

# So, What's Next? Existential Risk

Spring HSSP 2022

## Introduction

Hello! My name is Kenny, and while your interest in a class on the end of humanity is concerning, the fact that I'm offering it in the first place is perhaps worse.

## Scope and Brief Logistics

The apocalypse has been given significant consideration in human history through religion, stories, and endless worry. However, it wasn't until recently that scientists entered the fray and began giving serious intellectual attention to the sources and timeline of our potential downfall. In this class, we will review the recent advancements made in this new field, existential risk studies. We will first discuss "Hollywood apocalypses" and why scientists don't take them seriously, and then move on to the real scary stuff: climate change, nuclear war, pandemics, and artificial intelligence.

Throughout the class, I will offer supplemental articles and videos that I think are cool, and also sprinkle in a bit of philosophy to get those critical thinking juices flowing. The only prerequisites for this class are an open mind and a willingness to ask questions.

## Schedule

### *Week 1: Origin Story*

Where we are now • Philosophical considerations • The Hollywood apocalypses

### *Week 2: Climate Change*

A big problem, but an existential one? • The runaway greenhouse effect • Our prospects

### *Week 3: Nuclear War*

The effects of nuclear war • Nuclear winter • The current political situation

### *Week 4: Pandemics*

Requirements for a killer pathogen • Natural pandemics • Bioweapons and lab accidents

### *Week 5: Artificial Intelligence*

The myth of the evil robots • Technological singularity • A slow and steady death • Uploaded consciousness and other "not-so-bad extinctions"

### *Week 6: Final Remarks and Preparations*

Are we screwed? • General preparedness strategies • Figuring out whether you should build a doomsday bunker