
Perception du risque : un point de vue international
Biopolitics, bioethics and risk society

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Centre for Science, Society and Citizenship

The Centre for Science, Society and Citizenship is an independent, interdisciplinary research centre which was established in 2002 as a collaboration between scholars from three Rome Universities (La Sapienza, Tor Vergata, and Campus Biomedico). The CSSC's mission is to attempt to clarify the human (social, cultural and ethical) factors which shape technological innovation.

- BIG – BIOETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF GLOBALISATION
- BITE – BIOMETRIC IDENTIFICATION TECHNOLOGY ETHICS



Risk after 9/11

Many claim that 11 September 'changed the world forever', particularly impacting on public perceptions of risk and creating a sense that we live in an ever-more risky world. But it is wrong to blame today's culture of fear on the collapse of the World Trade Centre.

Long before 11 September, public panics were widespread - on everything from GM crops to mobile phones, from global warming to foot-and-mouth.



A long history of risks

1950s – 60s Nuclear Risk

1970s - 80s Environmental Risk

**1980s – 90s AIDS and
emerging infections**

**1990s – 00s Animal diseases,
GMOs**

**2000s – 10s Terrorism,
Bioterrorism,**



RISK: a word without etymology

Italian – *risicare*

Arab = *rizq*

Latin = *resecare*

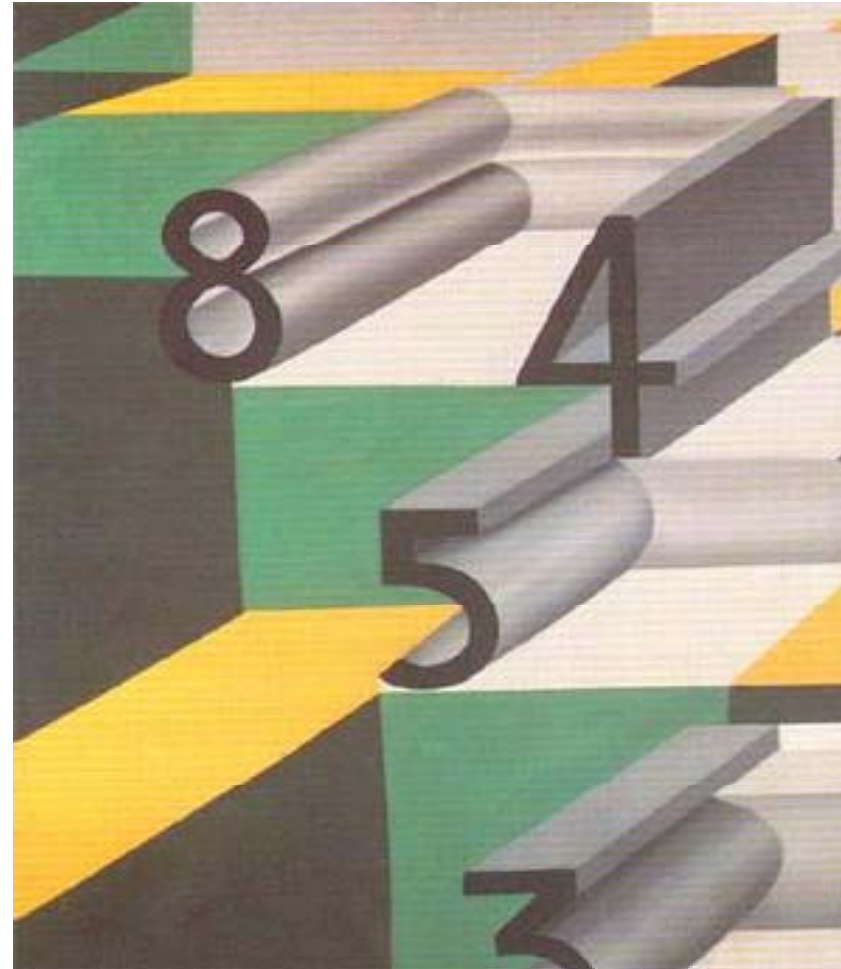
Greek = *rizikon*

Synonymous of danger

Commercial use (insurances)

Faith as a risk (Pascal,
Kierkegaard, esistenzialism)

Risk assessment
(analysis, communication,
management)



Calculus of Probability

- The concept of risk when considered scientifically (risk = accident x probability) takes the form of the calculus of probability.



The language of risk

The language of risk is traditionally associated with the economic world of trade and insurance, the medical world of health professionals, as well as dangerous sports and individuals risking their lives for others. In these traditional risk situations, people assessed the risk potential of certain actions and made decisions and choices in the light of their appraisal.



Modernity and Insecurity

“Technology, in its broader sense, is **functional simplification**, that is, a form of the reduction of complexity [...] This changes the social imperatives for individuality. The question is no longer *What should I be?* but rather *How should I be?* Whenever the individual is marginalised by technology a sense of distance is achieved that allows the individual to observe its own observation [...] In all this it acquires a sense of insecurity ”

N.Luhmann – Observations on Modernity - 1992



Risk definition as a political tool

- Luhmann pointed out the crucial problem of the acceptance of the risk decision by differentiating between risk and danger.
- Risk definition is the tool with which society can terrify itself and thereby activate its political centres and become politicized from within. The public dramatization of risk is in this sense an antidote to current narrow minded attitudes.



Beck's "Risk Society"

Ulrich Beck (1992), in his sociology best-seller defined "risk society", or "Risikogesellschaft", as probabilities of physical harm due to given technological or other processes. He argued then that we are moving from "industrial society" to "risk society". Industrial society was structured through social classes, risk society is individualised.



Politics and Risks

- In contemporary society politics are conflicts about the distribution of things that are undesirable and of dangers as much as they are conflicts about the distribution of wealth
- Current politics are chiefly concerned with the impact of undesirable risks and hazards caused by unconstrained science and technology



Risk in modern societies

In the past risks were conceived with reference to the person, the family, the company, the nation and their physical, mental, social and economic welfare. This language of risk was deeply, inescapably, social. This world of risk belongs to the realm of rational action and scientific certainty, a realm of clear distinctions between safety and danger, truth and falsity, past and future.



Risk in late modern societies



Ulrich Beck recognises that all societies, whether pre-modern, modern or late modern, face dangers, but he reserves the right to use the term 'risk society' for the third era, our own, because it has changed everything, especially the way we conceive security. Risk consciousness has worked into the mindset of all communities, including the security world.

We talk of 'the war on AIDS' and 'the war on want' and 'the war against crime'. The metaphors, in turn, invest the risks with even more apocalyptic overtones and even greater global resonance. They make us insecure because they have become endless, too large and too global and too apocalyptic to be contained within regimes or new world orders.



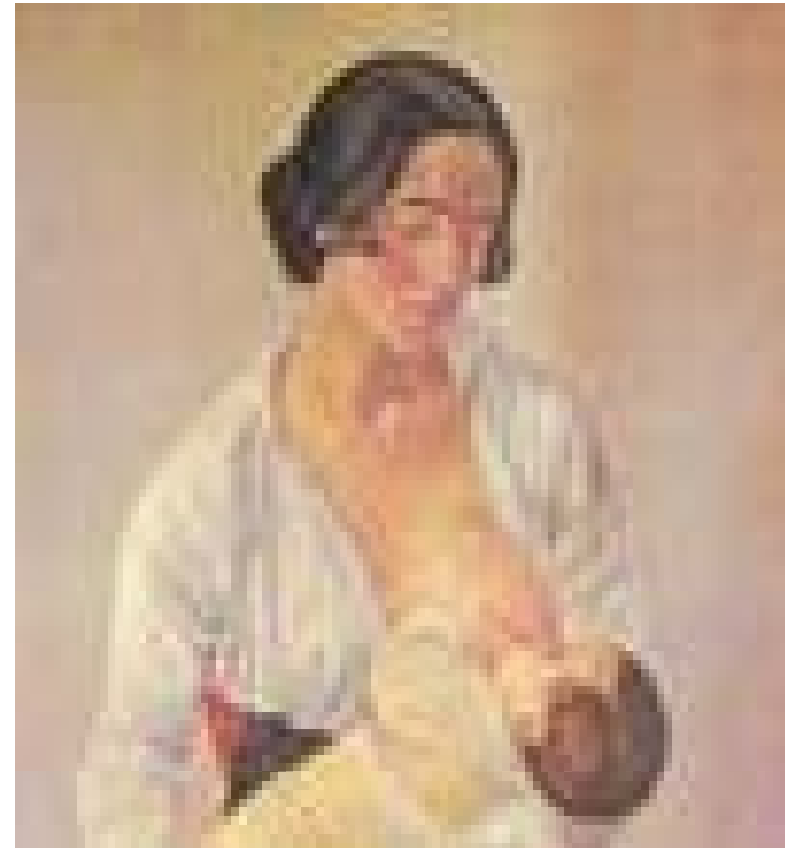
Global risk cannot be calculated

Every society that has faced dangers has evolved security strategies to deal with them. But the difference today is that the risks, being global, cannot be calculated with any degree of certainty. And being global, they cannot be insured against. If for no other reason than symbolism, the idea of private insurance is an interesting one, for it is impossible to privately insure oneself against nuclear disaster, climate change and its consequences, or the Asian financial crisis.



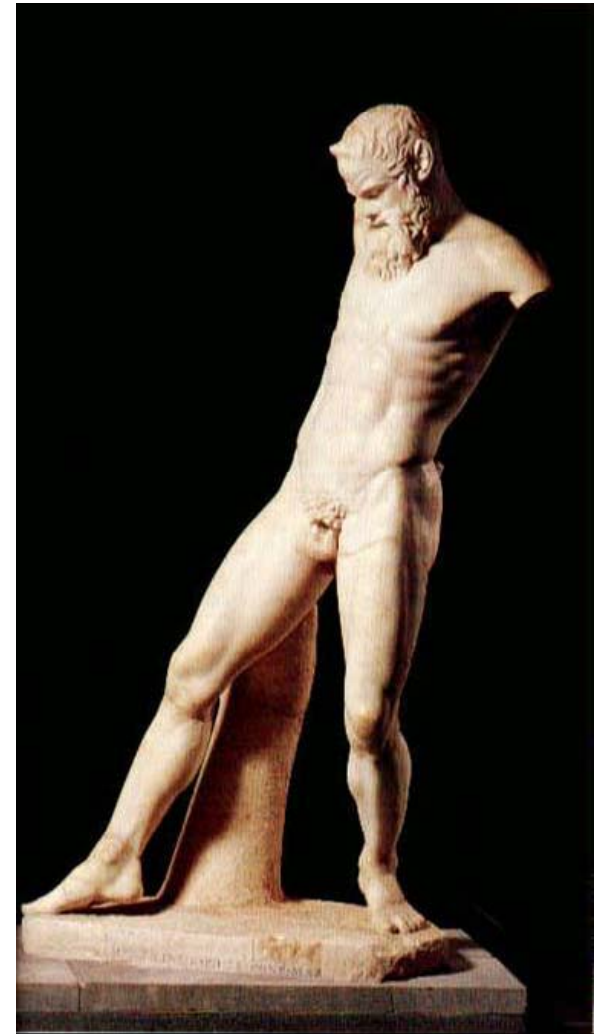
The end of the welfare state

In a way, the situation is analogous to the fate of the welfare state in Western Europe. The welfare state can be seen as an attempt to provide security for a people who demanded it after the trauma of the Second World War. The provision of services such as free health care, the creation of insurance schemes and the regulation of the economy were all undertaken to create security, or, at least, a sense of it.



Living with risks and insecurity

Just as the welfare model is now under threat from the forces of globalisation which dictate that economies be as competitive as possible to survive, so the old security regimes like the anti-ballistic missile treaty are under threat too. The collapse of concepts such as the new international economic order in the 1980s, and the new world order in the 1990s, merely confirms an innate scepticism that risks can be eliminated or even significantly reduced. Instead, all we can do is manage them.



“Risk” and “Individualisation”

Central in risk society theory is Beck's thesis of individualisation.

Because the different experts "dump their contradictions and conflicts at the feet of the individual", he has to find biographical solutions to handle risks. Where to live, what to eat, where to take a vacation, what clothes to wear, with whom to mingle and to have sex with is up to the individual.



Risk and Culture

According to M. Douglas (Douglas M, Wildavsky A, 1983, *Risk and Culture*) there is in fact no increase of risks in contemporary society. The concept of risk is hypothetical or metaphorical “risk is not a thing but a way of thinking”. There is not correspondence between risk perception and real risks: “What has gone wrong is that the public response to risk as been individualised. Public perception of risk is treated as if it were the aggregated response of millions of private individuals”.



Globalisation and Risks

According to Mary Douglas, the current concern with risk is a product of globalisation and what it brings - a sense of vulnerability in being part of a world system. Douglas argues that this first manifested itself in the late 1950s, which saw a debate about '*le defi Americain*', the fear that American multinational corporations were about to dispossess Europe of its economic sovereignty.



Reflexive Modernity

- In "simple modernity", according to [Giddens \(1994\)](#) lay people trusted the experts more or less automatically, while in "reflexive modernity" they actively calculate and choose whom to invest their trust in.
- The **reflexive modernity** thesis suggests that whereas once life paths were structured around institutions such as class, the family or gender, today this is less so.
- Another key part of this thesis suggests we once trusted experts and expertise whereas now we are more sceptical. Supposedly, these changes mean we have more control over our lives.



Risks and Values

“Risk statements are neither purely factual claims nor exclusively value claims. Instead, they are either both at the same time or something in between, a mathematicized morality as it were. In a risk society the question we must ask ourselves is: *How do we want to live?*”

U.Beck



Biopolitics

Michel Foucault was the scholar who introduced the term biopolitics in contemporary debate. With "biopolitics" he meant the various strategies employed by European nation-states to manage and regulate their population: health records, sanitation studies, birthrates, death rates, infant mortality statistics, genealogical records, demographics, and so forth.

As Foucault commented, biopolitics "tends to treat the 'population' as a mass of living and coexisting beings who present particular biological and pathological traits and who thus come under specific knowledge and technologies. And this 'biopolitics' itself must be understood in terms of a theme developed as early as the seventeenth century: the management of state forces" (



Risks as a biopolitics strategy

Risks only suggest what should *not* be done, rather than what should be done. Doing nothing and demanding too much both transform the world into a series of intractable risks. This is what sociologists call the 'risk trap'.

In other words risks are a crucial element of the strategic game between different political and social powers.



**Powell mostra
una boccetta di antrace**



The unconscious doesn't know the concept of “risk”

The concept of risk is
embedded in time

The Unconscious is
timeless

In the Unconscious Risk
is equal to Fear



Psalm 49

Ecoutez ceci, tous les peuples, prêtez l'oreille, tous les habitants du monde, gens du commun et gens de condition, riches et pauvres ensemble!
Ma bouche énonce la sagesse, et le murmure de mon cœur, l'intelligence; je tends l'oreille à quelque proverbe, je résous sur la lyre mon énigme.
Pourquoi craindre aux jours de malheur? La malice me talonne et me cerne eux se fient à leur fortune, se prévalent du surcroît de leur richesse.
Mais l'homme ne peut acheter son rachat ni payer à Dieu sa rançon il est coûteux, le rachat de son âme, et il manquera toujours pour que l'homme survive et jamais ne voie la fosse.
Or, il verra mourir les sages, périr aussi le fou et l'insensé, qui laissent à d'autres leur fortune. Leurs tombeaux sont à jamais leurs maisons, et leurs demeures d'âge en âge; et ils avaient mis leur nom sur leurs terres!
L'homme dans son luxe ne comprend pas, il ressemble au bétail muet. Ainsi vont-ils, sûrs d'eux-mêmes, et finissent-ils, contents de leur sort. Troupeau que l'on parque au shéol, la Mort les mène paître, les hommes droits domineront sur eux. Au matin s'évanouit leur image, le shéol, voilà leur résidence!
Mais Dieu rachètera mon âme des griffes du shéol, et me prendra. Ne crains pas quand l'homme s'enrichit, quand s'accroît la gloire de sa maison. A sa mort, il n'en peut rien emporter, avec lui ne descends pas sa gloire. Son âme qu'en sa vie il bénissait et l'on te loue d'avoir pris soin de toi ira rejoindre la lignée de ses pères qui plus jamais ne verront la lumière. L'homme dans son luxe ne comprend pas, il ressemble au bétail muet.



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