

English 2: Composition and Critical Thinking
Emphasis on Environmental Ethics

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We humans think critically on an everyday basis: Which class should I choose? Which lane? Which wave? Which soap?...as well as on a more formal basis, such as in writing academic arguments: e.g., "Paper or Plastic: A Treatise on Bagging." All such choices require not necessarily thinking that criticizes but *thinking that discerns*—i.e., critical thinking. What is even more fun and fruitful about critical thinking is to turn it on the very tenets and principles that underlie the basis for Western rational thinking itself. In fact, critical thinking is most useful for questioning those basic assumptions we take for granted about the world.

Enters environmental ethics, a relatively new branch of philosophical ethics that questions the very way our culture tends to look at the natural world, or at culture vs. nature. Environmental ethics questions our fundamental human sojourn on Earth: What is our place on this planet and is that an ethical place? Did evolution culminate in human beings? Are non-human animals "like us"? Do they think rationally, think consciously of themselves, feel, suffer, love? Do animals have rights? Do trees have rights? Do redwoods have intrinsic value—value unto themselves without considering anything else? Does the land? What ought to be the human role in the land, with wildlife, the environment, the biosphere? How is the planet faring with our domination of it?

Environmental ethics, once fully deliberated, can be transformative. As Holmes Rolston, one of its premier writers, has claimed, "After accepting environmental ethics, you will no longer be the humanist you once were. Environmental ethics requires risk. It explores poorly charted terrain, where one can easily get lost. One must hazard the kind of insight that first looks like foolishness. . . . But the questions here are. . . serious: The degradation of the environment poses as great a threat to life as nuclear war, and a more probable tragedy."

Environmental ethics takes science seriously into account, then goes beyond it to offer understanding of our place as humans in the larger community of life, an understanding, according to the physicist Fritjof Capra, that "nature sustains life by creating and nurturing communities" and so do the best of human societies. In other words, ecology offers us a *systems* view of the biological world; environmental ethics offers an overlay of how to treat that world ethically, morally. Aldo Leopold, who many consider one of the fathers of environmental studies, long ago offered a baseline for our ethical dealing with the natural world: In *The Sand County Almanac* in the 1940's he wrote, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

In this class, we will explore such issues and beyond, critically examining the human relationship to other animals and the environment, first via Washoe the

chimpanzee, subsequently via history, morality, religion and culture, politics, policy, economics, aesthetics, even a bit o' science, and various environmental ideologies: anthropocentrism, individualism, ecocentrism, and ecofeminism; then ending on a hopeful note with Dr. Jane Goodall. We'll cut a broad swath, leaving always the possibility of questions unanswered and therefore further inquiry on your part. By the end of the semester, my goal for each of you is to formulate your own environmental ethics--or at least the seeds of one.

It's serious stuff--so let us maintain our senses of humor! On that note, also, I'll assume your sincere participation in the issues; there is no room for apathy here. I assume also we'll get beyond the merely "p.c." and onward to the truly complex and real. It's also important to note that environmental ethics can get pretty abstract, so it is imperative that we not forget the down-to-Earth land and plants, air and ocean and animals we're talking about.

To that end, let me spell out the course requirements:

I. **Five papers** (about which I will tell you more). **Your grades on papers form the essential core of your overall grade; you'll need an A or A- average on them--as well as completion of all other requirements below--to warrant an A in the class.** The papers will concern the following:

1. Public issue addressed to two different audiences and purposes: 4-6 pages
2. Analyzing an extended argument, including logical fallacies: 4-6 pages
3. Arguing an environmental position while acknowledging opposition: 4-6 pages
4. Researched analytic argument on a sustainability issue of personal connection: 7-10 pp
5. Formulation of your own environmental ethic: 3-6 pages.

II. **Texts:** Writing Logically, Thinking Critically, 5th edition, Cooper and Patton
Next of Kin, Fouts and Mills
Environmental Ethics, 3rd edition, Botzler and Armstrong (many though not all essays)
Reason for Hope, Goodall

III. **At least five (5) visitations to one or more animal/environmental volunteer sites** of your choosing to help hands on. (You'll get a helpful handout on this.)

IV. **Journal of 60 pages by semester's end that incorporates a balance of responses to ALL the above readings, as well as entries concerning your volunteer work.** I'll collect this twice during the semester. (You'll also receive a handout on this.) End-of-semester journal grades, assuming you have a good balance of writings about the different readings, are as follows:

<u>Number of pages</u>	<u>Grade</u>
52-60	A/A-
42-51	B/B-
32-41	C/C-
22-31	D/D-

V. **For those whose papers and other class work points to an A, a presentation** to the class concerning a topic important to you, one that you can connect

to your interests, passions, or even volunteer work, linking to one of the required readings, if possible. (Yes, there will be a handout on this.)

VI. **Exuberant attendance and participation!** In accordance with Cabrillo's attendance policy, I allow at most three (that's 3) unexcused absences. (Call me ahead of time if you know you can't make it to class; that's an excused absence.) Talk! Discuss! Participate! Your discussion of the issues is invaluable to everyone's thinking about them, and it is vital to the class. Think how boring it will be if nobody has anything to say! I will also assume that everyone's sane viewpoints will be respected; we can always agree calmly to disagree.

VII. **I highly encourage you to form ongoing study groups** of 3 or 4 students; these groups can come in handy for group work on papers, volunteer work with a buddy, and class presentations.

All students needing accommodations should inform the instructor ASAP. Veterans may qualify for accommodations. Wounded Warriors may have acquired injuries which, through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, entitle the use of accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for students with verified disabilities. To determine if you qualify or need assistance with an accommodation, please contact Disabled Student Services, Room 810, 479-6379, or the Learning Skills Program, Room 1073, 479-6220.

Learning Outcomes of the class:

You will evaluate logical reasoning and argument in assigned and researched texts.

You will write evidence-based essays demonstrating logical reasoning and argumentative skills.

These include essays in which you analyze a current environmental issue by applying to it any of various environmental philosophies, such as anthropocentrism, individual rights, ecocentrism, or ecofeminism.

You will formulate or refine your own environmental ethic that demonstrates your awareness of environmental issues that include and go beyond human-centered concerns, showing the interconnectedness of such issues.

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One final note: Because we are(still) pioneers in this particular class emphasis on environmental ethics at Cabrillo, I know we will all be learning from one another--and so I encourage you to raise questions, bring in articles, actively assess our ongoing inquiry. You ultimately will make this class what it is--and I have every faith in you.