

# Philosophy and the Environment



“One of the recurring philosophical questions is: ‘Does a falling tree in the forest make a sound when there is no one to hear?’ Which says something about the nature of philosophers, because there is always someone in a forest. It may only be a badger, wondering what that cracking noise was, or a squirrel a bit puzzled by all the scenery going upwards, but someone.”

(Terry Pratchett, Sourcery)

Instructor: Dr. Chris Goto-Jones (he/him) ([chrisgotojones@uvic.ca](mailto:chrisgotojones@uvic.ca)) (please call me Chris!)

Office Hours: Monday 12-13:00 and Thursday 13.00-14.00 (online by appointment)

(book via Calendly: <https://calendly.com/chrisgotojones/office-hours>)

Class Information: COR B107, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday 11.30-12.20

Course Website: Through Brightspace. <http://bright.uvic.ca>

Teaching Assistants: John Miller ([johnrmiller@uvic.ca](mailto:johnrmiller@uvic.ca)), Win Sern Wong ([winsernwong@uvic.ca](mailto:winsernwong@uvic.ca))

Readings available through the course website – all available electronically when on campus network.

Links to academic support and other services available in this syllabus and through course site.

## Course Description

This course explores a range of approaches to the modern philosophy of the environment with a focus on how such philosophies might describe and also inform the relationship between humans and the wider 'other-than-human' world. Hence, this course adheres to the famous dictum of Marx: the purpose of philosophy is not just to interpret the world, the purpose is also to change it (11<sup>th</sup> thesis on Feuerbach). So, in addition to a broad-brush survey of some of the major currents in environmental philosophy (in the West), the course delves into the more contemporary and radical concerns of deep ecology, eco-philosophy, and eco-psychology. It discusses the radical epistemological, ontological, ethical and existential implications of embracing a phenomenological sense of the human that is an aspect of (rather than separate from) the natural world. Hence, the course necessarily deals with some issues in decolonization, emancipation, and even abolition. Finally, given the implications of this material, the course makes a deliberate decision to include a range of 'marginalized' voices, including the voices of non-males, non-westerners, and even non-humans as important and visionary philosophers.

By the end of this course, you can expect to:

- Understand the contours of the development of the modern philosophy of the environment, including during the Enlightenment and Romantic periods.
- Understand the emergence and philosophical dimensions and implications of Deep Ecology.
- Be able to recognise and deploy the phenomenological method to describe and engage with the natural world.
- Understand the difference between anthropocentric and eco-centric epistemologies and ontologies.
- Understand the therapeutic, ethical, and political implications of a more eco-centric philosophical system.
- Recognise and adjudicate the competing imperatives of different environmental philosophies in concrete case studies.
- Be able to answer the question: if a tree falls down in the forest and there's nobody there to hear it, does it make a sound?

## Course materials

Given the diversity of the material, there is no single textbook for this course. Nearly all of the readings are available electronically through UVic libraries – links will be provided in brightspace to all materials.

A useful textbook (which is available as an ebook through the library) is:

Pratt, Howarth & Brady, *Environment and Philosophy*. London: Routledge, 2000.

We will make use of several chapters from this book throughout the course.

Towards the end of the course, we will be considering Rebecca Campbell's recent prize-winning novella, *Arboreality*, which is the UVIC Environmental Humanities book of the year. It's not long and it's beautifully written. You are encouraged to read this gradually throughout the course so that you're ready to discuss it with the author in week 11.

Additional materials, including text excerpts and alternative readings will also be provided through brightspace. In many weeks, the first two classes will be dedicated to analysis and exploration of the set readings, while the third session will tend to present and explore an additional text to add examples or elaborations on the week's theme.

## Course Logistics

This will be in-person. This means that most of the classes will be held in COR B107. For reasons related to my own health issues, sessions on Fridays will be provided online instead of in person. You should expect the Friday sessions to be in the form of an online lecture (which will be recorded for later review if that's helpful for you), and then the Tues/Wednesday sessions in the following week will be in-person classes with a more dynamic, discussion-oriented format. Some of the Friday lectures will be provided by special guest stars. So, it might be helpful for you to think of our weeks as starting on Fridays and ending on Wednesdays



Attendance on Tuesdays and Wednesdays is highly recommended; interaction and discussion are vital to learning (and teaching!). If you are sick or have other good reason to miss the class (life happens!), please let me know in advance of the class (or as soon as possible thereafter), and this may count as an excused absence.

## Academic Integrity

Everything you will be evaluated on in this course will be fully open book and untimed. All answers to assignments have to be your own written work. This means that you are not allowed to provide answers for someone else, or vice versa or even versa vice. If you are ever unsure about what constitutes a violation of academic integrity, more information is provided on the University Calendar:

<http://web.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/info/regulations/academic-integrity.html>

Professionalism is expected from all students enrolled in courses in the Faculty of Humanities. As part of professionalism, students, faculty and staff are expected to be familiar with University policies, including the [Tri-Faculty's Standards for Professional Behaviour](#).

## Communication and Office Hours

Email is my preferred method of communication, as opposed to Brightspace messages or forum posts, especially for any official requests. If you ask me a question over email, you can expect a reply within about 1 working day. If you don't hear back from me within that time frame, feel free to try again in case your message went astray, or in case I'm just snowed under (it happens). Please be aware that if you email on Friday night, the first working day will be ... Monday.

When you do address me (over email or otherwise), please do so as Chris, because that's my name. If you feel more comfortable with titles, then please use either Professor (Prof.) Goto-Jones or Dr. Goto-Jones. No 'sir' or 'mr,' for various reasons, thanks! If you are ever nervous about sending me an email, or asking a question, feel free to include a funny anecdote, cartoon, or a picture of your pet with your request. This will not affect whether or not I will be able to help you with your request, but it will be much more fun for us all.

Finally, my pronouns are he/him. If you think I am unlikely to know the name you would prefer to be called, or the pronouns I ought to use for you, please don't hesitate to make me aware. It's helpful if you add your pronouns to your email footer.

My default platform for office hours will be Zoom, Mondays and Thursdays 12:30-13:20 am (TBC), but if that does not work for you, please feel free to email me in advance to suggest an alternative time and/or platform. Office hours will require pre-booking via Calendly (link to follow). If you don't make an appointment, you are welcome to sit in the Zoom waiting room until I become free, but please keep in mind

that all the slots might already be booked. It's much better to make an appointment. All relevant links will be posted on Brightspace.

## **Evaluation**

You are expected to maintain high standards of respect and academic integrity throughout this course. Discussion is essential to learning in this course, and it relies upon an atmosphere of trust. Everyone present should feel safe to express their views, which also means that everyone present is responsible for ensuring that they exercise academic freedom (rather than merely freedom of speech), treating each other respectfully and supportively.

### **• Continuous Assessment/Participation: 10%**

In this course, your participation will be evidenced by attending and participating in classes on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Each time you come to class you will receive 0.5 points up to a maximum of 10 by the end of the semester.

### **• Reflective assignments: 45%**

Because a goal of this course is to reflect upon and understand how our patterns of thinking impact our relationship with the natural world, there will be 3 reflective assignments, one after each of the first three sections of the course (orienting the field, establishing the field, world and worldviews). Each will be worth 15% of your final grade. A 'reflective assignment' encourages you to explore your own responses to the material covered in these sections and how (if at all) this material may have altered your outlook. They are less formal than a regular academic essay, but no less important. For each reflection, you will receive a choice of 3 prompts; you will respond to 1 with about 750 words. Your work will be assessed on both your understanding of the material covered (you must represent it accurately) as well as your ability to relate that to your existing views on the topics concerned.

### **• Final assignment: 45%**

The final assignment will be open-book format. You will receive a list of potential topics in week 12. From that list, you will select one question, which you will address in sophisticated, academic manner. You should expect that the final assignment will be more conventionally 'academic' than the reflection assignments. I will expect approx. 2000 words. The questions will encompass topics from the whole course; your answers will benefit from making use of knowledge and context from the course overall.

Your work will be assessed on: its relevance to the themes and materials of the course; its accurate use of sources; its coherence, sophistication and persuasiveness; the convincingness and effectiveness of your argument and writing.

## **Grades**

Per [UVic grading rubric](#), grades will be given as percentile marks. I am encouraged to remind you that UVic does not endorse grading a curve, but nevertheless the rubric states that grades over 80 (ie. A-, A, A+) are 'normally achieved by a minority of students.'

## Course Schedule (provisional)

### Orienting the field

*In these opening sessions of the course we'll consider some of the most intriguing questions often asked of philosopher of the environment: what is the point in the environmental humanities? what are they for? how can they help?*

*Perhaps surprisingly, some of the answers will be found in the cold, lonely void of space. And then some more answers will be found in the suffering of a penguin, the ridiculousness of a wombat, and in the experience of a philosopher who was (almost) eaten by a crocodile.*

### **Week One (Sep 4, 6): philosophers in space the role of environmental philosophy today and the overview effect**

*Mandatory:*

'The Overview Effect,' NASA Podcast, <https://www.nasa.gov/podcasts/houston-we-have-a-podcast/the-overview-effect/> (40mins)

*Optional:*

'Overview,' Vimeo movie, <https://vimeo.com/278367786> (20mins)

Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. London: Routledge, 2002, introduction, pp.1-12

### **Week Two (Sep 10, 11, 13): penguins, wombats, and crocodiles story-telling as critical environmental philosophy**

*Mandatory:*

Val Plumwood, 'Meeting the Predator' (originally, 'Being Prey') in *The Eye of the Crocodile*. Canberra: ANU Press, 2012, pp.9-22

*Optional:*

Val Plumwood, 'A wombat wake: in memoriam Birubi,' in *The Eye of the Crocodile*. Canberra: ANU Press, 2012, pp.49-54

Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. London: Routledge, 2002, chapter 1, pp.13-37

### Establishing the field

*In this second part of the course, we'll move on from questions of the purpose of the philosophy of the environment to consider some more historical and descriptive questions, like: what actually IS the philosophy of the environment? what has it been in the past? and what are the interesting philosophical questions now?*

### **Week Three (Sep 17, 18, 20): the road to the present dualism, rationality, and the counter-enlightenment**

*Mandatory:*

Pratt, Howarth & Brady, *Environment and Philosophy*, chapter 2, 'Objective nature' (pp.5-18)  
AND

Pratt, Howarth & Brady, *Environment and Philosophy*, chapter 3, 'We are all one life' (pp.19-37)

### FIRST REFLECTIVE ASSIGNMENT ISSUED ON 18 SEPT (DUE 27 SEPT)

#### **Week Four (Sep 24, 25, 27): deepening the shallows the emergence of deep ecology, eco-psychology, and eco-philosophy**

*Mandatory:*

Arne Naess, 'The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary.' In *Inquiry*, 16:1-4 (1973), pp.95-100.

AND

Harold Glasser, 'Naess's Deep Ecology: Implications for the Human Prospect and Challenges for the Future.' In *Inquiry*, 54:1 (2011), pp.52-77

*Optional:*

Freya Mathews, 'Deep Ecology,' in Dale Jamieson (ed), *Blackwell Companion to Environmental Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, pp. 218-232

William Grey, 'Anthropocentrism and deep ecology.' In *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 71:4 (1993), pp.463-475.

Luca Valera, 'Depth, Ecology, and the Deep Ecology Movement: Arne Naess's Proposal for the Future.' In *Environmental Ethics*, 41:4 (2019), pp.293-303.

#### **Week Five (Oct 1, 2, 4): the gaze of a spider phenomenology and the importance of how we pay attention to the world**

*Mandatory:*

Pratt, Howarth & Brady, *Environment and Philosophy*, chapter 5, 'Phenomenology and the environment' (pp.51-77)

*Optional:*

Iris Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of the Good.' In *The Sovereignty of the Good*. London: Routledge, 1970/2014, esp pp.82-83

David Abram, 'Wood and Stone.' In *Becoming Animal: an earthly cosmology*. New York: Vintage Books, 2010, pp.37-56

#### **Week Six (Oct 8, 9, 11): can you steal a dolphin? animals, consciousness, and being a 'thing' (special guest, kristin andrews)**

*Mandatory:*

Mary Midgley, 'Is a dolphin a person?' In *The Essential Mary Midgley*. London: Routledge, 2005, pp.132-142

*Optional:*

Kristin Andrews & Jonathan Birch, 'What Has Feelings,' AEON, 2003, <https://aeon.co/essays/to-understand-ai-sentience-first-understand-it-in-animals>

Kristin Andrews, 'What is it Like to be a Crab?' AEON, 2023, <https://aeon.co/essays/are-we-ready-to-study-consciousness-in-crabs-and-the-like>  
Strachan Donnelley, 'How and Why Animals Matter,' in *ILAR Journal*, 40:1 (1999), pp.22-28

## **The world and worldviews**

*In this third part of the course, we'll be exploring some of the grand philosophical issues around human orientations towards the world. What does the world mean to humans? What even is the difference between humans and other-than-humans? Is there such a thing as more-than-human and, if so, what does that mean for our understanding and practice of 'humanity.' Is human a verb?*

### **Week Seven (Oct 15, 16, 18): what's it like to be other-than-human? greening the self and speaking for the animals**

#### *Mandatory:*

Joanna Macy, 'World as Lover, World as Self,' and 'Greening the Self,' in Arnold Kotler (ed), *Engaged Buddhist Reader*. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1996, pp.150-180

#### *Optional:*

Mary Midgley, 'Individualism and the Concept of Gaia.' And 'The Unity of Life.' In *The Essential Mary Midgley*. London: Routledge, 2005, pp.349-358, 373-378

Kristin Andrews, 'What is it Like to be a Crab?' AEON, 2023, <https://aeon.co/essays/are-we-ready-to-study-consciousness-in-crabs-and-the-like>

## **SECOND REFLECTIVE ASSIGNMENT ISSUED ON 16 OCT (DUE 25 OCT)**

### **Week Eight (Oct 22, 23, 25): voices of the inanimate mountains, waters, and pebbles speak the dharma?**

#### *Mandatory:*

'Mountains and Waters Sutra' translated in Kazuaki Tanahashi (ed), *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen's Shobo Genzo*. Boulder: Shambhala, 2012, pp.154-164

#### *Optional:*

Chris Goto-Jones, 'Visions of Myōe Shōnin in the Forest of the World.' In *Kyoto Journal*, 104 (2023), pp.48-50

Annie Dillard, 'Teaching a Stone to Talk,' *Atlantic Magazine*, Feb 1981, pp.36-39

### **Week Nine (Oct 29, 30, Nov 1): wahkootowin a metis view on being human in the world (special guest, john miller)**

#### *Mandatory:*

John Miller, 'Wahkootowin: a Metis view on Being Human in the World,' in *Philosophy News* (UoT), Fall 2024.

#### *Optional:*

Viola Cordova, *How It Is*. Phoenix: University of Arizona Press, 2007, chapters 'A New Reverence' and 'Preparing for the Seventh Generation,' pp.208-220

Whitt, Roberts, Norman, Grieves, 'Indigenous Perspectives,' in Dale Jamieson (ed), *Blackwell Companion to Environmental Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, pp.3-20.

**Week Ten (Nov 5, 6, 8): the zen of being in space  
overview effects, buddhist experiences, and unity with ... everything (special guest, david loy)**

*Mandatory:*

David Loy, 'Eco-Dharma: a new Buddhist Path?' in *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 15 (2020), pp.52-73

[https://thecjbs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Loy\\_Ecodharma-a-new-Buddhist-path\\_52-73.pdf](https://thecjbs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Loy_Ecodharma-a-new-Buddhist-path_52-73.pdf)

*Optional:*

David Abram, 'Earth in Eclipse,' in Cataldi & Hamrick (eds), *Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy*. New York: SUNY, 2007, pp.149-176

**THIRD REFLECTIVE ASSIGNMENT ISSUED ON 6 NOV (DUE 15 NOV)**

**Narratives of being**

*Having explored a range of possible lifeworlds, the questions for us in this final part of the course is how the very practice of narrating different approaches and perspectives on the world can change the world itself.*

**Week Eleven (Nov 12, 13 is Reading Break, Nov 15): arboreality  
narrating the an eco-centric existence (special guest, rebecca campbell)**

*Mandatory:*

Rebecca Campbell, *Arboreality*. Stelliform Press, 2022 (selections)

[this is the UVic Environmental Humanities book of the year, and also a finalist for the Philip K. Dick Award and the winner of the 2023 Ursula K. Le Guin Prize for Fiction.]

*Optional:*

Rebecca Campbell, 'An Important Failure,' in *Clarkesworld Magazine*, 167 (August 2020),

[https://clarkesworldmagazine.com/campbell\\_08\\_20/](https://clarkesworldmagazine.com/campbell_08_20/) [also available in audio – 1 hour]

[this is the prize-winning short-story on which Arboreality was based]

Kyle Whyte, 'Indigenous science (fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral dystopias and fantasies of the climate change crisis,' in *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*. 1:1-2 (2018), pp.224-242

Malecki, Sorokowski, Pawlowski, Cienski, 'Introduction' in *Human Minds and Animal Stories*. London: Routledge, 2019, pp.1-23

**Week Twelve (Nov 19, 20, 22): eco-philosophy, activism, and eco-therapy  
the implications of re-narrating, re-imaging, and re-living a different relationship with nature**

*Mandatory:*

Andy Fisher, 'Ecopsychology as Decolonial Practice,' in *Ecopsychology*, 11:3 (2019), pp.145-155.  
AND

Carl Anthony, 'Ecopsychology and the Deconstruction of Whiteness,' in Roszak, Gomes & Kanner (eds), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*. SF: Sierra Club Books, 1995, pp.263-278.

FINAL ASSIGNMENT ISSUED ON 22 NOV (DUE 11 DEC)

Week Thirteen (Nov 26, 27, 29): reviewing the themes and questions

Week Fourteen (last class Dec 3): [Wed 4<sup>th</sup> is National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women – no class]

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### Other Resources:

#### Student Resources

- a. [UVic Learn Anywhere](#). UVic Learn Anywhere is the primary learning resource for students that offers many learning workshops and resources to help students with academics and learning strategies.
- b. [Library resources](#). Information for students wishing to use the UVic library.
- c. [Student wellness resources](#)
- d. [Ombudsperson](#) A resource to help resolve disputes or complaints.
- e. Indigenous student services ([ISS](#))
- f. Centre for Academic Communication ([CAC](#))
- g. Math & Stats Assistance Centre ([MSAC](#))
- h. Learning Strategies Program ([LSP](#))
- i. [Other student groups and resources](#)
- j. [Academic Concession Regulations](#)
- k. [Academic Concession and Accommodation](#)
- l. Academic accommodation & access for students with disabilities – [Policy AC1205](#)

#### University statements and policies

- a. University Calendar- Section "[Information for all students](#)"
- b. [Creating a respectful, inclusive and productive learning environment](#)
- c. [Accommodation of Religious Observance](#)
- d. [Student Conduct](#)
- e. [Non-academic Student Misconduct](#)
- f. [Accessibility](#)
- g. [Diversity / EDI](#)
- h. [Equity statement](#)
- i. [Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response](#)
- j. Discrimination and Harassment [Policy](#)