

# SO363-15 Sociology of End Times

**20/21**

**Department**

Sociology

**Level**

Undergraduate Level 3

**Module leader**

Steve Fuller

**Credit value**

15

**Module duration**

10 weeks

**Assessment**

100% coursework

**Study location**

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

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## Description

### Introductory description

The phrase 'end times' is equivocal. It can mean either 'termination point' or 'goal realization' – or perhaps it could mean both. It is this last possibility that makes the topic interesting because it suggests that there is a plot to history – a beginning, middle and end – just like any good narrative. The two main such narratives have been cyclical and linear, which corresponds roughly to 'karmic' and 'anthropic' religions: i.e. on the one hand, narratives based on a life force that goes through an endlessly repeating pattern of birth, maturity, death and rebirth; on the other hand, narratives privileging humanity as the protagonist who gradually comes into its own over time to assume its proper place in the world.

[Module web page](#)

### Module aims

The module is designed as an optional module for final year UG and PGT students. It aims to look at various ways in which 'the end of history' has been conceptualised by theologians, philosophers, historians, biologists and social theorists.

The topic is of special interest today considering the wide-ranging discussions underway concerning the future of humanity, not to mention life on the planet more generally (aka the Anthropocene). The course will cover different sacred and secular senses of 'end', including

eschatology, historicism, teleology, evolution and progress.

## Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Indicative week-by-week topics:

1. Cyclical vs. linear conceptions of time in historical perspective
2. Eastern and Western conceptions of cyclical time: China and Greece
3. Which way points the arrow of linear time? The roots of the utopian future in the idyllic past
4. End as Terminal: Shifting the conception of death – from inevitable to avoidable
5. End as Destination: Shifting the place of Heaven – from the sky to the Earth
6. End as Purpose: Shifting the mission of Humanity – from stewards of the Earth to cosmic explorers
7. From Hegel to Marx to Fukuyama: The Western Consensus on the Modern Idea of Progress
8. Spengler and Gunder Frank on the 'Decline of the West' and the Second Coming of Asia
9. The empirical standing of 'the end of history': Prediction or Prophecy?
10. Will all of Homo sapiens make it to 'Humanity 2.0'? Will other beings be included?

## Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Knowledge of the historical roots of contemporary discussions about 'the end times';
- A sensitivity to the different theoretical and empirical assumptions made by various accounts of 'the end times';
- An understanding of various social functions played by various arguments that appeal to 'the end times';
- A critical awareness of the difficulties involved in fairly evaluating arguments that appeal to 'the end times'.
- An understanding of the difference between Europe and Asia centred accounts of 'the end of times'

## Indicative reading list

Bury, J.B. (1918). *The Idea of Progress*.

Collingwood, R.G. (1938). *The Idea of History*.

DeFries, R. (2014). *The Big Ratchet: How Humanity Thrives in the Face of Natural Crisis*.

Frank, A.G. (2005). *ReOrient*.

Fukuyama, F. (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man*.

Fuller, S. (2012). *Preparation for Life in Humanity 2.0*.

Harari, Y. (2016). *Homo Deus*.

Löwith, K. (1948). *Meaning in History*.

MacCormack, P. (2012). *Posthuman Ethics*.

Morton, T. (2013). *Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*.

Passmore, J. (1970) *The Perfectibility of Man*.

Popper, K. (1957). The Poverty of Historicism.  
Ruse, M. (1996). Monad to Man: The Concept of Progress in Evolutionary Biology  
Spengler, O. (1919). The Decline of the West.  
Young, G. (2012). The Russian Cosmists.  
Zizek, S. (2010). Living in the End Times.

## **Interdisciplinary**

Readings are taken from history, philosophy, sociology and theology.

## **Subject specific skills**

knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles of their area(s) of study, and of the way in which those principles have developed

ability to apply underlying concepts and principles outside the context in which they were first studied

knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in the subject(s) relevant to the named award, and ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems in the field of study

an understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge.

use a range of established techniques to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, and to propose solutions to problems arising from that analysis

a systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline

## **Transferable skills**

the ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (for example, refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).

apply the methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding, and to initiate and carry out projects

critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete), to make judgements, and to frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution - or identify a range of solutions - to a problem

an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline  
conceptual understanding that enables the student:

- ◦ to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline
  - ◦ to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline
- an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge
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# Study

## Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Private study	132 hours (88%)
Total	150 hours

## Private study description

Student will read materials and consult with the instructor by e-mail or in person about matters of content and assignments that arise.

## Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

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## Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

## Assessment group A1

	Weighting	Study time
3000 Word Essay	100%	
Your essay is to provide an answer to the following question: Is it sensible for a society to be organized and oriented to the possibility that it could come to an end at some point in the future?		
If you answer yes, explain what a sensible approach would look like. Feel free to draw on any relevant precedents or ideas, among which should include at least some module materials. You are also free to define 'end times' in whatever way serves your argument, but you must make that clear at the outset.		
If you answer no, explain why focussing on the possible end of society is not a sensible strategy. Feel free to draw on any relevant precedents or ideas, among which should include at least some module materials. You are also free to define 'end times' in whatever way serves your argument, but you must make that clear at the outset.		

## Feedback on assessment

Students will receive written, electronic feedback on all work through the Tabula system, and more informally by e-mail and in person, including office hours.

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## Availability

### Courses

This module is Core optional for:

- Year 3 of ULAA-ML33 Undergraduate Law and Sociology

This module is Optional for:

- USOA-L301 BA in Sociology
  - Year 3 of L301 Sociology
  - Year 3 of L301 Sociology
  - Year 3 of L301 Sociology
- Year 4 of USOA-L306 BA in Sociology (with Intercalated Year)
- Year 3 of USOA-L314 Undergraduate Sociology and Criminology

This module is Unusual option for:

- UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics
  - Year 3 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
  - Year 3 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
  - Year 3 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)

This module is Option list A for:

- ULAA-ML34 BA in Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
  - Year 3 of ML34 Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
  - Year 4 of ML34 Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
- Year 4 of ULAA-ML33 Undergraduate Law and Sociology

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 3 of UPOA-ML13 Undergraduate Politics and Sociology
- Year 4 of UPOA-ML14 Undergraduate Politics and Sociology (with Intercalated year)