

Syllabus

PHI 3640 Environmental Ethics: “Climate Ethics and Apocalyptic Futures”

Course Description

This course examines ethical issues related to the environment through a careful examination of apocalyptic thought in the Anthropocene. We will critically examine complex environmental challenges in three ways: (1) as technical/scientific problems, (2) as social/political problems, and (3) in terms of ethical solutions/responses.

Environmental ethicists and climate scientists continue to fight not only to make their voices heard among the din of climate skepticism, species extinctions, environmental degradation, and continued carbon emission but also to fight for the very survival – some claim – of human civilization as we know it. This vision of an apocalyptic future should make us ask several key questions: How likely is this future? What can we do to prevent it? How can we prepare for it? By the conclusion of this course, we will be better prepared to offer reasonable answers to such questions – and better prepared to face the future, whatever it holds.

Participants in this course, yourself included, will:

1. understand and identify key themes and arguments in traditional environmental ethics,
2. develop an ability to apply ethical reasoning skills to contemporary cases of anthropogenic climate change,
3. and creatively analyze popular cultural instances of an apocalyptic future.

Assignments will include core readings, class discussions, and concise analytical papers. Four units shape the structure of the course, and the modules within each unit are framed around opportunities small group discussion, and engaging key themes through philosophical and popular sources. My goal is for you to leave this course with a deeper appreciation for the practical and philosophical significance of environmental issues – and some tools for engaging them in your own lived experience.

Office Hours

Office hours will be held in-person and online by Webcourses chat. I will be available during official office hours from 2:00pm-4:00pm on Mondays and will work with you to find a mutually agreeable alternative time as needed.

I am in my office considerably more than my scheduled office hours per week, so feel free to stop by or call at your leisure to talk. If I need to cancel or change my office hours during the semester, I will make that announcement on our course site. I am also available by email, and will respond as promptly as I can. I encourage you to speak with me about course material and related topics.

Instructor Contact

Dr. Jonathan Beever
Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy and Texts & Technology Program
University of Central Florida
Orlando, FL 32816
Office location: PSY238
E-mail: jonathan.beever@ucf.edu

Required Texts & Materials

I will provide readings and multimedia content through our UCF online course site. No physical textbook is required.

Course Requirements

- 1) **Connecting to Place (10%)** – Once each unit (so 6 times this term), I'll ask you to share a reflection of your experience watching and listening to some environment. I'll provide a prompt for each reflection and you'll post an audio comment, short written reflection, or video post in response to be shared with your peers **and with me.**
- 2) **QCKs for Readings (10%)** – In response to each module's readings, you'll post a QCK (Question, Comment, or (K)oncern). These can be single sentences or questions, or very brief paragraphs where you point me and your colleagues toward something of interest from the readings.
- 3) **Discussions/Quizzes (15%)** – Once each unit, I'll pose a discussion question or a brief quiz. These assignments are meant to push you to engage the themes, concepts, and arguments you just worked through.
- 4) **Face-to-face engagements (5%)** – I believe strongly in personal engagement when it comes to ethics, and sometimes online courses can feel isolating. So I'll offer six opportunities (2 each at early, mid, and late semester) for you to join me in a face-to-face discussion in webcourses discussions. You should take these opportunities to ask me questions, talk about content, or get feedback. **You must participate in at least two of these engagements.**
- 5) **Midterm Paper (20%)** – In 500-1000 words, I'll ask you to identify a recent (post 2000) apocalyptic film or video game and analyze it using themes we've discussed in the course. Your goal here is to identify course themes in popular media and to carefully and concisely analyze those themes.
- 6) **Peer Evaluations (10%)** – You'll evaluate two of your peers' midterm papers, using the same rubric I'll use to do my own evaluation.
- 7) **Final Paper (30%)** – The term project will be an approximately 3000 word essay that builds on your midterm assignment. You'll build on your midterm essay by including a second film or fiction piece to compare to the first and then, using that analysis, think about the ways the ethical issue(s) you address might apply to a real-world future 100 years from now. You may focus on any topic discussed in class, but must respond generally to our human ethical duties or obligations concerning climate change. The paper must be clear and concise, error free, correctly referenced, and pose a clear thesis, arguments, and conclusion.
N.B.: scoring rubrics will be included in individual assignments in webcourses as needed
N.B.: work submitted outside of the appropriate webcourse assignment will not be accepted.

Academic Integrity

This is an ethics class, so it seems unnecessary to say that plagiarism will not be tolerated. Plagiarism, or cheating of any kind on an examination, quiz, or assignment will result at least in an "F" for that assignment and may, depending on the severity of the case, lead to an "F" for the entire course and/or the placement of a "Z" designator with your grade. Academic dishonesty will subject you to appropriate referral to the Office of Student Conduct for further action. See the UCF Golden Rule and <http://z.ucf.edu> for further information. I also expect you'll act with *academic honor*: putting in your best effort, fully engaging with assignments and readings, and staying informed about course requirements. I will, in turn, do the same.

Course Accessibility Statement

It is my goal that this class be an accessible and welcoming experience for all students, including those with disabilities that may impact learning. If anyone believes the design of this course poses barriers to effectively participating and/or demonstrating learning, please meet with me (with or without a Student Accessibility Services (SAS) accommodation letter) to discuss reasonable options or adjustments. Helpful information is found at SAS: Ferrell Commons 185; 407-823-2371; sas@ucf.edu. You are welcome to talk to me at any point in the semester about concerns, but it is best if we talk at least one week prior to the need for any modification.

Teach Act Statement

The materials for this course are only for the fair use of students enrolled in this course for purposes associated with this course and may not be retained or further disseminated. The instructor receives no royalty payments for any materials used in this course.

Syllabus Subject to Change

I anticipate that I will follow the schedule outlined here, but I may make adjustments based on your interests and what decisions we make together in class. All changes will be clearly announced in person and online. Remaining in the course after reading this syllabus will signal that you accept the possibility of changes and responsibility for being aware of them.

Course Units (multiple modules in each unit)

1. Climate Ethics in the Anthropocene
2. Conquest: The Post-Natural
3. War: The Post-Human
4. Famine: Post-Truth
5. Death: The Trans-Human
6. Survival in the Apocalypse
7. Coda: Having Hope