

**THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY  
Undergraduate Course Outline 2015-16**

**Philosophy 2035F: Nature, Ecology and the Future**



**Fall Term 2012  
MWF 10:30-11:30  
Room TBA**

**Instructor: Eric Desjardins  
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Our changing relationship to the natural world, and our newly amplified ability to affect Earth's future, bring urgent and difficult philosophical questions with real-world implications. This course draws on ideas from ethics, political philosophy, and philosophy of science as well as biology, psychology and economics to explore the moral and epistemological dimensions of climate change, species extinction, and biotechnology. We will explore the interplay between ethical thought, our conception of ourselves and of the natural world, scientific knowledge, and technological and political action in debates on these topics. The course takes a practical attitude, seeking ways that philosophy can help clarify our thinking about what we should and can do.

**TEXTS**

The following are the required texts. (Further readings will be supplied as we go along):

**The End of Nature**  
by Bill McKibben

**At Home on the Earth: Becoming Native to Our Place**

Eited by David Landis Barnhill

**Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update**

by Donella H. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, Dennis L. Meadows

**The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power**

by Joel Bakan

**No-One Makes You Shop at Wal-Mart: The Surprising Deceptions of Individual Choice**

by Thomas Slee

**OBJECTIVES**

This course aims to provide a transformative learning experience, by giving students tools for confronting and rethinking deep ethical and epistemological problems about the future. Several concrete objectives serve this overall aim. These include:

- Giving students a basic understanding of several theoretical frameworks for analyzing global environmental problems, and the interrelations and limitations of these frameworks.
- Providing students with models and opportunities for practicing honest and careful exploration of and response to difficult conceptual, ethical and epistemological problems.
- Encouraging the integration of the intellectual insights from the course material with students' emotional, social, practical and creative lives through art production, blogging and field excursion.
- Training students in effective articulation and communication of their thinking in both formal and informal writing, in discussion, and in designing and performing group presentations.

**REQUIREMENTS**

Classes will combine lectures and class discussions, with an emphasis on student participation. Students will contribute a blog post to an online forum. Two papers will be assigned (one about midterm, one close to the end of term).

These elements will be weighted as follows:

|                     |     |
|---------------------|-----|
| Paper I:            | 20% |
| Paper/Project II:   | 30% |
| Blog Post:          | 15% |
| Leading Discussion: | 20% |
| Participation:      | 15% |

## **AUDIT**

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/proceduresappeals.html>. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.