



# Ethics of Risk and Uncertainty

**Joanna Różyńska, PhD**

Consultations: every Tue 13:30-15:00  
Room 8, Institute of Philosophy Building  
E-mail: jrozynska@gmail.com

## I – COURSE INFORMATION

### Course Overview

Risk and uncertainty touch most aspects of human life. Almost every decision we make has consequences that we cannot fully predict. The seminar explores ethical challenges raised by this fact. Its primary goal is to acquaint students with concepts of risk and uncertainty, problems risk and uncertainty pose for ethics (both ethical theories and moral decision-making), and methods and challenges in evaluating and managing risk and uncertainty in different domains of practical ethics, in particular ethics of biomedical research and ethics of new biotechnologies. Secondly, it is designed to help students develop analytical and argumentative skills necessary for identifying, examining and resolving ethical dilemmas brought about by risky or uncertain consequences of human actions and decisions. The course covers following topics: (1) risk, uncertainty, and ethics; (2) risk, uncertainty, and the ethics of biomedical research (3) precautionary principle and the ethics of biotechnological hazard.

### Requirements and Grading Policy

The final grade will be based on:

- (1) **Seminar participation** (attendance, familiarity with the assigned readings, activity) – **40%**
- (2) **Oral presentation** (presentation of a selected problem or reading material) – **30%**
- (3) **Seminar paper** (6-8 pages on a selected topic/paper/case/document) – **30%**

Attendance will be monitored on weekly basis. Two (2) absences are allowed per semester. Each class absence beyond the two allowed lowers the final grade by one full number grade (e.g. from 5 to 4, or from 4,5 to 3,5).

A '5' grade will require consistent insightful participation in seminar discussions, drawing upon readings and personal experiences, as well as excellent oral presentation and written works demonstrating students' mastery of the cases, terminology, precepts and principles discussed.

Final grades will be assigned on the following percentages:

100-90% – **5,0**; 89-85% – **4,5**; 84-75% – **4,0**; 74-70% – **3,5**; 69-60% – **3,0**; 59-0% – **2,0**

## II - TOPICS AND READINGS

# I. RISK, UNCERTAINTY, AND ETHICS

---

## 1. Introduction to the seminar.

*Introductory reading:*

- Hansson, S.O. (2009). An Agenda for the Ethics of Risk. In: *The Ethics of Technological Risk*, Eds. L. Asveld, S. Roeser. Earthscan, pp. 11-23.

## 2. Nature of Risk & Uncertainty

*Obligatory readings:*

- Cranor C. (2009). A Plea for a Rich Conception of Risks. In: *The Ethics of Technological Risk*, Eds. L. Asveld, S. Roeser. Earthscan, pp. 27-39.
- Hansson, S.O. (2013). *The Ethics of Risk. Ethical Analysis in an Uncertain World*. Palgrave Macmillan: Chapter 1: The Uncertainties We Face, pp. 7-20.

*Additional readings [for presenters]:*

- Hansson, S.O. (2010). Risk: Objective or Subjective, Facts or Values. *Journal of Risk Research* 13(2): 231-238.

🗣️ Oral presentation: *Definitions and nature of risk & uncertainty*, based upon obligatory and additional readings

## 3. Risk and Ethical Theories

*Obligatory readings:*

- Hansson, S.O. (2013). *The Ethics of Risk. Ethical Analysis in an Uncertain World*. Palgrave Macmillan: Chapter 2: Difficulties for Moral Theories, pp. 21-43.
- Hansson, S.O. (2013). *The Ethics of Risk. Ethical Analysis in an Uncertain World*. Palgrave Macmillan: Chapter 3: Back to Basics, pp.44-57.

🗣️🗣️ Oral presentations: [1] *Difficulties for Moral Theories*, close reading of Hansson's *The Ethics of Risk: Chapter 2*; AND/OR [2] *Back to Basics*, close reading of Hansson's *The Ethics of Risk: Chapter 3*.

*Further readings:* Brännmark, J., Sahlin, N-E. (2010). Ethical Theory and the Philosophy of Risk: First Thoughts, *Journal of Risk Research* 13(2): 149-161; Athanassoulis, N., Ross, A. (2010). A Virtue Ethical Account of Making Decisions about Risk. *Journal of Risk Research* 13(2): 217–230.

## 4. Risk and Hypothetical Retrospection

*Obligatory readings:*

- Hansson, S.O. (2013). *The Ethics of Risk. Ethical Analysis in an Uncertain World*. Palgrave Macmillan: Chapter 4: Reflecting on the Future, pp. 61-73.
- Hansson, S.O. (2013). *The Ethics of Risk. Ethical Analysis in an Uncertain World*. Palgrave Macmillan: Chapter 5: Thinking in Uncertain Terms, pp.74-93.

🗣️🗣️ Oral presentations: [1] *Reflecting on the Future*, close reading of Hansson's *The Ethics of Risk: Chapter 4*; AND/OR [2] *Thinking in Uncertain Terms*, close reading of Hansson's *The Ethics of Risk: Chapter 5*.

## 5. Ethics and Conflicts of Risk

*Obligatory readings:*

- Hansson, S.O. (2013). *The Ethics of Risk. Ethical Analysis in an Uncertain World*. Palgrave Macmillan: Chapter 6: Fair Exchanges of Risk, pp. 97-110.
- Hansson, S.O. (2013). *The Ethics of Risk. Ethical Analysis in an Uncertain World*. Palgrave Macmillan: Chapter 7: Moral Excuses under Scrutiny, pp. 111-126.

🗣️🗣️ Oral presentations: [1] *Fair Exchange of Risk*, close reading of Hansson's *The Ethics of Risk: Chapter 6*; AND/OR [2] *Moral Excuses under Scrutiny*, close reading of Hansson's *The Ethics of Risk: Chapter 7*.

Further readings: Hermansson H., Hansson S.O. (2007). A Three-Party Model Tool for Ethical Risk Analysis. *Risk Management* 9(3): 129-144.

## 6. Risk Perception and Evaluation: Rational Analysis or “Gut Feelings”

### Obligatory readings:

- Slovic, P., Finucane, M.L., Peters, E., MacGregor, D.G. (2004). Risk as Analysis and Risk as Feelings: Some Thoughts About Affect, Reason, Risk, and Rationality. *Risk Analysis* 24(2): 311-322.

### Additional readings [for presenters]:

- Roeser S (2009). The Relation between Cognition and Affect in Moral Judgements about Risks. In: *The Ethics of Technological Risk*, Eds. L. Asveld, S. Roeser. Earthscan, pp. 182-201.

🗣️ Oral presentation: *Role of Affect and Reason in Moral Judgements about Risks*, based upon obligatory and additional reading materials.

## 7. Risk Communication and Public Imagination

### Obligatory readings:

- Coeckelbergh M (2009). Risk and Public Imagination: Mediated Risk Perception as Imaginative Moral Judgement. In: *The Ethics of Technological Risk*, Eds. L. Asveld, S. Roeser. Earthscan, pp. 202-219.
- Hansson, S.O. (2004). Fallacies of Risk. *Journal of Risk Research* 7(3): 353-360.

### Additional readings [for presenters]:

- Kasperson R.E et al. (1988). The Social Amplification of Risk A Conceptual Framework. *Risk Analysis* 8(2). OR
- Hansson, S.O. (2005). Seven Myths of Risk. *Risk Management* 7(2): 7-17.

🗣️🗣️ Oral presentations: [1] *Fallacies and Myths of Risk*, based upon the obligatory and additional papers written by S.O. Hansson; AND/OR [2] *Risk and Public Imagination*, based upon the obligatory article by Coeckelbergh and the additional paper by Kasperson et al.

## II. RISK, UNCERTAINTY, AND ETHICS OF BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH

### 8. Balancing risks and potential benefits of biomedical research

#### Obligatory readings:

- Rid A, Wendler D. (2010). Risk-Benefit Assessment in Medical Research – Critical Review and Open Questions. *Law, Probability and Risk* 9: 151-77.

#### Additional readings [for presenters]:

- London, A.J. (2006). Reasonable Risks in Clinical Research: a Critique and a Proposal for the Integrative Approach. *Stat Med* 25: 2869-2885. OR
- Rajczi A. (2004). Making Risk-Benefit Assessment of Medical Research Protocols. *J Law Med Ethics* 32: 338-348.

🗣️🗣️ Oral presentations: [1] *London’s Integrative Approach and its critique*, based upon the obligatory paper and the additional text by London; AND/OR [2] *Rajczi’s Agreement Principle and its critique*, based upon the obligatory article and the additional paper by Rajczi.

### 9. Minimal risk standard

#### Obligatory readings:

- Kopelman LM. (2004). Minimal Risk as an International Ethical Standard in Research. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 29: [part] 351-78.

*Additional readings [for presenters]:*

- Freedman B, Fuks A, Weijer Ch. (1993). In Loco Parentis Minimal Risk as an Ethical Threshold for Research Upon Children. *Hastings Cent Rep* 23(2): 13–9.
- Wendler D. (2005). Protecting Subject Who Cannot Give Consent: Toward a Better Standard for “Minimal Risk”. *Hastings Center Report* 35: 37-43. OR
- Binik A. (2014). On the Minimal Risk Threshold in Research with Children. *The American Journal of Bioethics*. 14(9): 3–12.

🗣️🗣️ Oral presentations: [1] *Setting the minimal risk standard*, based upon the obligatory paper and the additional texts by Freedman et al. and Wendler; AND/OR [2] *Binik’s concept of minimal risk*, based upon the obligatory article and the additional paper by Binik.

## 10. Maximal risk threshold

*Obligatory readings:*

- Resnik, D.B. (2012). Limits on Risks for Healthy Volunteers in Biomedical Research. *Theor Med Bioeth* 33(2): 137-149.

*Additional readings [for presenters]:*

- Miller FG, Joffe S. (2009). Limits to Research Risks. *J Med Ethics* 35:445–9.
- Shaw D. (2014). The Right to Participate in High-Risk Research. *Lancet* 383: 1009–11.
- Różyńska J. (2015). On the Alleged Right to Participate in High-Risk Research. *Bioethics*: 1-10.

🗣️ Oral presentation: *Maximal risk threshold*, based upon obligatory and additional reading materials.

## III. PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE AND THE ETHICS OF BIOTECHNOLOGICAL HAZARD

---

### 11. Precautionary principle and its critics

*Obligatory readings:*

- Sandin, P. et al. (2002). Five Charges against the Precautionary Principle. *Journal of Risk Research* 5(4): 287-299.

*Additional readings [for presenters]:*

- Sandin, P. (2004). The Precautionary Principle and the Concept of Precaution. *Environmental Values* 13(4): 461-475.
- Munthe, Ch. (2011). *The Price of Precaution and the Ethics of Risk*. Springer Science+Business Media B.V.: Chapter 2: Dimentions of Preucation: 19-38.

🗣️ Oral presentation: *Precautionary principle*, based upon obligatory and additional reading materials.

### 12. Precaution and the Morality of Imposing Risks

*Obligatory readings:*

- Munthe, Ch. (2011). *The Price of Precaution and the Ethics of Risk*. Springer Science+Business Media B.V.: Chapter 5: The Morality of Imposing Risks: 85-130.

🗣️ Oral presentation: *Morality of Imposing Risks*, close reading of *The Price of Precaution...*, Chapter 5.

### 13. Precaution in Practice

*Obligatory readings:*

- Munthe, Ch. (2011). *The Price of Precaution and the Ethics of Risk*. Springer Science+Business Media B.V.: Chapter 6: Practical Applications: [part] 133-170.

🗣️ Oral presentation: *Morality of Imposing Risks*, close reading of *The Price of Precaution...*, Chapter 6.