

# **Ethics in the Anthropocene**

## **ETH 3650**

### **Fall 2023**

**Mark Doorley, Ph.D. (he/him/his)**  
**Director, Ethics Program**  
**SAC 104**  
**610-519-4736**

**Class Meeting Time: T/R 1 – 2:15PM**

**Classroom: Vasey 201**

**Office Hours: W 1:30 – 2:30PM or by appointment**

#### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

There was a time when *homo sapiens* were one species among many, a small force trying to survive in a world only partially hospitable to their many desires. However, the vast expansion of the human population, combined with extensive human-wrought environmental degradation, species extinction, and climate change, has rendered the human—the *anthropos*—a dominant influence on the makeup of our planetary systems today.

Geologists have therefore proposed that we are entering into a new age: the Anthropocene. In other words, humans have become a global, geologic force, shaping the world in unprecedented and, at times, unknown ways. In this class, we will focus on the overarching ethical question that arises from this transition: what does such a shift entail for the ethical life, for individuals and for collectives?

More particularly, the class will focus on the following questions: 1. What is the Anthropocene and how should we understand it? 2. What aspects of human and non-human life are impacted by the Anthropocene? 3. Is the idea of the Anthropocene accurate or does it promote a false, universal vision of ‘the human’ that ignores uneven contributions to climate change? 4. How might the Anthropocene affect our self-understanding as humans? 5. How might it affect our capacity to act morally? 6. How does the Anthropocene demand new ways of thinking about justice and responsibility? And 7. How might we learn to act in ways that would allow us, as humans, to live well in this new age?

We will address these questions through a) engaging the emerging literature on the subject of the Anthropocene, in conversation and debate with one another, b) writing essays that struggle with and respond to these questions, and c) formulating and executing projects that engage the issues that arise from the Anthropocene.

## **Peace & Justice Course**

Courses approved for a Peace and Justice attribute include significant engagement with peace and/or social justice issues including, but not limited to: exploring the varieties of oppression, prospects and proposals for liberation, theories of justice, peace, and peacemaking, and/or the roots of violence and war. Courses also include engagement with the themes of human dignity, the common good, solidarity, poverty, marginalization, or other concerns of Catholic Social Thought.

## **REQUIRED BOOKS:**

Dale Jamieson and Bonnie Nadzam. *Love in the Anthropocene*. New York: OR Books, 2015.

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

1. To engage in the close reading of texts, to identify main conversations in the field, to debate one another on ethical issues, and to contribute to the emerging conversation about the Anthropocene.
2. To examine and interpret the relationships between different aspects of the Anthropocene, including scientific, social, political, religious, and ethical dimensions.
3. To adopt a reasonable position to guide ethical decision-making with respect to global environmental problems.
4. To bring creative, independent thinking to the topics and readings of the course, through a thesis-driven paper or project.

## **COVID-19 POLICIES**

Masks are not required in class, unless you are either exposed to someone who tests positive (10 days since exposure) or has tested positive (5 days after 5 day isolation. If at any time you feel more comfortable wearing a mask, please do so.

A student who must quarantine because of contracting Covid-19 will be responsible for any course work that they miss. The professor will work with the student to make sure they have the resources to adequately make up for their absences. Recording the class is not an option.

## **FOOD AND DRINK IN CLASS**

Eating food in class is not permitted; having something to drink is permitted. Kindly be mindful of this as you plan your day.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

1. **In-class participation:** The discipline of ethics is grounded in the giving of reasons and engaging with objections. As such, debate and conversation are central to our endeavor in this class and are a necessary component in the grading. Meaningful participation includes reading the assigned texts for the class, completing discussion questions on time, and engaging actively in discussion in class through reasonable reflection, questions, and debate.

**2. Discussion Questions** (for every class with a reading between (August 29 – December 7)). One question should be for clarification: was there something (for instance, a term, an argument, or a claim) in the readings that was unclear to you? Alternatively, was there a section of the reading that it would be particularly useful for you if we spent time reviewing? The other question should be a discussion question or comment, based on your critical engagement with the texts. To guide the sort of question you will turn in, consider examining the texts with questions like these in mind: Are there assumptions made by the author that you question? Does the author consider all of the relevant factors when evaluating a moral issue? Does the author's depiction of the moral life or the issues illuminate or conflict with your experience in a particular way? These questions will serve as a basis for our in-class discussion.

These will be graded on a pass/fail basis. If a discussion question is particularly engaging or thoughtful, a student will get an asterisk on that "pass" grade. At the end of the semester, these asterisks can be beneficial in borderline grade cases. These questions will not be returned, given the regularity of submission. However, if you would like to have a specific question answered, that was not addressed in class, please send the professor an email.

If the professor is concerned about the quality of your questions, he will communicate with you by email.

**3. Discussion Leading:** Groups of two students will be in charge of orienting and starting off the discussion for the day once during the semester. Signups will happen on the third day of class.

Tips for facilitating discussion: Your facilitation should not solely summarize the readings but should also direct the class to particular critical aspects of the work(s). We have all read the reading, so please avoid providing an outline or step by step "walk" through the reading.

In facilitating discussion, there are many ways to approach a text, including:

- (1) relating the text to *your own ideas*: This doesn't mean reacting to superficial aspects of a reading (as in, "It wasn't well-written" or "I found it boring"), but explaining, for example, *why* it was or was not persuasive or *whether and why* it challenged your ideas or values;
- (2) relating it to *other texts from the class* and emphasizing areas of overlap/conflict among readings;
- (3) relating it to *broader themes*: the text's broader implications for our course themes.

Your facilitation can be a mix of such approaches, and it should probably not be limited to one. It should include a few questions directed to the class to prompt response and discussion.

You are partners in this facilitation, so that should be evident in the way you share responsibilities for both the presentation and the following discussion.

Discussion leaders should reach out to the professor if they have any concerns or questions about the material they are responsible for.

Aim for 5-7 minutes to offer your comments on the material, followed by guided conversation with your fellow students for a minimum of 15-20 minutes. (Total time: 20-27 minutes) The

timing of this will be monitored by the professor.

**4. Midterm take home exams:** There will be two mid-term take-home exams. The first is due October 3, 2023 at 11:59 PM. The second is due November 17, 2023 at 11:59PM. These exams cover all readings in the first half of the course (mid term #1), from midterm to November 16, 2023 (mid term #2). The essay questions will ask you to: a) interpret and explain texts from the course, b) synthesize and relate arguments from different thinkers, and c) provide defenses of your own positions in relation to these arguments. It will involve short essays and the creation of an infographic (midterm #1) and a meme (midterm #2). You will receive the first midterm by September 22nd, the second by November 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**5. Final Paper or Project:** You will have the opportunity to choose to write a final paper or complete a final project (see final project assignment handout on Blackboard). By **Tuesday, November 7, 2023**, you will need to have decided which option (final paper or project) you will complete. By the end of November you must schedule a meeting with the professor about your final project. This is worth 5 points for the course. A sign up sheet is available on Blackboard in the Final Project folder. In the prompt for the final project, find more information on what is expected of you at this meeting. This paper or project will be due at the end of the final exam period Thursday, December 14 at 11AM.

## GRADING

-Participation:

Active In-Class Discussion Participation 15 points  
Discussion Questions Submission 10 points  
Discussion Co-Leading 10 points

-Papers and Exams:

Midterm exams: 30 points (15 each)  
Final Paper or Project office discussion 5 points  
Final Paper or Project 30 points

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-TOTAL: 100 points

## GRADING SCALE

I will follow the University's grading scale. For Villanova's grading scale, please visit:  
<https://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/provost/resources/student/policies/grades.html>

## Academic Integrity

Every student is expected to adhere to the most rigorous standards of academic integrity. Central to any academic activity is honesty: honesty about one's sources, about one's collaborators, and about one's authorship of one's work. Villanova's policy on academic integrity, as well as the details of what happens should a violation occur, can be found [here](#).

### *AI Technologies*

The use of AI technologies to generate essays for this class is a violation of the university academic integrity policy. We should commit ourselves to engaging in the creative labor of preparing our essays.

### **Electronics in the Classroom**

All mobile phones should be on silent mode if not turned off during class. You are free to have your laptops or tablets for use in class, provided they are used solely for accessing the reading of the day or taking notes. Studies have shown that having a hard copy of the reading available and taking notes by hand, rather than typing, helps the process of learning. However, I will leave it up to each of you whether to have an electronic device in class. I do reserve the right to revoke that privilege if it is abused by doing work for other classes or being otherwise distracted.

### **Office of Disabilities and Learning Support Services**

Students with disabilities who require reasonable academic accommodations should schedule an appointment to discuss specifics with me. It is the policy of Villanova to make reasonable academic accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. You must present verification and register with the Learning Support Office by contacting 610-519-5176 or at [learning.support.services@villanova.edu](mailto:learning.support.services@villanova.edu) or for physical access or temporary disabling conditions, please contact the Office of Disability Services at 610-519-4095 or email [Stephen.mcwilliams@villanova.edu](mailto:Stephen.mcwilliams@villanova.edu) Registration is needed in order to receive accommodations.

### **Student Resources**

Villanova University has multiple academic support services. Visit this [site](#) for information on the Writing Center, Math Center, etc. There are also services available, free of charge for students, who need mental health support. Learn more [here](#).

### **Absences for Religious Holidays**

Villanova University makes every reasonable effort to allow members of the community to observe their religious holidays, consistent with the University's obligations, responsibilities, and policies. Students who expect to miss a class or assignment due to the observance of a religious holiday should discuss the matter with their professors as soon as possible, normally at least two weeks in advance. Absence from classes or examinations for religious reasons does not relieve students from responsibility for any part of the course work required during the absence.

Villanova's policy on this matter can be found [here](#).

## Important Dates

Mid Term #1: Tuesday, October 3, 2023 11:59PM Eastern

Final Paper/Project Notice: Tuesday, October 31, 2023 11:59PM Eastern

Alert Dr. Doorley, by email, of your choice of final project (paper or creative Project), and the topic.

Mid Term #2: Friday, November 17, 2023 11:59PM Eastern

End of November: have met with Dr. Doorley about the final project

Final Paper/Project: Thursday, December 14, 2023, 11AM Eastern

## SCHEDULE OF PROBABLE CLASSROOM EVENTS

### A. What is the proposal of the Anthropocene?

#### August 24:

Introduction to the class

Please be sure to complete the [Microsoft Form](#), if you have not done so already. Also, please complete the discussion board exercise on Blackboard, “Who am I?”

#### August 29:

1. Johan Rockstrom, Will Steffen, Kevin Noone, *et al.* "A Safe Operating Space for Humanity." *Nature* 461, no. 24 (September 2009).
2. Paul J Crutzen, and Eugene F. Stoermer. "The "Anthropocene"." *IGBP Newsletter* 41 (May 2000).

[If you are less familiar with the science behind climate change, you will need to take a look at the following pdfs on blackboard: “What is Climate Change?” and “Climate Change Impacts” both from *Climate Change: A very short introduction* by Mark Maslin.]

**I would like to meet with each of you for 10-15 minutes. A sign up sheet for this is available [here](#). Please sign up by August 31<sup>st</sup>.**

### B. Narratives of the Anthropocene

#### August 31

Clive Hamilton. “Human Destiny in the Anthropocene.” In *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking modernity in a new epoch*. Edited by Clive Hamilton, Christophe Bonneuil and Francois Gemenne. London: Routledge, 2015.

**September 5**

Crist, Eileen, "On the Poverty of Our Nomenclature," *Environmental Humanities*, 3 (2013): 129-147.

Look through: John Asafu-Adjaye, Linus Blomqvist, Stewart Brand, et al. "An Ecomodernist Manifesto." April 2015, [www.ecomodernist.org](http://www.ecomodernist.org).

**September 7:**

Joseph Kelley, "Anthropocene as Empire: An Augustinian Anthropology for 'Keeping the Wild'." In *Augustine and the Environment*. Edited by John Doody, Kim Paffenroth, and Mark Smillie. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2016.

(Discussion Leaders)

**September 12:**

1. Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg. "The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative." *The Anthropocene Review* 1, no. 1 (2014): 62-69.

2. Rob Nixon. "The Great Acceleration and the Great Divergence: Vulnerability in the Anthropocene." March 2014,

<https://profession.mla.org/the-great-acceleration-and-the-great-divergence-vulnerability-in-the-anthropocene/>

(Discussion Leaders)

**September 14:**

Christophe Bonneuil. "The Geologic Turn: Narratives of the Anthropocene." In *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking modernity in a new epoch*. Edited by Clive Hamilton, Christophe Bonneuil and Francois Gemenne. London: Routledge, 2015.

(Discussion Leaders)

**September 19:**

Pope Francis. *Laudato Si': On care for our common home*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015, Chapters 2-3 ("The Gospel of Creation" and "The Human Roots of Ecological Crisis")

(Discussion Leaders)

**September 21:**

Dale Jamieson and Bonnie Nadzam. *Love in the Anthropocene*. New York: OR Books, 2015, pp. 9-28, 197-214, 29-58. (Introduction, Coda, First Chapter).

**September 26:**

Jamieson and Nadzam. *Love in the Anthropocene*, pp. 59-137. (Chapters 2-3).

**September 28:**

Amitav Ghosh. *The Great Derangement*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016, 11-58 (sections 4-12).

(Discussion Leaders)

**October 3: NO CLASS, Take Home Mid Term Exam, due at 11:59PM**

**C. Hurdles to Action?**

**October 5:**

Robert Gifford, "The Dragons of Inaction: Psychological barriers that limit climate change mitigation and adaptation" *American Psychological Association* 66:4 (May/June 2011): 290-302.

**October 10-12: Mid Term Break**

**October 17:**

Kari Marie Norgaard, "Climate Change as Background Noise in the United States" in *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

**October 19:**

Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, "Unmasking Evil that Parades as Good," in *Resisting Structural Evil* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2013).  
(Discussion Leaders)

**D. Moral Action: Overcoming Hurdles, Determining Obligations**

**October 24:**

Sarah Fredericks, "Climate Apology and Forgiveness," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 39:1 (Spring/Summer 2019): 143-159.  
(Discussion Leaders)

**October 26:**

Allen Thompson, "Radical Hope for Living Well in a Warmer World," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 23 (2010): pp. 43-52.  
(Discussion Leaders)

**October 31:**

Robin Wall Kimmerer, "The Honorable Harvest," In *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants*, Milkweed: Minneapolis, MN, 2013, pp. 175-201.

Wahinka Top (Four Arrows) and Darcia Narvaez, Ph.D., "All Earth Entities are Sentient," in *Restoring the Kinship Worldview: Indigenous Voices Introduce 28 Precepts for Rebalancing Life on Planet Earth*. North Atlantic Books: Berkely, CA, 2022, pp. 89-95

**November 2:**

Daria Burnasheva, "Understanding Climate Change from an Indigenous Paradigm: Identity, Spirituality and Hydrosocial Relations in the Arctic," *Arctic Yearbook*, 2020. (17 pages)  
(Discussion Leaders)



**November 7:**

Aspects of Justice Discussion (no reading)

**November 9:**

Kevin O'Brien, *The Violence of Climate Change*: "Martin Luther King Jr.'s Hope for an Uncertain World" (146-167) and "Cesar Chavez and the Liberating Power of Sacrifice" (172-192)

(Discussion Leaders)

**November 14:**

Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, selections from Chapters 8-9 in *Resisting Structural Evil*(~37pp)

**November 16:**

Avner de Shalit, "Climate Change Refugees, Compensation, and Rectification," *The Monist* 94:3 (July 2011).

(Discussion Leaders)

**November 17<sup>th</sup>: Midterm #2 due by 11:59PM**

**November 21:**

Allen Thompson. "The Virtue of Responsibility for the Global Climate." In *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change: Human Futures of the Future*, edited by Allen Thompson and Jeremy Bendik-Keymer. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press (2012), pp. 205-211 (sections: "Standard Responsibility" and "Political Responsibility")

(Discussion Leaders)

**November 28:**

Augustin Fragniere, "Climate Change and Individual Duties" *WIREs Climate Change*, 7 (2016):798-814.

(Discussion Leaders)

**November 30:**

Henry Shue. "Historical Responsibility, Harm Prohibition, and Preservation Requirement; Core Practical Convergence on Climate Change." *Moral Philosophy and Politics* 2:1 (2015), pp. 7-31.

**December 5:**

Stephen Gardiner. "Geoengineering: Ethical Questions for Deliberate Climate Manipulators." In *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics*. Edited by Stephen Gardiner and Allen Thompson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

**December 7: Final Day of Class**

Forrest Clingerman, "Between Babel and Pelagius: Religion, Theology, and Geoengineering" In *Engineering the Climate: The Ethics of Solar Radiation Management*, pp. 201-220.

**Final Paper or Project Due at 11AM on Wednesday, December 14, 2023.**

