Full Spectrum Response to Environmental Degradation

Econ 3960, Section 2, Spring 2014.
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Do Not Despair, You are Not Alone

Civilizations have collapsed before. If you are young today, you will witness the collapse of modern industrial civilization during your lifetime (details). This collapse will be different in two respects:
- It is going to be world wide, it is taking many other species with it, and the planet’s ecosystem will be much less hospitable to humans than what we have to expect from the past.
- Humanity is going into the disaster with open eyes. The danger is known and the process has already begun. Nevertheless, only a small portion of the resources available to humanity are devoted to preventing or mitigating the disaster.

This class explores what can be done in such a situation: on a social/political level, on an interpersonal level, and in individual life-planning.

Politics is the art to make the necessary possible. This class will ask what is necessary, then see if there are any scenarios, at the late point in the game, in which that what is necessary may become reality, and finally explore what everybody can do to make these scenarios, if there are any, more likely.

What if we fail? Remember you are not alone. Every human on the planet is in the same situation. Therefore unexpected hopeful developments cannot be ruled out. Nevertheless the chances of failure seem much bigger than the chances of success.

Even if collapse cannot be prevented, this collapse will take many years. What happens during that time will make a lot of difference to billions of people. We do have options, we make many choices every day. There is broad consensus that continuing as in the past will make things much worse in the future. Since so many people know that business as usual is not an option, they will try new things, and will be open to others with novel ideas as well.

This class allows a different perspective to track the unpleasant realities and wishing them away. It provides emotional support and the scientific and philosophical tools so that participants can look at the situation in the eye and do what is rational, ethical, and rewarding. We will discuss how to best influence the social structures and change the culture we all are embedded in, how to overcome our own and our peers’ denial, how to grieve the losses, and how to lead fulfilled and satisfactory lives. The emotional challenges lying in such trying times are addressed in the new book, Collapsing: Consciously, summarized here.

In the past, humans have been a highly successful species; we are about to learn what it means to be human during historic decline and calamity. The goal of the class is to enable the participants to rise to the challenge.

The class meets every Thursday 6 – 7:40 pm in OSB 111. First class Jan 7, last class Apr 22, 2014. HB 50 students welcome. Enrollment.

Requirements:
- Watch the videos and do the recommended readings for each week. You can do this either privately or on your own schedule, or together with other class participants and the instructor after each class in the classroom.
- Attendance is required.
- Through Canvas submit a journal entry once a week summarizing your readings and thoughts regarding the preceding week’s materials. These journals are pass/fail. If you do not pass you are allowed to resubmit a better version.
- There is an in-class final exam, but no midterm.
- Easy online quizzes asking about the assigned readings will be available on Canvas. You are allowed to re-take them if you are not satisfied with your grade.
- For extra credit, if you fall behind on the other assignments, you may attend a stakeholder or advocacy meeting regarding environmental policies, and submit a report about it through Canvas.
- 25% of your grade will be the quizzes, and 25% the Final Exam. If you attend less than 75% of the classes or submit an acceptable journal less than 75% of the time, you have to make up for it by a stakeholder meeting report, otherwise there will be a grade penalty.

The main challenge of this class is not academic but emotional. This is why attendance and participation are valued so highly. You will know exactly at every point in time where you stand regarding grades, and you have opportunities to improve your grade.

Purchase of a textbook or other class materials is not required. All materials can be downloaded from the internet, and some important printed materials will be on reserve to be checked out for 1 week. If you request the call number “Ehrbar E-5P” the reserve desk in the Marriott library will give you a thumb drive for 24 hours max with the pdf and mp4.