

Globalization: Theoretical Perspectives
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Lecture 39
Ulrich Beck: The Risk Society Part - II

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Third thesis: the marketability of risks

Risks are becoming more and more amenable to definition by science, and (the one condition the other) risks are a growing business.

Risks are the driving force of economic boom because they are the interminable needs sought by economists. Quite new needs and hence new markets can be created by changing the definition of risks; needs that are open to interpretation can be causally constituted and proliferated endlessly. Thus production and consumption are raised to a new stage as the risk society becomes entrenched.

Risks must, so to speak, grow as they are brought under control. They must not actually be eliminated by getting to their origins and causes. Everything must take place within the framework of risk cosmetics, packaging, symptomatic reductions in pollutants, and installation of purifying filters, while the source of the filth is retained. Thus there is not a preventive, but only a symbolic, politics and industry to eliminate proliferating risks.



Welcome back to the class; we continue discussing Ulrich Beck's arguments about the risk society. This is the continuation of the previous lesson, and the next class will be the continuation. We will discuss the same topic- his critical and forceful arguments about contemporary society as a risk society.

So, to have a very brief recap, he argues that we need to identify contemporary society as a risk society because the risk has become so prevalent, and risk is the unintended consequence of modern life. He puts forward five theses about risk. The first one is the exciting relationship between risk, identification of risk and knowledge system, especially science. However, he also discusses the inability of science to address or engage with the magnitude of questions raised by this society.

The second thesis that he put forward is a kind of an argument that the risk society burst asunder the class schema and the risk is something so pervasive for everybody that whether it is the rich or poor, they are supposed to face this risk scenario. However, this distinction, the

class distinction, will directly impact the consequences of risk. The third one that he is talking about is the marketability of risk; this is again a fascinating topic.

So, what are the consequences of such a perception of risk? What are the implications of such a perception of risk? And is it a risk, something that everybody is critical of, that everybody despises, does everybody curse it or are there people, or are there institutions, or are there mechanisms, institutionalised ways in which we make use of this perception of risk?

Risks are becoming increasingly amenable to the definition by science and one condition or the other; the other dangers are a growing business. So the risk is not something everybody condemns equally or hates similarly. Some people always find a business opportunity in this emerging field of trouble, or others thrive by using this pervasive fear or anxiety about the threat.

Risks are the driving force of economic boom because they are the everlasting needs sought by economists, quite a new need, and hence new markets can be created by changing the definition of risk. Conditions that are open to interpretation can be constituted causally and proliferated endlessly. Thus, production and consumption are raised to a new stage as the risk society becomes entranced.

Look at our society and surroundings and see how many companies and business establishments are now thriving on this sense of risk. Starting with our water purifiers, we did not have any mechanism for purifying water, some 50 or 100 years back, and nobody cared about it; of course, it had its consequences.

But now we know that even ordinary water that we get from our tap in any of the urban centres in India is unsafe to drink. So we are forced to depend upon water purifiers. They speak the language of science; they talk about the language of kinds of adulterations, impurities or hazardous pathogens that can be found in your water and that you need to process it through reverse osmosis. A host of other technologically loaded terms are provided.

So, an ordinary household in India, in any Indian city, is forced to depend upon either the purified water or the purification systems. Even purified water that is bottled, what you call mineral water or pure water, we know there have been several reports that they are not

adequately purified. They contain quite a lot of impurities and other stuff. So, similarly, air purifiers have become a significant business avenue now.

And similarly, everywhere, insurance companies take care of your credit cards if some fraud happens to your bank account; if somebody cheats you online, there are insurance companies to take care of it. So, there are insurance companies to take care of your credit cards. Your bank accounts or any such perceivable issues or risk scenarios are turned into business possibilities.

So, this production and consumption are raised to a new stage as the risk society becomes entrenched. Risks must, so to speak, grow as they are brought under control. So now many people, for quite a lot of them, the risk is not something that has to be resolved and finished off; the moment they do that, their business would be affected. So, the company must be allowed to grow, be regulated, and grow.

They must not be eliminated by getting the origin and causes. Even we know that when you take the case of saying water purifier or air purifier, none of these companies is talking about stemming the root cause of that, how do we stop polluting our soil, how do we stop polluting our rivers, how do we stop polluting our air, these companies do not address these questions. They would say that it is not in our purview, we cannot do that, but at the same time, they are not interested in doing that.

In most European societies, tap water is drinkable, it is portable water, and you can take water from the ordinary tap straight away and the street tap and drink it. So, it means that they can preserve their water bodies, lakes, rivers, and groundwater free from any contaminations. But here in India or a vast part of third-world countries, we have been systematically polluting them by opening our drainage and then letting effluents directly into these water pools.

So, none of these companies or these entrepreneurs is interested in eliminating the source of such pollution because it would mean the closure of their business opportunities. Everything must take place within the framework of risk cosmetics; it only works as a kind of cosmetic action, packaging, symptomatic reduction in pollutants and installation of purifying filters while the source of the filth is retained.

Thus there is no preventive but symbolic politics and industries to eliminate proliferating risk. This is a critical point because we know that a number of scientific discoveries, technologies, or innovations will resolve pollution. After all, until you come across a scenario where you address a whole question of profitability, you address the question of how firms are allowed to work, certain policy decisions, certain ethical decisions, unless you understand, unless you address those more significant issues, the whole point of providing water filter is not going to work.

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- Fourth thesis: consciousness determines being, knowledge of risks, the state of being affected by risks



- The boundaries of specialized areas and disciplines, specialized competences and institutional authorities, the distinction between value and fact (and hence between ethics, the human sciences and the natural sciences), and finally they cut across the seemingly institutionally segregated domains of politics, the public, science, and economics. The modern world found itself constrained to "dedifferentiate" in bringing the risks of civilization under control.

- The usual distinction between "objective" risks that are discovered and determined by science and the relatively irrational perception of risk by the public is based on a categorical error.



The fourth thesis is consciousness determines being, knowledge of risk at the state of being affected by chance. So, he talks about how this consciousness of the pervasiveness of the risk and the whole idea of being affected by it is connected to consciousness. The boundaries of specialised areas and disciplines, technical competence, and institutional authorities, the distinction between value and fact and hence between ethics and human sciences and the natural science and finally cut across seemingly institutionally segregated domains of politics, the public science and economics.

The modern world found itself constrained to differentiate in bringing the risks of civilisation under control. So this whole question of being affected by the possibility of danger, its implications, what to do with it and how an ordinary person is forced to live under such a situation where they are all affected by the much larger consciousness of being affected by the risk.

So, these boundaries of specialised arenas and disciplines, technical competence and institutional authorities, the distinction between value and fact, all these things appear to be highly jumbled when you look into it. Like the previous example of a scientific asset, scientists might identify the root cause of a particular disease, but their expertise ends there. They cannot answer more significant questions about its compensation or how to fix the responsibility of this whole disaster. They do not have the proper knowledge, expertise, or exposure to address such questions.

So, a whole set of taken for granted distinctions between specialised areas and discipline, specialised competence and institutional authorities, the difference between value and fact and then hence between ethics, human science and natural science because the total cost of ethics comes as a fundamental question. Whether you can scientifically argue that this or that causes a particular disease, and then what do you do about that, how do you bring in the question of ethics? All these questions are much beyond the purview of the natural sciences.

And finally, they cut across the seemingly, institutionally segregated domains of politics, the public, science, and economics because these risk issues bring forward a set of vexed questions. And the usual distinction between objective risks discovered and determined by science and the relatively irrational perception of risk by the public is based on a categorical error.

So, you see that many times we try to conclude whether the people feel so, that the people are having a high number of morbidities or an increased number of diseases and that is because of a kind of a blind belief, because of their ignorance, let a group of scientists come and do an experiment and do a study and find it out. And this whole distinction between superstition of people or public opinion of people on the one side and expert opinion of the people, of the scientist on the other side this distinction in itself is turning out to be artificial.

This distinction itself is turning out to be quite problematic, like in the case of this Endosulfan, or there is a number of similar examples where even the scientific community does not reach a kind of a consensus. There are very different opinions on the type of people; take the case of a host of genetically modified crops; what would be its possible implications? The scientific community on its own is not on the same platform. So, you come across such a very different scenario, and the whole idea of science as capable of telling you the truth or the objectivity vanishes.

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- Everywhere, scientific risk research lags behind the social and environmental progress and cultural critique of the industrial system.
- The question that must be asked on the example of risk perception is how rationality emerges socially, i.e., how is it believed, how does it become questionable, how is it defined, how is it redefined, how is it acquired, and how is it squandered.
- The issue with scientific claims, and their claims over truth and objectivity



Everywhere, scientific risk research lags behind the social and environmental progress and cultural critique of the industrial system. What does it mean? Scientific risk research lags behind the industry system's social and ecological progress and cultural analysis because it is a cultural and environmental critique that brings forward the whole idea of the possibilities of risk or negative consequences.

Only once they are raised the scientific community can come and try to make sense of it. The scenario of the other way around is minimal. The question that must be asked on the example of risk perception is how rationality emerges socially, that is, how it is believed, how it becomes questionable, how it is defined, how it is redefined, how it is acquired, and how it is acquired it squandered.

The whole question of rationality is a critical point. I hope you have some familiarity with Max Weber's argument about rationality. Weber argued that one of the very fundamental features of the modern era or the period of modernity is the emergence of rationality, scientific rationality. So scientific rationality was able to displace the religious and traditional authority because science can discard or dismiss a whole set of knowledge systems based on tradition and religion.

And scientific rationality gave the assurance, or they provide the confidence that with the use of rationality, intellect, you will be able to make sense of, you will be able to understand the world around you and that you will be able to lead a life far better compared to that of your previous generation.

This was the optimism that scientific rationality provided, which is why we believed that science is the ultimate answer to every human problem. But now, in the late modern era, scientific rationality or scientific knowledge is only one of the possible knowledge systems of interpretations available to people.

You can take a different position that is another thing, agree with another thing, and disagree with that. Still, you increasingly realise that the scientific argument constitutes only one particular type of rationality. There are multiple rationalities available, and maybe the best example could be medicine.

We know that modern medicine has made huge advancements; it has made massive progress in eliminating death rates and eliminating diseases. The world health system or health system of India, in particular, is far better than that of some 100 or 50 years ago. But if you look into the health system now, modern medicine is the only one among the health systems available. There is increasing scepticism towards modern medicine.

There are increasing criticisms against modern medicine. That could be based on increasing costs or issues about the side effects or a host of other problems. However, you will not be able to convince anybody based on this modern medicine or its rationality; there are different nationalities, equally powerful, that exist; whether you agree or not is a kind of reality.

So how different nationalities are believed, how does it become questionable and how is it identified, how is it defined, how is it acquired, and how is it squandered. The issue with scientific claims, their claims over truth, and objectivity comes from a much larger critique of scientific claim to objectivity and truth, basically from the philosophy of science and a post-scientific scenario. So, I am not going into that, but we know that science itself does not have a monopolistic claim over the truth. The very character of science itself is like that.

Today's scientific finding might turn out to be false tomorrow, and something else might come in. Or today's evidence will be demonstrated as false evidence, so tomorrow, we will be forced to believe in something else; all these things have significant consequences on the larger issues.

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- Issues of permissible limits of chemicals, poisons etc

- One comes up against the hard law, sooner rather than later, that if risks are not scientifically recognized, they do not exist, at least not legally, medically, or technologically and socially, i.e., they are not hindered, treated, or compensated.
- The monopoly that scientific judgment has on truth thus forces those affected to make use of all the means and methods of scientific analysis to bring their claims to bear. The crisis in scientific authority can thus actually serve to put up a general smoke-screen around risks. The critique of science can also be counterproductive as far as recognizing risks is concerned.



Another interesting example that he gives is this issue of permissible limit of chemicals, poisons etc. This is, again, an exciting aspect of science because if you look at scientific acknowledge, scientific standards about what is a permissible limit of chemicals or pesticides or poison that is allowed in your food, there are different standards available in India. Other institutions in India would enable a particular ppm, parts per million count of particular pesticide, a threshold value they always keep, a kind of a threshold value.

So, it gives you an idea that a little bit of poison is okay, but that position should not exceed a particular limit. You see, whether it is the case of antibiotics in chicken or antibiotics in other animal products or chemicals or colouring agents or similar kinds of chemicals in food articles, they all talk about the theoretical permissible limit. This in itself is a very ethically and scientifically problematic issue.

How do we come to that kind of a conclusion? Is the permissible limit definite? Is it not going to change? What is the scientific basis for saying that so much is the allowable limit? Since science itself is the one to speak this language, many issues are raised. One comes up against the complex law, sooner than later, that if risks are not scientifically recognised, they do not exist, at least not legally, medically or technologically and socially; they are not hindered, treated or compensated.

The critical point is that if they are not scientifically recognised, even the victims' claims will have to be articulated in such a manner. It has to be amenable to the reception of the scientific community, it has to be approved by science, by a scientist, or it has to be approved by a

scientific board. So, if the scientific establishment of science turns a blind eye, the kind of suffering and the problems these people face will continue.

The monopoly that scientific judgment has on truth forces those affected to use all the means and methods of scientific analysis to bring their claims to bear. The crisis in scientific authority can thus serve to put up a general smoke screen around risk; critical science can also be counterproductive as far as recognising a threat is concerned. So, there is no other way to articulate the issues associated with risk other than through the language of science.

You must have come across many anti-scientists; anti-scientism has become a significant fashion these days; it has become a big trend now. There are quite a lot of people who are incredibly bitter about modernity, they are pretty upset about the advancement of modernity and science, and they all have a very glorious, very romantic idea about the pre-scientific or pre-modern world where they think that people lived a far better life, people ate everything healthy, people ate all-natural, unadulterated food. These are all very romantic exaggerations about our past.

If you ask the question, what was the kind of life expectancy some hundred years back or what was the life expectancy when India got independence, what was the morbidity rate, what was the child morbidity rate or infant mortality rate, if you ask these questions, the hypocrisy of this whole over-romanticization becomes very clear. But the point here is that even to articulate the risk of science, even while you criticise science, you have no other way but to use the scientific language and discourses.

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Fifth thesis: A society of risk creates the political potential for a dirigist policy

The more dramatically the dangers in the modernization process accumulate, the more patently the central values of the community are threatened, and the more clearly this enters the consciousness of all. Then all the more deeply will the power and authority structure in the relationship among economics, politics, and the public and the private domain be undermined, and the more probable it will be that a redefinition of responsibilities will bear the stamp of the impending danger, the powers to act will be centralized, and all the details of the modernization process will be covered over by bureaucratic controls and planning.



The fifth thesis that Beck talks about is that a society of risk creates the political potential for a dirigist policy, so what is a dirigist policy? A dirigist policy is a scenario where the state assumes or undertakes very arbitrary decisions. There is an overreach of the state, so that policy is essential now. This is an exciting point where Beck connects the risk and the whole question of governance, the state's role, our rights, citizenship rights and political processes, and many other things.

And this becomes very interesting, especially in the background of the recent covid pandemic; we know how there was a lot of criticism against how the state governments, whether in India or abroad, responded. There were a lot of complaints against state governments acting in a very partisan manner, in a very undemocratic way, and Beck makes a lot of fascinating arguments to make sense of that.

So, the more dramatically the dangers in the modernisation process accumulate, the more patently the central values of the community are threatened, and the more this enters the consciousness of all. So, this risk or an impending crisis or impending, say catastrophe, is seen as the reus; it is seen as an excuse for highly draconian actions, highly high-handed actions to dismiss due processes, dismiss decentralised decision making ultimately.

So, every decision will have to be made very fast, and they will present this as an excuse for a highly centralised form of action and that, he says, is an essential inherent feature of this society. Then, all the more deeply, will the power and authority structures in the relationship

among economics, politics and the public and the private domain be undermined, and the more probable it will be that a redefinition of responsibilities will bear the stamp of the impending danger. The powers to act will be centralised, and the bureaucratic control and planning will cover all the details of the modernisation process.

The example of this covid the 19 pandemics; again, we know how our essential freedom was curtailed, restrictions were imposed, a host of decisions were taken without much consultation because nobody had any clue. The scientific community was entirely in the dark, policymakers were in the night, and nobody had any idea how to deal with this pandemic. That is a scenario when a more centralised form of power establishment works and more authoritative kind of power decisions, power politics take place.

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- In other words, the other side of danger is the legitimation and normalization of emergency action, making things seem self-evident that otherwise would be inconceivable and unrealizable. At the same time it becomes clear that totally new challenges to democracy arise in a society of risk as the dangers accumulate.

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In other words, the other side of danger is the legitimation and normalisation of emergency action, making things seem self-evident that otherwise would be inconceivable and unrealisable. At the same time, it becomes clear that new challenges to democracy arise in a society of risk as the dangers accumulate.

So any scenario, any possibility of risk, is also a possibility of dangers to the very practice of democracy because in a risky strategy, in a system where you are faced with a threat, generally it is straightforward to convince everybody that we do not have the time to listen to everybody so this is the decision, you better obey that. And it looks compelling, and that is what, in every decision at the time of lockdown or dealing with COVID19 across the world

and in India, was accepted with the very least amount of resistance or least amount of criticism.

So, in the end, what does it do to democracy? What does it do to establish practices of democracy is a big question because it is never going to facilitate the democratic process. Instead, it is going to endanger the prospects of democracy.

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- To the extent that risk is experienced as omnipresent, there are only three possible reactions: denial, apathy or transformation. The first is largely inscribed in modern culture, the second resembles post-modern nihilism, the third is the 'cosmopolitan moment' of world risk society.
- The key distinction between risk and catastrophe. Risk does not mean catastrophe. Risk means the anticipation of catastrophe. Risks exist in a permanent state of virtuality, and become 'topical' only to the extent that they are anticipated. Risks are not 'real', they are 'becoming real'.
- At the moment at which risks become real for example, in the shape of a terrorist attack they cease to be risks and become catastrophes. Risks have already moved elsewhere



When the risk is experienced to be omnipresent, there are only three possible reactions, denial, apathy and transformation. The first is primarily inscribed in the modern culture, the contradiction; the second resembles post-modern nihilism that is the apathy that we do not care about, and we have done that kind of argument. The third is the cosmopolitan moment of world risk society transforming.

Beck is talking about all these changes, all these possibilities of risk basically to visualise a cosmopolitan society, a cosmopolitan movement that becomes even more apparent in his second article. So, as in the case of a sophisticated state that he visualised might take place in the whole world, he also argues that this world risk society, this ever-omnipresent threat of risk will push us towards a kind of a cosmopolitan moment.

The critical distinction between risk and catastrophe is that risk does not mean catastrophe; risk implies anticipating catastrophe, which is crucial. Once we know that every nuclear reactor is a potential danger, which is a kind of risk, we know that the fuel stored in a nuclear reactor will have to be disposed of somewhere, but where do you dispose of it or what

happens to some of these reactors because of some human error or some natural calamity; we know that that is an impending danger.

It is an anticipation of a catastrophe; risk exists in a permanent state of virtuality. It has never materialised but is about to become materialised and become topical only to the extent that they are anticipated. Risks are not real; they are becoming real, so is it every moment; it is the possibility of becoming real. When risk becomes real, for example, in the shape of a terrorist attack, they cease to be at risk and become catastrophes.

A nuclear explosion, a nuclear leak or a terrorist attack becomes a catastrophe. A catastrophe brings in utterly different kinds of dynamics and other forms of mechanisms, but the risk has already moved elsewhere.

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- Risks are always events that are threatening. Without techniques of visualization, without symbolic forms, without mass media, etc., risks are nothing at all. In other words, it is irrelevant whether we live in a world which is in fact or in some sense 'objectively' safer than all other worlds; if destruction and disasters are anticipated, then that produces a compulsion to act.



Risks are always events that are threatening. Without techniques of visualisation, without symbolic forms, without mass media etc. the risks are nothing at all; in other words, it is irrelevant whether we live in a world which, is in fact, or some sense, objectively safer than all other worlds, if destruction and disasters are anticipated then that produces a compulsion to act.

So, this is again from the second essay where he gives the larger argument that there are these techniques about visualisation, symbolic forms, mass media; these play a vital role in the understanding of risk.

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- The theory of world risk society maintains, that modern societies are shaped by new kinds of risks, that their foundations are shaken by the global anticipation of global catastrophes. Such perceptions of global risk are characterized by three features.

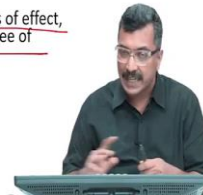
1. De-localization : its causes and consequences are not limited to one geographical location or space, they are in principle omnipresent.

The de-localization of incalculable interdependency risks takes place at three levels:

1. Spatial : the new risks (e.g. climate change) do not respect nation-state or any other borders;

2. Temporal : the new risks have a long latency period (e.g. nuclear waste) so that their effect over time cannot be reliably determined and limited.

3. Social : thanks to the complexity of the problems and the length of chains of effect, assignment of causes and consequences is no longer possible with any degree of reliability (e.g. financial crises).



So, the theory of world risk society maintains that new kinds of risk shape modern communities, that the global anticipation of global catastrophe shakes their foundations. Three features characterise such global risk perception, so one is the delocalisation of three essential parts of the risk. Its causes and consequences are not limited to one geographical location of space; they are in principle omnipresent.

This does not require further explanation, the issue of Fukushima reactor or case of Chernobyl disaster, these radioactive clouds, do not know the continental boundaries or national boundaries. It becomes transcends the geographical location and spreads across. The delocalisation of incalculable interdependency risks takes place at three levels.

One is spatial; the new risk of climate change does not respect nation-states or any other borders. Second, the unknown dangers have a long latency period, nuclear waste, their effect over time cannot be reliably determined and limited. Any form of pollution, for that matter, or we do not know what is happening due to global warming, rising temperature, or depletion of ozone layers. So, the kind of a temporal implication of that also is unknown.

Then the social, thanks to the complexity of the problems and the length of chains of effect, assignment of causes and consequences is no longer possible with any degree of reliability, whether it is a financial crisis, the global financial crisis or a kind of a particular economic crisis, what happens, how to fix the responsibility, what could be the consequences of that on a different section of people, all these things become invaluable.

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2. Incalculableness: its consequences are in principle incalculable; at bottom it is a matter of 'hypothetical' risks, which, not least, are based on science induced not-knowing and normative dissent.

- The crucial point, however, is not only the discovery of the unknown unknowns, but that simultaneously the knowledge, control and security claim of state and society were, indeed had to be, renewed, deepened and expanded. The irony lies in the institutionalized security claim, to have to control something even if one does not know whether it exists!



The second one is incalculableness; the first one mentioned is the delocalisation from a particular location, and it emerges as something beyond time and place. The second one is incalculableness; its consequences are in principle incalculable, and at the bottom is a matter of hypothetical risks that are based on science induced not knowing and normative dissent.

So often do not know how to calculate the risk and the consequences. Moreover, are science induced, so many times the response towards science is, reaction towards the trouble is caused by science, influenced without knowing and normative dissent about how to make your dissent precisely clear to that.

However, the crucial point is the discovery of the unknowns and that simultaneously, the state and society's knowledge control and security claim were valid to be renewed, deepened, and expanded. The irony lies in the institutionalised security claim and having control over something even if one does not know whether it exists or not. So, here he talks about the utter inability of, say, nation-states or the establishment to these kinds of risks waiting in the dark.

We know that none of the nation-states was prepared for a pandemic like Covid19. No nation-states were ready for an economic crisis in 2008, or no nation-state was prepared for biological warfare, chemical warfare, or nuclear warfare. However, all these establishments claim that we are all prepared and have enough precautions, and the best example that many people put forward is the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers.

So that was a time when America had spent billions on their defence, on their military, on their all spyware, on their high-tech military hardware, and that is a time when some of the most ingenious, most intelligent, most creative ways of attacking American soil was conceived by this terrorist who used the passenger plane and the fuel as the weapon of mass destruction. So many times, you are caught off guard; many times, all your preparations go simply in vain, and the risk becomes incalculable.

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- But why should a science or a discipline concern itself with what it does not even know? There is certainly a conclusive sociological answer to that: because in the face of the production of insuperable manufactured uncertainties society more than ever relies and insists on security and control; and because the argument about the knowing and not-knowing of global risks cancels the established national and international rule systems.

To be continued



However, why should science or any discipline concern itself with what it does not even know? So he asked a fundamental question: If that is the character of risk, why should a discipline like Sociology be concerned about it? Since things are unknown to us, we do not know much about what will happen, so why bother.

There is a conclusive sociological answer to that because societies rely on insistent security and control more than ever in the face of the production of insuperable manufactured uncertainties. Moreover, the argument about knowing and not knowing global risk cancels the established national and international rule systems.

So, such a system, such a fear of impending risk from unknown sources, can destroy and disturb our established patterns of power relations. As mentioned earlier, power relations can become authoritative. It can turn out to be undemocratic. In light of these unknowns, power relations and democratic systems can go for a toss. Thank you.