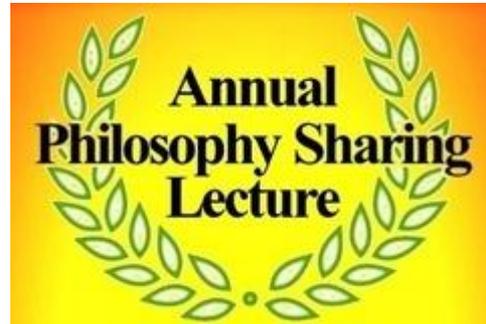


## Featured article

# The Risk of Banality

by Dr. Jean-Paul De Lucca



Ulrich Beck, who passed away earlier this year, is well known for his ideas on what he calls the 'risk society'. Globalisation, in his view, involves both opportunities and risks, ranging from climate change to the financial crisis. As it heightens the sense of risk, the globalisation of media and technology both leads to and defines modernity. In the risk society the 'self' increasingly reflects upon itself as an autonomous agent. For Hannah Arendt, who passed away forty years ago, 'the banality of evil' has its roots precisely in the individual's inability to think. In her book on the trial of Nazi officer Adolf Eichmann, Arendt provocatively claimed that although the Holocaust was an event of extraordinary evil, Eichmann himself was a relatively normal person who let himself be influenced by the tide of rhetoric and events, and who was not capable of recognising or distinguishing between good and evil. The apparent 'normality' of such ignorance led Arendt to rethink the idea of evil in terms of thoughtlessness and lack of judgement.

The title of the 2015 Philosophy Sharing Annual Lecture was inspired by the ideas of these two thinkers, Arendt and Beck. However, rather than focusing on them, I have woven together some aspects of their thought with a view of reflecting upon trends in contemporary forms of discourse (such as, for example, concerning science, art, culture, politics and religion) that tend to banalise or trivialize these activities and their meaning. This may sound paradoxical (which it may well be) in societies where individual liberty is affirmed, knowledge appears to be progressing and technology continues to evolve and develop. Beyond this paradox, however, banality should not be taken lightly – rather, it should be connected to the concept of evil that originates from the incapacity of individuals to reflect and think carefully. This is the main reason why banality should be perceived as a risk which one ought to identify, articulate and avoid.

It would have been easy to argue at an event such as this, the Annual Philosophy Sharing Lecture, that Philosophy is the antithesis of banality or, possibly, its antidote. However, Philosophy is not immune to these risks. Consequently, I have briefly surveyed the manner in which banality may manifest itself in various philosophical

traditions, and explored whether Philosophy (or at least some of the attitudes it encourages) may serve as a 'consolation' in offsetting the risk of banality.

*This abstract was submitted by  
Dr. Jean-Paul De Lucca  
following the Annual Philosophy Sharing Lecture (2015):  
'Ir-Riskju tal-Banalita'  
(Maltese for 'The Risk of Banality')  
given in Floriana, Malta, on the 14th of March 2015.*

*The views expressed in this article are those of the  
author and do not necessarily reflect the position  
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