

Dystopian Futures? Ontological Security in an Age of Anxiety

Thursday 18 June 2020 17:00 (1h 30m)

The emergence of a sense of generalised anxiety increasingly characterises much of Western –and possibly global –discourse and experience. Such anxieties are connected to an ever increasing set of transnational ‘crises’ in the face of which both people and states appear increasingly disoriented and are struggling to respond, and where such anxieties are frequently experienced in profoundly existential and ontological terms. Amongst others these include: a sense of crisis over the future of (democratic) governance, crises of consumerist capitalism, and crises of climate change and ecological breakdown. Generalised anxieties are also increasingly prevalent with regard to technology, where the often unanticipated effects of technological innovations designed to improve lives –such as social media and the ‘internet of things’–are often a considerable source of angst and uncertainty. For some, technological innovation has also resulted in a crisis of war, as it has become increasingly post-human and therefore post-heroic. And not least, at a more general level, we are also in the midst of a crisis of knowledge and the associated decline of trust structures central to modernity. This latter is not just connected to the populist assault on experts and the emergence of a post-truth politics, but also to the fact that apparently robust scientific predictions (e.g. regarding climate change) increasingly appear to have been woefully inaccurate and optimistic. This sense of crisis is in turn reflected across popular culture, where dystopian themes increasingly predominate, but where we might also identify nostalgia for earlier times.

To date, International Relations scholars interested in ontological security have primarily focused their analyses on issues of national identity. Papers on this panel will instead seek to expand discussion to a broader set of themes of global significance that cut through a narrower concern with the nation state to consider how such broader processes are a considerable source of anxiety at both transnational and everyday levels. In doing so, papers consider the ways in which individual and collective subjects have tried to respond to the emergence of such anxieties, with a particular eye on the political implications.

Track Classification: Emotions in Politics and International Relations Working Group