

# PHIL 51: Climate Ethics

Professor: Karen Kovaka

Fall 2023

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Office Hours: Wed 4-6pm

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Class Hours: Mon/Wed 6:30-7:50pm

Class Room: Peterson Hall 103

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## Course Description & Learning Objectives

This course explores the ethics of climate change at personal, structural, and global levels. We will begin with climate emotions (grief, anxiety, hope) and the ethics of belief about our ecological future. Then we will consider individual-level responses to climate change and the nature of collective action problems. Shifting focus from individuals to broader society, we will ask a series of questions about climate justice: Should past emissions matter when deciding how much different societies can justifiably emit now? How do we weigh the interests of future generations of people against the interests of people living now? What are the ethics of popular climate mitigation and adaptation schemes, from net-zero emissions to carbon removal to geoengineering?

More specifically, at the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Articulate and justify a view about the nature of your personal climate obligations, as well as any uncertainties you have about this view.
- Discuss unresolved questions within climate ethics, including why they are difficult to resolve.
- Identify relevant normative issues in particular climate policy case studies.
- Develop normative standards for evaluating climate policies.
- Evaluate climate policies using these standards of evaluation.

## Course Structure

We will meet for in-person class sessions twice a week (Mon/Wed). You need to complete the required reading before each class, as well as an online weekly reading quiz (10 total, on Canvas) due each Wednesday. There are three additional homework assignments due throughout the

quarter. At the end of the quarter, there will be a final exam. The final component of the course is attendance and participation: there is no substitute for active engagement from everyone during class time. In class, I will assume you've done the assigned reading and then build on what you've read, rather than duplicating it.

## Teaching Assistant

Your TA for the course is Sam Ridge. Sam and I will share the job of grading course assignments and exams

- email: [siridge@ucsd.edu](mailto:siridge@ucsd.edu)
- Office hours: Mon 5:30-6:30pm

## Evaluation

1. Weekly Reading Quizzes 20%
2. Homework Assignments: 60%
  - (a) Assignment 1 (due 10/20): 20%
  - (b) Assignment 2 (due 11/10): 20%
  - (c) Assignment 3 (due 12/1): 20%
3. Final Exam (Mon, 12/11): 20%

## Grading Scale

Letter grades in this course correspond to the following percentages:

- |              |             |             |             |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| • A+: 97-100 | • B+: 87-89 | • C+: 77-79 | • D+: 67-69 |
| • A: 93-96   | • B: 83-86  | • C: 73-76  | • D: 60-66  |
| • A-: 90-92  | • B-: 80-82 | • C-: 90-72 | • F: <60    |

## Fine Print

- **Attendance:** I expect you to come to every class session except when illness or other personal circumstances prevent you. I will keep track of attendance each week and forgive up to two absences with no questions asked. This means you do not need to contact me to explain your first two absences. After two absences, I will start deducting points from your final grade for each additional absence. If circumstances require you to miss more than two classes, you and I need to speak in person about alternative ways for you to participate in the course.

- **Participation:** Even though this is a large course, I expect engagement and participation from everyone during class. Attendance is necessary but not sufficient: I encourage speaking up in class so that everyone else can benefit from what you have to say, as well as other forms of participation, such as visiting office hours or sending thoughts over email.
- **Late Work:** Your TA and I can grant extensions on assignments *if you request them in advance*. If you turn in work late without requesting an extension, we may reduce the grade of an assignment by 5% per day late. In general, however, we are happy to adjust deadlines in response to your circumstances. If you are experiencing difficulties turning in work, please talk to us proactively, rather than waiting until things pile up.
- **Accessibility:** We all learn differently, and I am committed to making this course accessible to everyone. Please come talk to me if some aspect of the course isn't working for you: we can collaborate on alternatives that suit your needs, interests, and learning style. If you have a disability (or think you might), it's also a good idea to contact [Services for Students with Disabilities](#).
- **Technology:** Our phones, tablets, and laptops are crucial tools for learning, yet they are also notorious distractions. I will leave it to you to regulate your technology use. But my expectation is that during class and discussion sessions, you do not check your email, message people, or use the Internet for things that aren't course-related.
- **Academic Integrity:** I take academic integrity very seriously. It's important that all the assignments you complete are your own work and that you know how to credit and cite sources appropriately. **In particular, using chatGPT or other AI tools to help you complete coursework is not permitted.** If you have any questions about my expectations for a particular assignment, be sure to talk to me! I also recommend you read the [UCSD Policy on Integrity of Scholarship](#).
- **Changes to the syllabus:** There is a very good chance I will adjust the course readings and schedule as the quarter goes along. It is your responsibility to pay attention to Canvas and your email so that you are aware of any changes.

## Texts

All of the required reading for the course will be posted on Canvas. Our primary text is called *Dialogues on Climate Justice*, by Stephen Gardiner and Arthur Obst. If you wish to purchase a hard copy (not at all necessary), you can find one online for about \$40.

# Reading Schedule

Date	Content
Mon. 10/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Introduction to Climate Ethics</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> <i>The Climate Casino</i>, William Nordhaus, ch 1 (pp. 3-11)</li> </ul>
Wed. 10/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Introduction to Climate Ethics</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> <i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i>, Stephen Gardiner and Arthur Obst, Dialogue 1 (pp. 1-43)</li> </ul>
Mon. 10/9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Climate Emotions</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> "What to Do with Climate Emotions," Jia Tolentino</li> </ul>
Wed. 10/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Climate Emotions</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> "Ok Doomer," Karen Kovaka and Carlos Santana + "Hope from Despair," Jakob Huber</li> </ul>
Mon. 10/16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Individual and Collective Responsibility</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> <i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i>, Stephen Gardiner and Arthur Obst, Dialogue 3 (pp. 89-132)</li> </ul>
Wed. 10/18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Individual and Collective Responsibility</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> "What's Wrong with Joyguzzling?" Ewan Kingston and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong</li> </ul>
Mon. 10/23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Individual and Collective Responsibility</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> "Climate Change and Individual Obligations," Julia Nefsky</li> </ul>
Wed. 10/25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Individual and Collective Responsibility</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> "Individualism, Structuralism, and Climate Change," Michael Brownstein, Daniel Kelly, and Alex Madva</li> </ul>
Mon. 10/30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Climate Justice</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> <i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i>, Stephen Gardiner and Arthur Obst, Dialogue 4 Part 1 (pp. 133-160)</li> </ul>
Wed. 11/1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Climate Justice</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> <i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i>, Stephen Gardiner and Arthur Obst, Dialogue 4 Part 2 (pp. 161-175)</li> </ul>
Mon. 11/6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Climate Justice</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> "Cosmopolitan Justice, Responsibility, and Global Climate Change," Simon Caney</li> </ul>
Wed. 11/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Climate Justice</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> "The Right to Be Free of Fear," Doreen Martinez</li> </ul>

Date	Content
Mon. 11/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Geoengineering</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> <i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i>, Stephen Gardiner and Arthur Obst, Dialogue 5 (pp. 176-227)</li> </ul>
Wed. 11/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Geoengineering</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> "Starting a Flood to Stop a Fire?" David Morrow</li> </ul>
Mon. 11/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Future Generations</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> <i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i>, Stephen Gardiner and Arthur Obst, Dialogue 6 (pp. 228-273)</li> </ul>
Wed. 11/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Future Generations</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> "Climate Change and the Ethics of Discounting," Marc Davidson</li> </ul>
Mon. 11/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Carbon Removal</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> "As Much as Possible, As Soon as Possible," Kent Peacock</li> </ul>
Wed. 11/29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> None. Thanksgiving.</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> None. Thanksgiving.</li> </ul>
Mon. 12/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Net Zero Emissions</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> "Which Net Zero? Climate Justice and Zero Emissions, Chris Armstrong and Duncan McClaren</li> </ul>
Wed. 12/6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Topic:</b> Review</li> <li>• <b>Required Reading:</b> None.</li> </ul>