



# Emancipatory catastrophism: What does it mean to climate change and risk society?

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**Ulrich Beck**

Ludwig Maximilian University, Germany

## Abstract

The metamorphosis of the world is about the hidden emancipatory side effect of global risk. This article argues that the talk about bads produces ‘common goods’. As such, the argument goes beyond what has been at the heart of the world risk society theory so far: it is not about the negative side effects of goods but the positive side effects of bads. They are producing normative horizons of common goods. This is what the author defines as ‘emancipatory catastrophism’. Emancipatory catastrophism can be seen and analysed by using three conceptual lenses: first, the anticipation of global catastrophe violates sacred (unwritten) norms of human existence and civilization; second, thereby it causes an anthropological shock, and, third, a social catharsis.

## Keywords

Anthropological shock, emancipatory catastrophism, metamorphosis, social catharsis, world risk society

Climate change is one of the most salient issues that peoples and governments across the world are facing – but does it have the potential to alter the social and political order of the world? ‘Yes, it does’ is my answer, but in a very different way than we expect and imagine it. The scale of change is beyond our imagination. The idea that we are the masters of the universe has totally collapsed and has turned into its opposite. In the age of climate change, modernization is not about progress, or about apocalypse – this is a false alternative. Rather, it is about something ‘in-between’. We do not even have a word for

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## Corresponding author:

Ulrich Beck, Ludwig Maximilian University, Konradstr. 6, Munich, 80801, Germany.  
Email: u.beck@lmu.de

this; we need a new public and scientific vocabulary. I propose the notion of ‘*Verwandlung*’ – ‘metamorphosis of the world’.

All of the discussion about climate change up till now has been focused on whether it is really happening, and if it is, what can we do to stop or contain or solve it? This is because we know it is an extremely time-sensitive issue. What no one has seen is that the focus on solutions blinds us to the fact that climate change has already changed the world – our way of being in the world, our way of thinking about the world, and our way of imagining and doing politics. This change of the conditions and understandings of change I define as ‘metamorphosis’ (*Verwandlung*). Before I go into conceptual details and clarifications, here are a few illustrations of what I mean by this.<sup>1</sup>

First, climate change induces fundamentally changing landscapes of social class and inequality created through rising sea levels which draw new maps of the world where the key lines are not traditional boundaries between nation-states and social classes, but rather elevation above sea – a whole different way of conceptualizing the world and the ‘life’ chances, the chances of survival within it.

Second, only if we involve those who are affected in our decision-making processes will we be able to protect ourselves from the consequences of climate change. In this sense, and we can see it already today, global warming leads to a change of the central political paradigms. Climate change induces a basic sense of ethical and existential violation which creates all sorts of new developments – new norms, laws, markets, technologies, understandings of the nation and the state, and international and inter-urban cooperations.

Third, if we look at how the issue of climate change fits into the general perspective we have in politics and the social sciences, we can see the limitations of what I call ‘methodological nationalism’. We frame almost every issue, whether it relates to class, or politics, in the context of nation-states organized in the international sphere. However, when we look at the world from the perspective of climate change, this doesn’t fit at all.

Fourth, if we take the basic concept of global risk – in this case global climate risk – we find that there is a new power structure already imbedded within the logic of this concept. This is because when we talk about risk, we first of all have to relate it to decisions and decision-makers. We have to make a fundamental distinction between those who produce the risk and those who are affected by it. In the case of climate change these groups of people are completely different; they belong to different worlds. Those who are taking the decisions are not accountable from the perspective of those who are affected by the risks, and those who are affected have no real way of participating in the decision-making process. This is what I call organized irresponsibility.

So from the start, we have an imperialistic structure because the decision-making process and the consequences are attributed to completely different groups. We can only observe this when we step outside of a nation-state perspective and take a different view of the issue. I call this a ‘cosmopolitan perspective’, where the unit of research is a community of risk which includes what is excluded in the national perspective: that is, the decision-makers and the consequences of their decisions for others across space and time.

## Some conceptual clarifications: What does ‘metamorphosis of the world’ mean?

In order to conceptualize this, I introduce the distinction between the notion of social change and the notion of ‘metamorphosis of the world’. Social change allows us to turn towards the same, but does not allow us to understand that we are becoming different. The understanding that and how we are becoming different is what metamorphosis is about. This implies that social change is about the reproduction of the social and political order, while metamorphosis is about the transfiguration of the social and political order.

The focus on social change enables us to bound backwards and disables from looking forward to expecting the unexpected – ‘politics of possibility’.

Theorizing metamorphosis means: *history is back!* The notion of metamorphosis is an antidote to the ‘*presentism*’ of social and political theory and social scientific research.

Metamorphosis means there is a basic change globally, including a change in the frame of reference of change; metamorphosis is about epochal change of horizons.

Metamorphosis is more, and bigger than evolution. Evolution is ongoing steady change that is slow and nearly unrecognizable, and it has an aim, while metamorphosis does not.

Metamorphosis is reproduced without fanfare. It is a side effect of everyday practices on all levels, institutions, organizations and everyday life.

Metamorphosis is not revolution, which is imposed through the likes of doctrine, ideology, military and violence. It is happening through everyday practices on all levels; and it is affecting everyone everywhere differently.

Metamorphosis is not, like revolution, from this to that. Revolution we can plot. It is pointed, exploding at a specific time and at a specific place for specific reasons. Metamorphosis, again, is not. Revolution follows the ‘either-or logic’. It tends to bring up opposition to bringing back what has been there before (even if that might not be successful). Metamorphosis follows the logic of ‘and’. It is both – it has been there *and* it is new. Its power is the power of side effects.

In the case of global risks, side effects are so dangerous that everyone has to adopt survival strategies (not in military sense) – the imperative of survival of humanity. Some social and political theorists are trying to capture the coming future with old concepts. They use old lines of demarcations (‘friend and foe’) to put boundaries between earnest and worthy on the one side and those disingenuous and dangerous on the other side. Using those distinctions to understand the conflict dynamic of climate politics is actually not helpful. Those who can be labelled ‘foes’ as, for example, industries, are actually ‘both-and’. They are producing side effects and thereby push the metamorphosis they are trying to hold back.

With metamorphosis there is the problem of naming: experiencing that which we do not have the word for, the processes we observe, reflects that reality is still emerging. Looking at it this way, it seems to be somehow adequate: we can identify the process but are unable to fully define the word. We do not know what term is appropriate. Assuming that we already have the right word actually would contradict the theory of emerging metamorphosis.

Metamorphosis is very much open. Metamorphosis leaves wide gaps of not-knowing. Something is changing basically (the frame of reference in reality and in framing reality), but this leaves wide gaps of not knowing.

Revolution is doctrinal: this has to happen! Metamorphosis is not. It is not affected by power, coercion, agency, ideology, or democracy. It is about people and institutions that get involved in the change of certainties and how they get through it. Everyone is exposed, so nobody is exposed. Metamorphosis is *happening* – to everyone and therefore not recognized as important or not recognized at all.

This is what I call metamorphosis (*Verwandlung*). There is a double process unfolding. First, there is the process of modernization, which is about progress. It is targeted at innovation and the production and distribution of goods. Second, there is the process of the production and the distribution of bads. Both processes unfold and push in opposite directions. Yet, they are interlocked. This interlinkage is not produced through the failure of the process of modernization or through crises but through its very success. The more successful it is, the more bads are produced. The more the production of bads is overlooked and dismissed as collateral damage of the process of modernization, the greater and more powerful the bads become.

It is only when the observer's perspective brings both processes together that new possibilities of action open up. The focus on only one of these two interlocked processes makes it impossible to see the 'newness' of the world, the metamorphosis of the world. This is because the metamorphosis of the world is exactly the synthesis of these two processes and the realization of it through the observer. Hence, a theory and an analytical practice of metamorphosis brings both processes centre stage and looks at their interplay. The synthesis brings out a new diagnostic theory and concepts, such as 'global risk' (in opposition to 'normal risk'), 'cosmopolitization' (in opposition to 'cosmopolitanism'), 'risk class' and 'risk nations', 'emancipatory catastrophism', 'digital risk', 'suicidal capitalism', 'relations of definition', 'cosmopolitan communities of global risk' and 'global risk generations'. This enables a completely new view of the world. In fact, it enables the understanding of the DNA of the world in that the interlocked double process can be imagined as a sociological equivalent to the double helix (Beck, 2015).

Metamorphosis is not social change, not evolution, not revolution, not crisis, not war. It is a mode of changing the mode of change. It signifies the age of side effects. It challenges the way of being in the world, thinking about the world and imagining and doing politics. And it calls for a scientific revolution (as Thomas Kuhn understands it) – from 'methodological nationalism' to 'methodological cosmopolitanism'. I have four theses:

*First thesis:* There are hidden emancipatory side effects of global risk.

*Second thesis:* A case study on Hurricane Katrina shows how normative horizons of global justice are being globalized.

*Third thesis:* Global risks produce compasses for the 21st-century world.

*Fourth thesis:* Global risks enforce a categorical metamorphosis of generation.

## Hidden emancipatory side effects of global risk

In this article I want to focus on one central mode or figure of metamorphosis: the hidden emancipatory side effects of global risk. Global risk is about the co-production and co-distribution of goods and bads (cf. Han, 2014; Han and Shim, 2010). In this article I go an important step further. I argue that the talk about bads produces 'common goods'. As such, the argument goes beyond what has been at the heart of the world risk society

theory so far: it is not about the negative side effects of goods but the positive side effects of bads. They are producing normative horizons of common goods.

Global risk may be destructive nationally ('working institutions fail') but creating opportunities globally ('new normative horizons' and the emergence of unwritten but imperative norms).

The expectation of global climate risk to humanity has (despite all the pessimism on the failure of adequate political answers and action) already invested the postmodern everything-goes with a new – if not utopian, then dystopian – meaning. Global risks – like climate change or the financial crisis – have given us new orientations, new compasses for the 21st-century world. We recognize that we have to attach central importance to the dangers that we have repressed as side effects until now. Climate change is not climate change; it is at once much more and something very different. It is a reformation of modes of thought, of lifestyles and consumer habits, of law, economy, science and politics. Whether presenting climate change as a transformation of human authority over nature; as an issue of climate (in)justice; as concerning the rights of future generations; or as a matter of international politics and international trade; or even as an indication of suicidal capitalism – all this is about the dramatic power of the unintended, unseen emancipatory side effects of global risk, which already have altered our being in the world, seeing the world and imagining and doing politics.

Global climate risk could usher in a rebirth of modernity. Haven't climate scientists set in train a transformation of capitalism that is self-destructive and destructive of nature, a transformation that was long overdue, but seemed impossible before? Isn't the agility with which the Chinese are promoting the boom in the trade in renewable energy sources an example of the co-evolution of the opponent already today? Thus western climate sceptics in the US, Europe and Asia are violating their own economic interests. Perhaps it is reasonable to take all nuclear power plants off line regardless of whether they are safer than the Japanese or not – this solves the problem of the final disposal of the spent fuel rods in any case. And either way, the renewal of solar and wind energy is a meaningful renewal of modernity.

Perhaps the topos of climate change is even a form of mobilization thus far unknown in human history that breaks open a sanctimonious national autistic world with the vision of the impending apocalypse. The global climate risk, far from an apocalyptic catastrophe, is instead – so far! – a kind of 'emancipatory catastrophe'.

The transformation of the world produced by the emancipatory side effects of the bads of world risk society can be seen, and analysed, by using three conceptual lenses: first, the anticipation of global catastrophe violates *sacred* (unwritten) norms of human existence and civilization; second, thereby it causes an *anthropological shock*, and, third, a *social catharsis*. This is how new normative horizons as frames of perception and action emerge (for a similar topic, a different model and opposite consequences see Jeffrey Alexander 2012).

## **Hurricane Katrina: How the normative horizons of climate justice are being globalized**

Anthropological shocks occur when many populations feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks on their consciousness, will mark their

memories forever and will change their future in fundamental and irrevocable ways. Anthropological shocks provide a new way of being in the world, seeing the world and doing politics. The anthropological shock of Hurricane Katrina is a useful example.

The hidden emancipatory side effects of Hurricane Katrina unfolded when it hit the coast of Louisiana on 29 August 2005. This is manifest in how the literature reflected on the event. Analysing the discourses around Katrina makes apparent a paradigm shift, in fact, a social catharsis, in that two formerly separate discourses came together: ecological challenges and the history of racism in the US.

A prime example is Quincy Thomas Stewart and Rashawn Ray (2007: 39) who use the metaphor of '*race flood*'. They argue 'that this natural disaster mirrors a social catastrophe that has affected the lives of Americans since the colonial era – the *race flood*. Just as the hurricane and ensuing flood penetrated the lives of New Orleans's residences, the concept of race has penetrated America's social institutions such that racial classification shapes the breadth of an individual's social interactions or perspectives and life chances. Race, in many ways, is one of the primary lenses through which Americans view, experience and appraise their social world.'

Until Hurricane Katrina, flooding had not been positioned as an issue of environmental justice – despite the existence of a substantial body of research documenting inequalities and vulnerability to flooding. It took the reflection both in publics and in academia on the devastating but highly uneven 'racial floods' of Hurricane Katrina to bring back the strong 'Anthropocene' of slavery, institutionalized racism, and connect it to vulnerability and floods. This kind of connecting the disconnected is the way the cosmopolitan side effects of bads are real, e.g. the invisibility of side effects is made visible. And this way, the substantial community of environmental justice academics and activists in the US started to turn their attention to risk that was seemingly 'natural' but has to be uncovered as essentially social and political. They had to bridge the difference between the natural and the social science and humanities. And again this is the way the social birth and career of the cosmopolitan perspective and horizons of justice can be empirically located and studied: a small but growing body of literature is now framing flood risks in the US and elsewhere as a question of environmental inequality *and* injustice (e.g. Bullard and Wright, 2009; Dixon and Ramutsindela, 2006; Ueland and Warf, 2006; Walker and Burningham, 2011).

It was this social catharsis that led to the emergence of a new normative horizon, namely the global justice frame, i.e. produced a common good as a side effect of bads. Katrina made it clear that climate catastrophe and racial inequality are closely interlinked. This made obvious the inseparable connection between climate change and global social justice. The traumatic experience produces a process of reflection in which things, which had not been thought of as being connected, are now connected – flooding of cities with racial inequality with questions of global justice. This is what I call 'social catharsis'.

The social catharsis, however, must not be misunderstood as something that automatically happens and is inherently caused by the event as such. It is the product of carrier groups engaging successfully in 'cultural work', in 'meaning-work', in transformative work of activists in witnessing the (distant) suffering of others (Kurasawa, 2004, 2007).

This meaning-work was to provide answers to the following questions: what is the nature of the threat? Is it death, health, economic breakdown, moral devastation? Who are the victims? How do they relate to the publics involved? Who is made responsible? And last but not least, what should the global community and individuals, communities and organizations, wherever they are now, be doing in response?

The cultured work is not simply about the representation of the events as such but about the symbolic environment, from within and against which the event gets perceived and is perceivable to begin with, importantly, the imaginations of catastrophe, e.g. as presented in climate publics or in practices of climate aesthetics (intertwined with scientific and mass media events) and in popular culture (comics, blockbuster movies, sci-fi novels, etc.). 'Art practices are actively attending to this "risky" cosmopolitization, giving aesthetics voice and "visuality" to unfolding climate issues and concerns and hereby practicing ... an aesthetics of cosmopolitization!' (Thorsen, 2014).<sup>2</sup>

An example of 'transformative work' is provided by Gordon Walker (2009: 614) in his study of how the environmental justice frame has extended and diversified across topics, contexts and continents. 'The spatial-cultural and institutional context in which justice claims are being made and justice discourses are being articulated are globalising far beyond the USA to include, for example, South Africa (London, 2003), Taiwan (Fan, 2006), Australia (Hillman, 2006), the UK (Agyeman and Evans, 2004), New Zealand (Pearce et al., 2006), Sweden (Chaix et al., 2006), Israel (Omer and Or, 2005) and global contexts (Adeola 2000; Newell 2005).'

As Sang-Jin Han argues, 'the situation in East Asia differs significantly. Transitional justice, or the question of how to come to terms with the past, still remains unresolved. Japan is an obvious case, but the issue is actually broader and deeper. Systematic violation of human rights, ideological hostility, and excessive preoccupation with nationalism are still present in East Asia. Therefore, the first question that we need to investigate regarding second modern transformation is whether or not the prototypical and self-destructive tendency of modernity, deeply anchored in history through the systemic use of violence, instrumental pursuit of wealth and power, and aggressive nationalist drives, can be kept under control and, if so, how, and where the safeguard should come from' (Han, 2014).

## Compass for the 21st century

The *Verwandlung* or metamorphosis of the world is not something which is intentional, goal orientated, part and result of an ideological struggle (between parties or nations). It is – as I have tried to show with the case study on Hurricane Katrina – proceeding latently, behind the mind-walls of unintended side effects, which are being constructed as 'natural' and 'self-evident' by (national and international) law and social scientific knowledge production.

But this is only part of the story. The other part of the story is the anthropological shock of catastrophe creates a 'cosmopolitan moment'.<sup>3</sup> In this moment of catharsis the mind-walls of institutionally constructed side effects are breaking down and we can empirically study the cultural fact of how cosmopolitan horizons are emerging and being globalized.

I did not argue in terms of a philosophical-normative, European-centred cosmopolitanism. I did argue in terms that climate change *empirically* involves a basic sense of existential and ethical violation of the sacred, which depends on normative traditions in East Asia, Europe, Africa, the US, etc. creating the potential for all sorts of normative expectations and developments – laws, technologies, urban changes, international, inter-city negotiations and so on. This is the power of *Verwandlung* towards a cosmopolitan horizon of normative expectations – without linear political answers. This is the critical standpoint (for social and political actors and social scientific observers).

This critical standpoint has to be clarified. It is empirical and normative at the same time. But the normativity of this critical standpoint is very specific. It is about the power of ‘value relations’ (*Wertbeziehungen* as Max Weber called them). They don’t have to be confused with value judgements using value-loaded terms, sentences and explicit moral languages. They are empirical in the sense that their reality can be studied from an observer perspective in the frame of time-diagnostic theorizing.

The discourse on climate justice has uncovered a number of hurdles – sometimes hurdles of a theoretically troubling kind. One example is that issues of climate justice include the excluded non-living generations, who are going to suffer most. Therefore the problem arises: how to address and account norms of justice to subjects who do not live yet and therefore have no voice of their own in decision-making which affects their conditions of life dramatically? Often those unjustly injured by climate change risk cannot complain to anyone in particular; they cannot demand as their due any specific action; they can merely ‘howl at the moon’. This, in fact, makes it easy to apply the existing national law system, which does exclude the excluded.

At the same time a vision for climate justice sooner or later has to recognize the persistence of colonial historical patterns and the dense intimacy of their linkages and dynamics with law’s constitution of both its ‘subject’ (the legal actor) and ‘the environment’. The problem of climate justice discovers links between the colonial foundations of international law and the philosophical foundations of the western juridical imaginary. The consequence is that what empirically and therefore normatively is at stake here is a mode of violation aimed at the living order itself.

But at the same time we have to be careful not to confuse the difference between ‘*dependency theory*’ and ‘*cosmopolitization theory*’: problematizing climate injustice by pointing at those individuals, communities and nations who have been on the wrong side of colonial history, which have suffered and continue to suffer, is in itself an indication that cosmopolitization enforced by global climate risk creates a normative horizon and reflexivity about exactly that fact. More than that, it creates (again as a fact) the expectation (sometimes even the conviction) that a reformation of institutions (economy, law, politics) is now urgent, morally imperative and politically possible – even if it fails at conferences and in politics.

I have tried to show that on the basis of the empirical globalization of this critical standpoint, we are able to criticize what one can call the technocratic national (and transnational) domestication of climate change, the post-political consensus around ‘green economy’, technological innovations, etc. This is where things become a matter of political economy, and from a cosmopolitan perspective intrinsically connected to climate change we can include and mobilize the new global geographies, which do not respect



the post-political European ‘consensus’ in any way. This is also a key point in terms of the metamorphosis of international power relations.

*Verwandlung* or metamorphosis then also means that the past is re-problematized through the imagination of a threatening future. Norms and imperatives that guided decisions in the past are re-evaluated and questioned through the imagination of a threatening future. From that follow alternative ideas for capitalism, law, consumerism, science (e.g. the IPCC), etc.

It even includes a self-critical approach to everyday norm-creation in the mode of dogmatism. In the technocratic iron cage of environmental politics, carbon emissions are becoming the measure of all things. How much carbon does an electric as opposed to a manual toothbrush produce? In the Christian conception of salvation, milk and honey flow in paradise; on earth, however, milk is supposed to lead straight to environmental death. The ‘climate killer’ cow produces a couple of hundred litres of methane gas per day, the equivalent of almost a kilogram of carbon per litre of milk. From now on, even divorce is answerable not only before God but also before the environment. Why? Married households are more ecologically sound than single households.

Seen this way, climate change risk is far more than a problem of measures of carbon dioxide and the production of pollution. It does not even only signal a crisis of human self-understanding. More than that, global climate risk creates new ways of being, looking, hearing and acting in the world – highly conflictual and ambivalent, open-ended, without any foreseeable outcome.

As a result, a compass for the 21st century arises. This compass is different from the postmodern ‘everything goes’ and different from false universalism.

This is a new variant of critical theory, which does not set the normative horizon itself but takes it from empirical analyses. Hence, it is an empirical analysis of the normative horizon of the self-critical world risk society.

## Metamorphosis of generation

Are there global risk generations? How does the metamorphosis of the world manifest itself in the break between generations? Does the being in the world, seeing the world, and imagining and doing politics differ between social generations? Does the metamorphosis of the world necessitate a different concept of generation? Is there a different self-understanding of generations confronted with the present future of global risk?

Grounded in a discussion of the problem of generation as developed by Karl Mannheim (and Pinder), I ask, how does the historical dynamic sociology that Mannheim imagines relate to the idea of the cosmopolitan turn in social science?

Karl Mannheim is interested in the transformation of the modes of social stratification. He focuses on generations and stresses the importance of generations in contrast to classes. What is specific about his understanding of generation is that he develops it from within a historical sociology of time, i.e. what he calls ‘dynamic sociology’. Following the theoretical perspective that I developed in my Seoul lecture, Mannheim can be interpreted as follows. He makes a double move. First, we can see that he talks about the metamorphosis of social stratification and captures this in the categorical metamorphosis of the concept of class to the concept of generation. Second, with that Mannheim makes

the move from a theory of the reproduction of social and political order (class) towards a theory of transformation of it (generation). This is apparent in his strategy of looking for the movement, in the sense of flow and dynamic, of sociological concepts as well as social knowledge and institutions in empirical reality.

Mannheim develops a sociology of historical time that stands beyond the ideas of linearity and chronology. At the heart of his thinking is the idea of a coexistence of what could be called 'time worlds'. This means that contemporaries do not live in the 'same time'. There is no homogeneous simultaneity.

In this context, Karl Mannheim picks up art historian Pinder's idea of '*Ungleichzeitigkeit des Gleichzeitigen*' ('non-temporality of contemporaneous') – that is, a basic idea of metamorphosis. Pinder argues against the idea of art and style epochs. He suggests that at every moment in time, art historical epochs and styles exist simultaneously and next to each other. They are not to be misunderstood as distinct and closed historical units. With that Pinder counters the idea of time and history according to which one epoch is replaced by another, following the logic of evolution or progress. As an art historian he develops a neo-romantic vision of metamorphosis. He introduces the notion of 'entelechy', which for him is a mythical idea according to which life and death can be overcome by artistic creativity.

Mannheim (1952 [1928]) picks up certain elements in Pinder's (1926) thinking and critically uses them for his sociological theory of generation. He argues that it is not positivist facts that constitute generations but patterns of social change, or, in the language of this article, patterns of the metamorphosis of the world. In fact, for Mannheim the concept of generation is a synonym for change and metamorphosis. In Mannheim's view then there is a significant variation and fragmentation of generations, which implies the interplay and confrontation between different horizons and worldviews, as seen in Occupy, the Arab Spring, digital generations, generations of jobless South Europeans and 'home-grown' fundamentalists.

Mannheim argues that generations can be understood with the help of three concepts (Kettler, Loader and Meja, 2008: 27).

The first is the concept of '*generational locations*'. This concept implies that if one wants to understand generations, one first needs to locate them. Generations need to be understood against their actual location in historical time, which cannot be easily generalized.

The second concept is '*generational association*'. This concept implies that members of a generation share a common fate which shapes them and accounts for their shared sensibilities.

The third concept is '*actual generation*'. It implies that members of a generation share a common sense of problem. This is what Mannheim, with and in contrast to Pinter, calls 'entelechy'. Mannheim stresses that a common sense of problem does not imply and equal a common response. This is exactly because of the different generational locations and associations. The concept further implies that members of a generation are social actors. Their unity arises from their action. In this sense generations are political. Their transformative power is grounded in the utopia that they hold and share against resistance.

What is fascinating about Mannheim's theory of generation is that he understands generations as dynamic figurations which produce and reproduce themselves in action.

His idea of generation is based on the assumption that there is a common sense of problem. In the widest sense he assumes a common historical rationality. This is my point: in the cosmopolitan turn the common sense of problem, the historical rationality, is constituted and transformed by global risk.

Mannheim talked about utopia as a transformative force for generations. The difference is that global risk is dystopian vision, which, however, has a significant power of mobilization because it is about the existence of humanity. As discussed earlier, global risk has unintended side effects beyond ideologies and political programmes. The key to the ideas of global risk is that bads produce normative horizons of common goods.

This means that the idea of fragmentation of generation that Mannheim suggests needs to be radicalized. Global risks are about cosmopolitization. As discussed earlier, cosmopolitization means that the contrasts and antagonisms of the world cannot be externalized. They collide on all levels of society and politics from institutions to the individual life. As such, the metamorphosis of generation means that this cosmopolitization, this collision of antagonisms, becomes an integral part of the '*Sinnhorizont*' ('horizon of meaning') of generations. The generational change is not only about a difference in political perspective, situations of social inequality, conflicts and crisis but about a difference in being in the world, seeing of the world, and imagining and doing politics.

However, what keeps the cosmopolitized fragmented generation together is the reflexivity and reflection produced by global risk. This reflexivity and reflection in the face of global risk, i.e. in the face of the existential threat to humanity, stands for what Mannheim calls 'entelechy'.

So what is the 'cosmopolitan turn' all about? How can we reinvent sociology for the 21st century? At the heart of the cosmopolitan turn of sociology is the challenge of how global risks and cosmopolitan situations enter into the changing of meanings in the basic concepts of sociology – for example, from class to risk-class, risk-nation, risk-region; from nation to cosmopolitanized nation; from generations to global risk generations; from catastrophe to emancipatory catastrophe; from rational capitalism to suicidal capitalism, etc. – a process of metamorphosis of the world, which is no longer embedded in paradigms of North and South, neoliberal notions of the 'West' and the 'rest', but simultaneously includes the excluded global others so far in unknown transborder relationships; they become objects of cosmopolitan theorizing (diagnostical, middle-range) in new organizational forms of cosmopolitan research. This is what 'we', my colleagues – Professor Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, Professor Anders Blok, Albert Gröber, Professor Daniel Levy, Dr Sabine Selchow, Professor Natan Sznajder, Line Marie Thorsen, Professor David Tyfield, Professor Ingrid Volkmer, Dr Zhifei Mao, and many others – and I are trying to practise and research in an ERC project on climate change.<sup>4</sup>

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## Notes

1. This article is a revised version of my public lecture at the 2014 Seoul Conference – *Climate Change and Risk Society: New Trends for Megacity Transformation* in Seoul, Korea, on 8

July 2014. In the following I extend the discussion in Beck and Grande (2010) and Beck et al. (2013).

2. See also Yui (2013) and Tien (2013).
3. For East Asia see Kyung-Sup (2010).
4. See [cosmostudies.com/](http://cosmostudies.com/)

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### Author biography

Ulrich Beck is a Professor of Sociology at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, and, since 2013, the Principal Investigator of the European Research Council (ERC) project: ‘Methodological Cosmopolitanism – In the Laboratory of Climate Change’. Since 1997 he has been the *British Journal of Sociology* Visiting Centennial Professor at the London School of Economics, and since 2011, a Professor at the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, Paris. He has received many international prizes and honours. He is author or editor of more than 45 books which have been translated into more than 35 languages.

### Résumé

La métamorphose du monde est induite par les effets émancipateurs et cachés du risque mondial. Cet article soutient que le débat sur les maux produit des « biens communs ». L’argument va au-delà de ce qui est au coeur de la théorie de la société mondiale du risque ; il ne s’agit pas des effets secondaires négatifs des biens, mais des effets secondaires positifs des maux. Ils produisent des horizons normatifs pour les biens communs. C’est ce que j’appelle le « catastrophisme émancipateur ».

Le catastrophisme émancipateur peut être vu et analysé en utilisant trois cadres conceptuels : premièrement, l’anticipation d’une catastrophe mondiale transgresse les normes tacites de l’existence humaine ; deuxièmement, il engendre un choc anthropologique et troisièmement une catharsis sociale.

### Mots-clés

Métamorphose, société du risque mondial, catastrophisme émancipateur, choc anthropologique, catharsis sociale

**Resumen**

La metamorfosis del mundo trata del oculto efecto secundario emancipatorio del riesgo global. Este trabajo sostiene que la charla sobre los males produce 'bienes comunes'. Como tal, el argumento va más allá de lo que ha estado en el corazón de la teoría de la sociedad del riesgo mundial hasta el momento: no se trata de los efectos secundarios negativos de los bienes, sino de los efectos secundarios positivos de males. Están produciendo horizontes normativos de los bienes comunes. Esto es lo que defino como 'catastrofismo emancipador'. El catastrofismo emancipador puede ser visto y analizado por el uso de tres lentes conceptuales: en primer lugar, la anticipación de la catástrofe global viola las normas sagradas (no escritas) de la existencia humana y la civilización; segundo, por lo tanto, se provoca un shock antropológico, y, en tercer lugar, una catarsis social.

**Palabras clave**

Metamorfosis, sociedad del riesgo mundial, catastrofismo emancipatorio, choque antropológico, catarsis sociales