

# Social Contexts and Responses to Risk Network (SCARR)

Working Paper  
2007/17

## Risk, Social Change and Morals. Conceptual Approaches of Sociological Risk Theories

Jens Zinn



Contact:

---

Author: Jens O. Zinn

Address: SSPSSR, Cornwallis Building NE, University of Kent,  
Canterbury, CT2 7NF

EMail: [j.zinn@kent.ac.uk](mailto:j.zinn@kent.ac.uk)

Tel.: 0044 (0)1227 82 4165

---

**ESRC priority network ‘Social Contexts and Responses to Risk’  
(SCARR)**

School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research (SSPSSR)  
Cornwallis Building NE  
University of Kent at Canterbury  
Canterbury,  
Kent CT2 7NF, UK

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/scarr/>

## Risk, Social Change and Morals. Conceptual Approaches of Sociological Risk Theories

This working paper is based on my period of research at the Collaborative Research Centre 580 "Social Development after the System's Change. Discontinuity, Tradition, Structure Development" at the University of Jena from 18 to 25 November 2006. This was motivated by the recognition, that transformation processes are directly linked to risk and morals issues. Since sociological risk research so far has rarely referred explicitly to societal transformation processes, while morals and risk issues are addressed again and again, my focus in the following will be to bring out how risk, social change and morals are conceptualized by the available, in a narrower sense sociological risk theories.

Common sociological approaches to risk and uncertainty are – following relevant international introductory literature (Lupton 1999, Boyne 2003, Adams 1995) – the *culture-theoretical approach* (Douglas 1992, Douglas/Wildavsky 1982, Tulloch/Lupton 2003), the thesis of the *risk society* (Beck 1986) and the approach to *governmentality* (Foucault 1991, Dean 1999, O'Malley 2004, Rose 1999). Since the *system-theoretical perspective* in contrast to its rather modest international reception is of central significance in the German risk discussion, I will amend my remarks by the works of Luhmann (1991) and Japp (1996, 2000).

### Cultural-Theoretical Perspective

Pioneering as regards the sociological approach to the risk problem were the works of Mary Douglas, an anthropologist. Central to her works is her approach to the risk problem deviating from the technical-objectivist understanding. Douglas did not analyze risk as an objective, technical quantity (risk = extent of damage multiplied by the probability of occurrence), that can be determined as exactly as possible. Although she did not doubt the reality of dangers and risks ("the dangers are only too horrible real", Douglas 1990, 8), what mattered to her were the processes of how risks are "politicized" (ibid.). She argued, based *inter alia* on her ethnographic studies on the Lele in Zaire, that danger perception and management had to be understood as a fundamentally social construction process (Douglas/Wildavsky 1982, 6-7):

"In Zaire the Lele people suffered all the usual devastating tropical ills – fever, gastroenteritis, tuberculosis, leprosy, ulcers, barrenness, and pneumonia. In this world of disease, they focused mainly on being struck by lightning, the affliction of barrenness, and one disease, bronchitis; They use amulets as a kind of

protection because these 'illnesses' are not understood as a somatic issue but as a result of immorality in which the victim would generally be seen as innocent and some powerful leader or village elder would be blamed."

"A cultural approach can make us see how community consensus relates some natural dangers to moral defects. According to this argument, dangers are selected for public concern according to the strength and direction of social criticism." (Douglas/Wildavsky 1982, 7)

"Our guiding assumptions are that any form of society produces its own selected view of the natural environment, a view which influences its choice of dangers worth attention. Attribution of responsibility of natural disasters is a normal strategy for protecting a particular set of values belonging to a particular way of life. Consequently, research into risk perception based on a cultural model would try to discover what different characteristics of social life elicit different responses to danger." (Douglas/Wildavsky 1982, 8)

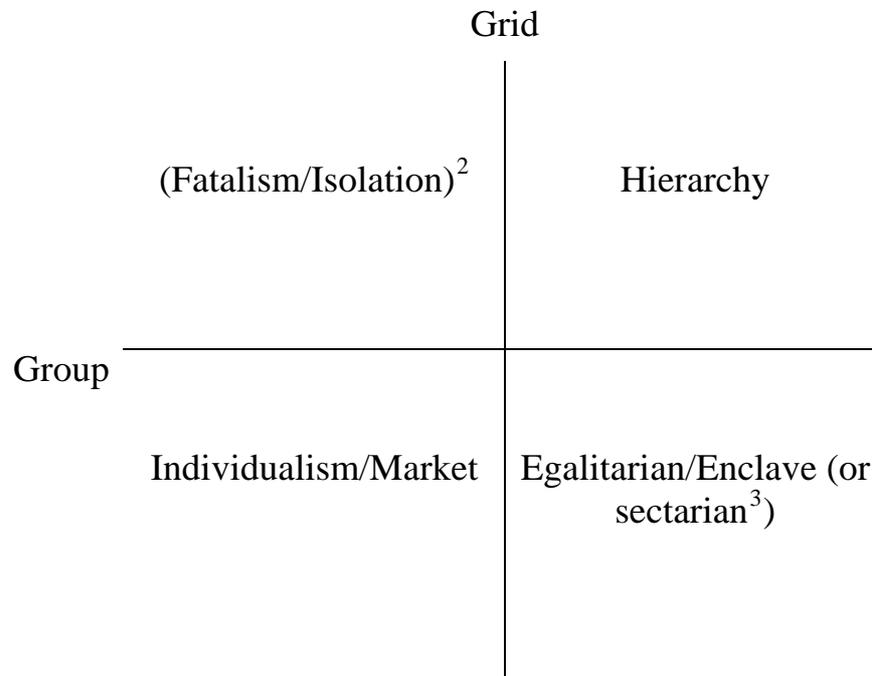
Dangers and the way to counter them in this sense are socially produced. This applies to small communities as well as to highly complex modern societies. Important, however, is the function of these dangers or risk constructions to preserve social order. In her works on *Purity and Danger* Douglas argues (1966) that objective risks are selected and transformed into social risks. Only to the extent that an objective risk is interpreted as a danger for a social group and its system of norms, it appears as a danger to be managed. These cultural preferences are integral part of social organization. Adopting risks and risk aversion, shared self-confidence and shared fears, all these form part of the dialogue, how social relations are best organized (Douglas/Wildavsky 1982, 8).

The central achievement of Douglas' work was the development of a typology in which various forms of organization and risk rationalities or worldviews are distinguished. Douglas' (1992) central ideal types are hierarchy, market and enclave (or sect<sup>1</sup>). They result from two dimensions: "grid" as the vertical dimension describes the degree of norms structuring action within a social entity. Where the structural norms are high, the individual's autonomy is low. The horizontal "group" dimension indicates the degree of group cohesion. A low degree of group integration in the case of (market) individualism and fatalism, and a high

---

<sup>1</sup> The term *sect* criticized because of its normativity was later replaced by that of *enclave* and by other proponents by the term *egalitarianism* (Thompson/Ellis/Wildavsky 1990, Lupton 1999).

degree of integration in the case of hierarchy and enclave (Douglas/Calvez 1990, 449).



Douglas and Wildavsky used this typology to explain the resistance against the introduction of nuclear power. It was interpreted as cultural reaction by sect-like forms of organization (enclave) at the margin of society.

"Our argument is that a complex historical pattern of social changes has led to values that we identify as sectarian being more widely espoused. The sectarian outlook has three positive commitments: to human goodness, to equality, to purity of heart and mind. The dangers to the sectarian ideal are worldliness and conspiracy. Put into secular terms, worldliness appears in big organization, big money, and market, values – all deny equality and attack goodness and purity; conspiracy includes factions plotting secret attack, transporting evil into an essentially good world. Infiltration from the evil world appears as Satanism, witchcraft, or their modern equivalent – hidden technological contamination that invades the body of nature and of man. We shall argue that these ideals and these dangers respond to the problems of voluntary organization: they are the daily coinage of debate in

---

<sup>2</sup> Other researchers working in the field of cultural sociology use the presented Four-Field-Typology: Thompson/Ellis/Wildavsky 1990, 62-6, Adams 1995.

<sup>3</sup> The term "sectarian" with its quite negative implications later was abandoned by Douglas.

groups that are trying to hold their members together without coercion of overt leadership. The remedies most easily proposed in such organizations are to refuse to compromise with evil and to root it out, accompanied by a tendency toward intolerance and drastic solutions. These organizations depending on the voluntary principle also tend to reject wealth. Nature in the wild, uncorrupted by social artifice, equivalent, to a society without social distinction, is their preferred emblem of godliness and symbol of unworldliness." (Douglas/Wildavsky 1982, 10-11)

Proponents of this approach interpreted the various types as worldviews and try to determine their influence on perception and the types of response to risks. The power of explanation of the standardized, quantitative studies, however, is smaller than expected (compare for Zinn/Taylor-Gooby 2006, 37-9).

The focus of Douglas' and Wildavsky's works marked by structural functionalism lies on the function of danger and risk with respect to the stabilization and reproduction of social entities (communities, societies etc.). **Social Change** in this sense is understood as contingent or as "complex historical pattern" in which "our preference for individualist values" has developed and gained ground. However, from this does not result a particular logic of development or transition in the first place. It is generally true for each socio-moral environment that only such changes are "perceived" as risks (or considered relevant) by the respective group which threaten the institutionalized rules constituting the respective group. Violations of values and moral conceptions are generally interpreted as threatening group cohesion and trigger strong feelings like fear and hatred. They are opposed accordingly.

More recent culture theory approaches going beyond the structural-functional perspective, have been influenced by a cultural or qualitative change in social sciences (Tulloch 2007, Denzin/Lincoln 1998/2003) and favor descriptive descriptions of individual risk management or risk discussions. In the analysis of the definition and violation of cultural boundaries, here, central significance is attached to differentiations as between Self and Otherness (Lupton 1999, Tulloch/Lupton 2003). Socio-moral change in this sense can take place only if the systems of interpretation of a group are "disturbed" and newly formed. Such a change can be facilitated for instance by opinion leaders taking a pioneer role in the redefinition of central **moral** values.

In their reconstruction of the historical development process so far, Douglas and other risk researchers assume that only with the transition to modern times risk has become a key societal issue. She argues that in terms of function the significance of "danger" for stabilizing pre-modern

societies is equivalent to "risk" in modern times (1990). This, however, would mean a shift in the significance from the stabilization of societies concerning the notion of danger towards the protection of the individual concerning the notion of risk (1990, 7), thus indicating a shift in socio-moral priorities.

Culture theory approaches focus on the socio-cultural and -moral factors. These approaches, in the end, have no moral argument deriving from the "objective" quality of a risk (which would only be due to a specific socio-cultural perspective). Which risks are transformed into social risks and how, is determined by the perspective and societal location of the respective socio-moral environment.

## **Risk Society**

A key argument of risk society (Beck 1986) is the particular quality of new risks. They occur as *side effects* (unseen consequences) of the modern industrial times and are responsible for the self-transformation of modern times:

"The entry into risk society occurs at the moment when the hazards which are now decided and consequently produced by society undermine and/or cancel the established safety systems of the welfare state's existing risk calculations." (Beck 1999, 77)

"In contrast to early industrial risks, nuclear, chemical, ecological and genetic engineering risks (a) can be limited in terms of neither time nor place, (b) are not accountable according to the established rules of causality, blame and liability, and (c) cannot be compensated for or insured against (Beck 1994, 2)." (Beck 1999, 77)

In this sense, it is the objective qualities of new risks making it so difficult for modern society to cope with them in the traditional manner. Until today, Beck is again and again criticized for this risk objectivism (e.g. Elliott 2002; Mythen 2004). Beck, by contrast, justifies his approach to the risk problem in various publications as being at the same time constructivist and realistic. From the beginning, Beck stressed that risks are produced by knowing about them and, thus, are always socially constructed (1986). Later, however, he justified his position by referring to the ideas of Latour and Haraway and the concept of *hybridity* (1999, 27 et seq., 145 et seq.). Here, the separation between nature and culture is regarded as an idea which gained ground only with the emergence of the modern times. A sharp distinction between both sides would be impossible. Access to nature is possible only by means of culturally produced observation strategies, and culture is inconceivable without

nature being interwoven. Accordingly, scientific analyses can only work on describing the hybridity of nature/culture constructs.

This problem becomes particularly clear again in the context of the societization of risk. For the scientific assumption that nature can be and is controlled so far has concealed the implicit normative assumptions. The previously tacitly assumed consensus in social values with the limits of manageability becomes an issue again and is questioned. The technical and scientific development considered desirable until then, is itself called into question because of its unseen or ignored side effects and the monopoly of knowledge of the sciences is broken (1986, 38). On the one hand, science is increasingly necessary for giving effect to criticism and alternatives. On the other hand, it is no longer sufficient. Expert opinions and counter-opinions refer to underlying assessments and the different answers to the question in which world we actually want to live. Lack of knowledge, or better: increasing knowledge on ignorance, on the one hand calls for strategies to manage ignorance and on the other for normative-moral discussion.

Risk issues, however, are not restricted to environmental risks. With his individualization thesis, Beck addresses "institution-dependent individual situations". At the core are orientation uncertainties resulting from detachment from and devaluation of class- and estate-specific knowledge. Detachment from estate and class is paid for by a loss in stability or a disconcertion with regard to orientation knowledge of social action, at the same time, however, it is accompanied by social reintegration (1986, 206 et seq.). In the individualized society, the individual is primarily integrated as 'market individual', driven by ideas and desires on the one hand and by secondary institutions (market, social security systems) on the other. Compulsion and impossibility to decide and the simultaneous attribution of individual responsibility would put pressure on the individual in a new and unsuspected manner. Beck's individualization thesis establishes a link between the desire to create and the norms of creation of a modern individualism. Management of uncertainties and risk management, thus, turn into a project to be managed and answered for individually ("beyond estate and class").

**Social change** in Beck's approach to risk society is conceptualized as the inevitable consequence of modernization processes. Since side effects are neither intended nor known, they cannot be avoided. Rather, they are the "blind spots" of modernization. Accordingly, Beck draws the conclusion that we cannot choose the risk society. It rather prevails inexorably against our will:

"Risk society is not an option which could be chosen or rejected in the course of political debate. It arises through the automatic

operation of autonomous modernization processes which are blind and deaf to consequences and dangers. In total, and latently, these produce hazards which call into question - indeed abolish - the basis of industrial society." (Beck 1999, 73)

Here, there is at least a twofold link between social change and **morals**. For one thing, they receive attention in the context of limits of knowledge and the side effects of the modern industrial times. The morals issue is raised anew in view of side effects and new uncertainties. "Solidarity out of fear" becoming the political mainspring in risk society and from which arises solidarity of those affected transcends the social-moral environments of class and estate. At the same time, it introduces a new moral basis called by Beck for instance "halo of care for nature" or "moral economy" (1986, 102, 105). It stands for the norm of 'non-endangeredness' (1986, 99) and of being spared the poison (1986, 65). In the end, it is about a moral of an ecologic way of living and the sustained key issue raised anew in risk society: in which world do we actually want to live (Beck 1986, 37).

Moral economy and solidarity out of fear are in a relation of tension to the morals of the market individual which Beck attributes to individualization processes based on other shifts in societal structure: In his view, it is primarily the 'elevator effect' (a general increase in the level of inequality leading to a relativization of the problem of absolute poverty) and the adjustment of differences in education, mainly between the genders, would finally result in the prevailing of individualized morals. This would then be not just different environments among which to select, but forms of attributing self-responsibility to a subject perceiving him-/herself as autonomous – comparable to the demands on the market individual of neo-liberalism. This norm, on the one hand, is institutionally demanded by so-called second-order institutions (welfare state and markets). On the other hand, there is a self-culture (Beck 1986, 161 et seqq.; Beck/Beck-Gernsheim 2002) in which autonomy and self-creation are central values having an increasing effect in any possible areas of life. Particularly elaborated is the argument with respect to the change of the family and partnership and the change "from being there for others to the claim to a portion of one's own life" (Beck-Gernsheim 1983).

The norm is an attitude of life placing the Ego in the centre of one's own life and considering the individual – even contra-factually – as the planning office for one's own life and, thus, as being self-responsible for the success and failure of one's own course of life. This can lead to a sharpening of social inequalities insofar, as these no longer can be

balanced by socio-moral environments (which applies both to material aspects and to mental strains).

While Douglas places market individualism and moral economy in different socio-cultural environments (individualism respectively enclave), Beck looks at them in a generalized manner only, as a new trend without environment-specific differentiations. Albeit Beck refers to the dangers and chances resulting from individualized morals gaining ground (1986).

## **Systems Theory**

From a systems theory perspective, risk appears as a decisive form of societal self-observation. It is typical of modern societies, describing themselves primarily in categories of acting and deciding instead of coincidence, fate or Providence. Central to the systems theory approach to the problem of risk is the assumption of a transition from societies differentiated by strata (i.e. by classes and estates) to a society differentiated in terms of functions. Societal functional systems would fence against other societal areas by specific binary codes. Economy by numbers/non-numbers, the legal system by right/wrong, science by truth/non-truth, politics by power/non-power etc. Functional systems are environment for each other. They are obscure to each other. They cannot be directly interfered with, they rather are structurally coupled.

This has far-reaching consequences for the constitution and reproduction of society. It loses its top or its centre. There is no societal (observation) position any more in the society claiming for itself to be universally valid. Rather, any observation perspective is coupled to the respective logic of the specific subsystem. Religion, for instance, in this sense is not (no longer) capable of integrating society as a whole, for example by means of the idea of an all-embracing God's will. Religion rather constitutes just a specific perspective on society. Also politics and political control lose their prominent position. Rather, they too, are structurally coupled to the conditions of and influences by other subsystems, like science and economy.

From the systems theory perspective, the smallest constitutive entity is defined by social entities and society as communication (or the integrated whole of communication act, information and understanding, Luhmann 1984). Acts and decisions in this sense are socially constituted only to the extent they are produced by communication. This, however, means that acts can also be assigned afterwards. This heightens the problem of attributing responsibility, for in modern societies also omission can be described as decision and attributed in retrospect to entities or persons (in the legal system to legal ones, in the political system to political ones,

etc.). At the same time, in modern societies describing themselves not by categories of eternity but in the form of decisions there do not exist any absolute certainties. Decisions per definition are always hazardous. Prior to a decision, there is uncertainty as to how to decide. After a decision, whether the decision was right. In societies differentiated in terms of function, decision and attribution of responsibility becomes a permanent problem and, thus, *risk* becomes a central factor of a society's self-description.

Japp in this sense underlines that it is not the extent of damage or the probability of occurrence, which are of central significance in the risk problem context. It is rather the taking of responsibility which matters, the attribution of events to decision (2000).

Besides the historical diagnosis of the transition to a society differentiated in terms of function, **social change** from this perspective appears largely contingent. Although the structural coupling of social systems and their binary coding indicate that not an equal degree of probability applies to everything, the idea of evolution, however, is neither a targeted logic of development towards the better, as Parsons viewed it, nor an inevitable development towards societization of risk, as Beck saw it. Evolution rather appears to be a non-directional progress during which not everything is possible, but concrete predictions remain extremely difficult if not impossible. This is due to the various logics of development of social subsystems each of which follows its own rationalities. It is interesting, however, which is the relation between morals and the functional systems.

**Morals** is described by Luhmann as a logic permitting to distinguish between good and evil. A strict and universal logic of principles or morals, however, is undermined by functional differentiations (Luhmann 1986, 214). If at all, functional system-specific morals must be reckoned with (Luhmann 1986, 97) which can claim validity only with respect to the system-specific operation. (Claims to economic competitiveness, for instance, restrict private sector research with regard to their exploitation contexts.)

Since morals does not only produce good but also evil and damnable [things], Luhmann sees the task of sociology in cautioning against morals. Ethics cannot accomplish this since it confines to the justification or substantiation of morals.

Accordingly, Luhmann in *Ecologic Communication* (1986) warns against ecologic or different morals nourished by fear instead of rational considerations. Communication out of fear in the context of ecologic

issues tend, such the view of Luhmann, to hamper the processing of functional systems. The new style of morals, not based on norm and deviation (237 et seq.) but on fear cannot be managed let alone minimized by science, law or other functional systems. To fear always is legitimate. Fear cannot be regulated away by functional systems. Risk communication rather produces new fear (238). "It remains an adverse factor in the social system" (240). It is selective, since it underlines development towards the worse and withholds progresses (244). Morally burdened communication out of fear, thus, obstructs future developments since no decision can be made on whether they are justified (Luhmann 1986, 245 et seq.). Japp (2002) is a bit more moderate and considers the slowing down of decision to be the price to be paid in the context of sensitive ecological decision making.

What is assumed here for ecological "fear" communication in this perspective can also be assumed for other social areas of emotion-based risk communication. As far as uncertainty is mainly perceived in categories of fear of potential negative consequences, this is at the expense of potential benefit.

## **Governementality**

The governementality approach is moulded by Foucault's works on rule and power (1992, see also Lupton 1999). He does not see power from the perspective of the theory of the state, as something wielded by a government over a population. Rather, he understands power as being distributed within a society through practices and discussions. It takes effect through the production of knowledge and the definition of truth.

Risk as a technique of calculating uncertainty by means of probabilistic-statistical procedures, here, is understood as a technique of knowledge production which gained ground with the establishment of the modern nation state. Governments began to understand and treat their citizens as populations. The citizen was ever less directly addressed by the immediate enforcement of obedience. Rather, indirect regulations based on risk calculations and autonomous self-regulation gain in significance. They refer to probability calculations and quota, for instance regarding birth rates, increase in prosperity, unemployment or sick-rate. So it is not a specific event that constitutes a risk, but its description as part of a risk calculation make it a risk. Ewald (1991, 199) for insurance companies elaborates accordingly:

"So what is this thing called risk? In everyday language the term 'risk' is understood as a synonym for danger or peril, for some unhappy event which may happen to someone it designates an objective threat. In insurance the term designates neither an event

nor a general kind of event occurring in reality (the unfortunate kind), but a specific mode of treatment of certain events capable of happening to a group of individuals - or, more exactly, to values or capitals possessed or represented by a collectivity of individuals: that is to say, a population. Nothing is a risk in itself; there is no risk in reality. But on the other hand, anything *can* be a risk; it all depends on how one analyzes the danger, considers the event. As Kant might have put it, the category of risk is a category of the understanding; it cannot be given in sensibility or intuition. As a technology of risk, insurance is first and foremost a schema of rationality, a way of breaking down, rearranging, ordering certain elements of reality. The expression 'taking risks', used to characterize the spirit of enterprise, derives from the application of this type of calculus to economic and financial affairs."

"Risk" produces a specific type of knowledge applied in various contexts of society. It defines average behaviour and probabilities and, thus, suggests what is normal and what has to be done. Normalities created by observing the society and calculation define a measure, a normality or an average that may become a normative entity of orientation.

However, a risk is never isolated. Risk calculations are always embedded in specific socio-cultural contexts. Zelizer (1983) for instance in her study on the introduction of life insurance in the United States at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has illustrated, how moral reserves for a long time impeded the introduction of life insurance. After the moral reserves against calculating death or to link it to a financial benefit were re-interpreted and seen as a morally desirable precaution for one's dearest, life insurance became as successful as in other countries.

This approach underlines that there is not just one specific risk technology but that calculative practices are applied in various contexts (Dean 1999). Each practice links with specific objectives: for instance to minimise risks (risk assessment) or to distribute damage (insurance), to improve health or to optimize the treatment of diseases, that is to increase probability of survival.

**Social change** in this perspective appears contingent. In the view of Foucault, it is an expression of non-inevitable changes resulting from numerous factors and conflicts of interests coinciding. The required development towards increasing colonialization of the society by risk technologies (Castel 1991), which now and again is assumed by researchers of this perspective, is not inevitable and ignores the continued existence (and need) of technologies dealing with uncertainty as such (O'Malley 2004). From this perspective, social change is always the result of human action and, thus, can always happen in a different way. As a

consequence, criticism basically is justified. There does not exist a merely objective legitimacy of risk calculations and their moral embedding. Anyone can bring to bear his/her individual experience in the form of criticism.

Risk calculations in the governmentality perspective on the one hand are embedded in the norms, on the other, however, they at the same time entail normative implications. In addition, normative implications in the context of the thesis on the colonialization of society by risk are discussed in neo-liberal forms of governance (Rose 1999). Here, the main issue is to make prevail the normative model of the self-responsible and autonomous subject, to whom responsibility for his/her own situation of life is attributed. Risk technologies produce the context knowledge for right behaviours. They suggest, for instance, to take certain precautions against burglary. On the basis of a rational decision model of risk minimization and benefit optimization, they gain a normative status. In case of omission, then a share in guilt by the victim can be assumed (Ericson/Doyle 2003), for instance if in case of burglary the front door was not secured by common locks and bolts.

Governmentality on the one hand assumes a contingent future limiting analyses mainly to description and reconstruction. On the other hand, they imply that good governance must reap a benefit of the individuals' desire to self-creation if changes of behaviour are to be achieved. Similar to the socio-cultural approach, this speaks for societal transformations being carried out mainly to the extent they can refer to individual desires, norms and morals.

## **Social Change and Morals – Summary and Perspectives**

The relevant theoretical approaches to risk specify social change and morals in different ways, offer various approaches to explanations, in several respects, however, their diagnoses overlap.

Douglas' grid/group typology offers a measure for and enables statements on how socio-moral environments react to which risks. The focus, here, is on the explanation of resistance against social change. Nevertheless, they can show which "channels" of social change are accepted or promoted by which socio-moral environments and which changes meet with resistance since they are contradictory to the normative core values of social entities. Also the later, more descriptive cultural-sociological approaches offer insights into the tendencies of persistence and opportunities for change of socio-cultural inventories.

Beck's assumption of new solidarities and political engagement initiated by risk affectedness, as well as the simultaneous individualized

attribution of responsibility mark out a general area of tendencies of change. They refer to general socio-moral tendencies of development towards individualized sets of morals. At the same time, however, Beck also identifies a moral economy resulting from the new hazard situations of nature or the individual affectedness by risks. Solidarity out of fear would provide the moral grounds for resistance. Environment-specific and resource-dependent differences, here, are not considered in theory. As far as the general tendency of development towards more individualized social patterns are concerned, however, Douglas and Beck agree. They differ, however, with respect to their justification. While this development to Douglas appears as a contingent historical process, Beck attributes a diagnosed renewed push to individualization in Germany back in the 1960ies, 1970ies and 1980ies (that is in a shorter historical perspective) to the general increase in prosperity and the narrowing of differences in education (primarily between the genders).

In the systems theory perspective, however, general processes of societal differentiation are held responsible for the increase in risk communication and conflicts as to the attribution of responsibility for damage (and/or decisions). In contrast to Beck who introduces new socio-moral criticism as a rather positive corrective for social erroneous developments (1986), Luhmann regards a moral economy (1986) based on a "solidarity out of fear" (Beck 1986) as a rather detrimental development which cannot be managed by rationally operating functional systems. While he considers possible area-specific sets of morals which follow the differentiation logic of the functional systems, a higher moral that would be able to integrate all social subareas is inconceivable to him because of functional differentiation processes. A generalized morals based on fear not only can not be managed by the functional systems, it also is downright detrimental since it can hamper reasonable social reproduction processes.

Foucault by contrast reasons that individual criticism based on subjective experience is basically legitimate. For to the extent the world is man-made it could well be different. The non-inevitability of the circumstances leaves it open to criticism. The fact that risk technologies, risk-based uncertainty management and neo-liberal morals are prevailing is regarded as a new societal program of rule gaining ground. Similar to Beck's "double face of individualized social situations", also Foucault's perspective stresses that in individualized neo-liberal morals of self-creation and self-responsibility individual interests and desires link with governmental impositions. Whether generalized directions of development of social change can be derived, for instance towards a risk society (Beck 1986) or a culture of fear (Furedi 2002), however, is disputed (e.g. O'Malley 2004).

What does this mean for processes of societal transformation? It may be expected that the social environments the socio-moral rules of which are the most capable of referring to the new rules are also those able to adopt new rules in the quickest and most unproblematic manner and integrate them into previous experience knowledge and socio-cultural patterns of interpretation. Other socio-moral environments whose existence is most threatened will put up the most vehement resistance to transformation processes. Societal integration is easiest where opinion leaders add new boundary definitions and patterns of interpretation to old traditions and render possible comparatively improbable change. In this context, emotional resistance gets in the focus in two respects: as a blockade with regard to societal transformation, but also as an indication for a too fast or biased distribution of risks and dangers during the transformation process. To the extent tendencies of individualization already have their effect, it may be expected that those already detached from existing social environments can no longer take recourse to appropriate securing networks. If they do not manage to develop their own new networks, they are inclined to become victims to social change.

## **Bibliography**

*Adams, John*, 1995 (1998 printing): *Risk*. London [England] : Bristol, PA: UCL Press.

*Beck, Ulrich*, 1986: *Risikogesellschaft: auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

*Beck, Ulrich*, 1999: *World risk society*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.

*Beck, Ulrich & Beck-Gernsheim, Elisabeth*, 2002: *Individualization: institutionalized individualism and its social and political consequences*, SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks, Calif.

*Beck-Gernsheim, Elisabeth*, 1983: *Vom Dasein für andere zum Anspruch auf ein Stück eigenes Leben - Individualisierungsprozesse im weiblichen Lebenszusammenhang*, in: *Soziale Welt*, 3, p. 307-341.

*Boyne, Roy*, 2003: *Risk*. Buckingham; Philadelphia: Open University Press.

*Castel, Robert*, 1991: *From dangerousness to risk*. p. 281-298 in: *Burchell, G., C. Gordon und P. Miller (Hg.): The Foucault Effect. Studies in Governmentality*. London: Harvester/Wheatsheaf.

*Dean, Mitchel*, 1999: *Governmentality: power and rule in modern society*. London: Sage.

*Denzin, Norman K. und Yvonna S. Lincoln*, 2003 (2nd ed.): *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*. Thousand Oaks, Calif., London:

Sage.

*Douglas, Mary und Aaron B. Wildavsky*, 1982: Risk and culture: an essay on the selection of technical and environmental dangers. Berkeley: University of California Press.

*Douglas, Mary*, 1990: Risk as a Forensic Resource, DAEDALUS, 119(4):1-16.

*Douglas, Mary, Marcel Calvez*, 1990: The self as risk taker: a cultural theory of contagion in relation to AIDS,.

*Douglas, Mary*, 1992: Risk and blame: essays in cultural theory. London, New York: Routledge.

*Elliott, Athony*, 2002: Beck's Sociology of Risk: A Critical Assessment, Sociology, 36(2):293-315.

*Ericson, Richard Victor und Aaron Doyle*, 2003: Risk and morality.

*Ewald, Francois*, 1991: Insurance and risk. p. 197-210 in: *Burchell, G. und et al. (Ed.): The Foucault Effect*.

*Foucault, Michel*, 1991: Governmentality. S. 87-104 in: *Burchell, G. und et al. (Ed.): The Foucault Effect*.

*Furedi, Frank*, 2002: The Culture of Fear. London; New York: Continuum.

*Japp, Klaus Peter*, 1996: Soziologische Risikotheorie. Weinheim; München;: Juventa.

*Japp, Klaus Peter*, 2000: Risiko. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.

*Luhmann, Niklas*, 1984: Soziale Systeme: Grundriss einer allgemeinen Theorie. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

*Luhmann, Niklas*, 1986: Ökologische Kommunikation.

*Luhmann, Niklas*, 1991: Soziologie des Risikos. Berlin, New York: W. de Gruyter.

*Lupton, Deborah*, 1999: Risk. London; New York: Routledge.

*Mythen, Gabe*, 2004: Ulrich Beck. London: Pluto Press.

*O'Malley, Pat*, 2004: Risk, Uncertainty and Government. : Glashouse Press.

*Rose, Nikolas*, 1999: The Powers of Freedom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

*Thompson, M., Richard Ellis und Aaron B. Wildavsky*, 1990: Cultural theory. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.

*Tulloch, John, Deborah Lupton*, 2003: Risk and everyday life. London: Sage Publications.

*Zelizer, Viviana A. Rotman*, 1983: Morals and markets: the development

of life insurance in the United States. New Brunswick, U.S.A: Transaction Books.

*Zinn, Jens O. und Peter Taylor-Gooby, 2006a: Risk as an Interdisciplinary Research Area. p. 20-53 in: Taylor-Gooby, Peter und Jens O. Zinn (Ed.): Risk in Social Science. Oxford: Oxford University Press.*

**Author**

Dr. Jens O. Zinn is Senior Research Fellow at the Universität of Kent at Canterbury. Since 2003, he is working in the ESRC priority network Social Contexts and Responses to Risk (<http://www.kent.ac.uk/scarr/index.htm>). His main efforts of research are sociological and interdisciplinary risk research, (in particular sociological) risk theories and issues of uncertainty management in biography and autobiography.