

The 5 to 7 Page Thesis Paper: Aldo Leopold's Environmental Ethic

Each of you is asked to write a thesis defense paper. The word thesis comes from the Greek and means “a setting, placing, arranging,” or, more broadly, “to lay down, hold, reckon, or regard as so and so.”¹ Your paper will focus on Aldo Leopold's environmental ethic. You can defend his ethical stance from, let's say, animal rights arguments; or you can attack his view. The choice is yours. In essence, a thesis defense is a non-trivial answer to question. As you will see from the details of the assignment below, you will have to tell me the question you wish to address in your thesis defense paper. This question may be one of your own formulation, or you may address one of these suggested questions.

- Is Aldo Leopold's land ethic really non-anthropocentric?
- Does Leopold's conception of land completely repudiate Locke's² conception of property?
- Does John Stuart Mill's critique of the concept of nature as a moral norm affect Leopold's argument for a land ethic?
- Does Leopold's land ethic deny Peter Singer's claim that we ought to give equal consideration to the animal's interest not to suffer?
- Does Leopold's land ethic deny the intrinsic value of animals, i.e., deny what Tom Regan sees as the basis from which a biotic right is granted?
- Does Leopold's land ethic imply a respect for nature in the sense that Paul Taylor means it?
- Where, if anywhere, does Leopold's concept of obligation to land or of biotic right fit in the conception of obligations laid out by Mary Midgley?
- Is Leopold's land ethic inconsistent with Val Plumwood's conception of ecological animalism?

Assignment Details

- Kind of Paper

The paper is a thesis defense. In their paper, the student will take a non-trivial stance (a conclusion you wish to defend), present evidence from the texts that supports your conclusion, and address one or two basic objections to your position.

- Length

As stated in the syllabus and here, the working or final draft of your paper must be a minimum of 5 pages in length and no longer than 7 pages. A page is defined as 300 words. Consequently, each paper must be a minimum of 1,500 words and no longer than 2,100 words.

- Structure of Paper Assignment Deadlines

Each student must write one 5-7 page, i.e., 1,500-2,100 word, thesis defense paper. However, rather than submit a single final draft, students are required to submit their work in stages.

- On Oct. 17th by 2:00pm, all students must submit a one page THESIS PLAN document (single-spaced) that contains the following:
 - One or two sentences describing the question that you wish to address in your thesis statement
 - A single sentence that expresses the proposed thesis (provisionally held) you intend to defend
 - A planning outline laying out the basic articulation of the structure of your defense of this thesis
 - This stage constitutes 5% of the total paper grade, unless the student decides to submit a rewrite of the working draft.
- On Nov. 11th by 2:00pm all students must submit a one page DEFENSE STRUCTURE document (single-spaced) that contains the following:
 - A single sentence that expresses the thesis, refined and more precisely formulated than the earlier provisional thesis.
 - A working outline of the planned defense of this thesis, clearly structured and more detailed than the earlier submitted planning outline

¹ <http://perseus.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/cgi-bin///lexindex?lookup=qe/sis&lang=greek&display=>

² The first version of this assignment handout indicated the wrong philosopher's name.

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- This stage constitutes 5% of the total paper grade, unless the student decides to submit a rewrite of the working draft.
- On Nov. 21st by 2:00pm, all students must submit a WORKING DRAFT of the paper (double-spaced).
 - Appended to this the student must include
 - a Works Cited page
 - a one to two page outline of the finished paper (single-spaced)
 - This paper constitutes 90% of the total paper grade, unless the student decides to submit a rewrite.
- By Dec. 13th at 11:59pm, students may but are not required to submit a FINAL DRAFT, i.e., a rewrite of the working draft of their paper.
 - Appended to this the student must include a Works Cited page
 - The grade of this final draft will replace the previous grades earned on the paper entirely.
 - This final draft is optional for all students except those who receive a D or an E on the working draft. All these latter students must submit a final draft. Rewriting the paper does not guarantee a better grade.
- Online Submission Guidelines
 - Submit your paper via the Canvas system (Assignments: Paper Assignment)
 - Follow the directions as indicated here and as spelled out in Canvas.
- Paper Grades

Papers, i.e., the working and final drafts, will be graded according to a general rubric (see below). The total possible for each paper, i.e., the working draft or the final draft, is 100 points. See the syllabus for the grading scale. As stated above, students have the option to the working draft for a better grade. The rewrite score replaces the original score, regardless of which score is higher.

Formatting

- All papers must be formatted as Word documents with the extension .docx or .doc
- Each page of text should contain approximately 300 words.
- Text margins should be 1 inch for top/bottom and left/right.
- Please include the following information at the top of the first page of the paper (single-spaced):
 - Student's Name
 - Title
 - "PHI 336," Date Submitted
 - Word Count of Your Essay (the actual number of words you wrote, minus footnotes and bibliography).
- Number every page.
- A Works Cited page must follow the paper. See below for formatting examples:
 - Book:
 - Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
 - Edited Book:
 - Rolston III, Holmes. "Value in Nature and the Nature of Value." In *Philosophy and the Natural Environment*, edited by Robin Atfield and Andrew Belsey, 13-30. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
 - Primary source supplied in class, where bibliographic information is unclear:
 - Midgley, Mary. "Duties Concerning Islands, of Rights and Obligations." In PHI336 Course Packet, 36-43.

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- Citations in paper should use a basic author-date system and refer to the work cited at the conclusion of the paper. For example:
 - "It is time to ponder the fact that the cane-lands, when subjected to the particular mixture of forces represented by the cow, plow, fire, and axe of the pioneer, became bluegrass" (Leopold 1987, 205).

Academic Integrity

Conclusive evidence of plagiarism from any source will result in a zero for paper at a minimum, more likely a zero for the class and possibly official punitive measures. The University defines plagiarism in a handout available on the University Ombud's web site. The address of this handout is: <http://www.uky.edu/Ombud/Plagiarism.pdf>. This is the definition of plagiarism used in this class. Furthermore, wherever the work of 2 or more students is related in such a way as to provide evidence of cheating, such as matching elements of an essay or the collective copying of responses from some other source, all students committing the infraction will be punished accordingly. Depending on the severity of the infraction, the case may be referred to the Philosophy Department Chair and the Dean of your College.

Evaluation Rubric

An "A" paper (100-90 points) has the following elements:

- Good, clear thesis and complete and consistent discussion of major parts of the topic
- Concise, engaging and comprehensive introductory and closing paragraphs
- Accurate, skillful use of argument and evidence
- Transitions between major sections clearly and skillfully announced; logical structure to the argument as a whole
- No significant grammatical, syntactical or stylistic errors

A "B" paper (89-80 points) has the following:

- Weakly stated thesis that does not hold the whole paper together
- Bland but adequate introductory and closing paragraphs
- Adequate argument and evidence offered but obvious objections not considered
- Some transitions tentatively expressed; logical structure to the argument clear but inadequately accomplished
- Some grammatical, syntactical or stylistic errors but does not affect clarity of central argument

A "C" paper (79-70 points) has:

- Thesis unclear with incomplete, sometimes inconsistent, discussion of thesis
- Inadequate or overly brief introduction or conclusion
- Loosely related evidence; objections which are obvious unaddressed
- Missing transitions; logical structure of the argument unclear and inadequately accomplished
- Significant grammatical, syntactical or stylistic errors disrupt clarity of presentation at points in the paper

A "D" paper (69-60 points):

- Thesis merely implicit, not readily apparent in argument
- Missing either opening or closing paragraphs
- Garbled, inaccurate discussion in which little evidence or argument is presented; abuse of quotations
- Gaps in organization
- Significant grammatical, syntactical or stylistic errors disrupt clarity of presentation generally or make the paper unreadable in part or in whole