



# EMERGENCY IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

12<sup>th</sup> Annual London Graduate Conference  
in the History of Political Thought

24-25 June 2021

Keynote Speaker: Prof. John Sabapathy  
(University College London)

## CALL FOR PAPERS

Emergency has always been a central political problem. From antiquity to the present day, thinkers and theorists have confronted the question of how institutions, politicians, and citizens must adapt to moments of danger. Under the Roman Republic, Cicero's career was defined by his extra-legal response to the Catiline emergency. During the Renaissance, the *virtù* of the Machiavellian Prince hinged on the ability to effectively respond to the unpredictability of unfolding events. Under the Weimar Republic, Carl Schmitt argued that the ability to declare a state of emergency was the defining act of sovereignty.

Today we are living through multiple emergencies. Governments regularly declare emergencies in response to threats of terrorism, the Covid-19 emergency continues to dominate our lives, and the climate emergency heralds a long-term crisis of the Anthropocene. These emergencies have reshaped our political institutions, creating new roles for government and new forms of law. They have altered our experience of politics, bringing it ever more into our lives and yet further from our direct control. They have warped our temporalities, bringing us instantaneous updates, yet keeping our lives in suspended animation. And they have sparked political responses ranging from QAnon's online conspiracy theorizing to Extinction Rebellion's embodied, street-level activism. Indeed, the prevalence of emergencies in contemporary political life has led Giorgio Agamben to argue that 'state of emergency' is now the dominant paradigm of government.

In the present context, then, it is appropriate to reconsider how emergency has been defined, theorized, and narrated in the past. For intellectual historians, contemporary emergencies invite

reflection on the historical role of emergency in political language, theory, and practice, as well as the conceptual history of the term itself. What defines an emergency? What impacts do emergencies have? Are they outside of, or constitutive of, political life?

This conference will explore how thinkers throughout history have considered emergencies and their political implications. We invite submissions from graduate researchers in intellectual history or related disciplines, drawing from different periods and places. Proposals for panels and papers may wish to consider the following themes:

- Conceptual histories of emergency
- States of emergency and states of exception
- Historical narratives of emergency
- The temporality of emergency
- Environmental, climate, and health emergencies
- Historical perspectives on the Anthropocene
- Emergency as context in the history of ideas
- Emergency as a methodological consideration

To apply, please email a C.V. along with your proposal to [historyofpoliticalthoughtnet@gmail.com](mailto:historyofpoliticalthoughtnet@gmail.com). Abstracts should be no more than 500 words for papers of 20 minutes in length. Panel proposals should include the titles of individual papers and not exceed 1500 words in total. As this is a graduate conference, please note that we can only consider proposals from applicants who have not been awarded a doctorate.

The conference will most likely follow a hybrid format. While we hope to conduct some aspects in person, speakers will still be able to present virtually. Please let us know whether you would like to present in person, circumstances permitting, or online, and which timezone you are based in.

The call for papers will close on **26 March 2021 at 23:59 GMT**. Successful applicants will be notified no later than 28 April 2021.

**Annual London Graduate Conference Committee:** Calyx Palmer (KCL), Atlanta Neudorf (QMUL), Jack Edmunds (KCL), Peter Morgan (UCL), David Klemperer (QMUL), Cathleen Mair (QMUL), Giuseppe Grieco (QMUL), Conor Bollins (QMUL), Alessandro de Arcangelis (UCL), Emily Steinhauer (GHIL), Adela Halo (UCL)