

# Philosophy of Nature

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## Professor

Nora Mills Boyd, PhD

“Dr. Nora”

(she/her/hers)

## Email

nboyd@siena.edu

## Office Location

Siena Hall 423

## Office Hours

Tuesday & Thursday

1-2pm

Wednesday 2-5pm  
(preferred)

and by appointment

## Class Meeting

Tuesday & Thursday

9:50-11:15am

Roger Bacon 302

## *What is nature? What is our place in it?*

### **This course is an experiment in student-centered learning**

The aims of this approach are to empower you in your education and provide you with valuable opportunities to actively pursue lines of inquiry that genuinely interest you. It should be both challenging and fun!

<i>Student-centered learning</i>	<i>Teacher-centered learning</i>
How could I make this a fun challenge?	Is it required?
Are my study habits really helping me learn?	Will this be on a test?
What are some ways that this material relates to my own life?	How will this affect my grade?
What could I do to grow in this context?	What is the least amount of work I can do to pass this class?
Where do I want to take this?	Just tell me the answer!!
<<your example here>>	<<your example here>>

Consensus decision-making is a process by which a group of people can decide together how to proceed on a decision relevant to some shared goal. The process is beneficial for making decisions in non-hierarchical contexts as it allows for the active participation of all members of the group and the result is (by construction) something that everyone in the group can live with. In class councils, we agreed together on the following learning goals for the course, activities and assessments that aim to serve those goals, and course media for 9/24 onwards by consensus.

### **Learning Goals**

- 1) We aim to be challenged and explore outside of our usual comfort zones in order to improve our understanding.
- 2) We aim to practice open mindedness, and foster open discussion.
- 3) We aim to break the monotony of typical, often overwhelming, courses.
- 4) We aim to strengthen our philosophical vocabularies and the scope and nuance of our understanding of philosophical concepts.

- 5) We aim to gain a working familiarity of the main philosophers and philosophical views in content areas that we focus upon.
- 6) We aim to strengthen and practice our skills in analyzing the arguments of others and in structuring our own arguments.
- 7) We aim to reconcile our own experience regarding nature with philosophical arguments about nature and the relation between nature and human beings. In service of this aim we will reflect on our own personal views regarding nature and enrich and sharpen those views.

## Assessments

In service of our learning goals, we agreed on the following assessments:

**Weekly journal entries (14%)**, 2pts each, submitted to the professor through Canvas before 9:50am on Tuesdays. 1 point for non-superficial engagement with something from last week's reading or in-class discussion and 1 point for reflecting on how engagement with that material alters or relates to our own views and experiences. The first of these will not be graded, but will be used to identify model responses. This assessment serves goals 5, 6, and 7.

**Final project or paper (70%)**, which we will work up to in components that build on one another over the semester: topic & tentative thesis statement (3%), abstract & bibliography with optional annotations (5%), outline due before midterm grades (7%), first draft & peer review (15%), second draft, which should receive thorough comments from the professor (12%), and final draft (30%). Presentation, podcasts, and other modalities are allowed, if cleared by the professor. Topics chosen by the individual students (consultation by the professor available if people get stuck coming up with a topic). There is no strict word or page count for this assignment. Rather the aim is to choose a position of appropriate scope and defend it well in an insightful and informed cogent argument. This series of assignments serves the three course goals listed above, as well as goal 1.

**Participation (9%)**, three self-assessment worksheets distributed over the semester with feedback from the professor. Good participation can take different forms including speaking in class as well as contributing to our shared course notes document. These assessments are intended to primarily serve goals 2 and 5.

**Argument assignment (5%)**, in service of goal 6, students will complete a worksheet-based assignment to practice active reading of a philosophical text, as well as extracting, analyzing, and responding to arguments made by others.

In addition to these graded assignments, each class we will add to a [Collective Course Notes](#) document to keep track of key ideas that emerge from the in-class discussions we have about course media. This document is intended to serve as a common resource for everyone in the course and may be useful for remembering course content while working on the final project/paper. This should help us with the aim of gaining a working familiarity of main philosophers and views course goal. Dr.

Nora will also briefly present a new philosophical term/concept at the beginning of each class (which she will then record later in the shared [Glossary](#) document) with the aim of serving learning goal 4.

Finally, our emphasis on student-centered learning and the use of class councils for consensus decision-making is one of the main ways we are striving towards the remaining course goal not already mentioned above, goal 3: we aim to break the monotony of typical, often overwhelming, courses.

Course media is either available in pdf form through our Canvas course, or through links directly from the course schedule below (and sometimes both). Assignments are due before class starts (i.e. before 9:50am) on the date indicated in the schedule. For instance, Reading Response 1 is due through Canvas before 9:50am on Tuesday 9/24.

## Course Schedule

Date	Media	In Class
T 9/3	<a href="https://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/golden-record/">https://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/golden-record/</a> <a href="https://soundcloud.com/nasa/sets/golden-record-greetings-to-the">https://soundcloud.com/nasa/sets/golden-record-greetings-to-the</a> <a href="https://soundcloud.com/nasa/sets/golden-record-sounds-of">https://soundcloud.com/nasa/sets/golden-record-sounds-of</a> <a href="https://apps.sciencefriday.com/goldenrecord/">https://apps.sciencefriday.com/goldenrecord/</a>	Introductions, the golden records, and our core course questions
H 9/5	Kraft, Robert G. "Bike Riding and the Art of Learning." <i>Change</i> 10, 6 (1978): 36-42. Wright, Gloria Brown. "Student-Centered Learning in Higher Education." <i>International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education</i> 23, 3 (2011): 92-97.	Discussion: student-centered learning Philosophy of Nature concept map
T 9/10	<a href="#">Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" In <i>Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature</i>, edited by William Cronon, 69-90. New York: W. W. Norton &amp; Co, 1995.</a>	Class council: course goals
H 9/12	Sloterdijk, Peter. "The Anthropocene: A Process-State at the Edge of Geohistory?" translated by Anna-Sophie Springer In <i>Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among</i>	Class council: course activities and assessment

Date	Media	In Class
	<i>Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies</i> , edited by Davis, Heather and Etienne Turpin, 327-340. London: Open Humanities Press, 2015.	
T 9/17	Kragh, Helge S. "New Horizons" In <i>Conceptions of the Cosmos: From Myths to the Accelerating Universe: A History of Cosmology</i> , 221-252. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.	Class council: course media
H 9/19	Snyder, Gary. "Good, Wild, Sacred." In <i>The Practice of the Wild</i> , 78-96. New York: North Point Press, 1990.	Class council: extra-classroom elements
<b>Reflecting on Canonical Environmental Philosophy</b>		
T 9/24	Henry David Thoreau selections from <a href="#">Walden</a> (also available from <a href="#">Project Gutenberg</a> ) (1854): "Economy" (45 pages)	Journal entry 1 (not officially graded)
H 9/26	continued	
T 10/1	Henry David Thoreau selections from <i>Walden</i> (1854): "Sounds" (11 pages)  "Walking" (available from <a href="#">Project Gutenberg</a> ) pages 54-63	Journal entry 2
H 10/3	John Muir selections from <a href="#">My First Summer in the Sierra</a> (also available from <a href="#">Project Gutenberg</a> ) "Through the Foothills with a Flock of Sheep" (7 pages) and "The Yosemite" (9 pages)	
T 10/8	John Muir essays "Alaska" pages 649-686, " <a href="#">Hetch Hetchy Valley</a> " (5 pages)	Journal entry 3  Participation Self-Assessment 1
H 10/10	Carolyn Merchant "Indian Land Policy, 1800-1990" pages 157-176	Topic & thesis
T 10/15	Aldo Leopold's (1949) "The Land Ethic" (14 pages)	Journal entry 4
H 10/17	Roberta Millstein's (2018) "Debunking myths about Aldo Leopold's land ethic" (6 pages)	Abstract & bibliography

<b>Date</b>	<b>Media</b>	<b>In Class</b>
T 10/22	David Chalmers " <a href="#">Consciousness and its place in Nature</a> " (30 pages)	Journal entry 5  Argument Assignment
H 10/24	<a href="#">Emma Marris' Ted talk</a>	Outline  In class: The Human Element
<b>MID-SEMESTER GRADES DUE</b>		
T 10/12	No required media	Midterm check-in discussion
H 10/31	No required media	Class council: modifications going forward
<b>Philosophy of Fishing</b>		
T 11/5	J. Baird Callicott "Whaling in Sand County: A Dialectical Hunt for Land Ethical Answers to Questions About the Morality of Norwegian Minke Whale Catching" (31 pages)	Participation Self-Assessment 2  First draft
H 11/7	No required media	In class peer review workshop
T 11/12	Kyle Whyte "Food Sovereignty, Justice and Indigenous Peoples: An Essay on Settler Colonialism and Collective Continuance" pages 345-366	Journal entry 6
H 11/14	Shijie Zhou et al. "Ecosystem-based fisheries management requires a change to the selective fishing philosophy" pages 9485-9489  Klaus Michael Meyer-Abich "Human health in nature -- towards a holistic philosophy of nutrition" pages 738-742  Peter Singer "A Case for Veganism" (5 pages)  Gary Snyder "Grace" pages 235-237	
<b>Climate Change</b>		
T 11/19	Aaron Maltais "Making our children pay for mitigation" pages 91-109	Journal entry 7

<b>Date</b>	<b>Media</b>	<b>In Class</b>
H 11/21	<a href="#">Greta Thunberg's Ted talk</a>	Second draft In class: Before the Flood (documentary film)
T 11/26	Willa Swenson-Lengyel "Moral Paralysis and Practical Denial: Environmental Ethics in Light of Human Failure" pages 171-187	Journal entry 8
THANKSGIVING BREAK		
T 12/3	No required media	Participation Self-Assessment 3  Class time reserved for presentations  Final project/paper due
H 12/5	No required media	Reflection day

### **Accommodation and Special Needs**

I am committed to working with students with disabilities and special needs to make sure everyone gets the most out of the course and is assessed fairly. Students with disabilities or special needs should contact the Office of Accessibility at the beginning of the semester so proper accommodations can be made. More information about the Office of Accessibility can be found at:

<https://community.siena.edu/student-life/departments/office-of-accessibility/>

### **Diversity and Inclusivity**

In this course, I will do my best to ensure that students from all backgrounds and perspectives will be served equitably. The diversity that students bring to this class will be viewed as a resource, strength, and a benefit. Welcoming diversity and cultivating an inclusive class climate is partly your responsibility too. We will have plenty of opportunity to practice respectfully listening and responding to one another. In class discussion please:

- Contribute by listening and speaking when appropriate
- Do not interrupt others
- Do not monopolize class airtime
- Avoid [Ad Hominem](#) responses
- Charitably interpret others
- Think before you speak

- Always be respectful, especially when you disagree or do not understand
- Apologize if you make a mistake
- Practice compassion and forgiveness

Your suggestions about how to improve the value of diversity, inclusivity, and respect in this course are encouraged and appreciated—please reach out.

### Academic Integrity

I have a *zero-tolerance* policy on plagiarism. In this course, students and the professor will respect Siena College’s policies on academic integrity, which can be found at:

<https://community.siena.edu/academic-affairs/resources/academic-integrity/> It is your responsibility to understand and refrain from cheating, plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. If you have *any questions* about what constitutes a failure of academic integrity, please ask me.

### Grading Scale

Letter	Score Between	Letter	Score Between
A	94% and 100%	C	73% and less than 77%
A-	90% and less than 94%	C-	70% and less than 73%
B+	87% and less than 90%	D+	64% and less than 70%
B	83% and less than 87%	D	57% and less than 64%
B-	80% and less than 83%	D-	50% and less than 57%
C+	77% and less than 80%	F	0% and less than 50%