

Zygmunt Bauman's Ethical Warnings in the Area of Economics. The Third Millennium's Perspective

Author: Rafał Matera

Source: 'Annales. Ethics in Economic Life' 2014, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 7-22

Published by Lodz University Press

Stable URL: http://www.annaesonline.uni.lodz.pl/archiwum/2014/2014_4_matera_7_22.pdf

Zygmunt Bauman's Ethical Warnings in the Area of Economics. The Third Millennium's Perspective

Autor: Rafał Matera

Artykuł opublikowany w „Annales. Etyka w życiu gospodarczym” 2014, vol. 17, nr 4, s. 7-22

Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego

Stable URL: http://www.annaesonline.uni.lodz.pl/archiwum/2014/2014_4_matera_7_22.pdf

© Copyright by Uniwersytet Łódzki, Łódź 2014

Used under authorization. All rights reserved.

Rafał Matera

University of Lodz, Institute of Economics
Department of the History of Economic Thought and Economic History
email: paramat@uni.lodz.pl

Zygmunt Bauman's Ethical Warnings in the Area of Economics. The Third Millennium's Perspective

Abstract

Zygmunt Bauman is not only a sociologist and philosopher reputable in the world of science, he is also a father figure for people interested in the phenomenon of globalization. Bauman investigates how current economic and political changes influence the lives of particular societies. It was important to underline that also economists can make use of Bauman's ideas but with a few reservations. That is why the following crucial areas were proposed relating to economic aspects: the meaning of consumptionism and wastage; global inequalities; the reasons and consequences of the global economic crisis, and some heterodox matters such as happiness, welfare, and well-being, all of which can be helpful in understanding the multidimensional globalization process.

Keywords: Zygmunt Bauman, consumptionism, inequalities, crisis, happiness, globalization

JEL Classification: B18, F63, I31

1. Presentation of the author

Zygmunt Bauman is not only a sociologist and philosopher renowned in the world of science, he is also an authority for those interested in the phenomenon of globalization. He is particularly inquisitive about how the modern economic and political changes influence the life of societies. By pulling a man out of the machine of

globalisation, he evinces sensitivity, which appeals to a great many opponents of the modern reality. For that reason, alter-globalists treat his works as the bible. His latest publications, written in great language, often in the form of essays, inspire next generations – including the youngest practitioners of science¹.

At present Bauman writes books in English. The sociologist, up to the year 1968, lectured at Warsaw University, however, as he was forced by the communist authorities to flee the country, he has been related to Leeds University all his scientific life. His output comprises around 50 books, including the most important ones such as (bestsellers most of the time): *Modernity and the Holocaust*; *Postmodernity and its Discontents*; *Globalization: the Human Consequences*; *Together, Apart*; *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*; *Liquid Modernity*; *Liquid Life*; *Liquid Fear*; *The Art of Life* or the recently published – and greatly personal work – *This is not a Diary*.

2. Modern angst

Trying to find the leading scientific trend in the newest compilations by Bauman, there is a visible focus on the ‘fears’ which have accompanied man since the beginning of civilization and which, however, have never been that greatly exposed and articulated in such a direct way. In the world of modernity and uncertain times in our ‘liquid’ life there are more and more threats and fears connected with them. He frequently tries to indicate how to prevent them and how to act in order not to feel the ‘wastes’ of postmodernity.

The sociologist tries to define what fear actually is. Among a number of various interpretations there is an interesting term which says that it is the uncertainty stemming from a lack of knowledge about a threat and what actions should be taken². We receive detailed information about what fears look like in the world of postmodernity – how they differ from previous epochs. Remarks by Bauman in the field are surprising: there are fears in every epoch but today they are permanent and an escape from them is doomed to failure. Among the three main types of fears there are those that pose a threat to our bodies and wealth, those which disrupt social order, and those which threaten our position in the world as well as our place in the social hierarchy³. Citing Jacques Attala, Bauman argues that today’s threats are like ice bergs: they take unawares, emerge in the least expected moment, generate panic attacks and are all-embracing – they affect almost every sphere of our life. They embrace a number of dimensions: financial (connected with the almost unlimited access to bank loans and the easiness of use of credit

¹ J. Smoleński, *Mój przewodnik Zygmunt Bauman*, „Gazeta Wyborcza” 2005, December 31st.

² Initially I used Polish translations of Bauman’s works, however, the quotations were taken directly from the original English publications. For the sake of reference, in the bibliography there are both Polish and English titles of the books. Z. Bauman, *Płynny lęk [Liquid Fear]*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 2008, p. 6.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

cards); technological (e.g. the millennium bug, new viruses attacking our computers); ecological (threats connected with global warming); medical (from the pandemic of bird/ swine/goat flu to the need for cyclical control of blood pressure, blood sugar levels and cholesterol); nuclear (greatly abstract for most people on earth, still emerging very often); terrorist (the issues of safety at airports) and finally social (the fear of collapse of law and order, especially in times of natural disasters)⁴. Bauman does not forget about the positive aspect of fear. It protects us against total destruction, imposing some sort of common sense in the insensible world. Paradoxically, at times it induces reasonable actions.

Among Bauman's fears and threats there often emerge economic threads and the globalization process which with both its causes and effects is inextricably linked with the functioning of the world economy. That is why it is worth attempting to confront the views of the renowned sociologist with the views of other researchers, including economists. Admittedly, Bauman does not profess to be an expert in the field of economics, still, at the same time he looks for advice 'to those who say that they are' and are treated as such⁵. What we need to add in the first place is that the collection of economists' views cited by Bauman is very selective and one-sided; it has strong ideological tones. Despite this, it is worth investigating his visions warning us against further modern threats. We cannot give in to each of his argumentations, yet we must not disregard his opinions that help to comprehend the times of global liquid modernity.

In the chapter a few significant spheres strongly connected with economic aspects that Bauman analyses have been singled out. We will in turn look closely at the modern importance of consumerism highlighting the issue of wastage; we will refer to the problem of inequality among societies; we will try and understand the causes and effects of the modern global financial crisis, while not evading the 'heterodox' threads such as happiness. For that reason an economist may easily derive something from Bauman's analyses, not so much obtaining another variable for the model, rather being obliged to look for counter arguments for the subjective interpretation of the economic environment in the third millennium.

3. The outcasts

Great concern about the fate of the modern global society, though overwhelmingly pessimistic, is presented by Bauman in the work *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*. He is interested in both commodity waste and human waste. No connection between the two is only ostensible. That is why next to the disregarded nations or social groups, asylum-seekers, immigrants, the unemployed or sufferers from depression, in the book there is 'regular rubbish', used products or information that nobody remembers. 'The revenge' of material waste manifests itself in the global ecological threat and indirectly in the changes in the attitude of societies

⁴ Ibidem, p. 25.

⁵ Z. Bauman, *To nie jest dziennik [This is not a Diary]*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 2012, p. 271.

to the goods flooding the markets. Bauman warns that our planet is filled to the brim, and further economic progress, mass production and permanent modernization will lead to the inundation of 'wasted humans'.

An extremely controversial thesis of Bauman is that it is economic progress and globalisation that generate the production of a greater and greater number of 'wasted humans'. When it comes to absolute numbers, it is undoubtedly an important remark, however, considering the percentage of people in the modern world that are useless and comparing that to the 19th and 20th centuries, it is impossible to measure. Even if we demonstrate that the level of unemployment was lower in previous times (and by no means that was a rule), we would then have to compare the working conditions of workers and managers. Is the stress accompanying us at present and resulting from the fear of losing a job greater than a century ago? It can by no means be proven even when making use of the expertise of a psychologist. The primary barrier in defending this thesis is the lack of proper statistical and comparative data in the analyses.

Bauman strives to convince the readers that the increase of social fears intensified especially at the moment of disintegration of the so-called welfare state which took care of fostering the well-being of its citizens. Regrettably, he did not indicate a great number of negative consequences of such a policy. Jerzy Holzer – a Polish historian – defending the conservative approach in times of Thatcherism drew attention to the fact that 'financial disaster or indebtedness burdening future generations would cause in the long-term acute losses in the tissue of public life. It is hard to acknowledge that the conservatives undermined the foundation of the welfare state'⁶. Bauman in turn pointed out that the key task of governments after the fall of the welfare state should be the creation of a new formula providing the authority of the state. Unfortunately, according to the sociologist, at present governments, supported by non-reflexive media, obsessively assure societies about the need for their security. People living in besieged fortresses do not necessarily feel safe, however, in the case of avoiding a terrorist attack, they convey their gratitude to the authorities who did not allow the tragedy to happen. As Bauman has it, contrary to the policy of security, economic issues were completely devoured by the market in which there is a constant insecurity, and even the best government in the most democratic country will not remedy that.

4. Remarks on the consumer society

Bauman concentrates on criticism of the modern consumer society. He presents a dramatic mechanism in which consumerism is a kind of escape from stress, forgetting about failures, and even – and it will sound dramatic – a substitute for love, friendship and communication (Bauman writes a lot about the crisis of mar-

⁶ J. Holzer, *Europa zimnej wojny*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Cracow 2012, p. 719.

riage and wonders why so many of them end in divorce⁷). Presenting the motives and characteristics of consumerism is by no means an original observation for an economist, as it was in the 19th century when Thorstein Veblen noticed similar behaviours in the American society. If we are to compare the two periods, however, there is a visible change in the number of participants of consumerism (its commonness) and a greater choice of new goods that potential participants have. It is also pointed out by Bauman when he writes that they are in a vicious circle. Through greater consumerism, people flood the world with a greater amount of waste. They themselves are reluctant to tidy up. The moment of hard and dirty work of utilisation is too disagreeable a task for them. They then have to turn to 'wasted humans'. With time, however, also this group unintentionally becomes open to the pleasures of consumer life. 'This is what consumerism is all about – and it certainly does not include the performance of dirty, gruelling, wearisome, or just unentertaining, "no-fun" jobs. With each successive triumph of consumerism, the need for rubbish collectors grows'⁸.

In his latest works Bauman is even more critical of consumer behaviours. He argued: 'And yet the invasion and annexation of the realm of morality by consumer markets has burdened consumption with additional functions it can perform only by pushing the levels of consumption even higher'⁹. The question arises whether consumerism may expand infinitely with the limited space of our planet? Is it possible to set limits of consumption growth only because of the threats of the outbreak of ecological disaster? Bauman has no doubts – he writes that this task seems impossible to realize and it is terrifying at the same time. Who is then to curb consumption? What government, what party would decide to include this issue in its programme, even in the name of saving the earth? As a result, he concludes that: '(...) the commodification of ethical responsibilities, those major building materials and tools of human togetherness, combine with the gradual yet relentless decay of all alternative, non-market ways of bringing it about, is a much more formidable obstacle to the containment and moderation of consuming appetites than the non-negotiable prerequisites of biological and social survival'¹⁰.

Bauman also remarks that modern consumerism does not refer to any needs. Goods have become props. The sociologist then draws the following conclusion: 'In the mature society of mature consumers, consumerism is a modality of life. It is not about the need to pocket, possess or use objects – but about the infinite act of purchasing and disposing. Consumerism focused on the very act of buying ceased to be dependent on the aim it serves. It is an aim in itself – a sufficient

⁷ An economist should get himself acquainted with the works of Polish scientists on the subject: J.J. Sztudynger, *Rodzinny kapitał społeczny a wzrost gospodarczy w Polsce*, "Ekonomista" 2009, No. 2, pp. 198-210; P. Baranowski, J.J. Sztudynger, *Rodzinny kapitał społeczny a wzrost gospodarczy – analiza dla Polski i 15 krajów Unii Europejskiej*, „Annales. Etyka w życiu gospodarczym/Annales. Ethics in Economic Life” 2011, vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 157-170. doi: 11089/1430.

⁸ Z. Bauman, *Życie na przemiał [Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts]*, Wydawnictwo Literackie Cracow 2004, p. 95.

⁹ Idem, *To nie jest...*, p. 194.

¹⁰ Ibidem, pp. 194-195.

aim'¹¹. This conclusion may paradoxically become a hope to reduce material waste. If transactions on the Internet are rendered all the time, and objects become more and more virtual (from debt securities and shares to music files, online games or even characters from these games) it is possible that there will be a significant shift of existence of physical waste into Internet spam (it does not imply that it will be easier to get rid of it, though, the physical space will not shrink that fast). While it is true that the amount of online waste increases at a geometric pace, it still seems that its utilization may be easier than disposing of piles of useless plastic, gum, or metal which have led to the ecological disaster of the planet.

5. People and data

Remarks connected to the problem of wastage also appear in Bauman's works when he makes references to the principle of population presented by Thomas Robert Malthus, who in his renowned work *An Essay on the Principle of Population* published in 1798 was afraid of an explosion of the 'demographic bomb'. He claimed at that time that the population, in the case of there being no boundaries, will grow in geometric progress, and food – as a means of maintaining the population – in arithmetic progress¹².

Bauman, citing data by the UN, warns against another population explosion. The reports cited by the sociologist forecast 14 billion people living at the end of the 21st century, however, the peak point for the earth's resources would be when it exceeds 9 billion, still in the first half of the century¹³. Bauman treated the data with some reservation, but his criticism of 'neo-malthusianism' does not seem to be sufficient. He conducts research into the problem from the perspective of society – he writes about fears stemming from overpopulation and why at the threshold of the new millennium there appears another wave of the threat. He claims that the threats of a demographic nature result from the inevitable products of modernization. The amount of waste, according to Bauman, is constantly increasing in line with the commonness of its production on earth: '(...) human redundancy is produced globally nowadays, not locally (...)'¹⁴. Industry in its traditional form cannot deal with removing or even processing the waste. In Bauman's valuable sociological reflection there are no cool-headed calculations of an economist. Just like the prognoses by Malthus did not include the significant increase of production efficiency¹⁵, present-day reports remain silent about the possibilities of further

¹¹ Z. Bauman, *Konsumenci w społeczeństwie konsumentów*, Lodz University Press, Lodz 2007, p. 14.

¹² T.R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society*, J. Johnson, in St. Paul's Church-yard, London 1798, The Online Library of Economics and Liberty, <http://www.econlib.org/library/Malthus/malPop.html>, ch. 1.

¹³ Bauman does not provide bibliographical data of the report by *The Economic and Social Council*, ECOSOC. Z. Bauman, *To nie jest...*, pp. 282-283.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 286.

¹⁵ Around the year 1870 agriculture provided 6 times more products in comparison to the beginning of the 18th century. What it meant is that even with an increase in population, food got to urban areas in

increase of productivity with a decreasing use of natural resources. We may turn to a simpler solution, possibly treated by Bauman as a utopian one. Referring here to waste once again – if in a great many countries, half (or even *gross*) of the food is wasted, then nourishing 14 billion people (that is twice as many people as the population in 2012) will depend not on the efficiency of the productivity, rather on the efficiency of distribution (which is now becoming faster and cheaper).

It turns out that, for economists, making use of Bauman's analyses may prove useful when confronting them with the theories both of institutionalists (*vide* Veblen) as well as classicists (*vide* Malthus).

Bauman also refers eagerly to the UN statistics when it comes to world poverty. Citing Margaret Bounting he repeats that '[t]hree quarters of the world's poorest now live in middle-income countries such as India or Nigeria'¹⁶. He, at the same time, claims that the United Nations hardly engages in the liquidation of inequality in developing countries. The sociologist reminds us that Glenn Firebaugh in the book *The New Geography of Global Income Inequality* (2003) talked about the appearance of new trends in income inequalities – he observed a decreasing trend between nations with a simultaneous increase of inequality within one country (which is so eagerly measured with the use of the Gini coefficient). However, neither the first part of the thesis nor the second finds its proper justification in economic research. One may here seriously debate the calculative methodology¹⁷.

The theses by Bauman and Firebaugh are refuted by Deepak Lal who tried to break the stereotype of the increase in disparities between rich and the poor countries. He proved that at least since the 1980s world poverty has decreased¹⁸. According to Lal, the diminishing of penury in the developing world came into being as a result of Chinese reforms at the end of the 1970s, the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991, and as a consequence of the transformation of the planned economy into a market economy in Latin America. The only region where poverty has actually increased in recent decades is Africa which has been struggling with serious management problems and has failed to integrate with the world economy¹⁹.

greater amounts, it was of better quality as well as it was more diverse. J. Skodlarski, R. Matera, *Gospodarka światowa. Geneza i rozwój*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2004, p. 105.

¹⁶ Z. Bauman, *To nie jest...*, p. 36.

¹⁷ It depends on which countries are compared, the same in two different periods or a given number of the richest and poorest states in the same periods. According to the Hindu researcher Sheilla Bhalla (the one that Deepak Lal refers to) in the publications of the World Bank there is numerous evidence of an increase in income gap, however, what is compared there is the product *per capita* of the 20 richest and 20 poorest countries. In this way, in only the years 1960-2000 the discrepancy of inequality increased from 23 to 36 times. It needs to be emphasized, though, that a comparison would make sense only if we juxtapose the same group of countries in a different period. It turns out that with such a method the gap between the richest and the poorest countries in 1960 actually decreased from 23 to 9.5 in 2000. D. Lal, *Reviving the Invisible Hand. The Case for Classical Liberalism in the Twenty-First Century*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 2006, pp. 134-135.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 135.

¹⁹ Lal explains where the misconceptions about the increase of the world income differences come from. He claims that it stems from a lack of reliability of the research at the lower level and an incorrect use of statistics applied by the World Bank. *Ibidem*, pp. 132, 143-145; see more: R. Matera,

Lal also claimed that the thesis of the increase of inequality within particular countries cannot be defended effectively. Even if in the 1980s such countries as the USA, China, Great Britain, Nigeria, and in particular Russia and the countries of Eastern Europe noted an increase in the indices of national inequalities, at the same time Sweden, Brazil and Mexico noted their decrease and in the four great economies of Asia – India, Indonesia, South Korea and Vietnam – there was no tendency towards an inequality increase. The conclusion of a more balanced and scientifically proven nature is then Lal's conclusion: while some countries developed in the next stage of globalisation, other states experienced a greater or lesser regression²⁰.

When verifying Bauman's claims in terms of the decrease/increase of inequality between nations and within countries one has to acquaint oneself (if only for the contrast) with the views of the sociologist on the issue of wealth. He dismisses, for example, the *trickled-down theory* according to which it is assumed that the wealth of the rich drips (trickles) down, reaching the poorest classes through investment and increase of employment. Bauman proved that we actually experience the opposite tendency (it needs to be understood that the richest getting richer results, relatively, in the poorest getting poorer)²¹, and the turmoil with loans did great harm to a sizeable group of the poorest, especially the pensioners. The sociologist equally strongly criticizes the actions of the state that are intended to 'save the economy' but which actually lead to the wealthy getting rich and the poorest getting poor. He then refers to the project of the American Congress as regards the issue of removal of the reduction of taxes for the wealthiest. He indicates the reluctance of the richest groups to change the state of affairs (fiscal solutions). He turns to the statement by the very Warren Buffett – one of the richest and the greatest world investors: 'There's class warfare, all right. But it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning'²². Making reference here to Buffet is unfortunate as it was the billionaire who openly criticized the American tax system and repeatedly said that he himself and his wealthy acquaintances ought to pay the state far more taxes²³. The suggestions of Buffet to increase taxes for the richest led to a heated debate in the United States. It needs to be pointed out that the billionaire was attacked on account of his apparent 'fiscal hypocrisy'. Among the critical voices of the owner of Berkshire Hathaway was another popular investor, and an economic commentator, Peter Schiff, or the renowned macro-economist Gregory Mankiw, who claimed that even if the tax rates were increased, Buffet would still avoid paying taxes on all his income since a great part of the profit came from capital transactions²⁴. Here Mankiw and Bauman spoke with one voice.

P. Matera, *Moralność i religia a rozwój kapitalizmu w ujęciu Deepaka Lala*, „Annales. Etyka w życiu gospodarczym/Annales. Ethics in Economic Life” 2011, vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 55-65.

²⁰ D. Lal, op. cit., pp. 137-139.

²¹ Z. Bauman, *To nie jest...*, p. 69.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 71.

²³ An article by Buffett entitled *Stop Coddling the Super Rich* published in New York Times on August 14th, 2011.

²⁴ <http://gregmankiw.blogspot.com>.

6. Bauman in times of crisis

Bauman pays a lot of attention to the present financial crisis which at the end of the first decade of the new millennium surprised not only the societies of the developed countries but also most of the economists. It was already in the year 2005 in *Europe. An Unfinished Adventure* that the sociologist mentioned the allayed fears sleeping fears of the outbreak of a serious crisis. Analysing the short story by Franz Kafka *The Burrow* he proved that '[a]nxiety disturbs life, but life turns gradually into a string of disturbances; tearing that string breaks life as one has learned to live it and to recognize it as life. Life is anxiety, anxiety is life'²⁵. One such worry was the fear of an economic crisis. He reminded us that generations remembering the depression from the beginning of the 1930s throughout their whole lives carried a fear of another collapse, and even the traumatic events of the Second World War did not erase from their memory the millions of unemployed, the fall of great enterprises, or the suicides of stock exchange players. In the course of time, as a consequence of alleviating the acute effects of economic recessions and the extending of the welfare state, such worries were forgotten. On account of this, the idea of the welfare state became *passé*. Economic problems turned into safety issues, which especially after the events of September 11th, 2001 became the greatest human obsession, and the fears of a market collapse were less and less visible until the collapse of the Lehman Brothers bank in 2008.

Bauman warns against the creation of other speculative bubbles. He writes about e.g. the fashion of buying out shares from emerging markets where allegedly '(...) a new virgin land has been discovered by the intrepid scouts of Wall Street'²⁶. However, at the same time he reminds us about the effects of such a form of investing for the economy of Mexico (1994), Thailand, Indonesia (1997), Russia (1998), Brazil (1999) or Argentina (2002), and he fills the list up with the victims of the present crisis: Greece, Ireland or Latvia²⁷, nevertheless, the condition of the countries is radically different, even if each of them was affected by a crisis situation. To present a full picture it has to be remembered that investments (both short and long term ones) had a favourable influence on the above-mentioned economies. The very same capital that was destructive had also a healing power for most of the analysed countries. Bauman must have forgotten about the famous statement by Joan Robinson, who is ideologically close to him, who argued that there is nothing worse for a country than being exploited (by a foreign capital) except for not being exploited²⁸. The sociologist has no illusions and asks: 'How many virgin lands need to be forced into catastrophe for that routine to be broken? Or does capitalism, or the politics servicing it, mean the very impossibility of learning?'²⁹. Bauman, however, disregards the fact that there are new legal

²⁵ Z. Bauman, *Europa: niedokończona przygoda* [*Europe. An Unfinished Adventure*], Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 2004, p. 140.

²⁶ Idem, *To nie jest...*, p. 76.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 77.

²⁸ J. Robinson, *The Accumulation of Capital*, Macmillan Company, London 1965.

²⁹ Z. Bauman, *To nie jest...*, p. 78.

protections, without which the flow of capital would be impossible to render. On the other hand, though, changes on the capital market are very dynamic and the law does not always manage to follow them.

Bauman tries to convince the readers that the recent crisis did not teach them much, especially the American society. Citizens of the United States, under the influence of the catastrophic information from Wall Street and the banking sector, at the end of 2009, managed to save some of their income, however, at the end of 2010 their savings drastically dwindled again. The sociologist concludes that: people do not learn from their own mistakes, they forget about the protestant virtues that were featured by Max Weber in his work *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Other conclusions by Bauman are equally controversial – e.g. the lack of the saving instinct became the cause of poverty in the USA – still, it needs to be mentioned that some liberal economists also believe that³⁰. In a provocative manner (possibly) the Professor quotes examples that in the difficult reality of the 19th century even the slaves in Haiti managed to save... One may continue feeling outraged when the scientist cites Thomas Geoghegan from the New York Times writing that 43 million Americans live in poverty that corresponds to the number of beggars in Egypt³¹. An economist would not agree with such a comparison: *primo* – without naming the methodology of gathering data about the number of the poor from both countries, and *secundo* – without giving the information that the population of Egypt is almost four times smaller than that in the USA which means that proportions are being lost. It would be just the same to say that the number of poor in Europe is equal to the number of the poor in some country in Latin America, Asia or Africa (it seems that it would be easy to produce such a comparison without the reflection of proportions). One way or another, Bauman's arguments stop being credible when he turns into a publicist. The reader develops complete bewilderment when the sociologist claims that people have got accustomed to a few-percent rise in the prices of train tickets, beef or electricity but they cannot stand a 300% price increase³². We will not find out, however, what commodity or service the rise relates to, and Bauman does not intend to show the inflation changes. This is an immature method, even for a scientist with a publicist face.

Bauman's remarks on the long-term effects of the crisis sound more convincing, though. It is hard to disagree that the crisis indeed had a different influence on the lives of the rich and the poor (it still changed both classes). According to Bauman, the suddenness and voracity of the crisis are inextricably linked with the class the citizens belong to³³.

³⁰ Looking for the source of crisis in insufficient consumption is Keynesian in nature.

³¹ Z. Bauman, *To nie jest...*, p. 257.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 218.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

7. Happiness, its essence and measures

Fortunately, in Bauman's works we may come across a great many interesting and in-depth threads that should not outrage economists so much, although they are often detached from their main trend in the research. The sociologist poses another provocative question: do we actually need economic growth today? He cites Tim Jackson – the author of *Prosperity without Growth* – that the present model (is the model really that modern) became the cause of irreversible harm, because the increase is measured materially, and not with the use of free time, health and education³⁴. In fact, economic growth is measured by estimating the size of production, and it is not confined only to material goods, since health and educational services are included in GDP.

Bauman asks whether we can infinitely measure the level of people's happiness with GDP³⁵. He does not want to remember that there are interesting compilations based on the *Human Development Index* (HDI) or the ranking of the happiest countries in the world published since 2006 – the *Happy Planet Index* (HPI). It needs to be remembered that the Human Development Index (HDI), as a synthetic measure, apart from GDP *per capita* includes the span of human life (which is a good exemplification of improvement or regress in the field of health protection) and the level of scholarisation (the level of education and access to it). When it comes to HPI, it takes into consideration the measurable life span as well as the non-measurable level of satisfaction of particular societies. HPI, next to the quality of life, tries to allow for the ecological value that is the index of exploitation of natural resource after the 'production' of welfare. More and more often the latter is converted into well-being.

While the new quasi-journal of Bauman certainly fosters reflection, it does not serve science. The reader is faced with stereotypes. A better choice would be to reach for *The Art of Life*, a book which covers the subject of achieving happiness. Bauman does it in terms of both a historical analysis and through an in-depth observation of the reality at the turn of the century. Even the beginning of the deliberations is fascinating, though a bit reproductive. The author adopts the evoked thesis that the size of GDP does not determine the level and intensity of human happiness. Research questions connected with the correlation were posed earlier by, inter alia, the authors of the great work *Happiness and Economics*, Bruno S. Frey and Alois Stutzer. Their research proved that people in countries of higher income are happier than those who have less money. However, what needs to be taken into consideration is more the growth of happiness, and in this case it is, in general, bigger in poorer countries where the growth of income in relation to the previous level is greater (proportionally). In wealthy countries individuals get accustomed to the large income and, in consequence, their level of happiness decreases to the initial level. What counts for an individual is a relative level of in-

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 182.

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 193.

come that can be compared directly to the income of others³⁶. Bauman notices this trait as well by citing Max Scheler, who in 1912 observed that the appreciation of value by the average individual happens ‘in the course of, and through comparison’³⁷.

Bauman is not an economist – he looks at the size and distribution of GDP mainly through the lens of social changes. He argues that half of the goods that are indispensable for man in order to achieve happiness have no market price. He claims also that the invisible hand of the market was not effective enough so as ‘to save humans from the horrors of reciprocal cruelties’³⁸. He admits, however, that from the statistics of GDP we find out ‘(...) how strong and how widespread the *belief* is that there is an intimate link between happiness and the volume and quality of consumption’³⁹. The key to understanding this idea is the word ‘faith’. What do we want to believe in? We, the artists of life (this is the title of the second chapter of *The Art of Life*) have great problems defining happiness. Such a difficulty is not exposed in contemporary times. Bauman makes use of statements of the great sages of antiquity (he cites Socrates, Aristotle, Epictetus, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius) and contemporary philosophers and sociologists (he wants us to read Blaise Pascal, Immanuel Kant, Emile Durkheim and Erich Fromm), and even with this intellectual support, the result is predictable – there is no single definition of happiness. We may as well include in the list Leszek Kołakowski whose statements may easily be juxtaposed with Bauman’s theses. The guru of Polish philosophy wrote:

*There are, of course, people who consider themselves happy because they are successful: healthy and rich, lacking nothing, respected (or feared) by their neighbours. Such people might believe that their life is what happiness is. But this is merely self-deception; and even they, from time to time at least, realize the truth. And the truth is that they are failures like the rest of us*⁴⁰.

The authors of *Happiness and Economics* pointed to the relationship between happiness and socio-economic factors such as: age (the young and the old are, in general, happier than the middle-aged), health, marital relationships, education, even sex and nationality. As regards Bauman, he considers the following factors the most ‘creative’ as regards happiness: work (without hard work life does not gain value), but also such vaguely measurable phenomena as friendship (it is a kind of escort in the journey through liquid modernity), responsibility (it is the proof that Bauman walks hand in hand with Emmanuel Lévinas) and love. The latter does not guarantee a reasonable life if it is modelled on our consumption behaviours. Love will not build itself and it will not last, it has to be created and

³⁶ B.S. Frey, A. Stutzer, *Happiness and Economics. How the Economy and Institutions Affect Well-being*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey-Oxford 2002, p. 79.

³⁷ Z. Bauman, *Sztuka życia [The Art of Life]*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 2009, p. 48.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 92.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

⁴⁰ L. Kołakowski, *Is God Happy? Selected Essays*, Basic Books, New York 2013, p. 214.

recreated every day, 'love is something that has to be continually revived and confirmed, enveloped with unremitting/unfailing care and attention'⁴¹.

Bauman makes a lot of references to the apparent achievements of technology. What attracts attention is his analysis of the 'strategy of detours' (he uses the book by Jean-Pierre Dupuy), in which he argues that our achievements in the field of transport or medicine are only ostensible. He wonders whether the invention of the car does indeed save our time. He quotes data on the number of hours spent in the car, the time sacrificed to its operation, maintenance and the time needed in order to afford a new vehicle. Taking all that into consideration, the car allows us to move at 4 miles an hour (that is almost the pace of a pedestrian). An example of the 'strategy of detours' is also our introduction into the pharmaceutical-medical chain. Instead of leading a healthy lifestyle, we spend a lot of time in surgeries, queuing to meet a specialist, taking a lot of medications, which often cost us a fortune. Here I would also add the newer and newer computer programmes which we learn anew, instead of just mastering the old ones (optimizing their application). Once we manage to perfectly use them, we waste time on new adaptations. This is the 'detour route' which is understood as the need to acquire technical progress⁴². These might be interesting threads for economists, and not only the heterodox ones.

Technology at least keeps developing, unlike morality which is in a delay state. Maybe we are afraid because our morality is that weak. Bauman writes that there is such a phenomenon as a technological trap. Having at hand a pallet of gadgets (mobile phones, programmes for communication on the Internet for which we need laptops, notebooks, micro PCs, smartphones, tablets) we are exposed to constant invigilation – we are always and everywhere available. Each of us has to be on call immediately (*instant!*) for our employers, family, net operators, or sellers. Such a form of communication became at the same time a duty and an internal need. The doors of our houses became draughty, they stopped isolating the hustle and bustle of the outside world, and they cannot stop the outflow of information, nor our emotions and feelings.

8. Towards the conclusions

The great Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges (who is cited also by Bauman, recognizing him as one of the greatest Europeans in every sense except for the geographical dimension) in the preface to his book *A Universal History of Infamy* wrote that 'reading (...) is a later activity than writing: more resigned, more courtesy-like, more intellectual'⁴³. On account of that intellectualism it is worth reading Bauman, however, it is difficult to agree with all of his theses. One cannot be

⁴¹ Z. Bauman, *Sztuka życia...*, p. 231.

⁴² Idem, *Płynny lek...*, pp. 131-132.

⁴³ J.L. Borges, *Powszechna historia nieczemności [A Universal History of Infamy]*, Prószyński i S-ka Warsaw 2005, p. 6.

indifferent to them, though. Through reading and this indirect form of confrontation with the Author's views one can deepen their thoughts and find arguments for their own views. However, we are often unable to write them down precisely.

In *Terrors of the Global* (the chapter *Liquid Fear*) Bauman acts as the guru of alter-globalists. He notices and characterizes the negative shades of globalization. A few times he goes too far, writing that the bad globalization comes from the United States, the International Monetary Fund or the World Trade Organization. Criticising centres of power and institutions is easy but noticing or appreciating help rendered in times of disasters is more difficult (airlifts from the USA to Haiti after an earthquake, or the activity of IMF in times of financial crises, including aid in Argentina, Iceland, Ukraine and Hungary). The author arouses strong controversies when he equates the negative consequences of globalization, such as arms smuggling, crime, terrorism or the omnipresent control, to trade, business, capital and information. Globalisation is, in his eyes, only a parasitic and predatory process⁴⁴. After the insult of the unbearable world, Bauman reminds himself, however, that the societies of developed countries live in the safest moment, so the uncertainty, panic and fear are, in fact, a paradox. The scientist warns us against the conviction about the need to fight and generate artificial threats.

In the final part of *Liquid Fear* (in the last chapter entitled *Thought against Fear*) Bauman reveals his views. He is against the spread of neoliberalism, which favours the strong and the rich and excludes the weak and the poor. He does not support the state as a provider of personal safety either, which took the place of the ailing social state. However, the first turns out to be less welcoming as regards democracy. Moreover it generates fears – and it is the fears that totalitarian countries are based on. Bauman puts forward the thesis that the state of personal safety shifts the real economic fears (such as inflation or unemployment) to other types of fears (e.g. terrorism or lack of safety on the roads, that lead to buying more stronger, more heavy duty vehicles). The sociologist also wants us not to forget the warnings of Karl Marx in these fragments where he writes about wastage and moral impropriety. It is a pity, though, that he does not stress that it is still a very dangerous book for enthusiasts of radical solutions and the creation of more predictable fears (and because of that even more traumatizing) than generated by capitalism. Bauman puts forward a very daring thesis that the prophets of the concept/idea (Marks? or maybe the very Author of these words?) wanted the future to show that they were wrong in order for their prophecies themselves to fail⁴⁵.

Bauman's books inspire and incite criticism. Even if we do not agree with a number of his theses, it is still vital that we start to think about them intensively. It protects us from intellectual inertia and forces us to deal with fundamental ethical aspects. It is only then that the reality becomes bearable. In his controversial journal Bauman repeatedly states, citing Lévinas, that '(...) ethics is not superior to ontology due to the unquestionability of its truth (its agreement with reality),

⁴⁴ Z. Bauman, *Phynny lek...*, pp. 167, 255.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 310.

but thanks to being better than reality ("better" being a house-term for ethics, but a foreign notion for ontology)⁴⁶.

References

- Baranowski P., J.J. Sztudynger, *Rodzinny kapitał społeczny a wzrost gospodarczy – analiza dla Polski i 15 krajów Unii Europejskiej*, „Annales. Etyka w życiu gospodarczym/Annales. Ethics in Economic Life” 2011, vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 157-170. doi: 11089/1430.
- Bauman Z., *Europa: niedokończona przygoda [Europe. An Unfinished Adventure]*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 2004.
- Bauman Z., *Konsumenci w społeczeństwie konsumentów*, Lodz University Press, Lodz 2007, p. 14.
- Bauman Z., *Płynny lęk [Liquid Fear]*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 2008.
- Bauman Z., *Sztuka życia [The Art of Life]*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 2009.
- Bauman Z., *To nie jest dziennik [This is not a Diary]*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 2012.
- Bauman Z., *Życie na przemiał [Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts]*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 2004.
- Borges J.L., *Powszechna historia nikczemności [A Universal History of Infamy]*, Prószyński i S-ka, Warsaw 2005.
- Buffett W., *Stop Coddling the Super Rich*, “New York Times” 2011, August 14th.
- Frey B.S., A. Stutzer, *Happiness and Economics. How the Economy and Institutions Affect Well-being*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey-Oxford 2002.
- Holzer J., *Europa zimnej wojny*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Cracow 2012.
- Kołakowski L., *Is God Happy? Selected Essays*, Basic Books, New York 2013.
- Lal D., *Reviving the Invisible Hand. The Case for Classical Liberalism in the Twenty-First Century*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 2006.
- Malthus T.R., *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society*, J. Johnson, St. Paul's Church-yard, London 1798, The Online Library of Economics and Liberty, <http://www.econlib.org/library/Malthus/malPop.html>.
- Matera R., P. Matera, *Moralność i religia a rozwój kapitalizmu w ujęciu Deepaka Lala*, „Annales. Etyka w życiu gospodarczym/Annales. Ethics in Economic Life” 2011, vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 55-65.
- Robinson J., *The Accumulation of Capital*, Macmillan Company, London 1965.
- Skodlarski J., R. Matera, *Gospodarka światowa. Geneza i rozwój*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2004.
- Smoleński J., *Mój przewodnik Zygmunt Bauman*, „Gazeta Wyborcza” 2005, December 31st.

⁴⁶ Z. Bauman, *To nie jest...*, p. 123.

Sztaudynger J.J., *Rodzinny kapitał społeczny a wzrost gospodarczy w Polsce*, "Ekonomista"
2009, No. 2, pp. 198-210.

<http://gregmankiw.blogspot.com>.