The Subject of Sustainability:

The Politics of “Humanity” in an Era of Climate Change

This workshop advances the debate on two questions: the question of *subjectivity* in world politics, and the question of *sustainability* as it pertains to the phenomenon of climate change. We are interested in their intersection and overlap and its implications on the future of world politics.

The first question this workshop raises concerns the “who” of world politics. Who is authorized to speak and act? Whose actions are understood as legitimate? Who bears responsibility for meeting global challenges like that posed by climate change? We do not believe that an answer to this question can be found without a critical examination of the *politics of subjectivity*, which is to say, an account of the practices, processes, arrangements, institutions, and structures that make possible the attribution of acts to an actor and deeds to a doer on the world stage. Such an account should not begin with the typical assumptions of U.S.-centered Anglophone IR, which confine actor-hood to individuals or to states; instead, the focus should be on the multiplicity of ways that subjects are produced and reproduced in contemporary world politics, along with the successes and failures of those efforts to generate order and stability/change and continuity in social systems.

The second question this workshop raises is: *how* is sustainability managed? The problem of sustainability cannot be understood outside of the context of the global development agenda *and* the scale, magnitude and impact of environmental change on the future of humanity: RIO 1992; KYOTO 1998; Millennium Development Goals; COPENHAGEN 2009; RIO+20 (2012); Sustainable Development Goals 2015; and the PARIS AGREEMENT 2015. In this light, the dominant discourse on sustainability cannot solely be evaluated in terms of the agenda of the scientific community and the data and projections that they provide; nor can we simply focus on technological innovations that might help to manage finite resources, that is to say, the capacity of humans to continue to modify the planetary environment, more specifically the biosphere. At stake in the question of whether states or humanity or some other actor or set of actors faces the implications of climate change is nothing less than the matter of who participates in world politics and who world politics is ultimately for. Sustainability raises the issue of the politics of “humanity”, linking climate change to a vision of the human future. When “we” speak of sustainability, what kind of a crisis, therefore, do “we” face?

The overall goal of the workshop is to build on analyses of the present moment to suggest new approaches, processes, and models – a new set of vocabulary - for the field of International Studies to help confront what we think is the greatest and most urgent *global and universal* challenge – scientifically, socially and politically - that we face today. Doing so will likely require us to go beyond the existing states-in-anarchy or individuals-in mutually-beneficial-contracts models or ontologies that continue to dominate the field.

Convenors:

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