

Autumn 2019

Course: Climate, Environment and Human Societies

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Summary

Earth's ecosystems are rapidly becoming uninhabitable for many species of the planet, and the destruction visited upon these diverse environments creates massive suffering worldwide. Most troubling, these atrocities committed against nature are a direct result of modern human societies functioning 'normally'. How has this come to be? What about our relationship with nature, and each other, has engendered such a destructive capacity in human societies? What are the causes of the increase to average global temperatures ("climate change", or "global warming")? How do other acts of environmental violence factor in, e.g., air/water/noise pollution, due to plastics, agricultural runoff, mining activities, etc.? Who are most affected by these devastations to the life-support systems of our planet? And, what does the science say about our near- and long-term future?

This course provides an introduction to modern climate and environmental sciences, giving a broad, but no-less urgent overview of the contemporary literature. Topics of interest include: pollution; ocean acidification; thermohaline circulation; ice cap melting; permafrost and methane releases; carbon emissions (from industry, transportation, electricity, etc.); land use and agricultural practices; extreme weather events (floods, droughts, heatwaves, etc.); and issues relating to environmental economics. The course complements the sciences of climatology, geophysics, etc. by focusing additionally on the necessarily intersectional components of environmental destruction. We examine gender and indigenous rights; imperialism, war-making and sources of potential conflict (and what populations will be most affected); asymmetric effects of global temperature change on the Global South; and poverty, racism and environmental justice. Finally, we ask 'what can be done' (in conjunction to the course "Activism and Moral Action") and look at contemporary environmental justice movements, media campaigns (literature, theater, podcasting, etc.), political efforts, and technological innovations like solar and wind energy, carbon capture, solar geo-engineering and more. Students read selections from the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, the *Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystems Services*, *Nature*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Intercept*, *The Economist* and more.