

PHIL78500/EES79903: Climate Change and Social Change

Time: Thursdays 4:15-6:15

Location: online

Instructor: Michael Brownstein, msbrownstein@gmail.com

Office Hours: after each class, or by appointment

Course Description

Climate change will be among the most influential forces shaping human life in the 21st century and beyond, if not *the* most influential force. It is not just a technical problem, an environmental issue, a moral challenge, or a political quandary. Rather, as environmental engineer Costa Samaras put it, climate change is the landscape on which our future unfolds. While there is well-developed philosophical literature on some aspects of climate change, this course focuses on topics in need of more attention from philosophers. As such, the course presents an opportunity for graduate students to begin work in areas that likely will, and should, gain prominence over time. We will consider some of the cultural, political, psychological, economic, and conceptual changes needed in the face of the climate crisis. Specifically, we will discuss (1) the political psychology of climate voter behavior; (2) the history and recent growth of authoritarianism, right-wing populism, and “eco-fascism;” (3) climate justice and the relationship between prejudice, inequality, and decarbonization; (4) and “individual” vs. “structural” approaches to social change. While no specialist knowledge is required, students should expect readings to draw widely from the social and behavioral sciences, and thus to become familiar with multi-disciplinary literatures and methods by means of which they can make their own work relevant to the climate crisis.

Structure

Most meetings will have a guest speaker, for part or all of class. The course concludes with a one-day public workshop as well as a student-led workshop for works in progress.

Requirements

15%: Participation

15%: Weekly writing

25%: Workshop presentation

45%: Term paper

Participation

Well-prepared students will come to class having read at least the asterisked material below, and they will be ready to discuss and ask questions about it. Each registered student will also give at least one 10-minute presentation in class on the required reading for the week.

Weekly Writing

Students are required to write a short (~500-750 word) response to one of the assigned readings each week. Assigned readings will be divided up so that a response is written to each one. These

responses should start with a one-paragraph summary of the main points of the reading. Following that, students should discuss the significance of the reading and/or raise questions or challenges to it. **Responses are due two days prior to class (i.e., Tuesdays at 4:15 PM).**

Workshop Presentation

The course concludes with a student-run workshop. Mimicking a professional philosophy conference, students will present 20-minute oral versions of their seminar papers, followed by Q&A from the class. Students should prepare a handout or a slide deck to accompany their presentation.

Term Paper

Students will write one term paper of 4500-5500 words (including notes but not references).

- Students must submit a plan for their term paper. This must include (1) a one-paragraph abstract describing your paper; (2) a 1-page outline of the structure of your paper; (3) a list of 5 annotated sources you plan to use. **Deadline: April 22 (but earlier is better).**
- Students are *strongly encouraged* to submit a rough draft of their paper for comments. **Deadline: May 6 (but earlier is better).**
- Final drafts must be properly formatted in some standard way (e.g., MLA, Chicago, etc.). Do not exceed the word limit. (Note: students who have passed their first QP and want to use their term paper as the basis for their second QP may request an exception.) See [here](#) for useful tips on writing your essay. **Deadline: May 20 (but earlier is better).**
- Caution: if you plagiarize a paper, you will fail the course. Please read the GC's policy on plagiarism [here](#).

Schedule

2.4: Introductions

Reading:

- *IPCC special report summary, “Global Warming of 1.5°C: Summary for Policymakers”
- *Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth* (especially Section I (“Cascades”), Section II (“Heath Death,” “Wildfire,” “Freshwater Drain,” “Plagues of Warming,” “Climate Conflict,” “Systems”), and Section III (“Storytelling”))
- Stanley Robinson, *The Ministry for the Future* (a novel)
- [A Matter of Degrees](#) (podcast with Leah Stokes & Katharine Wilkinson)
- [How to Save a Planet](#) (podcast with Alex Blumberg & Ayana Elizabeth Johnson)
- [Zero Carbon Action Plan](#) (especially the Executive Summary)
- “Merchants of Doubt” (film)
- Stokes, *Short Circuiting Policy* (especially Chapters 1&2)

2.11: Emissions, Models, and Pathways

Guest: Rob Jackson, Earth System Science, Stanford

Reading:

- *Jackson et al., “Persistent fossil fuel growth threatens the Paris Agreement and planetary health”
- *Jackson et al., “Increasing anthropogenic methane emissions arise equally from agriculture and fossil fuel sources”
- Winsberg, *Philosophy and Climate Science* (Chapters 1-4)

2.18: Voter Behavior and Opinion Formation

Guest: Samy Sekar (Analyst Institute)

Reading:

- *Leiserowitz et al, “Climate Change in the American Mind” (April 2020)
- *Weber, “[What Shapes Opinions About Climate Change?](#)”
- *Druckman & McGrath, “[The evidence for motivated reasoning in climate change preference formation](#)”
- *Kalmoe & Kinder, *Neither Liberal nor Conservative* (Chapters 1-2)
- Healy & Malhotra, “[Myopic Voters and Natural Disaster Policy](#)”
- Feinberg & Willer, “[Apocalypse Soon?: Dire Messages Reduce Belief in Global Warming by Reducing Just-World Beliefs](#)”
- Campbell & Kay, “[Solution Aversion: on the relationship between ideology and motivated disbelief?](#)”
- Kahan et al., “[The polarizing impact of science literacy and numeracy on perceived climate change risks](#)”
- Bago, Rand, & Pennycook, “Reasoning About Climate Change”

2.25: Political Economy of Transitions

Guest: Robert O. Keohane (Political Science, Princeton)

Reading:

- *Keohane & Victor, “The Regime Complex for Climate Change”
- *Keohane, “The Global Politics of Climate Change: Challenge for Political Science”
- *Keohane & Victor, “Cooperation and discord in global climate policy”
- *Bernstein & Hoffmann, “Climate Politics, Metaphors, and the Fractal Carbon Trap”
- *Breetz, Mildenerger, & Stokes, “The political logics of clean energy transitions”
- *Breetz & Stokes, “Politics in the US energy transition: case studies of solar, wind, biofuels, and electric vehicles policy”
- *Victor, Geels, and Sharpe, *Accelerating the Low-Carbon Transition* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2019), ch. 2 (“Understanding System Transitions, pp. 16-31); pp. 34-38 on the Montreal Protocol; and ch. 4, “Application to the Low-Carbon Transition” (pp. 46-59).
- *Pahle et al., “Sequencing to ratchet up climate policy stringency”

3.4: Ecofascism and Populism

Guest: Leigh Raymond (Political Science, Purdue)

Reading:

- *Lockwood, “Right-wing populism and the climate change agenda: exploring the linkages”
- *Raymond, “Carbon pricing and economic populism: the case of Ontario”
- *Gilman, “[The Coming Avocado Politics](#)”
- Mildenberger, “[The Tragedy of The Tragedy of the Commons](#)”
- Bonikowski, “Ethno-nationalist populism and the mobilization of collective resentment”

3.11: Epistemic Chaos

Guest: David Roberts

Reading:

- *Roberts, “[Donald Trump and the Rise of Tribal Epistemology](#)”
- *Roberts, “[America is Facing an Epistemic Crisis](#)”
- *Anderson, “Epistemic Bubbles and Authoritarian Politics”
- *Pennycook & Rand, “Lazy, not Biased: Susceptibility to Partisan Fake News Is Better Explained by Lack of Reasoning than by Motivated Reasoning”
- Rauch, “[The Constitution of Knowledge](#)”
- Lazar et al., “[The Science of Fake News](#)”
- Rini, “Weaponized Skepticism: An Analysis of Social Media Deception as Applied Political Epistemology”
- Hannon, “Political Disagreement or Partisan Badmouthing?”
- de Ridder, “Deep Disagreements and Political Polarization”
- Edenberg, “The Problem with Disagreement on Social Media: Moral not Epistemic”

3.18: Internationalism and Political Psychology

Guest: Nikhar Gaikwad (Political Science, Columbia)

Reading:

- *Aklin & Mildenberger, “Prisoners of the Wrong Dilemma: Why Distributive Conflict, not Collective Action, Characterizes the Politics of Climate Change”
- Bechtel & Schreve, “Mass Support for Global Climate Agreements Depends on Institutional Design”
- Tingley & Tomz, “Conditional Cooperation and Climate Change”
- Barrett, *Environment and Statecraft* (Chapter 3)

3.25: Climate Justice and Moral Psychology

Guest: Jennifer Jacquet (Environmental Studies, NYU)

Reading:

- *Jacquet, “Guilt and Shame in US Climate Change Communication”

- *Jacquet, “Shame”
- *Fessler, “From Appeasement to Conformity: Evolutionary and Cultural Perspectives on Shame, Competition, and Cooperation”
- Jacquet & Jamieson, “Soft but significant power in the Paris Agreement”
- Srinivasan, “The Aptness of Anger”
- Fricker, “What’s the Point of Blame? A Paradigm Based Explanation”
- Shoemaker & Vargas, “Moral torch fishing: A signaling theory of blame”

4.8: Climate Justice and Climate Engineering

Guest: Marion Hourdequin

Reading:

- *Flavelle, “[As Climate Disasters Pile Up, A Radical Proposal Gains Traction](#)”
- *Hourdequin, “Climate Change, Climate Engineering, and the ‘Global Poor:’ What Does Justice Require?”
- *Flegal et al., “[Solar geoengineering: social science, legal, ethical, and economic frameworks](#)”
- *Winickoff, Flegal, & Asrat, “Engaging the Global South on climate engineering research”
- Whyte, “[Indigeneity in Geoengineering Discourses: Some Considerations](#)”
- Sapinski, Buck, & Malm, *Has it Come to This? The Promises and Perils of Geoengineering on the Brink* (chapters TBD)
- Horton & Keith, “Solar geoengineering and obligations to the global poor”
- Carr, Wylie, & Preston, “Skewed vulnerabilities and moral corruption in global perspectives on climate engineering”
- Morrow, “A mission-driven research program on solar geoengineering could promote justice and legitimacy”

4.15: Climate Justice and Race

Guest: Olúfemi Táíwò (Philosophy, Georgetown)

Reading ideas:

- *Táíwò, “[Cops, Climate, Covid: Why there is only one crisis](#)”
- *Táíwò & Cibralic, “The Case for Climate Reparations”
- Lustgarten, “[How Climate Migration Will Reshape America](#)”
- Pulido, “[Geographies of race and ethnicity II: Environmental racism, racial capitalism and state-sanctioned violence](#)”
- Pulido, “[Racism and the Anthropocene](#)”

4.22 -Individual and Structural Change

Reading ideas

- *Brownstein, Madva, & Kelly, “Climate Change, Individualism, and Structuralism”

- *Mann & Brockopp, "[You Can't Save the Climate By Going Vegan. Corporate Polluters Must be Held Accountable](#)"
- *Heglar, "[I work in the environmental movement. I don't care if you recycle](#)"
- Madva, "Individual and Structural Interventions"
- Davidson & Kelly, "Minding the Gap: Bias, Soft Structures, and the Double Life of Social Norms"
- Sinnott-Armstrong, "It's not *my* fault: global warming and individual moral obligations"
- Broome, "How much harm does each of us do?"
- Sparkman, Attari, & Weber, "Focusing on Personal Sustainable Behavior Rarely Hinders and Can Boost Climate Policy Support"
- Zheng, R., "What is my role in changing the system? A new model of responsibility for structural injustice"
- Haslanger, "Distinguished lecture: Social Structure, narrative and explanation"

4.29: Workshop on Individual and Structural Change

Speakers:

- Sally Haslanger (Philosophy, MIT)
- Alex Madva (Philosophy, Cal Poly Pomona)
- Dan Kelly (Philosophy, Purdue)
- Robin Zheng (Philosophy, Yale-NUS)
- John Broome (Philosophy, Oxford)
- Mike Hiscox (Government, Harvard)
- Greg Sparkmann (Psychology, Princeton)
- Kim Wolske (Public Policy, Chicago)

5.6: Student Workshop

5.13: Student Workshop

5.20: Catch-up, etc.