

School of Business Seminar Series

CPPE

People are disappointing: The fantasy of the State and the end of the world

Presenter: Nicholas Beuret, Lancaster Environment Centre, University of Lancaster

Discussant: David Harvie

Date & Time: Wednesday 1 February 2017, 3:30pm - 5:00pm

Venue: Ken Edwards Third Floor SR 324

Abstract

The world as we know it is not only ending, it is over. As ecological crises deepen and expand, it seems as though it is quickly becoming too late to do much about them despite the faux optimism of government ministers, international climate change summits and UN spokespeople. For decades now environmentalists have asked us to take action: to do everything from change light bulbs to take to the streets and call on governments to act in line with the demands of science. Yet action, where it has been taken, has been profoundly inadequate and ineffective in stopping the earth getting warmer. For many, if not most environmentalists across the globe, hope rests with decisive government action. However, dramatic change has rarely been the preserve of governments. More often than not, the concrete actions required to produce dramatic social transformation, actions that make hope possible, have rested with people. Yet confronted with the social realities as well as the science of climate change, people have proved disappointing. Not only have they failed to act sufficiently, in many cases they have failed to act at all. Within such a sea of inaction, the State appears as our last hope to ward off ecological catastrophe. This research seminar explores what happens when governments fail to save the world and political realism is unable to accommodate scientific fact. It will explore how the failure of both 'the people' and 'the government' has produced a crisis in environmental politics, one bound to a broader crisis in liberalism as a political framework, and ask what kind of environmentalism can exist after the exhaustion of (liberal) politics.

Biography

Nicholas Beuret is a research associate at the Lancaster Environment Centre working on issues of climate migration and security. His work explores how environmental issues are produced as sociotechnical matters of concern and how these function to shape political practices and imaginaries. Interrogating the construction of environmental agency and its modalities, his current research focuses on the environmental politics of climate change and resource use, emerging energy infrastructure, and extinction and the catastrophic imaginary.