

## Fall 2021 Junior courses final writing assignment (based on guest lectures by Prof. Beattie & Prof. Gellers) instructions

This course was originally intended to switch to writing by Nov., but we will make up for the delay in the spring writing course. To salvage the title of “Academic English Reading & Writing,” please answer ONE of the following prompts in a short essay of about three paragraphs (1-2 double-spaced pages) for 20% of the final course grade. The due date will be discussed in class.

Give your essay a title, and put both your English and Chinese names at the top of the page, along with the date and the name of the course (Academic English Reading & Writing). You may cite outside readings or the lectures themselves, but this is not required. In answering at least two questions in the prompt (but not trying to answer all the questions), you should mention something the authors of the required texts (Lieven & Osborn for Prof. Beattie, Prof. Gellers’s book) said. We will learn these writing skills formally next semester, and you should consider this a “writing sample” to introduce me to your English writing skills (or lack thereof).

PROMPT 1: Self-described “climate skeptics” (or climate change deniers) would dismiss Prof. Beattie’s presentation as “alarmist” (intended to scare us about something unlikely to come true), to which he would likely respond that he is only giving the scientific consensus the attention it deserves, that climate science must be taken much more seriously in politics than we have so far. In turn, they would say, “Scientists have been wrong before, such as predictions that we would run out of oil by the 1980s, or using Malthusian calculations to predict rising human populations would cause global famines by the late 20th century.” Still others think technological solutions will prevent climate change from reaching anywhere near levels that could cause “collapse of human civilization.” Why are you persuaded or not convinced by Lieven & Beattie’s warnings about “tipping points” leading to “runaway climate change,” going from “first-order” climate effects to “second-order” social & political effects endangering human & global security (as well as more traditional national security)? To what extent is climate change already affecting (Chinese & international) politics, and how much bigger/worse (with specific examples) will the effects actually become?

PROMPT 2: Prof. Beattie & Prof. Gellers’ topics overlap somewhat with regard to the “rights of nature” (RoN), including animal rights. While we dither about how many degrees in global temperature is an acceptable rise, pollution and other destruction of natural habitat (often linked directly to the goals of “development” & “progress”) reduced ALL animal populations in the world by nearly 70% from 1970 to 2016, according to World Wildlife Fund’s (WWF) Living Planet Report 2020. To what extent has our anthropocentrism (assigning human life & flourishing, including GDP growth, higher value than anything else) blinded us to these rights? To what extent do we acknowledge this ideology? If unacknowledged, will those other rights continue to be violated until our own extinction is threatened, or will humanity realize the damage it has done before it is too late? Will animals only survive this century if they are cute or otherwise useful to humans (aka delicious enough to be raised miserably in CAFOs/factory farms, not incidentally terrible for climate change also)? What actual rights to animals & nature have, regarding survival of species (i.e. why should we care if mosquitoes or arch-predators like tigers die out), and who (or what) is responsible for providing and protecting these rights? How much would changing to a bio-centric or eco-centric perspective help? How much “human prosperity” are you personally willing to give up for nature & other animals?

PROMPT 3: Prof. Gellers notes many possibilities for granting rights to robots, ranging from “properties-based” (how similar they are to humans) to “relational” (how humans relate to them on a daily basis). What theoretical perspectives on the subject of “personhood” or other worthiness of rights make the most or least sense to you? Do you think robot rights will become more likely the closer a robot becomes to being a “perfect android” indistinguishable from a human? Regardless of physical form or distance from human likeness, how advanced must an artificially intelligent object (non-living thing) be before it should be given rights (i.e. political like the right to vote, physical like protection from being damaged, human like prohibitions against slavery, and the right to life/existence), or will/should robots always remain humans’ property? Why?

PROMPT 4: How might an advanced, self-replicating AI or other high-tech tool (currently existing or yet to be invented/discovered) help us to solve the problems and global threat of climate change? As I asked Prof. Gellers, could you imagine a “Terminator” scenario in which intelligent robots realize that the “best” solution to anthropogenic climate change (climate change caused by humans, specifically the burning of fossil fuels for heat and energy) is to “kill all the humans”? If so, how might that happen? If not, why not? To what extent does hope in a technological “deus ex machina” reduce our urgency in transitioning to 100% renewable energy/carbon neutrality, limiting consumption in our everyday lives, and holding industries & large corporations accountable for the damage they have already done? How optimistic or pessimistic are you about these possibilities, and what are your reasons?

PROMPT 5: (International politics majors should know that writing about Realism will be an option in another essay in the spring semester; for politics & PA majors, this may be your only opportunity to write about it in English.) Prof. Beattie outlined the basic assumptions and prescriptions of Realism in IR theory at the beginning of his lecture, but they only came up a little in the Q&A, more so in his assigned readings by Lieven & Osborn. How well does Prof. Beattie’s introduction align with your understanding of the theoretical paradigm? How do the authors explain & use Realism? To what extent is Realism able or unable to address the threats posed by climate change, terrorism (threats from non-state actors), and non-military security in the 21st century (compared to past centuries)?