



Human Dimensions Quarterly Newsletter

Culture, Learning and Risk

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The Conundrum of Being and Suicide

We struggle with suicide because of what it theorises about being. We are what we value and the trajectory of our values determines our sense of 'being' in the world. This is why mechanistic, determinist, materialist, behaviourist and reductionist views of the world fall short of explaining the nature of being. Each of these mechanistic worldviews supposes a model of 'being' in the world that is de-personal, de-humanising and object-focused. Such philosophies simply fall short when seeking to explain the nature of personhood. One cannot get to a holistic understanding of personhood without some sense of transcendence in understanding persons, which mechanistic worldviews don't provide. To really understand the nature of being one needs to engage in a metaphysical conversation with life and living.



In the *Myth of Sisyphus* Camus reflects on the will to live by tackling the big ontological question of existence. Ontology is the study of being and emerges out of the metaphysical school of philosophy. Camus suggests that the function of consciousness is not retrieval of truth but rather the higher-order synthesis of meaning (semiosis). Of course, the limitations of fallibility also mean that even if we were to find a sense of meaning in living we couldn't know it fully. Similarly, with Camus, we learn to live with the absurd, with faith and the unknown in order to live a life worth living. It is when one decides that life is not worth living that suicide seems like a good option. Camus states:

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest — whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories — comes afterwards.

He writes:

I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living. I see others paradoxically getting killed for the ideas or illusions that give them a reason for living (what is called a reason for living is also an excellent reason for dying). I therefore conclude that the meaning of life is the most urgent of questions.

A recent fascination has surfaced with the question of death, suicide and being with the interest in the *Blue Whale* suicide game and *13 Reasons Why* Netflix series. Both the game and series having 'gone viral' in recent times. You can read more on these two trends here:

Blue Whale

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4zi8t0-xsE&feature=youtu.be>
- <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/web-edits/blue-whale-suicide-challenge-fact-or-fiction-and-a-wake-up-call-4641835/>
- <http://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/news-life/blue-whale-suicide-game-linked-to-130-teen-deaths-is-just-tip-of-the-iceberg-in-the-worlds-suicide-capital/news-story/62a3f76de05d14db4100fd81a511714c>
- <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/blue-whale-challenge>

13 Reasons Why

- <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/tv/2017/05/05/13-reasons-why-netflix-suicide-depiction-backlash-explained/101210380/>

There are also some interesting commonalities between these two trends and the suicide ideation offered by the *Dumb Ways to Die* (DWTD) campaign. The DWTD campaign offers young people a range of animated characters who suicide and self harm in various ways as some strange counterintuitive

IN OTHER NEWS

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discourse in safety around trains. Of course, the hidden and unconscious message of this campaign endorses self-harm, just as the 13 Reasons Why series endorses the sensibility of suicide. Further see here:

Dumb Ways to Die

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJNR2EpS0jw>
- <https://safedesign.wordpress.com/2014/05/01/dumb-ways-to-die-definitely-did-not-work-2013-statistics/>
- <https://www.safetyrisk.net/dumb-ways-to-die-and-a-strange-sense-of-success/>
- <https://www.safetyrisk.net/dumb-ways-to-discourse-a-failed-approach-in-safety/>
- <https://www.safetyrisk.net/dumb-ways-to-measure-effectiveness/>

What is most distressing about the nature of suicide is its finality and uncontrollability. Humans are essentially moral and social agents in the world and when someone decides that life is not worth living, we are all confronted by fallibility, mortality, suffering, loss and the heavy questions of existence and being. Coupled with the confrontation of suicide is a collection of questions which have no answer, just as there are few answers to many metaphysical questions.

So what do we learn from tackling these tough questions of being and existence? We learn wisdom, empathy, trust, hope, faith, discernment and personhood. There is no value in being avoidant about the tough questions of life. One can choose not to attend a funeral but denial is not a recipe for real being. It is a recipe for a shriveled existence and the delusion of perfectionism.

If you want to better understand suicide or seek training in suicide training, then follow the links:

- <https://www.lifeline.org.au/about-lifeline/resources/download-our-resources>
- <https://www.lifeline.org.au/about-lifeline/media-centre/guidelines-for-safely-speaking-about-suicide>
- <http://www.livingisforeveryone.com.au/>
- <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/suicide-prevention>
- <http://suicidefirstaid.org.au/asist/>

SEEK Investigations Workshop - July

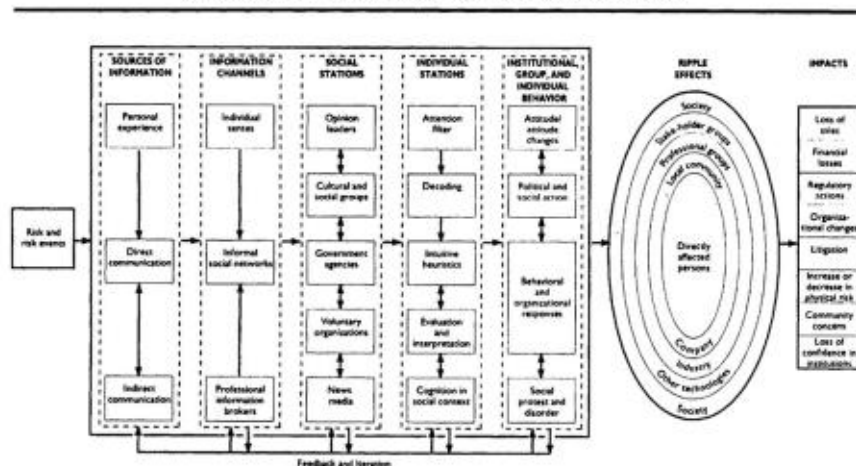


The SEEK Investigations training workshop is set for 5,6,7 July. If you wish to find out more about it or enroll, you can do so here:

- (<http://cllr.com.au/product/seek-the-social-psychology-of-event-investigations-unit-2/>)

The Social Amplification of Risk Workshop - October

FIGURE 1
SOCIAL AMPLIFICATION AND ATTENUATION OF RISK



All perceptions of risk are socially amplified and attenuated. This is so clearly demonstrated by the work of Pidgeon, Kasperson and Slovic in their book *The Social Amplification of Risk*. In the book the SARF model is introduced to help explain how risk is amplified or attenuated according to a host of social factors, heuristics and social biases. **The SARF model is illustrated above.**

The idea that risk perception is objective and simple does not match the evidence. The perception of risk, the feeling of risk (Slovic) and the unconscious amplifying or attenuating of risk are highly complex.

The idea that people simply 'chose to be unsafe' or that 'all accidents are preventable' is obliterated by all the research that shows just how much risk perception is amplified and attenuated socially. Some of the research is listed below:

- <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4b33/419863b96c270d5875af9bd5af3ce5dbb1e2.pdf>
- <https://elib.uni-stuttgart.de/bitstream/11682/7420/1/ren18.pdf>
- <https://www.kent.ac.uk/scarr/events/beijingpapers/Ji%20Bum%20Chungppr.pdf>
- <http://www.wmsym.org/archives/1989/V1/24.pdf>

If you wish to find out more about the Social Amplification of Risk Workshop or enroll, you can do so here: <http://cllr.com.au/product/social-amplification-risk-unit-8/>

Wicked Problems Workshop

If you are interested in learning more about wicked problems and the challenges for leadership you can request more information at: admin@humandymensions.com or Download an overview here:

http://www.nichethinking.net.au/Home_files/Wicked_Problems_1.pdf

The Program is presented in collaboration with Craig Ashhurst (currently competing his PhD in Wicked Problems at ANU). Craig is also Director of Studies at the **Centre for Leadership and Learning in Risk**.



Competition – Poster



Do you see the shape or the people? Name the three animal shapes to win a Social Psychology of Risk Body of Knowledge Poster (<https://safetyrisk.net/social-psychology-of-risk-body-of-knowledge/>). Submit your entry to admin@humandymensions.com with your postal address.

Taleb - Skin in the Game

Nassim Taleb is well known for his research on the morality of risk taking and argues that one should

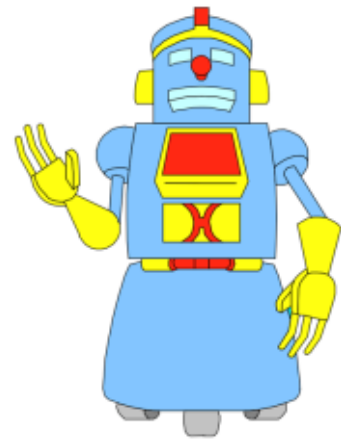
never set a risk for others without 'skin in the game'. His best books include *Black Swan* and *Anti-Fragility*. *Skin in the game* is a risk management code that best assists the management of risk. He cites illustrations from the ancient world where engineers had to camp under the bridges they built. Similarly, engineers should fly in helicopters they design and build.

The basic code is one of putting oneself at risk in the same way we put others at risk. For example, executives that proclaim 'safety first' but who never have to face the risks of the construction worker lack enough 'skin in the game' to make effective decisions about risk in their industry. In which case, the spin of 'safety first', according to Taleb can only be propaganda. The following links give some insight into Taleb and *Skin in the Game*.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Uc4DI-BF28>
- <https://medium.com/incerto/inequality-and-skin-in-the-game-d8f00bc0cb46>
- <https://medium.com/incerto/the-merchandising-of-virtue-b548762658f0>

Critical Thinking Challenge- Robots and Human Rights

Recently, there has been a strange circulation of propaganda associated with technology, algorithms and artificial intelligence. Such propaganda is spread as a collection of assertions coupled with wishing and projecting but very little substance or evidence for the assertions that are made. Run any critical thinking tool (eg. Toulmin's Model) across these articles and they are found wanting as nothing more than cheap speculation and spin. This is certainly the case with this article by George Dvorsky entitled 'When Will Robots Deserve Human Rights?' (https://www.gizmodo.com.au/2017/06/when-will-robots-deserve-human-rights/?utm_content=buffer2e1f0&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer) published on Jun 6, 2017.

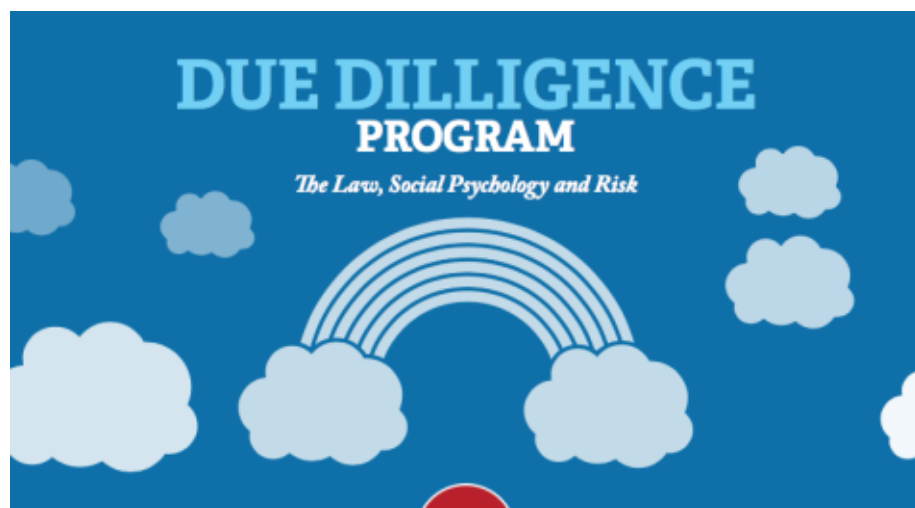


It is important that people be able to deconstruct and think critically about material that is spread across the Internet, much of it propaganda or 'fake news'. The idea that a manufactured machine of programmed algorithms could ever be defined as a person is a nonsense that only materialist determinist philosophy would even find entertaining. I certainly wouldn't be going to a mechanistic philosophy to tackle the ethical and metaphysical questions of being and existence.

The purpose of articles like this is to endeavour to normalise the acceptance of 'machine learning' without the skills or philosophy of learning to deconstruct such a text. The shifting of definition around the word 'person' in the article is nothing short of linguistic gymnastical nonsense. At no place in the article is personhood defined nor is intelligence defined. Then to talk of consciousness emerging in a machine is so fanciful when we can't define or explain it anyway. The jumps in this article are just amazing and so I have presented it in this newsletter as a test for critical thinking.

Deconstructing texts like this were part of the Master Class on Critical Thinking held recently in Canberra in June 2017 (<http://cclr.com.au/product/ithink-critical-thinking-dialectic-and-risk-unit-12/>). If you are interested in undertaking studies in Critical Thinking or would like the iThink Workshop inside your organisation please contact admin@cclr.com.au

Early Notice New Zealand Workshops 30,31 August 2017



Early notice for those across the ditch who have been asking for some time for us to run workshops in New Zealand particularly in light of the recent changes to WHS legislation.

We are pleased to announce that Greg Smith and I will be running workshops in New Zealand on 30 and 31 August 2017 on Due Diligence. An overview of the program can be viewed here:

<http://www.humandimensions.com/services-and-programs/due-dilligence/>

Attendees will receive a copy of Rob and Greg's book *Risky Conversations, The Law Social Psychology and Risk*.

You can see Greg and Rob in action on Due Diligence here: <https://vimeo.com/162493843>

If you wish to register for the mailing list for this event to be held in Dunedin and Queenstown then please email your details to [Chris Webb](mailto:Chris.Webb).

Contacts

You can contact here: admin@humandimensions.com

Join The Centre for Leadership and Learning in Risk facebook Group

For those who have undertaken studies with Dr Long (at least 2 units) you are eligible to join the facebook group, Centre for Leadership and Learning in Risk Group (<http://cllr.com.au>). It is a closed group.

or: go to the group and request membership

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/405049469878070/>

This is a group for more advanced thinking, high level research and dicussion about the Social Psychology of Risk. Just request membership by application to admin@cllr.com.au

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