

Ulrich Beck

**Risk Society's 'Cosmopolitan Moment'**

Lecture at Harvard University – November 12th, 2008

What a priceless comedy of conversion is unfolding on the world stage at present! I am, of course, talking about the ongoing financial crisis. Overnight, the missionary idea of the West, the free market economy, which justified our abhorrence to Communism as well as our philosophical gap from the current Chinese system, has collapsed. With the fanaticism of the converted, bankers - now "banksters" in the eyes of the public - are demanding state intervention to support their losses. So is the hitherto derided, accursed and feared Chinese form of state-run private industry now also starting to find its way into the Anglo-Saxon centres of laissez-faire capitalism? How can we explain this revolutionary power of global financial risks?

In this lecture I want to investigate the *irony of risk*. Risk is ambivalence. Being at risk is the way of being and ruling in the world of modernity; being at global risk is the human condition at the beginning of the twenty-first century. But, against the grain of the current widespread feeling of doom, I would like to ask: what is the *ruse of history* which is also inherent in world risk society and emerges with its realization? Or more tightly formulated: is there an *enlightenment function*, a 'cosmopolitan moment' of world risk society? So, what are the *opportunities* of climate change and the financial crisis and what form do they take?

There is a nostalgia built into the foundations of European sociological thought, which has never disappeared. Perhaps, paradoxically, this nostalgia can be overcome with the theory of world risk society. My aim is a not-nostalgic, new critical theory to look at the past and the future of modernity. In my argument I want to keep the two contradictory views within modernity - self-destructiveness and the ability to begin anew - in balance with one another. I would like to demonstrate that here in three steps (drawing on empirical research findings of the Munich Research Centre 'Reflexive Modernization'):

- 1 Old dangers - new risks: what is new about world risk society?
- 2 'Cosmopolitan moment': what does that mean?
- 3 Consequences: is there a need for a paradigm shift in the social sciences?\*

### **1. Old dangers - new risks: what is new about world risk society?**

Modern society has become a risk society in the sense that it is increasingly occupied with debating, preventing and managing risks that it itself has produced. That may well be, many will object, but it is indicative rather of a hysteria and politics of fear instigated and aggravated by the mass media. On the contrary, would not someone looking at European societies from outside have to acknowledge that the risks which get us worked up are luxury risks, more than anything else? After all, our world appears a lot safer than that, say, of the war torn regions of Africa, Afghanistan or the Middle East. Are modern societies not distinguished precisely by the fact that to a large extent they have succeeded in bringing under control contingencies and uncertainties, for example with respect to accidents, violence and sickness?

As true as all such observations may be, they miss the most obvious point about risk: that is, 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' (Joost van Loon). 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

---

\* The arguments presented in this lecture have been taken from my books *Power in the Global Age* (2005; German 2002), *The Cosmopolitan Vision* (2006; German 2004), *World at Risk* (2008; Weltrisikogesellschaft 2007), all published at Polity Press.

moved elsewhere: to the anticipation of further attacks, climate change or a potential financial break-down. Risks are always events that are threatening. Without techniques of visualization, without symbolic forms, without staging, 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.

This in turn conceals an irony, the irony of the promise of security made by scientists, companies and governments, which in wondrous fashion contributes to an increase in risks. Finding themselves accused in public of countenancing risk, ministers jump into rivers or get their children to eat hamburgers, in order to 'prove' that everything is 'absolutely' safe and under control - from which follows as sure as night follows day that every doubt cast, every accident violates the basis of the unshakeable right to security which appears to be promised.

In my first publication in 1986 I described *Risk Society* (1992) as 'an inescapable structural condition of advanced industrialization' - and criticized the 'mathematicized morality' of expert thinking and public discourse on 'risk profiling'. While policy-oriented risk assessment posited the manageability of risks, I pointed out that 'even the most restrained and moderate objectivist account of risk implications involves a hidden politics, ethics and morality'. Risk 'is not reducible to the product of probability of occurrence multiplied with the intensity and scope of potential harm'. Rather, it is a socially constructed phenomenon, in which some people have a greater capacity to define risks than others. Not all actors really benefit from the reflexivity of risk - only those with real scope to define their own risks. Risk exposure is replacing class as the principal inequality of modern society, because of how risk is reflexively defined by actors: 'In risk society relations of definition are to be conceived analogous to Marx's relations of production'. The inequalities of definition enable powerful actors to maximize risks for 'others' and minimize risks for 'themselves'. Risk definition, essentially, is a power game. This is especially true for world risk society where Western governments or powerful economic actors produce and define risks for others.

Risk makes its appearance on the world stage when God leaves it. Risks presuppose human decisions. They are the partly positive, partly negative, Janus-faced consequences of human decisions and interventions. In relation to risks there is inevitably posed the highly explosive question of social accountability and responsibility, and this is also true where the prevailing rules allow for accountability only in extremely exceptional cases. The acknowledged, decision-governed social roots of risks make it completely impossible to externalize the problem of accountability. Someone, on the other hand, who believes in a personal God has at his disposal a room for manoeuvre and a meaning for his actions in the face of threats and catastrophes. Through prayers and good works people can win God's favour and forgiveness and in this way actively contribute to their own salvation, but also to that of their family and community. There is, therefore, a close connection between secularization and risk. When Nietzsche announces: God is dead, then that has the - ironic - consequence that from now on human beings must find (or invent) their own explanations and justifications for the disasters which threaten them.

The theory of world risk society maintains, however, 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.
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.

3. *Non-compensatability*: the security dream of first modernity was based on the scientific utopia of making the unsafe consequences and dangers of decisions ever more controllable; accidents could occur, as long as and because they were considered compensatable. Once the global finance system has collapsed, once the climate has changed irrevocably; once terrorist groups possess weapons of mass destruction – then it's too late. Given this new quality of 'threats to humanity' - argues Francois Ewald - the logic of compensation breaks down and is replaced by the principle of precaution by prevention. Not only is prevention taking precedence over compensation, we are also trying to anticipate and prevent risks whose existence has not been proven.

Let me explain these points - de-localization, incalculableness, non-compensatability - in greater detail. 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 present anticipation of future catastrophes cannot rely any longer on experiences in the past; thus risk as expectation of the unexpected, the colonizing of the future based on probability doesn't work; new risks have a long latency period (e.g. nuclear waste) so that their effect over time cannot be 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).

The discovery of the incalculability of risk is closely connected to the discovery of the importance of not-knowing to risk calculation, and it is part of another kind of irony, that surprisingly this discovery of not-knowing occurred in a scholarly discipline which today no longer wants to have anything to do with: economics. It was Knight and Keynes who early insisted on a distinction between predictable and non-predictable or calculable and non-calculable forms of contingency. In a famous article in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* (February 1937) Keynes writes:

by 'uncertain knowledge', let me explain, I do not mean merely to distinguish what is known from what is merely probable. The sense in which I am using the term is that in which the price of copper and the rate of interest twenty years hence, all the obsolescence of a new invention are uncertain. About these matters there is no scientific basis on which to form any calculable probability whatever. We simply do not know.

However, Keynes' admonition to open up the field of economic decision-making to the unknown unknowns of future systematic catastrophes hidden in normalized practices of risk taking was entirely neglected in the subsequent development of mainstream economics (including mainstream Keynesian economics).

The crucial point, however, is not only the discovery of the importance of not knowing, 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! 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.

Thus world risk society is faced by the awkward problem (here one can no longer talk about irony) of having to make decisions about unimaginable billions of dollars, pounds and Euros

or even about war and peace (nuclear terrorism), on the basis of more or less unadmitted not-knowing.

The boundary between rationality and hysteria becomes blurred. Given the right invested in them to avert dangers, politicians, in particular, may easily be forced to proclaim a security which they cannot honour - because the *political* costs of omission are much higher than the costs of overreaction. In future, therefore, it is not going to be easy, in the context of state promises of security and a mass media hungry for catastrophes, actively to limit and prevent a diabolical power game with the hysteria of not-knowing. I do not even dare think about deliberate attempts to instrumentalize this situation.

## **2. What is meant by the ‘cosmopolitan moment’?**

World risk society is a latent revolutionary society in which the state of normalcy and the state of emergency overlap. From this one can explain the historical power of global risk, which is neglected by the conventional social theory and sociology of risk: In dealing with catastrophic risks the present of a future state of emergency is being negotiated. The anticipated state of emergency is no longer national but cosmopolitan. The belief that the risks facing humanity can be averted by political action taken on behalf of endangered humanity becomes an unprecedented resource for consensus and legitimation, nationally and internationally. In this sense, the fundamental principles of modernity, including the free market principle and the nation-state order itself, become subject to the change, the existence of alternatives, and contingency.

You might even say, the historical power of global risk is beyond all the ‘saviours’ brought forth by history: not the proletariat, not the excluded, not the Enlightenment, not the global public, not the migrants of global society – if anyone or anything at all, it is the perceived risks facing humanity, which can be neither denied nor externalized, that are capable of awakening the energies, the consensus, the legitimation necessary for creating a global community of fate, one that will demolish the walls of nation-state borders and egotisms – at least for a global moment in time and beyond democracy.

Here we must distinguish two variants of central importance for the theory of world risk society: on the one hand, the anticipation of *unintended* side effects catastrophes (such as climate change and the financial crisis). On the other hand, the anticipation of *intentional* catastrophes, with transnational suicide terrorism being the prime example. It is in fact a matter of developing the political theory of world risk society in the light of this key distinction between the anticipation of *unintended* and *intended* catastrophes.

Unintended catastrophes (climate catastrophes, etc.) are *conditional* in an *ambivalent* sense: they are a mixture of *goods* and *bads*. They give rise to a particular combination of utility and more or less probable destruction, useful for some, destructive for others. This intertwining and antagonism of socially unequally distributed hopes and fears does not hold for the anticipation of intentional catastrophes, because the perhaps remote probability of terrorist attacks is not counterbalanced by any compensatory benefits. The terroristic world is the deliberate attempt to create hell upon earth.

One might initially think that Carl Schmitt anticipated the political potential of the state of emergency induced by financial melt-down and climate change. However, in his theory of sovereignty, Schmitt associates the state of emergency exclusively with the nation-state and with an (potential) attack coming from the outside. A transnational or even a cosmopolitan state of emergency that, quite to the contrary, transcends the distinction between friend and foe and creates a cosmopolitan moment is utterly unthinkable for Schmitt. But global risks do

come from the inside, even from the centre – as unintended consequences – of radicalized free market economy (financial crisis) and industrial modernity (climate change).

What is ‘cosmopolitan’ about the cosmopolitan moment? Risk society’s cosmopolitan moment means, the *conditio humana* of the irreversible non-excludability of the distant and alien other. Global risks tear down national boundaries and jumble together the native with the foreign. The distant other is becoming the inclusive other - not through mobility but through risk. Everyday life is becoming cosmopolitan: human beings must find the meaning of life in the exchange with others and no longer in the encounter with like. We are all trapped in a shared global space of threats – without exit. This may inspire highly conflicting responses, to which renationalization, xenophobia, etc., also belong. *One* of them incorporates the *recognition* of others as equal *and* different, namely, normative cosmopolitanism.

World risk society forces us to recognize the plurality of the world which the national outlook could ignore. Global risks open up a moral and political space that can give rise to a civil culture of responsibility that transcends borders and conflicts. The traumatic experience that everyone is vulnerable and the resulting responsibility for others, also for the sake of one’s own survival, are the two sides of the belief in world risk. Let me go into more details.

*Enforced enlightenment: representations of danger in the mass media can lend the underprivileged, the marginalized and minorities a voice*

If you ask me: what worries you most, my answer is: what makes me angry, helpless and bitter is that the poorest of the poor, the most vulnerable are hit worst. We are experiencing a state socialism for the rich, which costs a put on the shoulders of the poor – nationally and globally. There is an outrageous injustice happening right now which is going to politically explode in the months and years to come.

And if you keep on asking me: are there signs of new beginnings, a rise accompanied with the fall of the financial system? My answer is: yes. There can be observed too an enforced enlightenment: representations of danger in the mass media can lend the underprivileged a voice.

It is a commonplace that the Greek *polis* knew only face-to-face communication and that it was both elitist and exclusive because it excluded women, slaves and the underprivileged. Danger globalized via the mass media can lend the poor, the marginalized and minorities a voice in the global public area. Hurricane Katrina was a horrifying act of nature. As a global media event, it also performed an involuntary and unintended *enlightening function*. What no social movement, no political party, and certainly no sociological analysis, no matter how brilliant and well founded, could ever have achieved occurred within the space of a couple of days: America and the world were confronted with the voices and images of the repressed *other* America, the racist face of poverty in the sole remaining superpower. American television does not care for images of poor people, but they were ubiquitous during the coverage of Katrina. The whole world saw and heard that the black districts of New Orleans were destroyed by the storm tides because of their social vulnerability.

Do you really think sociologists could have the method and the power to discover the outrageous practices of the bankers which caused the global crisis and bring it into the global public? No, of course not, but the financial meltdown and its impact on the global media did. A month ago, did anybody really believe, the hegemonic discourse of neoliberalism, in politics as well as in the media, could collapse over night? No. But it happened. What made it real? The global anticipation of the global catastrophe. Those are right who argued: after the

collapse of communism, only one opponent of the free market remains, namely, the unbridled free market which operates exclusively on the maxim of short term profit-maximization.

The glooming catastrophe is a merciless teacher to all humanity. The market is not what economists made and make us believe, the answer, the saviour to all our problems, but a threat to our existence. We have to learn fast that modernity is urgently in need of reflexive market regulations, more than that, of an international constitution to negotiate conflicts over answers to global risks and problems – built on consensus between parties, nations, religions, friend and foe. Of course, this may not happen. But suddenly it is common knowledge that this is the precondition of survival. All this is part of the reflexivity generated by risk, by the anticipation of catastrophe. I cannot think of any power inducing, enforcing such a global learning process in such a short period of time. Be careful: not catastrophe does this. The catastrophe is the moment of (total) destruction. The anticipation of catastrophe does it. Manufactured uncertainty, global risk is, highly ambivalent, paradoxically also a moment of hope, of unbelievable opportunities – a cosmopolitan moment.

Which principles of publicity are operating here? And which theoretical proposals can help us to understand them? The principle of almost *boundless inclusion*, as regards both groups and topics, is reminiscent of analyses of the public sphere such as those offered by Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas and most recently Roger Silverstone (2006). However, global risk public spheres have a completely different structure from the ‘public sphere’ explored by Jürgen Habermas. Habermas’s public sphere presupposes that all concerned have equal chances to participate and that they share a commitment to the principles of rational discourse. The threat public sphere is as little a matter of commitment as it is of rationality. The images of catastrophes do not produce cool heads. False alarms, misunderstandings, condemnations are part of the story. Threat publics are impure, they distort, they are selective and stir up emotions, anger and hate. They make possible more, and at the same time less, than the public sphere described by Habermas. They resemble the picture of ‘Mediapolis’ so minutely and sensitively painted by Roger Silverstone and the picture sketched by John Dewey in *The Public and its Problems* (1946).

In his search for a public space that is at once transnational *and* anchored in the actions of individuals, Dewey proposes a dual approach: first of all, he distinguishes between collectively binding *decisions* and their *consequences*. He links this with the argument that a public sphere only ever emerges *not* out of any general interest in collectively binding decisions – but, rather, triggered as a result of their *consequences*. People remain indifferent to decisions as such. It is not until individuals perceive and start to communicate with one another about the problematic consequences of decisions that they become worked up and anxious; communication shakes them out of their complacency and makes them worry, it pulls them out of their indifference and their egoistical existence, creating a public sphere of action based on commonality and community. This is a variation on the sceptical insight formulated by Epictetus: it is not deeds themselves that distresses human beings, but the public words spoken about these deeds.

People, Dewey argues, get together for all manner of reasons. But no single element and no sum of their social actions in and of itself can generate reflexivity about the public nature of their actions. This arises ‘only when the *consequences* of combined action are *perceived* and become an object of desire and effort. Human association may be even so organic in origin and firm in operation’, but they develop a reflexive ‘public’ quality only when their consequences, to the extent these are known about, become the subject of appreciation or striving, ‘or of fear and rejection’.

In response to the question of how political action is possible in transnational, cosmopolitan contexts, Dewey says the following: the binding power, the sensory system and the nervous system of politics, which generates and binds together people's attentiveness, morality and willingness to act, emerges *only* in the course of public reflection about consequences. Its scope of influence does *not* coincide with national borders; instead, *the public world is everything that is perceived as an irritating consequence of modern risk society's decisions*. In one word, it is risk – or, to be more precise, the perception of risk – that creates a public sphere across all boundaries. The greater the mass-media-projected omnipresence of the threat, the greater the boundary-breaching political force of risk perception. Thought through to its conclusion, this means that the everyday experiential space known as 'humanity' does not come about in the form of everybody loving everybody else. It emerges instead in the perceived problem of the global consequences of actions within the risk society.

Although some insist on seeing an overreaction to risk, global risk conflicts do indeed have an enlightenment function. They destabilize the existing order but can also be seen as a vital step towards the construction of new institutions. Global risk has the power to confuse the mechanisms of organized irresponsibility and even to open them up for political action.

Egoism, autonomy, autopoiesis, self-isolation, improbability of translation – these are key terms for describing modern society in sociology and in public and political debates. The communicative logic of global risk must be understood on precisely the opposite principle. World risk is *the* unwanted, unintended obligatory medium of communication in a world of irreconcilable differences in which everyone is turning on their own axis. Hence the public perception of risk forces people to communicate who otherwise do not want to have anything to do with one another. It imposes obligations and costs on those who resist them, often even with the law on their side. In other words, large-scale risks cut through the self-sufficiency of cultures, languages, religions and systems as much as through the national and international agenda of politics; they overturn their priorities and create contexts for action between camps, parties and quarrelling nations that know nothing about each other and reject and oppose one another.

That is what 'enforced cosmopolitanization' means: global risks activate and connect actors across borders, who otherwise do not want to have anything to do with one another. I propose, in this sense that a clear distinction be made between the philosophical and normative ideas of cosmopolitanism, on the one hand, and the 'impure' actual cosmopolitanization on the other. The crucial point about this distinction is that cosmopolitanism cannot, for example, become real only deductively in a translation of the sublime principles of philosophy, but also and above all through the back doors of global risks, unseen, unintended, enforced. Down through history cosmopolitanism bore the taint of being elitist, idealistic, imperialist, capitalist; today, however, we see that reality itself has become cosmopolitan. Cosmopolitanism does not mean - as it did for Immanuel Kant - an obligation, a task, that is to order the world.

Cosmopolitanism in world risk society opens our eyes to the uncontrollable liabilities, to something that happens to us, befalls us, but at the same time stimulates us to make border-transcending new beginnings. The insight that in the dynamic of world risk society we are dealing with a cosmopolitanization under duress robs 'impure' cosmopolitanism of much of its ethical attractiveness. If the cosmopolitan moment of world risk society is both at once: deformed and inevitable, then seemingly it is not an appropriate object for sociological and political reflections. But precisely that would be a serious mistake.

Of course, global financial crises and climate change are not the only cosmopolitan moments in history or modernity. Indeed, comparative studies of cosmopolitan moments are useful and necessary. We have to distinguish, for example, between the antique cosmopolitanism (Stoa),

the *ius cosmopolitica* of the enlightenment (Kant), the new concept of the ‘crime against humanity’, invented for the Nuremberg Trial, confronted with the Holocaust (which was ‘legal’ in relation to the national law of Germany); and there was the cosmopolitan moment of the atomic threat and nuclear self-destruction of humanity.

The logic of war and peace valid until that moment lost its meaning. Where victory is no longer victory and defeat no longer defeat, the warring parties had to create new institutions that make it possible to go on living, thinking and debating under the Damocles sword of nuclear self-annihilation. The Cold War ‘nuclear stalemate’ led to new forms of cooperation between the hostile military blocs; indeed this ‘nuclear threat’ ultimately made possible the *Ostpolitik* geared to ‘humanitarian relief’ of German Chancellor Willy Brandt. There is an interesting point how global norms can be created through cosmopolitan moments. Lawyers typically think that violations of norms can only be established if the norms themselves already exist. However, sociologists of law, and anthropologists of law in particular, also recognize the converse case: that norms emerge when expectations are disappointed and catastrophes or anticipations of catastrophes make it clear that this is by no means acceptable. This applies to the holocaust which then became the resource for the human rights regime; also to serious violations of nuclear security or of minimum standards of ecological prudence, in relation to climate change. It certainly is possible, then, to observe processes whereby from cosmopolitan moments worldwide norms emerge. Perhaps ethics is just the wrong word for it, because it is not simply an issue of matters of conscience or of moral regard – it is much more about an international law for which the possibility of sanctions is to be found. (Luhmann 1999)

*Possibility of alternative government: a cosmopolitan form of statehood*

Important as all these arguments are, the decisive question is a different one: to what extent does the threat and shock of world risk society open up the horizon *to a historic alternative of political action*? It is precisely this question that I have tried to answer in my book *Power in the Global Age*. I argued in 2002 (here I can only quote the basic idea):

Two premises: 1) world risk society brings a new, historic key logic to the fore: no nation can cope with its problems alone; 2) a realistic political alternative in the global age is possible, which counteracts the loss to globalized capital of the commanding power of state politics. The condition is that globalization must be decoded not as economic fate, but as a strategic game for world power.

A new global domestic politics that is already at work here and now, beyond the national-international distinction, has become a meta-power game, whose outcome is completely open-ended. It is a game in which boundaries, basic rules and basic distinctions are renegotiated - not only those between the national and the international spheres, but also those between global business and the state, supra-national organizations and the rising powers China, India, South America, the US and the EU. No single player or opponent can ever win on their own; all are dependent on alliances. This is the way, then, in which the hazy power game of global domestic politics opens up its own immanent alternatives and oppositions.

The strategies of action which global risks open up overthrow the order of power, which has formed in the neo-liberal capital-state coalition: global risks empower states and civil society movements, because they reveal new sources of legitimation and options for action for these groups of actors; they disempower globalized capital on the other hand, because the consequences of economic decisions contribute to creating global risks and destabilized markets and even the global market system. Conversely, there is an opportunity to bring about what I call a *cosmopolitan form of statehood*. The forms of alliances entered into by the neo-liberal state instrumentalize the state (and state-theory) in order to optimize and legitimize the interests of capital world wide. Conversely the idea of a cosmopolitan state form aims at

imagining and realizing a robust diversity and a post-national order. The neo-liberal agenda surrounds itself with an aura of self-regulation and self-legitimation. The cosmopolitan agenda, on the other hand, surrounds itself with the aura of transnational reinvention of politics and regulation, global justice and struggles for a new grand narrative of radical-democratic globalization.

This is not wishful thinking; on the contrary, it is an expression of a *cosmopolitan realpolitik*. In an age of global risks, a politics of ‘golden handcuffs’ - the creation of a dense network of transnational interdependencies - is exactly what is needed in order to regain national sovereignty, not least in relation to a highly mobile world economy. The maxims of nation-based realpolitik - that national interests must necessarily be pursued by national means - must be replaced by the maxims of cosmopolitan realpolitik. The more cosmopolitan our political structures and activities, the more successful they will be in promoting national interests and the greater our individual power in this global age will be.\* This is the time to overcome the antiquated notion of unilateralism, even in the US, and to bring China, India, South America and Russia in for collaboration to produce new rules that bind all the players. More than that: we, the West, the European countries have to learn about the facts of dependency even in our internal affairs from those who we still believe to be external ‘foreign others’.

What happens when the states' hubris evaporates or has the opposite effect? The reply is both cynical and realistic: danger grows with the inefficiency of political action, and as a result the need experienced by all - with one paradoxical consequence: wrongdoing can cleanse itself of its wrongdoing in the waters of the problems to which it has contributed. Forgiveness for mistakes may well grow with the mistakes that increase mankind's need.

At the same time, the perceived danger that threatens to destroy everything in its path creates a dynamic of acceleration for counter action, and thus the pressure for consensus that can bypass the gap between the rhetoric and political decision-making. With the result that that which is wholly unthinkable in the national political field becomes possible in, of all places, global internal politics, namely that despite the principle of unanimity and the involvement of every state whose interests are known to conflict dramatically, global, fiscally binding decisions *could* be made under the strictures of sudden urgency.

However, the historical power of global risk perception comes at quite a price, since it works only for a short time. As everything depends on its mass media perception, the legitimisation of global political activity in the light of global risks goes only as far as mass-media awareness.

The facts tell a different story. The action that was taken so far in the EU (and other countries), the government's bail-out of the banks amounted to an old-fashioned partial nationalization of some of the major high-street banks. This looks more like individual nation-

---

\* It is, of course, important to look at the unwanted and unpredicted side-effects of this Cosmopolitan Vision (Beck 2006): the call for justice and human rights is used to legitimate the invasion of other countries. How can one be in favour of cosmopolitan legitimacy when it leads to crises and wars and thus to the bloody refutation of the idea itself? Who will rein in the side-effects of a cosmopolitan moral principle that speaks of peace while facilitating war? What does ‘peace’ mean when it generalizes the possibility of war? It is necessary to make a clear distinction between true and false cosmopolitanism and yet such clarity is hard to achieve because it is the comparative legitimacy of cosmopolitanism that makes it so tempting to instrumentalize the latter for national-imperial purposes. Fake cosmopolitanism instrumentalizes cosmopolitan rhetoric – the rhetoric of peace, of human rights, of global justice - for national-hegemonic purposes. There are numerous examples of this in history; the Iraq War is only the most recent. The ideological ambivalence which is inherent from the beginning in the idea of cosmopolitanism is the reason why, in the last chapter of my book on Power in the Global Age in an (ironic) self-critique, ‘A brief funeral oration at the cradle of the cosmopolitan age’, I warn against the abuse of cosmopolitanism.

states taking the decisions they judge to be the best, in discussion with other nation-states but not really in collaboration or concert with them.

What gives the inhabitants of the society of global risks an anthropological shock is no longer the metaphysical homelessness of a Beckett, the absent Godot or the nightmare visions of Foucault. What worries people is the premonition that the fabric of our material dependencies and moral obligations could tear, causing the delicate functional system of the world risk society to collapse. Thus everything is turned on its head: what for Weber, Adorno and Foucault was a terrifying vision - the perfected surveillance of the administrated world - is a promise for the potential victims of financial risks (i.e. everyone): it would be a fine thing if surveillance rationality really worked, or if we were only terrorised by consumption and humanism, or if the flawless operation of the systems could be restored by the liturgical chanting of "more market, please!".

### **3. Consequences: a paradigm shift in the social sciences**

It is evident, that the taken-for-granted nation-state frame of reference - what I call 'methodological nationalism' - prevents the social sciences from understanding and analysing the dynamics and ambivalences, opportunities and ironies of world risk society. A methodological nationalist as well as a national politician, who attempt to deal with global risks in isolation resembles a drunken man, who on a dark night is trying to find his lost wallet in the cone of light of a street lamp. To the question: did you actually lose your wallet here, he replies, no, but in the light of the street lamp I can at least look for it.

In other words, global risks are producing 'failed states' - even in the West. The first example is, of course, Iceland. But also Hungary, Ukraine and, very threatening, the instable atomic power Pakistan urgently need emergency assistance by the International Monetary Fund. A month ago the crisis seemed to affect only the countries that caused it, mainly the USA and the West-European highly industrial countries. But in a very short period of time the fire of crisis spread over to Asian, Latin-American and East-European countries and thereby it is now endangering those countries that didn't cause it, even if some of them participated in the high-risk capitalism - rich countries like Iceland and Russia. So, the global financial risk is rapidly producing new radicalised global inequalities. The state structure evolving under the conditions of world risk society could be characterized in terms of both inefficiency and post-democratic authority. A clear distinction, therefore, has to be made between the reinvention of state rule and inefficiency. It is quite possible that the end-result could be the gloomy perspective that we have totally ineffective and authoritarian state regimes (even in the context of the Western democracies).

Given the maddening conditions of world risk society, the older critical theory of Foucault is in danger of becoming simultaneously affirmative and antiquated, along with large areas of sociology, which have concentrated on class dynamics in the welfare state (Bourdieu, Goldthorpe). It underestimates or misses the historical change of the parameter of change by global risks.

But sociology and political science are not the only disciplines under pressure, economics is too. There is a situation vacant: a theorist is sought to succeed Mr. Keynes, transnationally. The need is now for a clever reflexive regulation (philosophy) *on a global scale*, including new actors like transnational corporations, World Bank, IMF, Attac, Greenpeace etc. In the EU, there is an equal need for much stronger political institutions - a European Minister for Economic Affairs - to complement the central bank. But the greatest need of all is a new theory of the mixed economy, framed for the global market place of today, as the now defunct Keynesian system was framed for the national post-war economies.

We are under the spell of a sociology, whose foundations were conceived and developed in

the past hundred years. The first century of sociology is over. On the way into the second, which has now begun, the space of sociological imagination and research has to be opened up and determined anew, i.e. opened up to the *cosmopolitan constellation*. Learning about others is not simply an act of cosmopolitan open-mindedness but an integral part of learning about and understanding the reality of ourselves or even viewing ourselves as other. A cosmopolitan sociology means a sociology which reflects on the ontologized premises and dualisms of a nation state sociology – such as national and international, us and them, internal and external – in their significance for the grammar of the political and the social, as for the determination of the sociological field of investigation, and in this way gains a new sociological frame of reference to all kind of subjects. A cosmopolitan sociology clearly distinguishes itself from a universalist one, because it doesn't start out from something abstract (usually derived from a European historical experience and context, e.g. 'society' or 'world society' or 'world system' or the 'autonomous individual' etc.). Instead key concepts like contingency, ambivalence, interdependence, interconnectedness take centre stage along with the methodological questions posed by them. Cosmopolitan sociology, therefore, opens up indispensable new perspectives on seemingly isolated, familiar, local and national contexts. With this new 'cosmopolitan vision' it follows the empirical and methodological paths which other disciplines – such as contemporary anthropology, geography, ethnology – have already taken with enthusiasm.

At the end coming back to the issue I raised at the beginning of my lecture on the cosmopolitan moment of risk society: what is good about something that's bad? That nationalistic egotism has to open up in a cosmopolitan direction for its own sake. Something else we might have to learn from this crisis is that the kind of laissez-faire, free-market capitalism dear to neo-liberalism has no place in the age of global risk society. And, of course, another, an alternative modernity is possible!