Course Description (principle topics covered):

Climate change—a development more accurately described as "global weirding" than "global warming"—has effects so all-encompassing that it demands a dramatic rethinking not only of traditional ethics and political theory but of the way we conceive our theoretical and practical relationship to the Earth itself. This class will begin with a look at the reasons for the current scientific consensus before introducing the consequences we already anticipate from developments to date as well as those additional consequences that will occur if we do not act dramatically and soon. We will then pursue a series of critical questions:

a) If the consensus is so strong, why is it still so hotly contested?
b) What authorities should we believe on scientific and policy questions and why?
c) What extraneous factors distort our current discussion?
d) What consequences does climate change have for traditional ethics? Can traditional ethical theories developed in much smaller societies with far less technological power cope with the problems climate change poses?
e) How must we reconceive our relationship with the Earth itself if climate change has already brought about what Bill McKibben famously calls "the end of nature"?

Student Learning Outcomes:

The goals of the first year seminar seminars include the following: that we…

Understand and appreciate the intellectual rigor and academic excellence that defines an LMU education.
Engage critically and reflectively in scholarly discourse.
Learn to read critically and carefully.
Exercise critical thinking in oral discussion and writing.
Be able to evaluate sources for quality (e.g., by learning to differentiate between scholarly and popular sources).
Acquire research skills including use of library catalog and electronic databases to retrieve books or articles, whether in print or online.

Prerequisites/Recommended Background:

None

Required Texts/References (subject to change):

Pdf files of academic articles, as assigned (available through mylmuconnect)
René Descartes, Discourse on Method (available online)
David Hume, Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (Hackett—available online)
E. F. Schumacher, A Guide for the Perplexed (Harper Torchbook—order online)

I may add a book in the next week or two—stay tuned.
Course Work/Expectations:

a) Info literacy and academic honesty sessions 5%
b) Info literacy assignment (likely an annotated bibliography or an assessment of web sources) 5%
c) First, diagnostic paper (3 pages) 5%
d) Reading responses linked to class readings 5%
e) Second paper outline, draft, and feedback on others (5, 10, and 5% respectively)
f) Second paper final draft 15%
g) Seminar presentation (P or F)
h) Third paper outline, draft and feedback (5, 10, and 5% respectively)
i) Final paper (25%)

Your attendance and participation will affect your grade as follows:

To determine your grade I first calculate the weighted average of the three major components above. Past experience suggests that many of your grades will fall between two of the standard grade point levels. Many teachers simply round down at this point, since your earned grade is the grade next below your actual raw average. For example, if you had a raw weighted grade-point average of 3.45, then your earned grade would be a 3.3, a B+. In this course as well, barring extra-ordinary circumstances, you will not be given less than your earned grade. However I exercise discretion in borderline cases: there your attendance and participation will determine whether I round a borderline raw grade up or down. I must round up or down in either case; these will be the deciding factors. Take them seriously: they could make the difference between an A- and a B+, a B- an a C+, or (let’s hope not!) a C and a C-.

General Expectations of Instructor:

1. Regular class attendance. You may have three absences for free. Use them wisely: accumulating more than three absences will affect your grade. Students with more than three absences by default fail the course.

2. Acceptance of your responsibility for the content of, and announcements made during, classes unavoidably missed.

3. Arrival on time in class (a courtesy to others). I will institute special sanctions for those who repeatedly violate this expectation. If you must leave early for some reason, please tell me ahead of time and sit close to the back door. Also, please be sure to turn off cell phones and pagers.

4. Completion on time of readings and written assignments (a responsibility to yourself).

5. A minimum of two hours of academic preparation for each hour in class.

6. Bringing to class the text under discussion that day. I’m quite serious about this: you will not be able to participate in some lessons without a text to work from.

7. I can’t believe I must say this, but experience shows: you may bring a drink, but you may not eat in class unless you have brought enough for everyone and cleared it with me in advance.

8. Acceptance of the moral and intellectual responsibility of documenting your work properly. You may not yet know how to do this; be sure you know before the first paper is due. I will point you to the resources, and you are always welcome to ask me when you are unclear. But be careful: the LMU calendar outlines very serious penalties for plagiarism.
**Grading System:**

To prevent the grade inflation which cheats outstanding students of the opportunity to stand out, the College in general and the Philosophy Department in particular have committed themselves to observe the following interpretation of letter grades (see the LMU Calendar under “Academic Policies,” in the section called “Grading System”):

A—Excellent  
B—Good (i.e., above average)  
C—Satisfactory (average)  
D—Minimal passing work  

Please see the attached handout “Grading Standards” below for a detailed account of what I—and indeed your philosophy professors more generally—expect in papers.

**Grading Standards**

Before I arrived here, the Philosophy Department had agreed on a qualitative description of grading standards, and I pass them on with a few minor modifications to give an idea of what I’m looking for in choosing a grade. These standards will govern most of your philosophy classes; indeed if you hold yourself to them, you will do well in virtually all of your humanities courses.

**Passing performance (D range):**

- regular attendance and participation in class  
- the ability to explain material in rudimentary terms with sufficient clarity and organization that its relation to the paper assignment or exam question is clear

**Satisfactory performance (C range):**

- the above, plus  
- demonstrated comprehension of the material, as witnessed by the ability to identify major positions, theories and concepts

**Good performance (B range):**

- the above, plus  
- a creative and insightful grasp of problems, issues, or potential objections  
- the ability to present and defend these insights in a clear, accurate, and organized fashion free of grammatical flaws

**Excellent performance (A range):**

- the above, plus  
- the ability to critically evaluate claims and defend alternatives  
- the ability to draw insightful connections between issues and ideas
What, in particular, does my instructor want in a paper?

Below I’ve drawn on some other attempts to interpret the qualitative expectations reflected in the major grade categories, this time with special attention to the grading of papers. I cannot claim that the following interpretations are universal, but they are common enough that you may find them to be of use when writing and editing papers for most of your humanities classes.

A Papers:

The hallmarks of a first-class essay are a lively and polished style, a judicious and effective organization, and a well-worked-out and substantive argument. Such a paper often has a special flair, “something extra,” which distinguishes it from a competent B+ paper--e.g. originality or profundity of argument, a special way with words, or exceptional research. Commonly these papers present a clear, identifiable claim or thesis which is well-focused and well-stated. They introduce and clarify working definitions when necessary. The author acknowledges the possibility of other competing and perhaps very reasonable positions, and thus she defends her choice among the alternatives with relevant, sound reasons. She raises significant objections to her position and answers them judiciously. Finally, she makes no major or minor-but-repeated grammatical mistakes, and the paper’s argument forms a tightly-knit, coherent “whole.”

B papers:

The middle B essay is typically competent but undistinguished. It is basically sound in style, content, grammar, etc., but will exhibit minor lapses and inconsistencies or minor but distracting flaws in organization or argument. It is sound enough to win one’s respect, but not one’s admiration. Often such papers are deficient in one of the areas which distinguish A papers, but they compensate for this lack in other substantial ways. Perhaps the thesis is not clearly enunciated but the reasons given in its defense are strong; or the thesis is sound but the writing is hampered by minor errors of grammar, diction, or organization; or the writing is very competent but the author does not push her reasoning as far as she could have done. B papers reflect the promise of excellent work, but a promise as yet unfulfilled.

C papers:

Here one expects to find distinct lapses in style, grammar and/or content. One way or another the paper will have shortcomings which suggest that although it has something to say it has not fully come to terms with its subject or expressed its insights clearly. A number of papers fit the “C” classification: those which stray from the assigned topic; those which deal with the topic in a perfunctory way; those which are rambling, disorganized, or which involve a good deal of padding; those which have major or minor, repeated grammatical mistakes; those which suggest carelessness (e.g. through atrocious spelling in the age of spell-checkers); and so on. In essence, a “C” paper leaves you feeling that it falls short of what is possible and expected, but which still does enough to merit a passing grade.

D papers:

Papers which do not manage a C are usually either very difficult to follow due to major difficulties in organization, grammar and/or style; or they miss the topic entirely; or they address it so perfunctorily a way that the reader cannot recognize any attempt to grapple with the issues at hand.
**Writing Instructor Contact Info and Office Hours**

FFYS 1000.01  James Mollison  UH 3742  Hrs: Tues 3:30-4:30  jmolliso@lion.lmu.edu
FFYS 1000.10  Bryan Kimoto  UH 3742  Hrs: Tues 3:30-4:30  bkimoto@lion.lmu.edu

**Assignment Deadlines:**

Due week 2, Tues: First two information literacy modules

Due week 2, Thurs: 3rd information literacy module and first “reading response” identifying solid sources of information on climate change

Week 3, Tues: read/watch climate science sources. Second reading response due on those sources.
Week 3, Thurs: Finish 4th information literacy module on academic honesty and further readings on climate science

Week 4, Tues: Assessment of sources on climate change science due. Diagnostic paper assigned.
Week 5, Thurs: Diagnostic paper on Descartes’ *Discourse on the Method* due

Week 8, Thurs: Second paper due—details about draft and critique to follow

Weeks 10-13: Seminar presentations

Week 14: Third paper due—details about draft and critique stages to follow

**Topical Outline of the Class**

**A: Introduction to the humanities and to philosophy**

**Week 1:** Handout on the Humanities, on Philosophy, and on Argument

**B: Climate change: what is it, and what may it bring?**

**Week 2:** The public discussion of climate change:

a) What is climate change

b) How do you see it portrayed:
   i) In the media?
   ii) In congress?
   iii) In popular opinion?

c) What does research show?

**Week 3:** The scientific discussion of climate change:

a) Basic science: what is climate change, how does it work, and what lines of evidence support it?

b) The likelihood and extent of climate change if we do little or nothing

c) Ecological consequences
d) Economic consequences

e) Geopolitical consequences

f) Civilizational consequences

g) The philosophical/ethical/metaphysical upshot: the “end of nature”

C. Why the disconnect between the scientific and political discussion?

Weeks 4-5: Contributions from the social sciences

a) Using psychology to unearth contemporary—and arguably anthropologically fundamental—assumptions:
   i) That the future will be like the past
   ii) That when change happens, it will proceed arithmetically, not geometrically
   iii) That change, when it happens, will be “smooth”
   iv) The psychology of loss aversion
   v) Blindness concerning the consequences of our actions

b) Using political science to grasp the interest structure behind our contemporary political inaction:
   i) Reagan, the demise of the “fairness doctrine,” and the current American media landscape
   ii) The interest of sitting congress people in the system that got them elected, in safe seats, and thus in gerrymandering.
   iii) The virtues of gerrymandering—and its vices: the demise of party authority and the weakening of any demand to compromise in the interests of all
   iv) The traditional problem of money in politics
   v) The current problem of money in politics
   vi) The good motives and bad thinking behind climate denialism

c) Using economics against economics: how environmental economics illuminates and undermines neoclassical dogmas

d) The upshot: the psychological, political and economic interests in suppressing the truth

D. Looking deeper: the foundations of intellectual authority

Weeks 6-9: Intellectual history

a) Philosophy in the ancient and medieval world

b) Modern philosophy and the birth of the scientific method

c) Grounds of the real authority of science and scientists

d) Limits of the real authority of science and scientists

e) The postmodern condition as a temptation to irrationalism

f) Self-orientation in a situation of forced choice
g) The postmodern condition as a challenge to recall the necessity, possibility, and means of recovering wisdom

h) Weaving together pre-modern, modern, and post-modern insights

E. Ethical Challenges

Weeks 10-13: Climate change as the “perfect moral storm”

a) Traditional environmental philosophy

b) A new context: not just the pollution of, but the end of nature?

c) Ethical challenges
   i) The shockingly irrational collective consequences of individually rational decisions
   ii) A problem still worse: the intergenerational issue

Week 14: The imperative to act: for the sake of the world, others, our children, and ourselves

a) Catholic social teaching on the environment

b) Two exercises in historical thinking:
   i) Using our moral imagination to illuminate past challenges, the choices between which were never as clear as they seem in retrospect. Consider the Germans under the Nazis, and Lincoln’s evolution on slavery
   ii) Using our moral imagination to illuminate a potentially much-compromised future in *Ethics for a Broken World*

c) The benefits of getting off our duffs: Bill McKibben’s *Deep Economy*