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# NATURAL DISASTERS AND THE END OF BLAMELESS EVIL

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## SLØK-FORELÆSNING 2023

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The purely natural disaster, for which no one is to blame, is an Enlightenment category. Previously, there were just disasters (*tribulationes*, in medieval Latin), of mixed divine, human, and natural causation, and plenty of blame to go around. In the age of anthropogenic climate change, we are fast losing the category of the natural disaster – and with it, the concept of blameless evil. Not so long ago, the legal recognition of catastrophes for which no one was responsible, which were regrettable but beyond human reckoning or control seemed a mark of progress: we had rid ourselves of the yoke of religious portents and chastisements, of reading divine wrath into events that were just part of the course of nature. But now enlightened opinion increasingly wonders whether natural disasters are really all that natural and poses hard questions about human responsibility – and liability. My question is: what happens when we *lose* the Enlightenment category of natural disaster, and with it, the concept of blameless evil?

Lorraine Daston has published on a wide range of topics in the history of science, including the history of probability and statistics, wonders in early modern science, the emergence of the scientific fact, scientific models, objects of scientific inquiry, the moral authority of nature, and the history of scientific objectivity. Recent books include *Gegen die Natur* (2018; English edition *Against Nature*, 2019) as well as *Science in the Archives* (2017) and (with Paul Erikson et al.) *How Reason Almost Lost Its Mind: The Strange Career of Cold War Rationality* (2014), the latter two both products of MPIWG Working Groups. Her current projects include a history of rules, the meaning of modernity in the history of science, international governance in science since the late nineteenth century, and the relationship between moral and natural orders. She is the recipient of the Pfizer Prize and Sarton Medal of the History of Science Society, the Schelling Prize of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, the Lichtenberg Medal of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences, the Luhmann Prize of the University of Bielefeld, and honorary doctorates from Princeton University and the Hebrew University. In 2018 she was awarded the Dan David Prize in the History of Science. In addition to directing Department II of the MPIWG, she is a regular Visiting Professor in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago and Permanent Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin.



Sløk-forelæsningen er åben for alle, og vi håber at se rigtig mange studerende, alumner, ansatte og venner af idéhistorie og filosofi. Man kan læse mere om tidligere modtagere og motivering af tildeling her:

<https://cas.au.dk/en/about-the-school/departments/philosophy-and-history-of-ideas/the-research-programme-at-the-department-of-philosophy-and-the-history-of-ideas/annual-johannes-sloek-lecture/>

Forelæsningen er arrangeret af Sløk-udvalget bestående af Christian Olaf Christiansen, Rithma K.E. Larsen og Rikke Louise Peters.

Forelæsningen finder sted fredag den 26. maj 2023 kl. 14.30-16.00 i Nobelauditoriet (1482-105), Aarhus Universitet, Jens Chr. Skous Vej 4, 8000 Aarhus C. Efterfølgende vil Afdeling for Filosofi og Idéhistorie være vært for en reception. Alle er velkomne!