

POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF DEATH IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

POL S 401B / HONR 392



AN UNDERGRADUATE SEMINAR

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TU/TH 10:30-12:20

Death is indispensable to the healthy functioning of ecosystems and even to evolution itself. One species has developed the capacity to anticipate (and therefore dread) death and commandeer the biosphere to its own ends. Pollution and habitat destruction, once limited to local and regional scales, are now planetary; hence the Anthropocene. The implications are profound. We face not only the end of “nature,” we also face the risk of civilizational death. How, then, do we live with a sense of meaning and purpose? And what can the current pandemic teach us about the political ecology of death and the Anthropocene?

While death is a fact of life, who lives, who dies, and who decides are political matters. Our discussion will therefore be informed by themes of justice, equity, power, authority, and agency. At the same time, because mortality is also an intensely personal reality, we will deepen our inquiry through poetry, videos, contemplative practices, personal exploration, and political action.

For further information, contact Professor Karen Litfin, litfin@uw.edu