



Exeter College Summer Programme

Anthropology & Climate Change: Exploring Collective Futures in the Anthropocene

Course Description

Climate change exemplifies the sort of planetary challenge facing humankind in the twenty-first century. In this course, you will interrogate how that kind of challenge can be understood as a scientific, political, social and moral problem, to better understand our place in the world under conditions of multiple and interlocking crises. The course will introduce the 'Anthropocene', as both a proposed geological phenomenon and a critical tool to rethink the relationship between humans and the planet. Pursuing this question will require us to question some established distinctions—between human/animal, nature/culture, biology/society, life/nonlife and Globe/Earth. Rethinking, and possibly unsettling these distinctions, is key to building a more just collective existence. Through anthropological materials, historical and contemporary accounts of life in the aftermath of industrial transformation, colonisation and anthropogenic change, we will consider the types of knowledge, forms of collaboration, political engagement, and social practice that might help us better apprehend the fragility of the planet and articulate a shared responsibility to its future.

Course Objectives

This course is for anyone interested in how humanity relates to the environment and concerned with our future existence in the face of climate change and other Earth-defining anthropogenic changes. No prior knowledge of anthropology is required. Drawing from a range of contemporary and classical critical resources across anthropology, the environmental and geo-humanities, the social and natural sciences, and the arts, we will explore how the relationship between humans and their natural environment (as an economic resource, site of exploration and home-making, a matter of concern and object of care) has changed over time. Students will be introduced to a range of theories and models from anthropology, biology, ecology, and geology (e.g., kinship, niche construction, entanglement, critical zone, sustainability) from which we can build a critical lexicon to engage with 'planetary imaginaries'. By the end of this course, students will be equipped with key analytical skills and technical proficiency to engage with contemporary debates about how best to mitigate, pre-empt and adapt to the impacts of climate change, and to critically ascertain the opportunities and risks of appeals to technological solution, existential crises, and economic degrowth.

Teaching Methods and Assessment

- 12 x 1.25hr Lectures (15hrs)
- 6 x 1.25hr Seminars (7.5hrs)
- 4 x 1.25hr Tutorials (5hrs)

Lectures will introduce key themes in the scholarship and current debates around climate change and related planetary challenges in the Anthropocene. The Seminars will open with a short summary of the key theme, followed by an in-depth discussion of the readings. Each week, a pair of students will be asked to help chair that discussion, preparing two to three critical questions (submitted a day in advance) regarding the issues the readings raise for how we understand the relationship between humanity and the planet and what that relationship should become.

Lecture Topics

1. Welcome to the Anthropocene
2. Colonialism and the 'Capitalocene'
3. Climate Models and Visualising Crisis
4. Toxic Lives and Afterlives
5. Regime of climate value
6. Thermal Inequities and The Geopolitics of Comfort
7. Microbiomes, Microbes and Probiotic Selves
8. More-than-Human, Non-Human and Multispecies Relationships
9. Epistemic Justice, Multiple or Plural worlds
10. One Health, Planetary Care
11. Technologies of Capture
12. Degrowth, Cruel Optimism and the Horizon of Hope

Sample Readings:

- Chakrabarty, D. (2009). The climate of history: Four theses. *Critical Inquiry*, 35(2), 197-222.
- Clark, N., & Szerszynski, B. (2020). *Planetary social thought: The Anthropocene challenge to the social sciences*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Haraway, D. (2015). Anthropocene, capitalocene, plantationocene, chthulucene: Making kin. *Environmental humanities*, 6(1), 159-165.
- Latour, B. (2018). *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Liboiron, M. (2021). *Pollution is Colonialism*. Duke University Press.
- Nading, A. (2023). The Plantation as Hotspot: Capital, Science, Labour, and the Earthly Limits of Global Health. *Medicine Anthropology Theory*, 10(2), 1-26.
- Povinelli, Elizabeth A. "The ends of humans: Anthropocene, autonomism, antagonism, and the illusions of our epoch." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116, no. 2 (2017): 293-310.
- TallBear, Kim. "Being in relation." *Messy eating: Conversations on animals as food* (2019): 54-67.

- Tsing, A. (2005). *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*.
- Ticktin, M. I. (2019). From the human to the planetary. *Med. Anth. Theory*, 6(3).

Assessment:

- An essay of between 2,500—3,000 words (45%)
- A final 3hr written examination (45%)
- Participation in seminar and tutorial discussions (10%)

The Essay (45%)

The essay topic is of the student's own choosing and critically engage with course themes and texts. Time will be giving in seminars and tutorials to develop topics that speak students' interests.

The Exam (45%)

The final exam will consist of six essay questions, from which students will be asked to answer three. Exam questions will correspond to lecture themes and debates discussed in seminar and at intended to test your critical grasp of the different ways in which climate change has been understood as a contemporary problem.

Participation (10%)

Students are expected to attend and actively engage in all sessions. In addition to volunteering to co-chair a seminar, students come prepared with their own critical questions and reflections from the readings.