulsion.” If you have any doubts about plagiarism and attribution of others’ work, please consult your Instructor.

Students with Disabilities: The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Office of Disability Equity [ODE]. If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with ODE, please contact ODE in Lommasson 154. (406) 243-2243.

Attendance: Four (4) unexcused absences (i.e. absences without a note from a doctor; evidence of official university business or serious hardship) will result in an automatic “F”

COVID-19:

- Mask use is required within the classroom.
- If you feel sick and/or are exhibiting COVID symptoms, please don't come to class and contact the Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330.
- If you are required to isolate or quarantine, you will receive support in the class to ensure continued academic progress. I will provide a recorded zoom link to access classes that you have missed due to a required quarantine. I will also be available via Zoom to meet with you during Office Hours to discuss the readings and classes.
- UM strongly recommends students get the COVID vaccine and booster. Please direct your questions or concerns about vaccines to the Curry Health Center.
- Drinking liquids and eating food is discouraged within the classroom.
- Please note this class is being recorded for the benefit of students who are required to quarantine.

Electronic Devices:

The use of electronic devices including cell phones and laptops are not permitted in class. I strongly encourage you to take hand-written notes.