

Philosophy & the Human Being

Climate Change Edition

Professor

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(she/her/hers)

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Office Location

Siena Hall 423

Office Hours

Tuesday & Thursday
1-2pm
Wednesday 2-5pm
and by appointment
Come visit!

Class Meeting

Tuesday & Thursday
2:35-4pm or
4:10-5:35pm
in Siena Hall 121

Course Description

Climate change is arguably the most pressing problem humanity faces today. What is climate change? What and who is responsible for it? What ought to be done? What is *my* role in all of this? In this course we take the time to face these questions head-on and devote ourselves to making meaningful progress on them. Our approach is multi-faceted: we explore climate science and the nature of evidence for climate change, we consider the moral obstacles in addressing climate change and explore pathways for overcoming them, and we examine concrete responses to climate change on several scales. This approach will introduce us to some distinctively philosophical views and methods from epistemology and ethics. We will read challenging and exemplary works by living philosophers, work together to understand their arguments in class discussions, practice thinking and writing philosophically, and apply our conceptual efforts in our own lives by developing individual and collective climate action plans.

Learning Goals

If you work hard, by the end of this course you will have learned how to carefully and charitably interpret philosophical arguments, respond to arguments made by others, conduct research in philosophy, and formulate your own answers to philosophical questions. You will also have had an opportunity to think deeply about some perennial and cutting-edge philosophical questions.

Required Books

Gardiner, Stephen M. et al. (Eds.) 2010. *Climate Ethics: Essential Readings*. Oxford University Press. [[paperback](#) approximately \$23]

Winsberg, Eric. 2018. *Philosophy and Climate Science*. Cambridge University Press. [[paperback](#) approximately \$33]

Preparing for Class

This class will involve a lot of student-lead discussion. It is therefore essential that you carefully and thoroughly prepare for class. Completing the assigned readings is the bare minimum requirement. Philosophically rich material is often best digested in multiple iterations. A good strategy would be to read the material at least twice, marking it up and taking notes as you go, recording your reactions and questions. Please bring your copy of the reading as well as the discussion topics, questions, reflections that arose for you while reading to class so that we can discuss them as a group. If you run into trouble that prevents you from attending class, please contact me.

A Note About This Class

This class is best approached with a sense of brave curiosity as opposed to defensive dogmatism. Climate change is a politically charged topic and can be polarizing. I strongly encourage you to bring your own perspective and experiences to bear on class discussion, and hope that you will contribute respectfully and thoughtfully to our conversations. Please speak up in class. *It is okay to be wrong, to learn, and to change your mind.* Philosophy class is a good place to practice several important skills that will help you whatever you go on to do in life, such as: clearly articulating your views, listening carefully and charitably interpreting others, evaluating arguments others make, raising objections and questioning assumptions, examining ethical commitments and their implications, defending your conclusions with reasons and evidence, communicating your position to others, and ultimately, clarifying, deepening, and advancing your understanding and your moral agency.

I reserve the right to change the syllabus depending on how the semester is going. I will always give you plenty of advance warning if I do.

Course Assignments

Instructions and rubrics for assignments are posted on Canvas. Please submit your assignments through Canvas. Unless otherwise specified, assignments are due the night before the class on which they are listed in the schedule below. I will accept assignments until 11:59pm of that night, although I encourage you to submit them earlier in the evening and to get enough sleep. For example, the first assignment is the Scavenger Hunt, which should be submitted through Canvas before 11:59pm on 9/18.

Essentials

Scavenger Hunt (15%)

A 15-step scavenger hunt to help you build skills that you will need to succeed in this course and beyond! Instructions on Canvas.

Reading Responses (30%)

10 short assignments (with one make-up opportunity), due through Canvas the night before the class indicated in the schedule.

Participation

Leading Discussion (10%)

Once during the semester, you will lead the class discussion with a team of about five peers. Your team must meet beforehand, and submit your discussion plan in writing to me in advance of the class. You will be assigned to a team in the first week of class.

Participation Self-Evaluation (6%)

Complete three self-evaluation worksheets over the semester reflecting on your participation in class and how to improve it.

Class Council (4%)

Submit complete individual and collective climate action plans on the final day of the course. Instructions will be provided.

Essays

Midterm Essay (10%)

A three-page essay explaining what we know about climate change, referencing readings we have done in the course (especially Winsberg's book and the IPCC reports).

Final Essay or Project (25%)

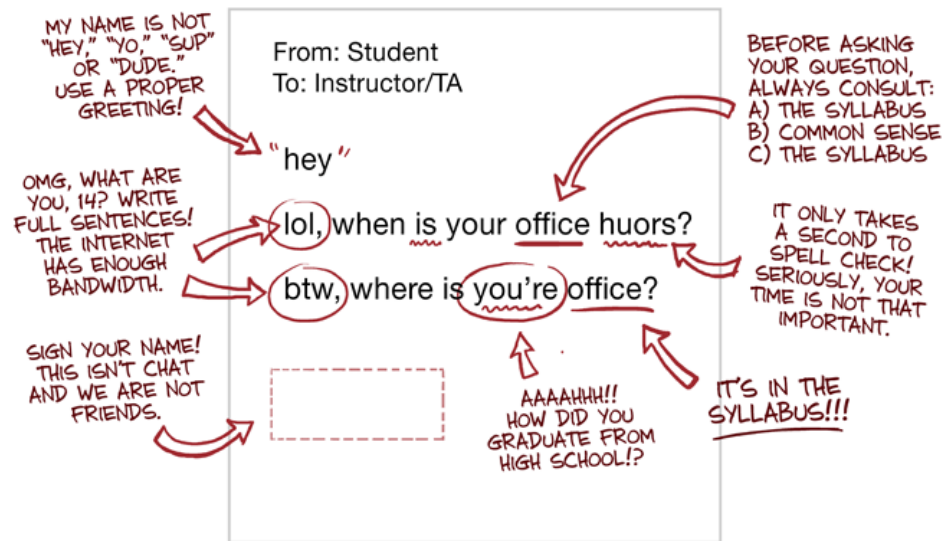
A five-page essay or alternative project of your choosing (subject to my prior approval) defending a position about what we should do about climate change, referencing readings we have done in the course and your own research.

Extra Credit will be awarded if everyone completes the course evaluations.

Communication

Please come visit me in office hours—this is a sorely underutilized resource! I would love to discuss the readings with you, talk philosophy, and help you work on your essays and/or final project. You are also welcome to email me with questions about the course using professional communication etiquette:

HOW TO WRITE AN E-MAIL TO YOUR INSTRUCTOR OR T.A.



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Course Schedule

Date	Readings	In Class
INTRODUCTION		
T 9/3	----	Welcome to philosophy, logistics, and introduction to the Scavenger Hunt
H 9/5	Stephen M. Gardiner’s “A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics, and the Problem of Moral Corruption” (<i>Climate Ethics</i> book, pages 87-98)	
T 9/10	----	Film: <u>Merchants of Doubt</u>
H 9/12	----	Discussion of film
T 9/17	CLASS CANCELED FOR BR. ED’S MEMORIAL	
H 9/19	Kate Rawles’ “The Missing Shade of Green” (on Canvas, 18 pages)	Pitch and vote on course content – Scavenger Hunt due the night before class
<i>F 9/20 – F 9/27</i>	<i><u>Global Climate Strike</u></i>	
<i>M 9/23</i>	<i><u>United Nations Climate Action Summit 2019, NYC</u></i>	
WHAT DO WE KNOW?		
T 9/24	Winsberg’s “Introduction” and “Data” (pages 1-25)	Reading Response 1 due the night before class
H 9/26	Winsberg’s “Decision” (pages 108-129)	Reading Response 2 due the night before class
T 10/1	Winsberg’s “Values” (pages 130-153)	Reading Response 3 due the night before class
H 10/3	Winsberg’s “Social Epistemology” (pages 208-226)	Reading Response 4 due the night before class
T 10/8	IPCC AR5 Summary for Policymakers (on Canvas, 32 pages)	Reading Response 5 due the night before class
H 10/10	IPCC Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C Summary for Policymakers (on Canvas, 24 pages)	

Date	Readings	In Class
T 10/15	----	Film: <u>This Changes Everything</u>
H 10/17	----	Discussion of film – Midterm Essay due the night before class
WHAT SHOULD WE DO?		
T 10/22	Simon Caney’s “Cosmopolitan Justice, Responsibility, and Global Climate Change” (<i>Climate Ethics</i> book, pages 122-145)	Project Proposal due (optional) the night before class
H 10/24	Caney continued	Reading Response 6 due the night before class
T 10/29	Simon Caney’s “Climate Change, Human Rights, and Moral Thresholds” (<i>Climate Ethics</i> book, pages 163-177)	Reading Response 7 due the night before class
H 10/31	Dale Jamieson’s “Adaptation, Mitigation, and Justice” (<i>Climate Ethics</i> book, pages 263-283)	Reading Response 8 due the night before class
T 11/5	Elizabeth Cripps’ “Climate Change, Collective Harm and Legitimate Coercion” (on Canvas, 24 pages)	Reading Response 9 due the night before class
H 11/7	<u>People’s Agreement of Cochabamba</u>	
T 11/12	<u>Pope Francis’ Encyclical Letter “Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home”</u> (read at least points 1-42, points 137-155, and points 199-201)	
H 11/14	Paris Agreement (on Canvas, 16 pages) & Green New Deal (on Canvas, 14 pages)	Final Essay or Project Draft due (optional) the night before class
T 11/19	Elizabeth Cripps’ “Mimicking Duties” (on Canvas, pages 115-139)	Reading Response 10 due the night before class
H 11/21	Naomi Klein’s “Introduction” from <u>This Changes Everything: Capitalism</u>	<u>Greta Thunberg’s TED Talk</u>

Date	Readings	In Class
	vs The Climate (On Canvas pages 1-28) Extinction Rebellion websites (main , U.S. , and NYC), Sunrise Movement website , and the Leap Manifesto	
T 11/26	[reading TBD by student vote]	Make-Up Reading Response due the night before class
THANKSGIVING BREAK		
T 12/3	Kyle Powys Whyte’s “Why the Native American Pipeline Resistance in North Dakota is about Climate Justice”	
H 12/5	Peter Gelderloos’ “An Anarchist Solution to Global Warming”	Class Council – Final Essay or Project due the night before class; Class Council assignments due *by the end of class*
NB: There is no final exam for this course.		

Supplemental Resources

Philosophy is hard! Check out these optional podcasts, readings, and other resources if you get stuck on the course material, want another perspective on the topic, or are just curious to learn more. These should be assessible to anyone, regardless of familiarity with philosophy or climate change. If you find other interesting things that you want to share with the rest of the class, please let me know.

Week	Link
1: 9/3 & 9/5	How to Philosophy Handouts (on Canvas)
2: 9/10 & 9/12	NOAA Climate Literacy: The Essential Principles of Climate Science (pdf) and Crash Course: Climate Science (10 min video)
3: 9/17 & 9/19	This American Life: Hot In My Backyard (about an hour-long podcast)
4: 9/24 & 9/26	MIT Climate Today I Learned About Uncertainty (10 min podcast)
5: 10/1 & 10/3	MIT Climate Today I Learned About Climate Impacts (10 min podcast)
6: 10/8 & 10/10	The Conversation, IPCC 1.5°C Report: Here’s What the Climate Science Says (short editorial)
7: 10/15 & 10/17	Mothers of Invention: Lungs of the North (about an hour-long podcast)
8: 10/22 & 10/24	Freakonomics: Two (Totally Opposite) Ways to Save the Planet (about an hour-long podcast)
9: 10/29 & 10/31	Philosophy Bites: Dale Jamieson on Green Virtues (about a 20 min-long podcast)
10: 11/5 & 11/7	Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge: Grafting Issue 01 June 2018 (15 pages, see especially Whyte’s piece and the Leap Manifesto)
11: 11/12 & 11/14	Mothers of Invention: Ghosting the Planet (about an hour-long podcast)
12: 11/19 & 11/21	Climate One: If You Won’t, We Will: Youth Action on Climate (about an hour-long podcast)
13: 11/26	Drawdown: 100 Solutions to Reverse Global Warming
14: 12/3 & 12/5	America Adapts: Climate Change Podcasters Unite! 8 Climate Pods, 8 Amazing Stories! (about a two hour-long podcast)

Further Reading

Edwards. Paul N. 2010. *A Vast Machine: Computer Models, Climate Data, and the Politics of Global Warming*. The MIT Press.

Jamieson, Dale. 2014. *Reason in a Dark Time: Why the Struggle Against Climate Change Failed—and What It Means for Our Future*. Oxford University Press.

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%