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PERSPECTIVES ON 'THE LENS OF RISK' INTERVIEW SERIES **INTERVIEWS WITH JUDY GREEN AND PETER TAYLOR-GOOPY**

Bob Heyman and Patrick Brown

INTRODUCTION

At the suggestion of the editor of *Health, Risk & Society*, Andy Alaszewski, Patrick Brown and Bob Heyman have undertaken a series of interviews with a sample of leading risk social scientists, including Andy Alaszewski, Judy Green, Nick Pidgeon, Ortwin Renn, Paul Slovic, Peter Taylor-Gooby and Joost Van Loon.

The interviews have been or will be presented across the series of special issues on *Health Care Through the Lens of Risk* published in 2012/2013. They cover views about: the meaning of the term 'risk'; the significance of the Royal Society (2002) *Risk* report; the history of risk social science; and the impact of risk thinking on wider society and government policy. All of these topics will not necessarily be included in every interview. Instead the most interesting material will be selected. The chosen interview content will be presented more or less verbatim, with a few contextual clarifications and interviewer comments added either in square brackets or endnotes. The interviewees were given the opportunity to edit the text as they wished, or to accept small changes suggested by the editors, and to add references which are indicated in endnotes. The order of presentation has been varied from the actual interview sequence which was variable and free-flowing.

Interview extracts to date have been published for Nick Pigeon (Heyman and Brown, 2012), and for Joost Van Loon and Ortwin Renn (Brown and Heyman, 2012). The present article includes material from Judy Green and Peter Taylor-Gooby. Judy Green is Reader in the Sociology of Health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. She has undertaken research and published extensively in the area of the sociology of health service organisation and delivery, and is editor of the journal *Critical Public Policy*. She mentions her book '*Risk and Misfortune: A Social Construction of Accidents*' (Green, 1997) in the present interview in relation to the history of risk. In her *Health, Risk & Society* editorial (Green, 2009), discussed in the interview, which has particular relevance to the themes of this special issue series, Judy has challenged the meta-narrative which views all health discourse through the lens of risk, and, in consequence, identifies public 'failures' to prioritise officially recognised risks in relation to everyday issues such as food choices.

Peter Taylor-Gooby is Professor of Social Policy at the University of Kent. *Inter alia* he is Chair of the British Academy New Paradigms in Public Policy Programme (2010/2011). Previously, he has been a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science Sociology and Social Policy Section. Peter has led a number of major funded research programmes, including the Social Contexts and Responses to Risk Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Priority Network, 2003-2008.

The two interviews reveal an interesting contrast between a qualitative interpretive approach, offered by Green as well as many contributors to *Health, Risk & Society*, and the '*tougher political*' approach advocated by Taylor-Gooby in relation to the

challenge to the Welfare State arising from the policies of the present UK Conservative-led Government. However, as Taylor-Gooby argues, these approaches can be viewed as complementary because the possibilities for constructing risk in alternative ways opens up risk analysis to political processes, as with the present UK media and Government line which problematises the unemployed rather than the absence of jobs. In terms of specific risk-related topics, Green offers an interesting historical analysis of the rise and fall of the 'accident'; and Taylor-Gooby makes a powerful case for an interdisciplinary social science approach to risk. Green challenges "*Young Man's PhD' grabbing a meta-narrative of yet more overarching typologies of risk studies*"; and Taylor-Gooby the blindness to social context of much psychological research carried out within the decision theory paradigm developed by Kahneman and Tversky (2000).

Judy Green with Bob Heyman

Bob: *How do you see your own contribution to risk social science?*

Judy: My interest really was in accidents rather than risk. And I suppose that's why I was a little anxious publishing something a little bit critical about contemporary risk scholarship¹, because it has been the hand that's fed me. I was very lucky that, had there not been this framing by Beck and others, and the wider thing about the Risk Society, accidents wouldn't have been interesting, and nobody would have published my book. But there is a category of misfortunes which I still find absolutely fascinating because there are such tensions in them. On the one hand, it's still in everyday discourse - an accident is just something that happens, nobody could have predicted, nobody can be blamed for. But the moment there really is an accident, it's the centre of moral enquiry, and the centre of a probabilistic enquiry about whether it was or wasn't predictable.

And accidents are also really interesting for being an event that seems to characterise the modern age and domain, and I mean the modern rather than the late modern. The idea of an accident is only possible once you have got a fairly probabilistic notion of the universe. Once you have got an idea that some things have a kind of regularity, and, in general, that everything has got a rational purpose or cause, only then have you got this category of left-over events. They are not willed by God. We haven't got any kind of faith any more in witches or Gods that cause misfortune. But some things just go wrong, and with the best planning and rationality in the world you still couldn't stop them. So accidents are particular features of the modern world. And then they disappear. By the end of the 20th century, they have disappeared again, certainly in health care. We are not allowed to talk about them. The BMJ [British Medical Journal] has banned the word 'accident'. How can you ban a word? So they disappear. I am still fascinated by accidents. And, in terms of a Risk Society kind of argument, an accident is a little reminder, isn't it? It's a little reminder that it hasn't worked.

Bob: You're back to a risk framework?

Judy: Yes. You've done all your risk assessment. You have got this obsession with risk and calculability. But it still goes wrong, and nuclear reactors still blow up, kitchen fires still happen, we still trip over pavements. However good our risk

assessment is, you can't control everything. So I am still fascinated by accidents and their relation to our broader ideas. I am not going to make claims about whether they really did emerge in the 17th century, or really did disappear in about 1950. But, for the sake of argument, I'd say the accident appeared in 1666 and disappeared in 1950. But of course we still use the term, and it's quite difficult to get by without using the word, despite the best efforts of my medical colleagues to ban it as too imprecise.

I think Mary Douglasⁱⁱ suggested many years ago that we have gone back full circle (which I don't quite agree with) to a primitive cosmology, in which people that couldn't conceive of the accident - everything had a purpose, and a cause. And she [Douglas] is going, 'Oh, we are back there again'. In our litigious society, we can't cope with the idea that some things just go wrong. And I don't think she is right, because the sort of post-modern lack of faith in something just going wrong is not the same as a belief in a universe where everything has a purpose. But there is something resonant in the idea that we have gone back to a pre-modern state. Actually what came in-between, this is a little bit of a weird, a little bit of an unusual, disruption. Yet, despite the fact that the risk assessments say that we can't just die of old age any more, neither can we die of an accident, but we still need the category. We still seem to have this cultural necessity in accounting for the misfortunes that happen. And it's a little indicator of the failures of late modern cosmologies for dealing with misfortune. But at least in terms of modernism, the victim of an accident can deserve some sympathy – 'It wasn't your fault, you know'.

I have some sympathy now with the decreasing number of things we can genuinely be blameless for. There is not much left, is there? All this started with an almost anthropological question about how do we deal with misfortune, and how do people answer that kind of fundamental question that they do seem to have whenever anything happens. 'Why, why did this happen to me?', and 'Why did this happen now?'. The idea of the accident gave a framing for people to say, 'Well things just happen, you know', whatever 'it' is, 'And you deserve our sympathy for this terrible thing that has happened to you'. Once you have got rid of that, I don't know quite what's left because probabilistic thinking in all of our risk assessments can't answer the 'Why me, why now?' questions. It can only answer that people like you in general might have this, that and the other.

Bob: That's what you see as your contribution to risk social science?

Judy: I suppose it's just to keep accidents on the agenda because they are a fascinating category of misfortune, and more broadly also to keep grounded in the mid-range. What I see as my contribution as a jobbing sociologist of health is to do those mid-range things that are grounded in the real problems that are faced by practitioners or people in making or getting on with their everyday lives, and connecting that to some of the grand theory that just sometimes doesn't resonate particularly well. You read Giddens or Beck, and you just think, 'Oh, at one level that makes sense, but, at another level, it doesn't quite match what I think is going on'. So I guess my contribution has been very much at the middle level, and to try and do methodologically good work that does try and answer a kind of practical question.

Bob: *How do you understand the term 'risk'?*

Judy: I will start with the Royal Society definitionⁱⁱⁱ which is a very nice elegant one for some kinds of question. And if we are doing some work on looking at the relative risks of, say, people who live in different areas of London, and their risk of being hit by a car, then that's exactly the kind of definition we would use, and it's perfectly reasonable. But if you are asking the question about social anxiety, or about how people adjudicate between the 'risks' of entirely different phenomena, then it starts getting a little less useful. That's maybe the problem when we try and police language that comes from one disciplinary area, and then take the epistemological high ground, and say everyone else has to use these terms and these concepts in exactly the same way that we are using them. That's when the problem starts. So if you ask, 'What do I mean by the term risk?' it depends who is asking. I have an excellent research degree student, a GP by training, who has come to do a research degree because, after many years in practice, it struck her that often her patients don't understand risks of medication (she is looking at statins) in quite the same way as professionals. So she has come with almost a classic interpretivist sociological question: 'And it occurs to me that when I prescribe statins, I don't really know whether that patient understands the risks'. And that kind of definition [Royal Society] is a perfectly good starting point for that question, because what she is asking is, 'If I am trying to explain to a patient that this is the risk of an event, and this is the number I need to treat to prevent this kind of event', then that makes perfect sense. But the moment she starts unpacking that, there is a question. It starts making a little less sense because what she realises is that actually risk is likely not to be the primary framing her patients come with. And I think that that kind of problem was what started me with that little paper I wrote for *Health Risk and Society*¹. But if you take that [Royal Society] definition, the risk is that it over-determines. And actually 'risk' might not be the most important frame.

If you are a sociologist in the tradition of Giddens or Beck or whatever, you are talking about risk **discourse**. What you are talking about isn't a technical statistical calculation. It's a kind of cosmology. It's a framing of reflexive modernity, so it means something different. And it doesn't seem to make too much sense really to beat a sociologist over the head and go, 'You must use risk to mean this'. You are talking about two different things. One is about policing language, and grabbing terms, and of course all disciplines do that. 'Don't be sloppy about how you use significance', 'Don't use the word accident', 'Don't use - '. There's a whole lot of disciplinary boundary maintenance about particular terms.

But I think your question was asking something rather broader, which is, if we are using the term risk, and we are interested in something very practical like how do patients understand the risk of statins or how do we calculate relative risks of road traffic injuries, then it [the Royal Society definition] is a good definition. Then the problem from a more interpretive sociological perspective is that it breaks down the moment you stop looking at risks that are about the same phenomenon, for example, the Royal Society [*Risk* monograph], and, to some extent, books like the BMA *Guide to Living with Risk*. When you try and start making claims about the public being naïve, or not having an objective assessment of risk, because they worry more about lightning than they do about road traffic accidents, that's when it starts getting really silly because you can't compare the risks of two things that are not comparable. With that [incommensurability], the definition just starts getting a little bit insane. I have got

colleagues who look at the risks of outcomes of hip replacements using two different kinds of hip implant. That makes perfect sense because you have got the same kinds of risks, you have got the same kinds of benefits, and adverse events that have been happening. You can calculate the probabilities and compare them. But if we start looking at the relative probability of dying in a road traffic injury if you are a pedestrian, in a car, or in a plane, well why would you do that? And then to start making claims that the public aren't being rational, it starts getting a little bit unstable. Why did we just suddenly start thinking that that was a sensible thing to do?

Bob: Because you wouldn't ever have to choose between those things anyway?

Judy: Or at least not in terms of risk. You are not viewing those things in terms of risk. And to start adjudicating on what the public should be worrying about, that's not an area that science ought to be concerned with. Yes it should be concerned with whether this hip replacement or that hip replacement is more or less beneficial. There are real choices being made, and it's legitimate to adjudicate between them. But to start saying to the public, 'You should worry about getting an arthritic hip more than you should worry about dying in a plane crash' is just madness.

Bob: *What do you think of the Royal Society definition of risk? How do you view the impact and significance of the Royal Society (1992) Risk monograph?*

Judy: That's where you started with the definition. And it looks on the surface so objective. But, as you say [in this special issue series], every single part of that definition is just loaded with value judgements. Even an adverse event - well, surely, we can all assume what death is? - but that is still a value judgement. Every level, every little bit of that is loaded with assumptions about how we define the event, what we define as adverse, what the outcome is. You can't get on with your everyday practice if you are constantly stopping to unpack your concepts. But I think, as scientists, and that's my view of the Royal Society definition to come back to it, that's the problem of promulgating an apparently objective definition which can be nothing of the sort.

Bob: Do you have any thoughts about the impact and significance of the Royal Society monograph?

Judy: Actually it's interesting because, when you sent this I just had a quick look at it and it hasn't got a huge amount of web presence has it?

Bob: No

Judy: Has it sort of sunk? [Laughter.]

Bob: I think it probably has. But there was a certain amount of fuss about it at the time.

Judy: Oh there was! It was huge, and then there was coverage of fights breaking out afterwards and the 'dialogue of the deaf' between the natural and the social scientist. Somebody, very recently, in your interviews^{iv}, commented that we haven't moved on. There is still a dialogue of the deaf between the natural and social

scientists. And you just think, 'Why should there be a dialogue?'. I can't think why would there be, other than for the sake of a TV show or a punch-up or something because they are asking different questions.

I have a student who is doing a very interesting PhD project which is looking at the production of knowledge in an atmospheric pollution project. And one of the first things she came up with, she said that all those different disciplines, like epidemiologists and statisticians and modellers and air pollution experts, they all use uncertainty very differently, the statistical concept of uncertainty. And they do have their own methods. Statistics isn't stable across those different disciplines. There are different kinds of statistics that use different assumptions about models, depending on the kind of data you have got and the kind of maths that has grown up around that. So I think that as social scientists we're sometimes just a little bit naive about our positivist colleagues. And actually, it is a bit more muddy, and they have to do quite a lot of work in finding common ground. So if this Royal Society definition was supposed to at least be a starting point of agreement between natural sciences then it did fantastically well, I think. You know - forget the social scientists.

Bob: *How do you see the history of risk social science?*

Judy: Origins, middle, future – Niklas Luhmann(1993) has been not very influential in the English-speaking world, and I don't know whether that is because he's a bit unreadable, or whether it's only relatively recently been translated into English. It certainly wasn't around in the early 1990s, but I just wonder whether there is going to be a resurgence in a sort of systems approach, or whether, again, we are going to end up with a bit of a watered down version. I have seen people referencing Luhmann and saying, 'Oh, here's a systems approach', and then, actually, it isn't. It's just kind of focusing on interconnecting, and he was saying something slightly bigger than that. So maybe that comes into the English-speaking risk arena a bit more. I think it [risk social science] is going to continue just because it's kind of there in society.

And, as a jobbing sociologist, people will still come to me with, 'We need to do something on risk communication', or 'I have got this problem in my practice'. So it will throw up interesting research questions, but in terms of the future I'd be keen that we now ask those second order questions. Let's not just assume that there is a risk framing, but be a bit more careful to ask in what context is a risk framing the most legitimate or most dominant way to conceptualise what is going on, and to ask who uses it and with what consequences; and then to ask what are the different ways in which risk is being constituted in these different domains. So, ask those second order questions a bit more, rather than how do we understand risk, or how are they [risks] perceived, or whatever. I think to some extent we have done that. And even though I am not saying there aren't still questions to be asked, the interesting questions are now the second order questions. How is risk used as a strategy, and when, and with what effects, and what other strategies get used? To what extent in the middle ground does risk get used, not just as a strategy of governance at a global level, but as a strategy for managing, say, the interaction between doctors and their patients, and social workers and their clients? How, and who uses it as a strategy? What kind of rhetorical devices are used by patients, clients and service providers? What I want less of is the 'Young Man's PhD' grabbing

a meta-narrative of yet more over-arching typologies of risk studies. We have got enough of those, and we don't need any more of those unless you are planning your major contribution, in which case I will let you off!

Bob: *Do you think risk has become a key element of government policy?*

Judy: What's always struck me is the amount of emotion that has to go into making a claim for rationality. Some of the work I did on looking at how, for instance, evidence was used in what were then called Accident Alliances, multi-sector organisations that were about having a more rational approach to injury prevention (Green, 2000). And it struck me that whenever anyone wanted to make a claim for an evidence-based approach, it never worked in discussion, unless they could tie that to a very emotional appeal. And often it was an appeal from a clinician about treating children with head injuries, or it was an appeal about you've seen somebody with a broken skull. And then they would draw in the evidence. But, oddly, rational discourse does require a huge amount of emotion to make it a legitimate discourse. I'd be not necessarily just taking emotion seriously, but looking at the role it plays in affecting the legitimacy claims of all these various debates around risk would be very useful. I have never seen any evidence that professional and lay rationalities are any different in kind in any of the fields I have worked in.

It needs to be spoken for, the idea that evidence can coolly adjudicate between two courses of action. If you look in practice at how decisions are made, it never seems to be that way. Whether it ought to be or not is a separate question, and that's quite an important distinction in some of the work on risk. It ends up that we are never quite sure whether people are being normative, saying that, in an ideal world, this is how decisions about, I don't know, policy funding, **ought** to be made, or whether they are saying this is how they **are** made. I am not particularly interested in how things ought to be done. I'm agnostic on how best to do it. I don't see that as my job as a sociologist. And there are other people like Jack Dowie (1999), for instance, who is very much in that kind of normative tradition. He is not particularly interested in the messiness of how decisions are made. He is interested in making better decisions which is an admirable programme. I think it's doomed to failure. It relies on a touching faith in the redeemability of human cognition. But if you are interested in how things are made, then emotion gets pulled in to make rational decisions. And that's what's interesting about risk as an element of governmentality - how it becomes (or not) a legitimate framing.

Interview with Peter Taylor-Gooby

Bob: *How do you see your own contribution to risk social science?*

Peter: Goodness. Well, to be honest with you I always think of myself as an outsider in relation to risk and social science because my first degree is in philosophy. And then most of my work is in comparative social policy, and I've been interested in attitudes, and in the general themes of how people think about their needs and their vulnerabilities, but also how they create solidarities that enable them to act politically, and how that impinges on the state's legitimacy. And it's that that's really taken me into the area of risk. I think my involvement has really been two-fold. One is through various chapters of accidents, and really no more than that. I managed to get into the

position of directing large ESRC [Economic and Social Research Council] research programmes, Economic Beliefs and Behaviour in the nineties, and then Social Contexts and Responses to Risks in the two thousands, which brought together people from a number of disciplines. And I learnt a huge amount doing that, and that was a really great experience for me. So one area which I've been involved in is trying to get different disciplines to talk to each other. And the two things I found are, first, that social psychology plays a very useful role in enabling communication between economists and sociologists who often find it difficult to understand each other's language. And the other issue about those networks is that they have enabled people to discover that they can make progress in their own disciplines by drawing on things that they would not have come across otherwise, that are taking place in other disciplines.

I think the UK genuinely does have something to offer [with respect to interdisciplinarity]. One of the things we did in the SCARR [Social Contexts and Responses to Risk] network^v was try to sort of build up links overseas, particularly The International Sociological Association, the European Sociological Association. We had some links with China and so on. And what we found is that risk research does tend to be much more single discipline focussed in most of the countries that we visited and spent time at conferences in. I'm not sure that's true in The Netherlands which is a very interesting case. But certainly in East Asian countries risk research appears to be dominated by natural science approaches to risk, particularly in medicine. In Germany, my impression is that there are groups of psychologists working on risk, but the sociologists tend to operate very much in a sociological framework and not pay much attention to other disciplines. The US does have a very wide range of approaches. But there does seem to be a division between what you might broadly call the decision theorists and the sociologists there, and not much interplay between them. And I did feel that, in the UK, there is more genuine interdisciplinarity, and more openness between disciplines than we seemed to encounter elsewhere.

The other thing that I've been very interested in is this question of trying to bring together what you might call a political economy approach to risk sociology, that is to focus much more on material conditions and how they relate to, in the broadest sense, political actions on the part of people. So I've been very interested in the ideas of legitimacy and of trust, of how state services interpret risk and assume that people will behave in relation to that - vulnerability and risk, and how that feeds back into a formation of political groups. But I've been also interested in the political economy of Welfare States, the crisis that we're running into now, and the continuing problems, how they will create new divisions of risk, and where this will take us in the future. I do think there is a very real concern about the possibility of the expansion of the extreme right. But there are also more optimistic scenarios which look towards the creation of new solidarities in countries like the UK, and new possibilities for people to exert effective collective pressures to manage their own vulnerabilities.

Bob: *How do you understand the term 'risk'?*

Peter: It's a good question, and of course there are lots of different academic traditions which provide definitions. My own interest in risk has really been to do with vulnerability. As you know, my background is in social policy and the Welfare State.

So I'm interested in how people understand their vulnerability, and how they mobilise politically to get the state to provide services to meet their needs.

Bob: Would you see the risk language, and all the machinery around it, contributing to that or would you see it as being something a bit separate?

Peter: Yes it definitely contributed to that approach, and it contributed in two kinds of ways. One way that's been very important during the last twenty or so years has been the development of what one might see as rational actor approaches to management of the Welfare State. And these have been associated with notions of risk that really are to do with an actuarial evaluation of different risks in terms of probability multiplied by degree of severity. And these kinds of arguments have fed through into quite complex accounting systems which are designed to provide incentives to managers of services. And they also feed through into service-users, understood as rational consumers making choices. And this is something that has actually produced cost efficiencies in the Welfare State. But it has also, in my view, undermined the trust relationship between individuals and service providers which is a severe problem in the current context. So there's that sort of issue about risk.

Bob: *What do you think of the Royal Society definition of risk? How do you view the impact and significance of the Royal Society (1992) Risk monograph?*

Peter: That's a good question. I think it certainly had impact at the time, and it's something that people have started out from in thinking about risk. And I think it's sort of framed some of the directions in which people asked questions. As I understand it, the Royal Society monograph was generated because natural scientists were concerned about their effectiveness in communicating what they saw as serious risks to the mass public, politicians and policy makers. They saw that as a failure, and they wanted to understand why it was a failure. I think that was the big driving force.

Bob: So it was a kind of deficit model which says, "We know what the risks are, but we can't get it across"?

Peter: That was their starting point. And I think the monograph did succeed in shifting perceptions among natural scientists, so that now the Royal Society thinks in a much more sophisticated way about communication. It is still confident that it knows what risks are, and that the problem is really to make sure that other people are aware of them. But it does understand about the importance of engaging and involving people, and informing people, at a much earlier stage in the process. It does understand the importance of responding to the way in which people understand risks, so that it has become much more open to the sociology of risk. And you can see that in Royal Society discussions at present. You can also see it in government activities, such as trying to put together risk management and resilience programmes, a process which is being revised at present, and I had some involvement in that. And there you do go along to meetings where there are essentially natural scientists of various kinds who will discuss, you know, various scenarios of the impact of climate change, on different aspects of the UK economy and population centres, the possibility of seismic events, different kinds of industrial

catastrophes and so on, pandemics. And there will also be social scientists who have a lot to say about how people will respond.

And the interesting issue from the policymaker's point of view, what they tend to come to the social scientists for, is really to get a grip on what are the sort of limits to how far we can change how people behave. And they then often get involved in what strikes me as fairly trivial approaches to do with behavioural psychology^{vi}. But they also are certainly more open than they were thirty years ago to spending some time thinking about what sociology has to offer - and psychology. And I think this is a real advance because we have to accept that sociology is always fighting an uphill battle to get serious recognition by people who hold power. And all the attempts to create genuine public sociology have found things very difficult. But risk is a field in which more progress has been made than in most other fields, so I think there is real potential in the risk approach. I think it's very flexible.

Bob: *How do you see the history of risk social science [past/present and or future]?*

It's not only the issue that people assign values differently and in complex ways, which we're making considerable progress in understanding. It's also that they apply value differently. And there's an enormous amount of work which is being developed very rapidly at present which examines the way in which people make judgements and compare different levels of risk and uncertainty, and demonstrates that the process is not a simple rational process. And one of the things I'm interested in is the extent to which one can inject into that debate an awareness of the importance of social context and social roles.

I've recently been asked by Lloyds of London, the insurance market, to do a report on risk. And what was interesting, talking to the various people there, was that they dealt with risk every day. They were extremely well-versed in demography, econometrics, accounting theory and so on, and they had very complex ways of assessing risks and parcelling them out in order to generate profits. Most of the time they succeeded, but they were aware that there was a whole different dimension to understanding risk and that was a dimension that had been developed by sociologists and social psychologists pre-eminently. And that was why they came to me because they wanted that process explained to them. And I wrote what was, I think, a very simple basic literature review. And the interesting thing is, they found it very exciting.

Bob: Because it was new to them?

Peter: It was new to them in a formal sense. Their formal training background and the way they saw themselves behaving certainly paid no attention at all to the sociology of risk behaviour. But the particular thing that struck me about it is that if you look at the way the brokers actually behave - it's a very interesting exercise wandering around Lloyds and just talking to people about how they make judgements about risk. While they'll present risks in an actuarial language, it's clear that relationships and trust and judgement, experience, concerns about how the bulk of a large risk will appear to another broker, irrespective of the probability of the risk occurring, notions of dread events and so on, play a very large part in how the thing actually works. And that provides something of an explanation of how markets like

Lloyds of London are prone to panics. And they're prone to being caught out by exceptional risks. And we had very good example of that in the big crash after the Big Bang on the Stock Exchange.

It's always claimed by people like Kahneman and Tversky, and also people like Gintis and others, who pursue the methodology of games and examine how people deal with risk by constructing these very stylised interactions, it's always claimed that social variables can be completely controlled for. And there is, of course, the famous experiment - The Ultimatum Game^{vii} - was played in a large number of very different societies and produced very similar results (see Gintis *et al.* 2005 ch. 1 for details).

One thing that's interesting there, and that I've only ever seen one piece of work on (Loomes, 2006) is how, it's the extent to which cultural assumptions are carried within the definition of the game. There was a little bit of work we did in the SCARR Programme with Graham Loomes and Judith Mehta, just playing the game in a very naive kind of way, but also spending a lot of talking to the participants and having different kinds of people doing it, And they all tended to say, "Yes, well, you know, it's a game isn't it?". So I always wonder if this whole body of knowledge which is taken very seriously really needs to be examined properly, but to be examined by people who are not decision theorists. I always feel, and perhaps this is a bit flippant, that, when I read some of the discussions of risk, that I'm reading an account of the world written from the point of view of a white upper-middle-class male travelling in a business class seat in the Boeing Dreamliner, looking down on this world below, and describing it. And that isn't the reality of life for most people. And to think of Risk Society as a society of radical uncertainties is something that does provide opportunities. But we all know that opportunities and vulnerabilities are very distributed in a society.

One of the things I've been interested in is the way in which sociological ideas about risk, which cover a broad span but often focus very much on meanings and understandings, contrast with the ideas that are central to decision theory, to economics, and to more rational actor approaches to risk which focus very much on the issues of measuring in some objective sense, in inverted commas, where the severity of risk is measured in terms of probabilities. I've been very interested in the way in which it's possible to link those two approaches together, or to bridge between them. And one discipline that's been very important in that area is actually social psychology. And this possibility hasn't really been recognised in social science until comparatively recently. And I think there are real possibilities, and that it is really important for subjects like sociology to expand their whole area of influence by taking seriously this possibility for developing links [to social psychology].

Bob: Do you think that the Risk Society thesis is a good starting point for trying to understand how people view the world these days?

Peter: I'm not sure it's a good approach for most people. For some people, and for intellectuals who are in a position to be entirely reflective about every aspect of their life, it may be appropriate. But most people live within a habitus, a framework of lifestyle, values and assumptions, shared with a social group and reinforced through everyday practice and established relationships with other people (Bourdieu 1977). And it's that everyday nature of life that allows them to cope with what they might

realise was radical uncertainty if they had the time and the inclination to stop and think about it.

Bob: *Do you think risk has become a key feature of late modern society?*

Peter: Another way of looking at it is to inject a rather sort of tougher political economy into the approach, and to think about what's happening to class and all the other social divisions that cross-cut gender, ethnicity, age distributions, and where people happen to end up living on the planet. Guy Standing has come up with a very interesting idea (Standing, 2009) of the key social divisions as between the Elite, the masters of the universe, and then the Salariat, which is you and me, who provide services to them. And we feel reasonably secure in our lives, and there's bit of uncertainty around, but the important, rapidly-expanding group is what Standing calls the Precariat. These are people who are increasingly aware that, while many of their social relationships may be established, their employment, their incomes are precarious. And whether or not they gain marketable skills, whether they have established jobs or not, there's a sense in which they can't rely on sitting in that situation comfortably for a long period of time. And all sorts of other changes, not only globalisation but changes in labour processes that we've seen, and the cutting back of pensions, greater insecurities, and uncertainties in the housing market, all these things bear on people's material circumstances. And I suppose it's going back to social policy again. I want to inject a more material, and less focussed on the sociology of values and meanings, aspect to this idea of Risk Society.

We should not expect the traditional centres of class conflict, the trade union movement to be in a lead position in any possible political struggles. One simple reason for that [in the UK] is that the trade union movement is so heavily concentrated in the state sector. The levels of trade-union membership outside the state sector are 14%, whereas in the state sector they're 51% at present. And that means that the trade-union movement is not in a position at present to provide the leadership for any wider action. And clearly we haven't got to the situation quite yet where that kind of struggle is going to become important. We've got youth unemployment at about 21% in the UK. Compare that across Europe, and it's more than twice that in Greece, Spain nearly twice that, and so on. Even in Germany, it's getting to that kind of level. But perhaps, once we've been through another winter of this kind of Government [the UK Conservative-led Coalition], and people are beginning to realise what the stagnation in the housing market, plus the cuts in social housing and housing benefit, mean, and we're seeing real homelessness on the streets, and we're seeing the decline of public services in areas affecting most people in areas like transport, healthcare and education beginning to impinge on people's lives, then one can see some kind of collective interest developing, but I think it will have to develop its own new institutions.

And we've seen BNP [far-right British National Party] votes going up consistently at every election since Nick Griffin took over as leader, which I think was 1998 wasn't it? And there is the very rapid expansion of extreme right political parties in European countries with proportional representation elements in their electoral system, not only places like Austria, France, Germany, Hungary and the Ukraine, but also, and rather shockingly in Denmark, Sweden and Norway recently. And we've also seen the capacity of anti-immigration and anti-multiculturalist views to influence

the mainstream parties. All mainstream parties believe in stringent immigration controls. It's noticeable that the [UK] Conservative Party does not mention the word 'multiculturalism' in its 2010 manifesto, which is indicative of the internal struggles on that kind of issue. We've had Cameron's speech rejecting multiculturalism, made interestingly in Munich, the same city that Angela Merkel made a rather similar speech about eight months before. All the indications are that there may be a shift towards the extreme right on the part of people who understand their own lack of opportunities in terms of competition with immigrants and black and minority ethnic groups, rather than in terms of the oppression of global capitalism.

Bob: *Do you think risk has become a key element of government policy?*

Peter: Well areas like social care, there are all sorts of interesting developments going on at present, which actually derive from the rational actor model, but do allow a greater role for people to develop collective interests, to understand their role more broadly. And what I'm thinking about is what is sometimes referred to as co-production of services, so that the state is involved in some process of understanding and defining needs, but rather than providing services through some kind of competitive model, it simply gives the individual access to the budget. And that person can then make choices about how they as an individual understand their needs on what the money is spent. And they may well make choices that a rational professional would see as mistaken. But, nonetheless, they have the choice that they want, and they learn by their mistakes. And it's a system that actually does seem to be very popular among people who are using it in the various areas. It's a system that certainly needs to happen. It's a very strong finding from the research - opportunities for people to talk to what you might see as a counter-bureaucracy. There has to be some kind of agency they trust that will tell them roughly what's available, give them some kind of quality rating on all the different, you know, home care, meals, bathing or whatever services are available. And research has shown that there's a strong need for that kind of information, so that in areas where you can get the information you can make it work. An area where it spectacularly failed is the Financial Services Authority [FSA]^{viii}. Of course the Financial Services Authority has now been through various changes and now actually it's incorporated into, I think, straight into the Treasury, isn't it?

And we did some work on this in SCARR with Peter Lunt and others^{ix}, who originally took the line that, seeing as financial services were essentially markets, all you needed was well-informed consumers and some kind of system that made sure that the providers didn't actually lie to people and then the market would police itself; and that, as time went on, people would make the choices that suited themselves, and that this would generally push resources in the way of the most effective and most desirable provider. And one of the things they found is that that simply didn't work. The decisions that people were compelled to make were simply too complex, or too shrouded in uncertainty. And here we're thinking of decisions about how you manage your pension, or long term healthcare, long term disability insurance where knowing what your future needs are likely to be is extremely difficult. And in that area one can see how the FSA was forced to move to a much tougher regulatory stance at the time. And now, of course, it's moving towards a very strong regulatory stance. At least I hope it is.

NICE is a very good example [of attempted rational decision-making in health services] because the dream is to take these decisions outside politics, and to make them simple, rational matters. John Stuart Mills said something very similar some time ago, but that principle runs right across public services. And let's remember that the Welfare State counts for about two-thirds of state spending in the UK, so it is a very big deal. The example I would be interested in is particularly the spread of New Public Management (Flynn 2007), the system whereby state services are split up into separate agencies which, crucially, hold budgets, and act as competing providers in some kind of market arrangement, so that all the incentives for managers are to provide the service as cost-efficiently yet as attractively to service-users as possible. And service users behave very like market consumers in their arrangements to get good information and to guarantee quality and so on. And that kind of process developed really through a whole series of decisions. And they're bound up with the centralisation of power that we've seen in the UK governmental system, the ascendancy of the Prime Minister's Office, and the capacity to bring decisions closer together, the increased ascendancy of the Treasury, and the desire to have a rational process whereby you could control yet decentralise everything.

So, a system of a targets was developed under New Public Management where the managers are controlled by the competitive process. And that's something that is bound up with ideas about political legitimacy and political trust. And it's a notion of trust that relies on incentives being aligned effectively, that you believe that the service will provide you with the service you need because you know their incentives are set up in such a way that that's how they will serve their own interests of keeping going and getting resources in. And that notion of trust is certainly something which works in a sense. But it ignores completely the whole approach to trust which takes very seriously shared values, ideas of commitment, the belief that the service has some professional interests in actually meeting your needs as an individual, so that, at the margin, if you are too expensive for it to be rational to treat you, they'll still treat you if that's what they want to do.

Can I just leave you with a final thought? It's not generally understood, but if you look at the IMF [International Monetary Fund] website which projects state spending plans into the future, and that's a fairly unimpeachable source in this area, you will find that most European economies project that state spending will fall as they recover from the recession and the crisis, but typically revert to the previous trend level of spending. The UK has a very different projected pattern. State spending falls and continues to fall at roughly the same rate as it's falling in Ireland, and is projected to fall in Greece, if the current plans are put into practice, faster than the rate of fall in Portugal and Spain. And the particular striking thing about the UK trajectory is that the state spending as a proportion of the GDP actually falls below state spending in the US for the first time in recorded history around 2014, or 2015 if the Tea Party manage to push the US spending down a bit.

This trend is driven by a whole series of changes [in UK government policy] which really haven't bitten yet. And they're changes to do with cuts in state spending. And we know all about the cuts in benefits, in local authority spending, the 4% cut in the NHS [National Health Service] - it's not so widely known but it is the biggest cut that's ever taken place in NHS spending - and so on. But more important than that is the restructuring of the whole state system in the UK. And this Government is in

process of bringing in, or has already brought in, a restructuring of all cash benefits, pensions and disability provision of the Employment Service. It is currently pushing through a radical restructuring of the NHS. It can restructure education by ministerial decision. And a restructuring of local government is going ahead at present because local government simply can't cope with a 27% cut, unevenly spread and imposing much bigger cuts in deprived than in more comfortable areas (House of Commons, Library 2011). Local government therefore has to change, and effectively cut-back or privatise what it does. But we're moving towards a kind of system where the private sector plays a much larger role - it may even take over most of the NHS - and where state spending is much more precisely targeted, where it's time-limited, and it's centred on developing work incentives for people who receive benefits under conditions of high unemployment and job insecurity, it'll be a very different kind of environment and public provision in which people will live (Taylor-Gooby 2013).

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ⁱ The editorial 'Is it time for the sociology of health to abandon 'risk'?' referred to in the Introduction to this article (Green, 2009).

ⁱⁱ (Douglas and Wildavsky 1983)

ⁱⁱⁱ The Royal Society (1992, p.2) *Risk* monograph defined risk as 'the probability that a particular adverse event occurs during a stated period of time, or results from a particular challenge'.

^{iv} The interview with Nick Pigeon in this special issue series (Heyman and Brown, 2012).

^v The SCARR website, at <http://www.kent.ac.uk/scarr/>, contains over 100 downloadable papers and research report.

^{vi} See discussion of the work of Kahneman and Tversky and others later in the interview.

^{vii} The game is played between two players. One has resources and can offer any division they choose to the other. If the other does not accept, all resources are forfeited by both parties. But if they accept, each gets the resources as proposed. The assumption is that a rational actor would propose the smallest possible amount to the co-player and she would accept since that is better than nothing. In practice people will not accept below a threshold, indicating that choices are driven by values about reciprocity and respect for others as well as by rational individualism.

^{viii} As of 2012, for example, UK banks are having to pay billions of pounds in compensation to members of the public who are now deemed to have been mis-sold payment protection insurance (PPI).

^{ix} See Lunt and Livingstone (2007).