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JOHN BLISS

Assistant Professor, University of Denver Sturm College of Law

“Legal Activism in the Age of Existential Risk”

Lawyers have played a central role in a wide range of social movements. How is this tradition of social-change lawyering being applied in the emerging movement to protect the future of humanity? This movement is motivated by growing evidence that humanity is entering a new age of “existential risk,” which refers to events that would entirely foreclose a meaningful existence for future generations, e.g. via human extinction or permanent dystopia. Technological developments in synthetic biology, artificial intelligence, and other fields have brought these risks out of science fiction and into serious academic inquiry and political concern. Leading scholars in this field estimate a roughly one-in-six chance of existential catastrophe over the next century. Awareness of risks on this scale has recently sparked the founding of dozens of non-profit organizations and the early stirrings of a transnational social movement. This article presents the first empirical study of the nascent, remarkably ambitious community of legal activists within this movement. How do these lawyers address such an abstract and probabilistic topic as existential risk? And how do they conceive of providing legal representation to the multitudes of future generations, a population that could be extraordinarily large yet entirely voiceless? And what can these lawyers learn from the interdisciplinary literature on law and social change?

Drawing on a year-long qualitative study including semi-structured interviews with the leading legal advocates and ethnographic observations embedded in the central legal organization of this movement, the article describes in empirical detail the distinct model of social-change lawyering practiced in this movement.

PLACE via Zoom webinar. The [registration link](#) is on our website.
TIME 12:45 – 2:00pm.
INFO <https://www.csls.berkeley.edu>

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