

Risk and Responsibility workshop
Workshop Program
18 and 19 February 2021
Online via Zoom

Organized by *Responsibility for Risks: Theory and Practice*, an Austrian Science Fund-financed research project (P 31527) at the University of Graz

Thursday, 18 February 2021

10:00 – 11:00 CET

Speaker: Sven-Ove Hansson (Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm)

Title: “The failure of luck anti-egalitarianism”

Abstract:

The anti-egalitarian view that a person deemed responsible for her own disease or injury has no right to public healthcare has received much attention among philosophers. It is known under the misnomer "luck egalitarianism". I will discuss some of the many problems with this standpoint, with a particular emphasis on how its proponents misconstrue the nature of disease causality and disease risks in order to defend the exclusion of vulnerable patients from treatments that they need.

11:00 – 12:00

Speaker: Ibo van de Poel (TU Delft)

Title: “Responsibility for risks beyond our control”

Abstract:

Control is generally seen as a precondition for responsibility. We are not, and cannot be reasonably held, responsible for things that are beyond our control. This seems to explain, for example, why we are not responsible for natural hazards or so-called ‘acts of God.’ At the same time, it seems to explain why as nature is increasingly under human control in the technological age, we acquire new responsibilities with respect to nature and what used to be natural

hazards. So while control is generally seen as preceding responsibility, I will explore whether the relation may also be reversed sometimes. More specifically, I will suggest that we can take or assume sometimes responsibility for a risk (or hazard) that is yet still beyond our control, but for which we have reason to increase control over it as result of our act of taking responsibility. I will discuss under what conditions it may be rational to take responsibility for certain risks beyond our control and I will explore whether taking such responsibility is merely morally supererogatory or whether there may also be a moral obligation sometimes to take responsibility for risks beyond our control.

12:00 – 13:00

Speaker: Maria Paola Ferretti (Goethe University Frankfurt)

Title: “Precarious employment and responsibility for risk”

Abstract:

In my presentation, I will consider the risks attached to precarious employment. By this term, I refer to work under uncertain and unstable contractual relations. One of the main features of precarious employment is that the employees, rather than the employers or the government, bear the responsibility for coping with risk and receive limited social benefits and statutory protections.

Some theorists, like John Tomasi, have praised the antipaternalistic character of individual responsibility for risk and its empowering effect in connection with self-respect and self-direction. Others, like Bieber and Moggia, regard this shift of responsibility as normatively problematic and argue that new forms of social insurance for workers should be imposed on employers, so as to compensate employees for the instability of working contract and the attached risks.

I will defend the idea of a societal responsibility for the risk attached to precarious employment. Justifying this position will bring me to discuss the nature of risk imposition and its normative evaluation, the link between causality and moral responsibility in risk issues and the distribution of risk.

Friday, 19 February 2021

10:00 – 11:00

Speaker: Jessica Nihlén Fahlquist (Uppsala University)

Title: “Moral responsibility and public health risks - examples from the Corona pandemic”

Abstract:

Researchers in risk ethics have demonstrated the difficulties associated with applying ethical theories to risk management. In my view, the most promising way forward is to approach problems of risk not partly, but primarily through concepts of responsibility. There are clear conceptual connections between risk and responsibility because risks in modern society are conceptualised as something that could, and should, be controlled and managed. This notion of control explicitly or implicitly, means that someone is to be held responsible or should take responsibility for risks.

Public health policy has become increasingly important in modern society, and governments invest a substantial amount of money in managing and communicating public health risks. The Corona pandemic has brought ethical aspects of public health to the fore, and the different strategies clearly illustrate the connection between public health risks and moral responsibility. Infectious diseases show us how individuals, in their risk-taking and risk-exposure are linked to each other and to society at large. This complex relationship calls for a thorough discussion concerning the extent, and distribution, of individual and collective responsibility for public health.

11:00 – 12:00:

Speaker: Madeleine Hayenhjelm (Umeå University)

Title: “Responsible Risking, Precaution, and the Case of Germline Gene Editing”

Abstract:

In this talk, I want to address a general question: what is responsible risking? Here, however, I will draw from a specific debate, namely the ethical debate on human germline gene editing

and three arguments from this debate in particular, before trying to make a more general case. First, the argument that there are risks on “both sides” of pursuing and not pursuing germline gene editing, and that it might be more precautionary to proceed than not to. Second, the argument that it would be irrational to favour what we currently have over more value that we could gain. Third, the value challenge argument directed at radical enhancement: that the values promoted by radical enhancement may not be of value for those enhanced or in any case a mismatch between the two. In the case of new and emerging technology with potentially very far-reaching and global impact, there are epistemic arguments suggesting that making it plausible that precaution would not be neutral between imposing and not imposing the new. In addition to epistemic concerns, I shall argue that there is a special category of potential losses that are in principle uncompensable. This seems to hold in particular for metaphysical losses of a whole kind qua kind, existential losses of what is essentially “us”, and losses of the basis for whole sets of values. This holds especially if two or more of these kinds of uncompensable losses attach to one and the same kind of risking. I shall refer to this as a case of a “most serious kind of risking” and suggest that responsible risking involves at a minimum to avoid such risking unless there are extraordinary reasons to do otherwise.

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Responsibility for Risks project members/workshop organizers: Adriana Placani, Harald Stelzer, and Stearns Broadhead

More info at <https://risk-responsibility-project.at/>