



Universiteit  
Leiden



Roosevelt  
Institute for  
American  
Studies

***Beyond Risk?  
Understanding the Threats of the Anthropocene***

**Academiegebouw, De Grachtenkamer  
Rapenburg 73, Leiden, the Netherlands  
May 31, 2024**

One of the most worrying characteristics of our contemporary age is that systemic risk production, being it related to war, poverty, instability, climate change, toxic pollution, loss of biodiversity, and pandemics, is outpacing risk reduction. Our ability to cope with existential threats is confronted with a series of cross-scale challenges that have become planetary, affecting the Earth's biogeochemical cycles as a whole. The ways in which we assess and manage risk, but also the ways in which we interpret, discuss, and perceive it, have become crucial to envisioning and achieving any form of sustainable future. But how does such a new, comprehensive understanding of risk emerge? Which role do rising doubts, uneven socio-ecological vulnerability, and widespread uncertainty play in the consolidation of new cultures of risk? How do perspectives and narratives of risk change over the times and spaces of the Anthropocene? At the same time, how should risk be communicated, codified, and institutionalized? How should it be transferred to new generations? And how does technological development – most prominently AI – interact with our attitudes toward it?

Across the world, several multilateral institutions and research centers are exploring possible answers to these questions. This workshop aims to contribute to this ongoing conversation by launching an interdisciplinary exchange within Leiden University and across its faculties and institutes. The invited scholars will discuss and address the evolving nature of risk in our contemporary societies from the point of view of the humanities, social sciences, global affairs, law, and environmental sciences. The goal is to lay the groundwork for a deeper and more critical understanding of risk and how it affects the paths toward adaptation and sustainability.

**Suggested readings:**

- [IPCC, The Concept of Risk in the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report](#)
- [SJ Beard, Martin Rees, Catherine Richards, and Clarissa Rios Rojas \(eds.\), \*The Era of Global Risk An Introduction to Existential Risk Studies\* \(Open Book Publisher, 2023\)](#)
- Shahr Avin, et al., "[Classifying global catastrophic risks](#)," *Futures*, Volume 102, September 2018, 20-26.
- [UN Global Assessment Report On Disaster Risk Reduction \(GAR\), 2022](#)

## Program

- 9:15-9:45 Welcome, registration, and coffee
- 9:45-10:45 Introduction  
A conversation with SJ Beard, Senior Research Associate, Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, Cambridge University, and co-editor of *The Era of Global Risk*
- 10:45-11:00 Coffee Break
- 11:00-12:00 Session 1  
*Who's doomed? Challenging existentiality and universality of risk*  
Discussion leaders: Gijs Dreijer – Elena Burgos Martinez
- 12:00-13:00 Lunch (Faculty Club, Academigebouw, Rapenburg 73, Leiden)
- 13:00-14:00 Session 2  
*Biological and ecological threats: Risk in the planetary age*  
Discussion leaders: Anne Urai – Thijs Bosker
- 14:00-14:15 Coffee break
- 14:15-15:15 Session 3  
*Human and more-than human risks: AI, wars, and injustice*  
Discussion leaders: Anne Heyer – Bernardo Ribeiro de Almeida
- 15:15-15:30 Coffee break
- 15:30-16:00 Closing Remarks  
Matthew Connelly, Director, Centre for the Study of Existential Risks, Cambridge University
- 16:00-16:30 Output discussion
- 16:30-17:30 Farewell & drinks (Brasserie, Academigebouw, Rapenburg 73, Leiden)
- 18:30 Dinner (La Diva, Noordeinde 23, Leiden)

The seminar is made possible by Leiden University's 2023 Kiem Grants program and is organized in cooperation with the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies.

Participants (Leiden University): Paul Behrens; Thijs Bosker; Elena Burgos Martinez; Gaetano Di Tommaso; Marleen Dekker; Gijs Dreijer; Dario Fazzi; Eduard Fosch Villaronga; Anne Heyer; Shivant Jhagroee; Bernardo Ribeiro de Almeida; Maud Rijks; Giles Scott-Smith; Anne Urai; Martina Vijver.