

PHIL 51: Climate Ethics

Professor: Karen Kovaka

Winter 2025

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Office Hours: Mon 3-4pm and Wed 4-5pm

Office: Arts and Humanities Building 0450

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Class Hours: Mon/Wed 5-6:20pm

Class Room: Ledden Auditorium

Course Description & Learning Objectives

This course explores the ethics of responding to climate change, both collectively and individually. It is organized around 6 main questions:

1. What is the nature of the problem?
2. How should we divide up the burden of fixing it?
3. Which fixes are ethical?
4. Whose interests matter?
5. How should I feel?
6. What should I do?

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 handwritten, in-person 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 Assistants

Your TAs for the course are Mika Smith and Bas Tonissen. They will be grading assignments and exams, and they are available to talk about course material during their office hours.

- **Mika Smith**
 - email: ms223@ucsd.edu
 - office hours: Wednesday, 11am-12pm in A & H 0471
- **Bas Tonissen**
 - email: btonisse@ucsd.edu
 - office hours: Wednesday, 4-5pm in A & H 0441

Evaluation

1. Weekly Reading Quizzes 20%
2. Homework Assignments: 60%
 - (a) Assignment 1 (due 1/22): 20%
 - (b) Assignment 2 (due 2/12): 20%
 - (c) Assignment 3 (due 3/5): 20%
3. Final Exam (Mon 3/17, 7pm): 20%

Grading Scale

Letter grades in this course correspond to the following percentages (no rounding up):

- | | | | |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| • 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-: 70-72 | • 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.

Reading Schedule

Date	Content
Mon. 1/6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Different Takes on the Problem • Optional Reading: <i>The Climate Casino</i>, William Nordhaus, ch 1 (pp. 3-11)
Wed. 1/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Different Takes on the Problem • Required Reading: <i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i>, Stephen Gardiner and Arthur Obst, Dialogue 1 (pp. 1-43)
Mon. 1/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Burden-Sharing • Required Reading: "Just Emissions," Simon Caney, pp. 255-282
Wed. 1/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Burden-Sharing • Required Reading: "Just Emissions," Simon Caney, pp. 283-300
Mon. 1/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: No class. MLK Jr Day. • Required Reading: None.
Wed. 1/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Burden-Sharing • Required Reading: "The Case for Emissions Egalitarianism," Olle Torpman
Mon. 1/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Decarbonization • Required Reading: "Contracts on the Seabed," Christina Ochoa
Wed. 1/29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Carbon Offsetting • Required Reading: "Carbon Offsetting," Dan Baras
Mon. 2/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Geoengineering • Required Reading: "The Ethics of Geoengineering," Daniel Edward Callies
Wed. 2/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Carbon Capture and Storage • Required Reading: "Why and Where to Fund Carbon Capture and Storage," Kian Mintz-Woo and Joe Lane
Mon. 2/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: The Interests of the Oppressed • Required Reading: "Too Late for Indigenous Climate Justice," Kyle Whyte
Wed. 2/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: The Interests of Non-humans • Required Reading: "Does Nature Matter?" Clare Palmer

Date	Content
Mon. 2/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: None. Presidents' Day. • Required Reading: None
Wed. 2/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: The Interests of Future Generations • Required Reading: <i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i>, Stephen Gardiner and Arthur Obst, Dialogue 6 (pp. 228-273)
Mon. 2/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: How Should I Feel? • Required Reading: "Hope from Despair," Jakob Huber
Wed. 2/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: How Should I Feel? • Required Reading: "What to Do With Climate Emotions," Jia Tolentino + "Climate Emotions and Ecological Uncertainty," Karen Kovaka and Carlos Santana
Mon. 3/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: What Should I Do? • Required Reading: "What's Wrong with Joyguzzling?" Ewan Kingston and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong
Wed. 3/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: What Should I Do? • Required Reading: "Climate Change and Individual Obligations," Julia Nefsky
Mon. 3/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: What Should I Do? • Required Reading: "Right Levelling Indeterminacy," Benjamin Hale
Wed. 3/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Review • Required Reading: None.