

Spring 2021

## **STS 360-454: Ethics and the Environment**

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# Ethics and the Environment

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Spring 2021  
STS 360 (451 & 453)  
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## OVERVIEW

This course focuses on an array of questions relevant to environmental and animal ethics, including: what are the necessary steps to respond to the climate crisis? What kinds of beings (humans, animals, plants, and ecosystems) have moral worth or morally relevant interests? Should animals have rights? Should we worry about endangered species? If so, why? How should we weigh the interests of our current generation against the interests of future generations? What does sustainable design truly look like? What is Environmental Justice?

All assignments, discussions, and grading will take place on **Canvas** and **Piazza**.

**Required Text:** Lori Gruen's *Ethics and Animals* (2011). Must acquire by the third week.

## GRADE BREAKDOWN

<b>70%</b>	FORUM PARTICIPATION	(10 forums = 100pts)
<b>20%</b>	WEEKLY QUIZZES	(7 quizzes = 20pts each = 140pts)
<b>10%</b>	HOMEWORK	(2 assignments = 20pts)

**This course does not feature any major exams or essays.** As such, in order to perform well you must take the weekly homework assignments and discussion forums *very seriously*. Please see the grading rubric that I will be using below.

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Every Monday I will upload a new lesson to Canvas. For each lesson, students are asked to **read a short lecture** that introduces core lesson themes and materials, **prepare homework responses** (400+ words) **or forum posts** expressing their thoughts on issues raised by the lesson, and complete a **short reading quiz**.

Except the first week, **quizzes** will be **due** by 11:59pm on **Friday** to ensure informed discussion.

On **forum weeks**, you must have **at least one post** uploaded by **Friday** at 11:59pm.

I have attempted to keep the amount of reading manageable each week, often—but not always—only assigning a single article for you to engage with. That said, **performing well on the homework will require that you read the required readings very closely**. There will certainly be some weeks where you will spend a couple hours engaging with a single essay.

**This course consists of 14 lessons. Each lesson consists of...**

- A short introductory lecture and selection of reading material
- A short reading quiz
- A homework assignment **or** graded forum discussion

## QUIZZES

Quizzes cover the required reading and video material for that lesson. Only material that is required reading will appear on quizzes (not “recommended” readings). Quizzes will consist of multiple choice and true/false questions. They are designed to make sure you are keeping up with the course content; they should be relatively easy if you’ve reviewed the assigned material. Occasionally there will be a tough question here and there. You can only take a quiz once, and

even though the quizzes are designed to be finished in ~15 minutes, you will always have one hour to complete them. **Hint:** I *strongly* recommend that you take the quiz *after* reading the assigned essay, rather than during the reading itself.

## HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

There will be two written assignments this semester. They consist of writing prompts for you to critically engage with. They vary in length from a *minimum length of 400 words to a maximum length of 800 words*.

Do not exceed the maximum word length for each assignment.

## LATE POLICY

**Late quizzes will not be accepted** unless prior arrangements are made or there is documentation of extreme circumstances. **Late homework will be deducted 5 points a day** until the following Wednesday at 11:59pm after which they will no longer be accepted.

## PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism of any form will not be tolerated. **Any instance** of copying and pasting from the web (including your own replies) without quotation marks is plagiarism. Failing to provide adequate citations is also a form of plagiarism. If you use any resource in your research, (including dictionaries, encyclopedias, and translation tools!) even if you don't quote it directly, provide a citation.

Suspected cases of plagiarism will be given **zero credit** for the assignment and reported to the Deans a violation of the Student Code of Academic Integrity, which carries a maximum penalty of expulsion.

## CITATION FORMAT

Every homework assignment and forum post must be professionally cited. For resources cited in the lesson lecture or reading material, the author name in parentheses is sufficient, with page numbers where appropriate. For instance, your essay might read:

Turing said that the question “can machines think?” was “too meaningless to deserve discussion.” (Turing, 4)

## GRADING POLICY

Your writing assignments will often be expressions of your own thoughts and beliefs on ethical issues. So I want to be clear that your grade will not depend on whether I agree with you. You are encouraged to think independently and to bring your own values and interests to our discussions. If you disagree with the views being presented or discussed in lecture and readings, you are *encouraged* to respectfully explain why by providing clear reasons and arguments. The grading rubric for this course is designed to be as objective as possible.

Many students struggle with abstract writing assignments, and many students do not have English as their first language. So I also want to be clear that your writing will not be graded on grammar or spelling, unless it makes your writing incomprehensible. The point of this course is not to write the perfect essay or perform extensive high level research. The goal of the course is to introduce you to pressing ethical issues and to provide you with various opportunities for thoughtful philosophical reflection on your *own* prior beliefs.

For this reason, your grade will largely depend on my impression of how seriously you have engaged with the course material in a thoughtful discussion of the issues. Substantive, thoughtful homework will be given more credit than half-baked or last minute homework that are transparent attempts to meet the minimum word count. To do well in class you need to demonstrate that you are thinking critically about the issues, and that you’re taking the time to express your thoughts carefully.

### Final grades are calculated on the following scale

- A (90% of total points)
- B+ (87%)
- B (80%)
- C+ (77%)
- C (70%)
- D (50%)
- F (49%)

## PIAZZA PARTICIPATION (use the class signup link [here](#))

In Piazza, **always use the “Note” format** rather than the “Question” format.

Discussion boards are the most important feature of our class. Each student must make **at least three** substantive posts each week (submitted via **Piazza**). Since the purpose of this exercise is back-and-forth dialogue, you should get into a habit/flow of spreading out your posts throughout the week. Overall, this course has **nine forums**.

### Forum Expectations

- You must make **at least three substantive posts** by Sunday night. To receive a high grade, these posts should be somewhat spread out over the week.
- **At least one** post must be **uploaded by Friday evening** to encourage/facilitate participation.
- **At least two** of these posts **must be substantive replies** to others.
- Your major posts (but not necessarily *all* of your posts) must be **informed by content from our class readings**.

### What is a Substantive Post?

Substantive responses do not have a word limit, but should be generally 250-400 words or longer. It is very difficult to say anything substantive in less space than that. Use your judgment. These forums are also intended to be big conversations so chat away naturally too! Occasional short responses are strongly encouraged. The tone should always be conversational.

The ultimate point of our forums is to evaluate you on your argumentative skills. If someone says something you disagree with, *respond to them*, get in there! And, if you get responded to, don't just reply like "oh yeah, my bad" -- no, *defend yourself*, or *change your mind*. Regardless of how you approach the forum, I want to see you anticipate strong counter-arguments to your own ideas. And, definitely, I need you to demonstrate familiarity with the assigned material.

## How to Start a Great Thread

Your posts are meant to demonstrate that you **(1)** have done the reading, **(2)** have thought closely about some *particular* aspect of the text, and **(3)** that you are willing to discuss the course content with your classmates.

### ***Never just summarize!***

I want you to critically analyze the text and engage with the ideas. For inspiration, here's an idea derived from Edward J. Gallagher. One can look at works of philosophy and/or science as if one has "four eyes". Each eye reveals a different perspective, and each one taps into a different level of your own thinking and requires the practice of a different skill. The "four eyes" are...

**(1) Hypothesize:** ask a detailed question and formulate a hypothesis about some element of the reading. Then, hypothesize potential *competing* answers to that question.

**(2) Analyze:** pick one portion of the text that confuses you and dive deep. What's really going on here? What does this concept really mean? What is the true foundation of this argument?

**(3) Synthesize:** relate a particular part of this reading to something else we read this semester. Could one idea from somewhere else be *productively* combined with one from this reading?

**(4) Criticize:** what did you like or not like about a particular part of the reading? Did particular arguments strike you as bad? Why? Create a hypothetical dialogue with a figure from the text.

## How to Structure Counter-Argumentation

- 1) Author X defends idea P in the following way...
- 2) I disagree with X; P is a weak argument due to the following reasons...
- 3) The strongest way that author X might *respond to my criticisms* is as follows...
- 4) Author X's counter-argument would be strong/weak because...

### **OR:**

- 1) Author X presents argument P in defense of her ideas
- 2) I find argument P convincing, however it still faces the following issues...
- 3) The best way that author X might *respond to my criticisms* as follows...
- 4) Author X's counter-argument would be strong/weak because...

Essentially, think of counter-argumentation in this class as a **dialogue** where you engage in a concise 'back-and-forth' with the author/philosopher of the reading. The more engaging the dialogue, the higher your grade will likely be. As a rule of thumb: the stronger you present your opponents arguments, the stronger your *own* position will come across. **High scores are given to students whose responses are nuanced**, *i.e.*, partially critical of *all* sides, including of the strength of one's *own* positions. Be humble!

## Uploading Your Weekly Post Record

After you have completed your participation (presumably Sunday), please copy and paste **all** of your posts from that week (even small ones) into a single document and upload it to the weekly assignment on Canvas with TurnItIn.

To collect your posts, simply **search for your own name** in the Piazza search field. Only copy and paste the posts relevant to the current lesson. Each copied post must have a date and time visible.

You can use Canvas to update / resubmit your post record if you decide to post more.

**The reason I ask you to do this every week** is that Piazza is not easily compatible with Canvas, so in order to use my rubric (and thus give you specific feedback) Canvas needs a document that I can grade.

I will be following all discussions every week and participating in many threads, so the context of your participation will always be at the forefront of my mind. As such, don't think of the documents you'll be uploading as anything but *basic records*. I'll be looking at Piazza itself when I determine your weekly participation grade.

As noted above, you can update an uploaded document (until the lesson ends) if you decide to post more.

# WEEKLY DISCUSSION RUBRIC

## 1. OUTPUT / COMMUNITY

<b>3+</b> (Bonus Points)	<b>2</b> (Full Points / Great work)	<b>1</b> (Default Grade)	<b>0.5 / 0</b>
<p><b>5+ substantive posts</b></p> <p>You're a <i>serious presence</i> on the forums, but not in a point-grabbing kind of way. Your posts are numerous, spread out, and convey genuine interest in the course-content and our online community.</p> <p>Sometimes you function as an intermediary who clarifies or resolves issues that other students are struggling with.</p>	<p><b>~4 substantive posts</b></p> <p>Your posts are somewhat spread out over the week. Attempts are genuinely made to reply to those who reply to you.</p> <p>You do not simply agree with others. You either <b>(1)</b> disagree with them, <b>(2)</b> reveal a potential flaw in their argument, or <b>(3)</b> agree with them, but with qualifications, or with a new point of your own.</p>	<p><b>3 substantive posts</b></p> <p>Your overall output is satisfactory, but feels somewhat rushed in terms of length and content, usually posted all in one session.</p> <p><b>At least one post is uploaded by Friday.</b></p>	<p><b>Beneath expectations</b></p>

## 2. CLOSE READING / ASSIGNED MATERIALS

<b>4</b> (Exemplary)	<b>3</b> (Close & Focused)	<b>2</b> (Surface-level Reading)	<b>1</b>
<p>The text is analyzed with a superior eye to detail. You demonstrate intellectual humility in the face of challenging material. You raise--and are not afraid to respond to--incisive questions about difficult concepts / arguments.</p>	<p>There is a clear sense of your mind working through hard problems derived from the text. Key terms are defined. Connections are drawn to previous readings.</p>	<p>Posts are either <b>(1)</b> not closely related to the readings, or <b>(2)</b> focus too much on merely summarizing the content.</p>	<p><b>Beneath Expectations</b></p>

### 3. CREATIVITY / CONTENT / CARE

<b>4</b> (Exemplary)	<b>3</b> (Original & Personal)	<b>2</b> (Surface-level Analysis)	<b>1</b>
<p>Your posts are a real pleasure to read. They are original, creative, and entertaining, <i>e.g.</i>, perhaps you construct a ridiculous yet insightful thought experiment.</p> <p>The strongest possible counter-arguments are constructed and considered.</p>	<p>You make an attempt to say something new or insightful about the text. Perhaps you evoke your own experiences.</p> <p>You start your own threads, do research, and aim to be a nuanced thinker by considering counter-arguments to your own views.</p>	<p>Posts are satisfactory in terms of content, but generally adopt an uncritical or non-nuanced perspective on the subject.</p> <p>Little-to-no attempt is made to entertain countervailing perspectives or to provide creative counter-arguments of your own design.</p>	<b>Beneath Expectations</b>

**Total: 10 pts (w/ option for +2 bonus)**

## UNIT ONE

### Challenging Traditional Morality: Human Nature, the Natural, and the Evolution of Ethics

1. **LESSON ONE: What is Human Nature? Is Morality Uniquely Human?**
  - a. Frans de Waal's TED Talk "Moral Behavior in Other Animals"
  - b. Frans de Waal's *Our Inner Ape* (Ch. 1: "Apes in the Family")
  - c. Are human beings fundamentally selfish?
  
2. **LESSON TWO: Ethics as an Evolutionary Phenomenon? (forum week)**
  - a. Peter Singer's *The Expanding Circle* (Ch. 4: "Reason")
  - b. What does "moral progress" mean, and does it exist?
  
3. **LESSON THREE: What is Speciesism?**
  - a. Peter Singer's "All Animals are Equal"
  - b. James Rachels' "Darwin, Species, and Morality"
  - c. Lori Gruen, "Why Animals Matter" (Ch1 of *Ethics and Animals*, only 1-13 and 22-33)
  
4. **LESSON FOUR: Can Animal and Environmental Ethics Be Friends? (forum week)**
  - a. Eric Katz, "Is there a Place for Animals in the Moral Consideration of Nature?"
  - b. Tom Regan, "How to Worry about Endangered Species" and "Rights and Environmental Ethics: An Aside"
  - c. Lori Gruen, *Ethics and Animals* (pgs 33-43)
  - d. Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic" (optional)
  
5. **LESSON FIVE: What is "Natural"? (forum week)**
  - a. Lori Gruen's "The Natural and the Normative" (Ch. 2 of *Ethics and Animals*)
  - b. Can ethical positions be justified by human history and theories of human nature?
  - c. Does the word "natural" belong in moral deliberation?

## UNIT TWO

### Sustainability, Agriculture, and Engineering Animals

6. **LESSON SIX: Sustainability and Animal Agriculture (forum week)**
  - a. Lori Gruen's "Eating Animals" (Ch. 3 of *Ethics and Animals*)
  - b. Jeff McMahan's "Eating Animals the Nice Way" (optional)
  - c. Sarah Ahktar, "Animal Pain: Worse for Them or Us?" (optional)
  
7. **LESSON SEVEN: Bioengineering Meat, Leather, and Homes (forum week)**
  - a. Andras Fogacs' *TED Talk* "Leather and Meat Without Killing Animals"

- b. Mitchell Joachim's *TED Talk* "Don't Build Your Home, Grow It!"
- 8. **LESSON EIGHT: The Ethics of Animal Experimentation (forum week)**
  - a. Lori Gruen's "Experimenting with Animals" (Ch. 4 of *Ethics and Animals*)
  - b. Film: *Project Nim*
- 9. **LESSON NINE: Protection and Personhood (forum week)**
  - a. Lori Gruen's "Animal Protection" (Ch. 7 of *Ethics and Animals*)
  - b. Steven Wise's TED talk, *Chimps have feelings and thoughts. They should have rights*

## UNIT THREE

### Politics, Protection, and Climate Change

- 11. **LESSON TEN: Environmental Justice (forum week)**
  - a. Figueroa and Mills, "Environmental Justice"
- 12. **LESSON ELEVEN: Natural Gas Extraction: What's the Fracking Deal?**
  - a. Howarth's and Engelder's comparative article "Should Fracking Stop?"
  - b. Jackson et al.'s "The Environmental Costs and Benefits of Fracking"
- 13. **LESSON TWELVE: Politics and the Climate Crisis (forum week)**
  - a. Wallace-Wells, "The Uninhabitable Earth" (selections)
- 14. **LESSON THIRTEEN: Geo-Engineering**
  - a. Toby Svoboda's "Is Aerosol Engineering Ethically Preferable to other Climate Change Mitigation Strategies?"
  - b. Matthew Liao's "Human Engineering and Climate Change"
- 15. **LESSON FOURTEEN: Cradle-to Cradle Design (forum week)**
  - a. McDonough and Braungart, "Food Equals Waste"