Section 9: Sustainability

Sustainable practices are practices that meet the needs of a human community in ways that are consistent with the flourishing of the ecosystems on which we depend. Although many philosophers are not explicitly concerned with sustainability, many current practices in philosophy are unsustainable, contributing to irreversible environmental harms that are expected to greatly increase global temperatures, "natural" disasters, political instability, war, disease, drought, and famine in this century. In many domains of life, human-caused climate change presents an urgent threat; animal and plant species are now going extinct at a greatly increased rate, and there is a credible risk that mass extinction is already underway. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change sets the year 2030 as a deadline for the implementation of widespread changes to institutions to reach carbon neutrality and to reduce other forms of pollution and land use to curb the most catastrophic effects of climate change. According to the United Nations, "Climate change is the defining issue of our time and now is the defining moment to do something about it."

Even compared to other citizens of wealthy nations, professional philosophers often contribute disproportionately to large environmental harms through practices such as high-frequency air travel. Philosophers can also play a particularly beneficial role in mitigating climate change through effective teaching, research, administration, advocacy, and community engagement. These practices are crucial to diversity, inclusion, and justice, as climate change disproportionately impacts communities of color and other marginalized populations. Like academic freedom and academic integrity, sustainability is a part of fair institutional practice and of nurturing the next generations of philosophers and members of society at large. Adopting sustainable practices as a department or institution also has a significant direct impact and can send a powerful message. Philosophy departments and other academic units should maintain a commitment to sustainability and consider its implications for their policies and codes of conduct, keeping in mind a wide range of individual and collective activities.

In all of these contexts, it is worth remembering that the largest environmental harms come from collective actions by governments and corporations. Although individual and departmental choices have highly significant impacts, in many cases philosophers can make the most effective environmental contribution by taking on larger collective issues of sustainability and doing what they do best: generating discussion, presenting arguments, seeking insight into larger human experiences and struggles, and challenging others to think critically. Individual choices should be made in tandem with encouraging others to treat sustainability as a priority, both in its own right and in connection to many central human values.

Events

Food

Good food is an important component of many professional and community events. Philosophers ought to recognize that the goodness of food extends beyond taste, aesthetics, and nutrition, to its origins and production as well as the treatment of food waste. We can aspire to provide sustainable, equitable, and

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humane foods which are culturally and religiously inclusive and serve the individual needs of all members of the philosophical community. In many cases, sustainable food practices are also cheaper or of comparable cost. In other cases, event organizers face the task of balancing expense and individual needs or preferences with environmental damage.

Environmentally sustainable food practices include the following:

- Consult with your catering or university food service to avoid excessive ordering when planning for catering.

- Have a plan for the use of leftover food and beverages, such as donation to other events or to students, organizers, a nearby lounge, or a shelter or food-recovery program. Provide means of repacking leftover food for transport.

- Avoid food that requires large amounts of packaging (e.g., individually wrapped sandwiches or creamers) in favor of food that uses less packaging (sandwich platters, reusable pitchers). Avoid single-use plastics, Styrofoam, and coffee capsules or pods whenever possible. When feasible, provide reusable and compostable dinnerware and compost bins for food and waste disposal.

- Recognizing that diverse communities have different dietary needs, consider whether it is feasible to eliminate or significantly reduce carbon-intensive foods, such as meat and other animal products. In other cases, it can be appropriate to limit or eliminate a narrower range of foods, such as beef, that are particularly closely linked to climate change, and/or to include a higher proportion of plant-based foods.

- Consider factors involved in the source and distribution of provided food, including the treatment of animals and the transportation of food across great distances.

- Consider using tap or filtered water as a typical beverage. This may include purchasing a pitcher and using or installing a nearby bottle-filling station or drinking fountain.

- When possible, develop relationships with sustainable catering services, and encourage on-campus catering services to adopt more sustainable practices.

- Promote interest in sustainable food choices by selecting options that are tasty and appealing to community members.

- Share and discuss food options and choices with members of the community. Broader discussion helps to ensure sustainable and appealing food choices, and food is an excellent opportunity for discussion of sustainable practices. In particular, animal agriculture emits more greenhouse gases worldwide than the entire transportation sector. It is often worth discussing how to weigh the resulting harms against individuals' food preferences.

Conferences and travel

At many colleges and universities, up to one third of greenhouse gas emissions come from faculty travel. Air travel is particularly high in emissions, with a typical roundtrip transcontinental flight in economy class releasing a metric ton of CO_2 per coach passenger; this is the entire annual per-person amount consistent with limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Both individual philosophers and institutions now face increasingly difficult choices with respect to travel. Environmentally sustainable practices can offer large and sometimes unexpected benefits, including a great deal of saved time and

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expense, which should be carefully weighed against the benefits of in-person interaction and increased travel. Conferences and colloquia based at academic institutions may be capable of accommodating a high degree of digital participation. In other cases, including many large hotel-based conferences, digital participation can greatly increase charges by a venue; these additional costs must then be weighed against other budgetary concerns as well as environmental damage. When digital participation is prohibitively expensive, organizers should consider other options for mitigating environmental damage. Sustainable practices for organizers and participants of conferences, colloquia, and other events vary by event type and size and will require a range of efforts at collaboration and innovation.

Sustainable conference and travel practices can include the following:

- Consider encouraging, allowing, or requesting digital participation using videoconferencing technology. When a combination of formats is most feasible or appropriate, consider what fraction of talks or participants can be included by videoconferencing.

- When digital participation reduces costs, consider instituting a lower or waived registration fee or a higher honorarium for digital participants, or contributing part of the saved costs to sustainability efforts.

- When digital participation increases costs, consider whether it is feasible to use conference funds, higher registration fees, and/or other sources of funding to cover these costs. In some cases, colloquium and/or conference organizers may be able to reduce costs by using cheaper live-streaming and/or pre-recorded video alternatives, and/or encourage speakers' departments to use travel or research funds to cover digital participation.

- Large conferences create particularly difficult challenges, with hotels and other venues often requiring the reservation of a large number of sleeping rooms and/or charging prohibitively high fees for high-speed internet. Passing these costs on to registrants can make a large conference inaccessible to many less well funded participants. Organizers of large conferences may need to consider alternatives to digital participation, such as holding additional local or regional events in addition to larger conferences; encouraging sustainable practices by the conference venue; funding and/or encouraging the use of carbon offsets; and/or including one or more sessions on sustainability on the conference program to promote continued discussion of sustainable practices.

- Videoconferencing can be more accessible to audiences who have difficulty attending academic conferences physically, including academics in less wealthy nations, students with limited funds, academics with mobility impairments, highly sought-after guest speakers with full schedules, and members of the general public. Maximize the accessibility of videoconferencing by using and testing appropriate audio and video technology, including aids such as closed captioning, and consulting with participants with hearing and visual impairments and other accessibility needs.

- When physical travel is necessary, make reasonable efforts to invite speakers from a short travel distance. Encourage rail and coach travel over air and single-occupancy car travel.

- When accepting and planning speaking engagements, make reasonable efforts to prioritize short-distance travel and to avoid flying. When possible, combine multiple events in one trip.

- Consider whether it is appropriate to include carbon offsets or as a part of your budget for conferences, colloquia, faculty travel, prospective student visits, and any other travel.

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- Consider the environmental impact of the use of videoconferencing and other technology, particularly at large scales.

- When selecting a venue, consider public transportation and a venue's sustainable practices.

- In your communication with event participants, publicize public-transportation options and make available information on the carbon footprint of your event, including the methods used to calculate the carbon footprint.

- Look for ways to cut down on paper waste such as programs and handouts, keeping in mind the needs of participants with disabilities.

- When feasible, provide ways to reduce, reuse, or recycle paper, plastic, and common conference items such as name tag holders. Keep in mind that reducing and reusing are often preferable to recycling.

- For large conferences, consider organizing regional remote hubs for participants to gather to watch sessions and network with others in their regions.

- When feasible for smaller events, offer support in organizing shared accommodations and/or accommodations in hosts' homes, as many graduate student conferences already do. Such options may be essential for some participants, and uncomfortable for others. In making decisions about organizing lodging, carefully consider the environmental impact of hotel accommodations as well as participants' budgetary constraints, the benefits and burdens of hosting, and the safety of all participants.

- When commuting, consider using, and encouraging the use of, public transit, bicycles, walking, and/or carpooling in place of driving alone.

- Consider making sustainability a theme of one or more events or parts of an event.

- Consider issues of diversity and inclusion in making changes to existing practices. For example, videoconferencing can greatly increase inclusion of philosophers with limited access to events, but event organizers should take care not to create a two-tiered system in which well-funded philosophers travel by airplane while others participate digitally.

Facilities

Many philosophers and academic units have access to and influence over facilities, including offices, meeting rooms, and kitchens. Greenhouse gas emissions and other sustainability concerns should be carefully considered when planning construction and renovation, including both initial needs and planning details, and when purchasing or disposing of computers and other equipment. When feasible, stock kitchens with reusable dishware and cutlery. Avoid or limit individually packaged items such as plastic water bottles and single use coffee capsules. More generally, it is good standard practice to consider environmental impact in all significant changes to the existence and use of facilities.

Teaching and writing

Environmental sustainability presents some of the most pressing and challenging problems of our time. Climate change in particular combines a global tragedy of the commons, scientific uncertainty, major economic impacts, unequal vulnerabilities, and crises for current and future generations, nonhuman animals, and the rest of nature. These issues bear on many academic disciplines, including many branches of

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philosophy, and on our work as teachers and writers. They are already a key issue for students, most of whom are, as young people, among the frontline populations most heavily impacted by climate change. Moreover, teachers and writers of philosophy are particularly well positioned to lead others in addressing the challenges of climate change and the relation of humans to the environment.

Course content

Sustainability is closely connected to the content of many courses, often in surprising ways. These connections offer valuable opportunities to address these issues, recruit students, demonstrate the relevance of philosophy to contemporary concerns, and train generations of students to think critically about their role in the environment.

Philosophy departments should consider the feasibility of adding or maintaining courses on environmental ethics and/or environmental philosophy more broadly, and petitioning for these courses to count toward major, minor, general education or core curriculum, and other requirements, as well as cross-listing courses in other departments. It can be useful to develop or maintain a major, minor, or certificate program in environmental ethics or environmental philosophy, as some departments already do, or to take part in an interdisciplinary program focused on the environment. In some cases, it may even be appropriate to require a course on sustainability or the environment of all philosophy majors or all undergraduate students, as a few institutions currently do.

At the same time, it is often particularly useful to integrate environmental issues into smaller components of courses that are not entirely concerned with the environment. These courses can reach a broader range of students, and encourage critical thinking about sustainability-in many philosophical contexts. For example:

- Introductions to philosophy, introductions to ethics, and courses in contemporary ethics or political philosophy can include a unit on philosophical issues about climate change, raising problems about the demands of morality on individuals, climate justice, and/or the relation of human beings to nature.

- Courses on underrepresented philosophical traditions can often highlight those traditions' contributions to an understanding of the natural world and humans' place in it.

- Epistemology, philosophy of psychology, and philosophy of science courses can use climate change as an entry point into considering scientific consensus as a standard for knowledge.

- Courses in philosophy of mind, philosophy of action, moral psychology, and freedom and responsibility can cover human-caused climate change as an example of collective agency and collective responsibility or consider the nature of and responsibility for climate-change denial.

- Courses on diversity or oppression can cover biodiversity, environmental racism, the trivialization of environmental issues as "women's work," and the position of younger people as a frontline population disproportionately impacted by climate change.

- Courses on philosophy and literature can discuss fiction or poetry as a way of raising philosophical issues about the environment.

- A logic course can use examples of fallacious reasoning in arguments about climate change, helping to show the relevance of logic to contemporary life.

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In all these cases and others, instructors should remember that issues of sustainability are often highly personal and emotionally charged and take care not to dismiss the views of students or alienate students who do not see environmental issues as a priority. Nevertheless, the complexity and variety of contemporary environmental challenges, and climate change in particular, offer a wide range of excellent opportunities for integration into current and new courses.

Course methods and policies

Integration into course content goes naturally with integration into course methods. Instructors should consider what pedagogical methods are best suited to their topics. Teaching sustainability may or may not call for a different approach. It may in some cases be useful to invite guest speakers from related disciplines or centers on campus, or host presentations by climate change activists, or bring in physical materials from the natural world, or organize a field trip. Other creative pedagogical methods may be useful as well. For example, assignments that require or encourage students to think for themselves, or apply course content to their own lives, can in some cases be more useful than testing for memorization or reading comprehension.

Moreover, all philosophy courses can address sustainability in ways that may be entirely unrelated to course content. Instructors should consider environmental concerns in, for example, setting syllabus policies with regard to food, printing, waste, and opportunities for electronic purchasing and/or use of course materials. Discussion of these policies in an introductory meeting can set a lasting tone of care for the environment.

Advising

When appropriate, philosophers should support and advise students who are interested in issues of sustainability. Whether they are engaging in a research project or building a student organization, students can be greatly benefited by faculty who care about their work and are willing to help them navigate the challenges of research and/or advocacy.

When teaching or advising students, it is worth keeping in mind that discussions of environmental sustainability, and particularly of climate change, raise emotionally charged and personally difficult issues. Students and colleagues may be dealing with grief, anxiety, depression, anger, denial, or other reactions caused or exacerbated by environmental damage, danger, and/or injustice. In most cases, philosophy instructors are not qualified therapists and should be ready to refer students or colleagues to counseling services or other mental health professionals as needed.

On the other hand, it is normally not feasible or desirable to avoid difficult reactions or conversations entirely or to end discussion whenever they arise. It can be useful to prepare for and encourage conversations about the impact of climate change on students' lives and choices and to share and discuss best practices for these conversations with colleagues.

Research

What holds for teaching holds for writing: a surprisingly wide range of philosophical topics have a significant connection to sustainability and climate change. It is good practice to consider what those connections may be and to consider discussing them in writing. These discussions can help make philosophical writing successful, and can help one take leadership in the field or, in some cases, avoid falling behind. Incorporating sustainability into teaching can be one way to discover connections to current and future research. Interdisciplinary contact and collaboration can also be a useful way to learn from past and ongoing sustainability efforts and to contribute to those efforts as a philosopher.

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Governance and public advocacy

Philosophy departments and other academic units regularly face decisions in which considerations of sustainability play a role. All departments, and most smaller department committees, do work that has an environmental impact. That impact should be considered, at least briefly, in deciding on procedure. Can large files be viewed electronically, without printing? What course offerings cover the environment? Are there funds for carbon offsets for travel by visiting speakers or prospective students? At what points and in what ways should sustainability be considered in offering recommendations to the department? In what ways do current department policies encourage or, in some cases, penalize sustainable practices, such as reducing high-carbon conference travel?

In particular, departments as a whole should consider whether to adopt or revise explicit department policies, mission statements, statements or resolutions on sustainability, and general website and publicity information with respect to sustainability in courses, event planning, faculty travel, and other topics discussed in these guidelines. Whenever feasible, a department should make its policies clear to its members, explain the rationale for them, and use them as a starting point for further discussion and revision. Department chairs may wish to appoint an official or unofficial committee, ask an existing committee, or decide, by themselves, to review the department's practices and make recommendations, gather and share useful resources, and/or hold a workshop or other event for the department to discuss sustainability. Many colleges and universities have an office, officer, committee, or task force devoted to sustainability that can send a representative to speak at such an event or at part of a faculty meeting. Colleagues in other departments may also have valuable experience in indigenous traditions, climate science, or other related areas.

Academic philosophers and departments may also decide to take a position with respect to the practices of their institution. Some colleges and universities are in the midst of bold initiatives designed to achieve total carbon neutrality as soon as 2025. Others prioritize sustainability much less or not at all. Some initiatives, such as the construction of a new stadium, may serve key institutional goals while also facing controversy and public protest over their environmental impact. Students often organize campaigns advocating for larger changes on campus, such as divestment from fossil fuels. Such campus events raise complex issues and have a large impact on the environment. They often provide excellent opportunities for advocacy and fruitful discussion. It is a good practice to discuss them with students and colleagues, think through one's own views about them, and collaborate in advocacy efforts when appropriate.

Philosophers may also become involved in public advocacy and community engagement efforts beyond the campus setting. Many years of training in assessing arguments, leading discussions, offering and evaluating examples, drawing connections between seemingly disparate topics, anticipating and responding to objections, articulating compelling rationales, and organizing events can often put us in a good position to make a valuable contribution as individuals and, more specifically, as philosophers. When feasible, these contributions should be recognized as service to the community, complementing academic service to the department and university.

Resources

The United Nations website on climate change: https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2018). "Global Warming of 1.5°C." www.ipcc.ch/sr15.

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Ken Hiltner, "A Nearly Carbon-Neutral Conference Model" (2019). https://hiltner.english.ucsb.edu/index.php/ncnc-guide/.

Tyler John and Carolina Flores (2018). "Moving Beyond Meat in Philosophy: The How and Why." https://philosophersagainstfactoryfarming.wordpress.com/2018/01/13/moving-beyond-meat-in-philosophy-the-how-and-why/.

The International Society for Environmental Ethics syllabus collection: https://enviroethics.org/syllabi/

The resources page at Philosophers for Sustainability: http://www.philosophersforsustainability.com/resources/

The American Psychological Association's report on psychology and global climate change: https://www.apa.org/science/about/publications/climate-change

The University of California Carbon Neutrality Initiative, pledging full carbon neutrality by 2025: https://ucop.edu/carbon-neutrality-initiative/index.html

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