

Philosophy of the Environment [Phil 125, section 001]  
Fall 2025

Course Number: 49303

Course meeting time/location: Tues/Thurs 10:45 – 12:00pm in Powdermaker Hall 152

Mode of course: In person

Instructor: Professor Ryan O'Loughlin (email: [Ryan.Oloughlin@qc.cuny.edu](mailto:Ryan.Oloughlin@qc.cuny.edu))

Drop-in hours: Tuesdays 1-2pm

Office Location: Powdermaker Hall 350V

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**Overview:** Climate change is a defining issue of our time. Scientists use computers and big data to study it, policy-makers squabble over how (or even whether) to address it, and the public may scarcely be aware of its impacts and its threat. In environmental philosophy, too, climate change looms large. What makes climate change an ethical issue? A justice issue? Does climate change *cause* extreme weather to become worse and will such accusations stand up in court? In this class we will employ logical tools and conceptual analysis, and we will draw from scientific research, to investigate questions in environmental philosophy, particularly in relation to climate justice. By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- ❖ Synthesize information argued in a philosophical text, determine its conclusion, and evaluate the support offered for the conclusion
- ❖ Construct counterexamples to show potential weaknesses of an argument
- ❖ Describe how climate change is a “perfect moral storm” and how philosophers have attempted to weather it
- ❖ Explain at a basic level the variety of evidence for anthropogenic climate change and some of the science related to various “geoengineering methods”
- ❖ Entertain positions you do not hold and treat them seriously and charitably

**Materials for Course:**

Book or e-book: *Dialogues on Climate Justice* (Stephen Gardiner and Arthur Obst). (ISBN-10 0367641968) (ISBN-13 978-0367641962)

A notebook and pen/pencil (yes, very old school). Research has shown that students learn better and retain more information when they take notes using a pen rather than by typing (or not taking notes at all). If you have strong evidence to the contrary, please let me know.

**Basis for Grading<sup>1</sup>:**

Reading Quizzes.....	90 points
In-class assignments.....	80 points
Midterm exam.....	100 points
In-class debate.....	100 points
Final exam.....	100 points

**Total: 470 points**

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<sup>1</sup> Queens College grading scale: <https://www.qc.cuny.edu/aac/academic-and-grading-policies/>

## Reading Quizzes

At the beginning many classes there will be a quiz (worth 10 pts) on the reading. You will earn 6 points just for turning it in; the remaining 4 points can be earned by answering the questions correctly.

## In-class Assignments

Writing, thinking, and discussing are core components of doing philosophy. To hone these skills and to practice using and thinking about new concepts in class, you will be asked to complete a variety of in-class assignments. These range from group problem solving to evaluating a case study to writing a short reflection or argument.

### *Note on participation and attendance*

Participation is strongly encouraged – the best learning takes place when you have skin in the game, when you risk failure, and when you acknowledge what you don't know by asking questions. Moreover, we all will benefit from each of you offering your ideas and perspectives! While I do not formally take attendance\*, ***you will need to attend if you want to take the quizzes and complete in-class assignments.*** Moreover, in my past teaching I have observed a strong positive correlation between student attendance and performance. It's simple: if you want a good grade, you need to show up.

\*If you have to miss class for a family or medical reason, please let me know and we will work together to make sure you don't fall behind.

## Midterm exam

9 weeks into the semester, we will have an exam. It will have 8 multiple choice and 12 short-answer questions. The exam will test your knowledge on all material covered prior to the exam. We will review together in class the Thursday before the exam.

## In-class debate

We will hold team-based debates during the last full week of classes. Each team will argue either FOR or AGAINST a position, such as "It is ethical for the U.S. to deploy geoengineering." Other topics will be discussed in class. Each team will meet with me ahead of time to discuss strategy, clarify relevant facts, ask questions, etc. The debate will be judged by your peers (everyone will get a chance to debate and a chance to judge).

## Final exam

This will take place during your scheduled final exam time (see schedule on next two pages). There will be 8 multiple choice questions, 12 short-answer questions (1-3 sentences), and 1 essay question (4-6 paragraphs). The essay question will ask you to critically reflect on the debate activity.

## Schedule

Week/Topic/Date	Readings/podcasts/videos	Notes, etc.
<b>Wk1. Introductions</b>		
Tues 8/26	1 <sup>st</sup> day; no readings	
Thurs 8/28	Optional reading: Oreskes' "How do we know we're not wrong"	
<b>Wk2.</b>		
Tues 9/2	<i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i> , Dialogue 1, part 1	Reading Quiz 1 at beginning of class
Thurs 9/4	<i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i> , Dialogue 1, part 2	In-class assignment #1
<b>Wk3.</b>		
Tues 9/9	<i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i> , Dialogue 2, part 1	Reading Quiz 2 at beginning of class
Thurs 9/11	Watch in class: <i>Merchants of Doubt</i>	In-class assignment #2
<b>Wk4.</b>		
Tues 9/16	Finish watching: <i>Merchants of Doubt</i>	
Thurs 9/18	<i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i> , Dialogue 2, part 2	Reading Quiz 3 at beginning of class <b>[Deadline to acquire your own copy of the text]</b>
<b>Wk5.</b>		
Tues 9/23 NO CLASS	NO CLASS	
Thurs 9/25	<i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i> , Dialogue 3, part 1	In-class assignment #3
<b>Wk6.</b>		
Tues 9/30	<i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i> , Dialogue 3, part 2	Reading Quiz 4 at beginning of class
Thurs 10/2 NO CLASS	NO CLASS	
<b>Wk7.</b>		
Tues 10/7	<i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i> , Dialogue 4, part 1	Reading Quiz 5 at beginning of class
Thurs 10/9	<i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i> , Dialogue 4, part 2	In-class assignment #4
<b>Wk8.</b>		
Tues 10/14 WE DO NOT MEET	CLASSES FOLLOW A MONDAY SCHEDULE	
Thurs 10/16	Review for midterm	
<b>Wk9.</b>		
Tues 10/21	Midterm	
Thurs 10/23	Climate justice and extreme weather (reading TBD)	Reading Quiz 6 at beginning of class
<b>Wk10.</b>		
Tues 10/28	TBD	
Thurs 10/30	TBD	In-class assignment #5
<b>Wk11.</b>		
Tues 11/4	<i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i> , Dialogue 5, part 1	Reading Quiz 7 at beginning of class <b>[Debate Materials Handed out]</b>

Thurs 11/6	<i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i> , Dialogue 5, part 2	In-class assignment #6
<b>Wk12.</b>		
Tues 11/11	<i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i> , Dialogue 6, part 1	Reading Quiz 8 at beginning of class
Thurs 11/13	<i>Dialogues on Climate Justice</i> , Dialogue 6, part 2	In-class assignment #7
<b>Wk13.</b>		
Tues 11/18	Excerpt from Taiwo's <i>Reconsidering Reparations</i>	Reading Quiz 9 at beginning of class
Thurs 11/20	Excerpt from Taiwo's <i>Reconsidering Reparations</i>	In-class assignment #8
<b>Wk14.</b>		
Tues 11/25	In-class debate prep	
Thurs 11/27 NO CLASS	NO CLASS	
<b>Wk15.</b>		
Tues 12/2	Debate prep	
Thurs 12/4	NO CLASS (debate prep outside of class)	
<b>Wk16.</b>		
Tues 12/9	IN-CLASS DEBATES	Attendance is Mandatory
Thurs 12/11	IN-CLASS DEBATES	Attendance is Mandatory
<b>Wk17.</b>		
Tues 12/16 FINAL EXAM	<b>Tuesday, 12/16, 11am-1pm in Powdermaker Hall 152</b>	

**How to do well in this course:** Read the assigned readings, take notes on the readings, participate in discussion, *and ask questions*. Visit office hours or email me if you have any questions about the material in the course. Participate in class discussions (yes, I've listed this twice) and take notes. Most importantly: show up to each class well-rested and willing/ready to learn.

Please reach out to me if you need assistance so I can help you make the most of this course!

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**Academic Policies and Procedures:**

<https://qc-undergraduate.catalog.cuny.edu/academic-policies-and-procedures>

**Info about Title IX and Sexual Misconduct:**

[https://www1.cuny.edu/sites/title-ix/?post\\_type=campus\\_profile&p=154](https://www1.cuny.edu/sites/title-ix/?post_type=campus_profile&p=154)