Experts agree the likelihood that nuclear weapons will be used in battle is now greater than it's been since the Cold War. A nuclear war between major powers would bring about an apocalyptic world, possibly bringing civilization or even the human species to an untimely end. Or supposing we avoid such a war, an apocalyptic world could still result from environmental catastrophe or a major epidemic.

In this course, we will confront the ethical and political questions raised by the possibility of apocalypse, with a particular focus on nuclear weapons.

In the first part of the course, we'll look at the worst-case scenario: what if this actually happens? We will examine the possible effects of apocalyptic war—the world after apocalypse—with an eye to the following questions:

--How do nuclear weapons work, and how might a nuclear war actually happen?
--How should people live in an apocalyptic world of collapse and scarcity?
--What are the ethics of "doomsday prepping"? Are we obliged to share resources following a catastrophe, or should we protect our own families and friends?
--Does the possibility of an apocalyptic future undermine any of our present-day ethical ideals?
--What can we learn about the meaning of human life by considering how an apocalypse would change us?

Then, in the second part of the course, we will ask how a nuclear apocalypse may be averted:

--What are the best and most ethical strategies for preventing nuclear war?
--Is reducing nuclear arsenals a worthwhile goal, or do nuclear weapons actually make us safer by deterring war?
--When, if ever, might the use of nuclear weapons be ethically justified?
--How do the rules of warfare and the ideals of just war theory apply to nuclear war?