Is the World Falling Apart?

POL486/POL2205
Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

By the pricking of my thumbs, Something wicked this way comes.

It's the end of the world as we know it. Or is it? Are we facing the four horsemen of the apocalypse, or are the doomsayers crying out 'the sky is falling' just a bunch of Chicken Littles? In this time of growing collective angst it is useful to step back and explore these important and potentially existential questions. This conversation is precisely what this seminar seeks to foster. Are the events we see around us signifiers of deeper (and perhaps alarming) change? How can we know? What policy areas should most concern us? Is there anything we can learn from history? What role do we play in determining the future? Through engagement with texts from various perspectives and intellectual traditions we will try to reflect on these questions and more.

Double, double toil and trouble; Something wicked this way comes.
Time & Place

Monday 14:00-16:00

Prof. Lilach Gilady

University College UC67
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Office Hours:

Online, by appointment
Course Meetings

At the moment we are back to conducting seminar meetings in person, huzzah! It is unclear how long this will last, and we may have to be flexible and adjust if conditions change. As we attempt to re-emerge back to some semblance of normality, please be respectful of fellow students' choices and needs.
This seminar meets for 2 hour class discussions every Monday during our designated course time. Attendance and participation in these discussions is obligatory. Office hours will be held online by appointment. We will rely on Zoom as our platform of choice. We will also rely on the Quercus message boards for some assignments later on in the course. You will need a computer (preferably one equipped with a microphone and camera) & internet connection in order to participate in office hours and in order to be able to submit your class assignments.

Some minor adjustments to this format may occur as the course progresses.

Course Readings

This is an intensive seminar which involves a significant amount of reading. Useful discussion is impossible in the absence of such preparation. Should you choose to enroll in this course, please be prepared to do the work. If you fail to keep us with this basic
responsible you are affecting the overall value of the seminar for everyone.

Almost all of the readings are available electronically through the library's online resources or freely on the internet. Most of the books are available as E-books through the library. Less academic books are readily available at most public libraries. The online archive project also offers free access to a few of our course readings. Google books often offers a free preview of the introduction and first chapter of many books. In short, you are not expected to purchase anything in order to complete this seminar.

The readings for this seminar rely mainly on academic articles and books, but also include magazine articles and book reviews. Some of the readings can be technical but, hopefully over time you will find it easier to identify the core argument of these works as well as the different ways in which researchers introduce empirical evidence in support of their arguments.

Lastly, I maintain the right to make minor changes to the attached reading list throughout the term, especially if any new articles appear
or related controversies flare up. Any such changes are not likely to affect the overall weekly workload.
Course Requirements

The seminar meets for two hours each week. Attendance is, obviously, a pre-requisite for active participation. Poor attendance record may lead to a final participation grade of zero. Generally, no accommodation will be offered for missed attendance.

Research or Take-Home Exam Options
Traditionally, courses like this one were offered as a research-focused seminar in which students are expected to complete an original research paper. Since the current iteration of this seminar is still taking place in the middle of a pandemic and at a time of increased uncertainty, you will be able to choose between writing a research paper (15% for your research proposal and 35% for the final paper, see below) or completing two take-home exams (each worth 25% of your grade).

**Participation**

This is a seminar—not a lecture course! Most of the learning is done through collective discussion and analysis. Active participation is therefore crucial for the success of the seminar. Accordingly, participation accounts for a significant portion of your final grade. Crucially, familiarity with the readings is an essential pre-requisite for productive participation. In addition to participation during class, you can also participate by posting messages on the seminar's message board.
Option I: Research Proposal and Final Paper

As part of this research seminar, students are expected to develop an independent research project. In order to facilitate this process, each student is expected to schedule at least one office hours meeting with me before the proposal's due date to discuss ideas for a research project. Following these meetings each student will submit a 1-2 pages of research proposal. Students are expected to post the proposals on Quercus and to provide comments and constructive feedback to fellow students. This proposal will then be developed into a 15-20pp research paper to be submitted at the end of the term.

Option II: Take-Home Exams

If you prefer not to follow the research track, you will be expected to complete two take-home exams, one around the middle of the term and one at the end. Each exam will cover 25% of your grade. In each case you will have 24 hours to complete the exam.
Discussant Week

Each week, a student will serve as class discussant. The discussant will start the class with a short presentation (5-10 minutes) synthesizing the readings and setting the stage for our discussion. The presentation should not summarize the readings but rather find core themes, debates or questions that cut across the assigned readings. In addition, each discussant will create a power-point presentation or a short (2-3 page) document offering critical engagement with that meeting's readings. These files should be uploaded to Quercus by 10:00AM on the day of the presentation.

Pet Case

Throughout the seminar, students will make short (5 minute) presentations of ‘pet cases’ that cover other global dangers and risks that are not fully covered by our course readings. This is your chance to prepare a presentation on your favorite super-volcanic or tectonic threats, explore historical examples of apocalyptic sects, discuss the record of previous mass extinctions or introduce us to your treasured
dystopian work of fiction. In short, anything that can enrich our conversation and is related to the seminar's theme. Pet case presentations will add breadth to the number of case studies and topics that we can otherwise cover through our weekly readings.

Grade Breakup

Option I (research track):

Research proposal 15%

Discussant week 15%

Pet case 10%

Participation 25%
Research paper 35%

**Option II (exams):**

Discussant week 15%

Pet case 10%

Participation 25%

Take home exam I 25%

Take home exam II 25%
Important Dates

September 12
First seminar meeting

September 19
Discussant list sign-up

October 10

Thanksgiving Monday- no class

October 31

Take home exam questions are distributed after class (17:00)

November 1

Research Proposals and take home exams are due (17:00)

November 7
Fall reading week - no class

December 8

Last seminar meeting

Take home exam questions are distributed (17:00)

December 9

Papers and take home exams are due (17:00)
Rules and Regulations

If you are unable to submit papers or exams at the appointed time, you must request permission for an extension. In almost all cases, requests for extensions and deferrals should be submitted ahead of time. All requests for extensions or deferrals should be submitted in writing. In general, extensions will not be granted unless it is a case of unavoidable and unforeseeable extenuating circumstances. In
most cases, supporting documentation is required before any extension is granted.

Appropriate documentation must be submitted within one week of the late assignment. Please note: Assignments in other courses are NOT grounds for an extension.

Late submission penalty is 4% per each late day or fraction of a day, weekends included. As noted above, discussant commentary should be posted by 10:00am on the morning of the presentation. Thereafter, the cut off time for the determination of a late day is 5pm. All assignments should be uploaded to Quercus.

All papers should be double spaced, 12 font, with proper margins and page numbers. Papers that go beyond the stated page limit for the assignment, or papers that do not conform to the directions above, may be penalized.
Academic Integrity

All written assignments must follow academic citation rules. All words and ideas of other individuals should be properly acknowledged. For further clarification and information please consult the University of Toronto’s policy on plagiarism. Failure to understand what constitutes plagiarism will not be accepted as an excuse.
Important course information will be distributed electronically through Quercus. Students are encouraged to use Quercus in order to add constructive criticism of each other’s work, to continue in-class discussions, or to engage with current events or course readings. Online activity will count as course participation. Feel free to use the electronic forums and message boards for any course related topics.
Please respect basic netiquette conventions when posting messages.
How Many Minutes to Midnight?

September 12

Introduction
The Times They Are A-Changin'

September 19


Apocalypse Now?

September 26


Systems & Orders I

October 3


October 10- Thanksgiving break!
Systems & Orders II

October 17

Glenda Sluga. 2017. *The Beginning(s) and End(s) of International Order*


Whither the Liberal International Order?

October 24


War!

October 31


November 7- Fall Reading Week!
Spaceship Earth I

November 14


Spaceship Earth II

November 21

Bernstein, Steven, 2019. The absence of great power responsibility in global environmental politics. European Journal of International Relations.


Economic Collapse?

November 28

Adam Tooze, Crashed: How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World (New York: Viking), introduction.


Germs!

December 5


The Robots Are Coming!

December 8

Stephen Hawking’s Warning


Papers and final take home exams are due on December 9
Credits:

Created with images by robert - "earth" · Geraldas - "At the end of time" · tino - "large library in living room in large abandoned house" · 1STurningART - "breaking the rules" · JavierArtPhotography - "Hourglass and Holy Bible" · jassada watt - "the road to storm" · Wirestock Creators - "Selective focus shot of a black "It Wasn't My Idea" inscription on a yellow tape" · Liudmyla - "Keep calm and carry on" words on a lightbox on a white wooden background, top view. Overhead, from above, flat lay." · he68 - "Doomsday Clock" · gustavofrazao - "Change Just Ahead sign on desert road" · jryancl0 - "Abandoned Detroit Packard automotive factory now turned zombie apocalypse" · Maria Vonotna - "Road sign with words chaos and order. White two street signs with arrow on metal pole on blue sky background." · Konstantyn - "Autumn pumpkin on wooden table; thanksgiving holiday party background," · Worawut - "Hand of businessman on background holding connections system and global data exchanges. Business network connection concept" · Oleksi - "Global network concept. World map point. Global network planet Earth. 3D rendering" · zef art - "War Concept. Military silhouettes fighting scene on war fog sky background, World War Soldiers Silhouette Below Cloudy Skyline At night." · Lilya - "Beautiful autumn landscape with. Colorful foliage in the park. Falling leaves natural background" · aloneasdj - "Amazing blue planet Earth with night yellow lights of megacities in space with stars. Deep space with a planet. Civilization concept. Cities of Central Europe" · Panumas - "Climate change, Two Asian boys walking and searching for water on dry cracked land and sunset. Environment conservation and stop global warming concept" · Who is Danny - "Business chart with glowing arrows and world map" · Alex Tihonov - "Kid holding globe map sphere isolated on black horizontal background. Ecological problems disasters. COVID-19 pandemic infection disease concept image, copy space for text" · Kaikoro - "3D render AI artificial intelligence technology CPU central processor unit chipset on the printed circuit board for electronic and technology concept select focus shallow depth of field" · gustavofrazao - "The End written on rural road"