WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION; discussion of course goal [relating our consideration of mundane, personal and family household (including catastrophic) risks to our consideration of sources of catastrophic risk to human societies and other species]

REFLECTION EXERCISE before class [Each week please share your reflections during class. As we progress through the course, we will consider how each week’s discussion may influence or be influenced by views we express[ed] in prior weeks’ classes.]: draft a concise statement of how you think about/evaluate different sources of risk including normal, personal/family life risks and catastrophic risks to you, other humans and other species. During each week’s class we will consider how our emotions and religious/spiritual attitudes as well as our reason may influence our risk evaluative process.

WEEK 2: STORY OF NOAH, Old Testament

REFLECTION EXERCISE before class: consider your understanding/interpretation of the Story of Noah

SUGGESTED READING AND LISTENING: Story of Noah, Old Testament; Dr. Irving Finkel, “The Ark before Noah: Decoding the Story of the Flood” [interview with Dr. Finkel by Cliff Dunning of the program, Earth Ancients, www.stitcher.com/podcasts]

WEEK 3: PREDICTABILITY VERSUS PROBABILITY OF CATASTROPHIC RISKS: human time horizons and human empathy; relevance of extinction of other species to human time horizons

REFLECTION EXERCISE before class: reflect upon your family and community relationships and probable lifespans of children, grandchildren and other family and community members [including refugees from elsewhere in our country or other countries] and how those relationships and the decline of species upon which humans depend for food may influence your consideration of and sensitivity to sources of catastrophic risk

SUGGESTED READING AND LISTENING: Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health podcast, Climate Change and Health (Part 2); The 15 Strange Behaviors of an Authentic Empath,” [The Minds Journal,
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WEEK 4: HUMAN TECHNOLOGIES AS SOURCES AS WELL AS POTENTIAL MEANS OF MITIGATING CATASTROPHIC RISKS: nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; Fukushima Daiichi and Chernobyl nuclear disasters; Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster; food production technologies [monoculture of limited food crops]; gun violence

REFLECTION EXERCISE before class: reflect upon how human [including food production] technologies that have social, economic or arguably political benefits can cause catastrophes, if such technologies are not well designed, constructed, operated, managed or controlled; consider whether and how you or family members or friends may have experienced harm from such technologies

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2019]; “The Inside Story of How the World Closed the Hole in the Ozone Layer” [Global Dispatches podcast, July 23, 2018]

WEEK 5: WATER SUPPLIES, HUMAN HEALTH CONDITIONS AND ADEQUACY OF SOCIETAL SYSTEMS OF DISEASE PREVENTION

REFLECTION EXERCISE before class: consider human health/disease prevention systems and how you think of the current vulnerability of human societies to diseases including ones previously considered “conquered”


WEEK 6: FUNDAMENTAL INSTABILITY OF EARTH’S GEOLOGY AND HYDROLOGY

REFLECTION EXERCISE before class: consider the sources of instability of the Earth’s land surfaces/tectonic plates and oceans and how they may influence your perception of the stability of the natural and manmade world

SUGGESTED READING AND LISTENING: listen to Earth & Environmental Systems Podcasts (Lecture 10, plate tectonics),
WEEK 7: HISTORICAL CAUSES OF MASS SPECIES EXTINCTIONS

RELECTION EXERCISE before class: consider how the workings of Earth’s physical, chemical and biological systems have disrupted [can disrupt] life on Earth and have determined/can determine which species may survive


WEEK 8: MORE ON VOLCANOES, EARTHQUAKES AND TSUNAMIS

RELECTION EXERCISE before class: consider the continuity of geologic and hydrologic disruptions and the interconnectedness of the two and whether such events elsewhere in our country or the world concern you

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WEEK 9: THE LITTLE ICE AGE OF 17th CENTURY: cooling of planet as source of human catastrophe
    REFLECTION EXERCISE before class: consider the public health, economic, political and other societal disruptions associated with climate change during 17th Century and currently and how the extent of those disruptions may influence your view of what may be encompassed within “climate change”
    SUGGESTED READING AND LISTENING: 15 Minute History podcast, Episode 44, Climate Change and World History; The New Yorker, “How the Little Ice Age Changed History,” (March 25, 2019, book review by John Lanchester); Geoffrey Parker, “Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the 17th Century [Yale Univ. Press, 2014];” Encyclopedia Britannica [online] on Little Ice Age

WEEK 10: HUMAN WARS, GENOCIDES, FAILURES OF NATION STATES AND REFUGEE FLOWS
    REFLECTION EXERCISE before class: reflect upon humans’ capacity to cause catastrophes and the sources of societal stresses that prompt such catastrophes; consider, also, whether you perceive any current societal stresses in our country or the world as leading to wars, genocides and failures of nation states
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WEEK 11: FOREST FIRES AND FLOODS [natural AND man induced or aggravated]

REFLECTION EXERCISE before class: consider both the forest fires and flooding that are “natural” [i.e., not aggravated by human behaviors] and those that appear increasingly so aggravated; consider further whether the distinction between the two may be disappearing


WEEK 12: COSTS OF INCREASING FREQUENCY OF EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS

REFLECTION EXERCISE before class: consider the social, economic, environmental, private financial and governmental fiscal impacts/costs of the increasing frequency of extreme weather events/disasters; consider your level of concern for these impacts/costs

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WEEK 13: CONCLUSION; FIDUCIARY RESPONSIBILITY OF HUMANS for other humans [family and non-family] and species

REFLECTION EXERCISE before class: draft a concise statement regarding how you now think [after the course] about considering and managing risk including sources of catastrophic risk to yourself, other humans and other species
