

Liquid Ethics – Psychotherapy in a Time of Uncertainty

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The changes of Society over time and into the 20th and 21st century have been substantial. The interview with Zygmunt Bauman considers specific issues relating to ethical concerns for the psychotherapist working in the 21st century.

Professor Zygmunt Bauman, an eminent Sociologist, agreed to be interviewed by Paolo Bertrando and Helga Hanks in the early part of 2009. The topic of the interview centered on the question of what Bauman thought of psychotherapy and particularly what his views on the 'ethics of psychotherapy' were. He extrapolated what clients coming to therapy today will be concerned with and how the generations since the 2nd World War can be identified into quite distinct groups. This became the central theme of the interview where Bauman's theory about what he calls 'Liquid Times – living in an age of uncertainty' provided us with the idea of asking the question about psychotherapy and its role within society today.

A presentation of the interview provided the opening for the international conference *Psychotherapy as Ethics: Postmodern Responsibility in Clinical Practice*, sponsored by Episteme (Centro di Psicoterapia Sistemica), Turino, Italy, October, 2009. This account of the interview, and the subsequent three papers in this issue of *Human Systems* are based on presentations at that conference.

Introduction

Bauman was born in 1925 in Poznan in Poland and refers to himself as ‘one of the pre-war generation’. His childhood was spent both in Poland and Russia. He went to the University in Warsaw where he studied first Sociology and then Philosophy and later lectured at the University of Warsaw. However he was ousted during an anti-semitic purge. He was granted permission to leave the country and moved to the University of Tel Aviv. In 1971 he accepted the Chair in Sociology at Leeds University, where he stayed until his retirement.

Bauman’s ideas about ‘consumerism, modernity and power’ are central to his writing. To some he is the greatest living sociologist’ (Fearn N. 2006). His name is also connected as being one of the main protagonists in coining the concept of ‘post-modernism’. He also wrote about the changes occurring over time between ‘solid’ and ‘liquid’ modernity and with these concepts described the challenges human beings and societies now face and how families in particular have changed from traditional lifelong patterns and commitments to the individual taking centre stage, needing to be satisfied at a quick pace. Moving from ever changing short-term projects (and relationships) demands a flexibility of the individual, a capacity to abandon plans, commitments and delete promises. Uncertainty is an outcome of these fast changes described in Bauman’s ‘Liquid Times: living in an Age of Uncertainty’ (2007), and ‘Liquid Life’ (2005).

Considering the question relating to ethics and psychotherapy he said in the interview; ‘Ethics presume a certain list of commandments, ... which was pretty straightforward 100 years ago, but no longer. So I think for every ethical commandment there is another which contradicts it...’ He further pointed out that; ‘Yes, revise them (ethics), reform them. They are never of absolute value; they always should be subjected to critical scrutiny.’

Bauman links and further describes the 3 successive generations of our time, the ‘boom generation’ (children born immediately after the 2nd World War) who fought for freedom and security. They were cautious and a ‘saving book generation’ he said. This was followed by Generation X (children born to the boom Generation) with their excitement for change, opportunities and little commitment. This generation still remembers the terrible consequences generated by the 2nd World War. ‘But (he says) now, I warn you psychotherapists, the next bunch of your patients/clients will be Generation Y’. This is the generation which exchanged freedom for security.

The generation who lives on credit, and in which individual members of the family live isolated, individual lives. Shopping is the main activity, Bauman declares. ‘The role of psychotherapists today is a very different from the one which Freud and his contemporaries practiced. Well, I think that the existence of psychotherapy is an indispensable component of modernity, actually, I can’t imagine it without that’.

Interviews with Zygmunt Bauman, illustrated with Photographic images of him, provided a stimulating introduction not only to the Turin conference (above) but also to the EFTA Training Institutes Chamber conference in Krakow, September 2009.

The Interview:

Q: *The interest we have is about psychotherapy, we are psychotherapists and family therapists, and so the first question is: what do you think of psychotherapy in itself? Our idea was the ethics of psychotherapy, but the first thing is: Is psychotherapy ethical to you? An ethical enterprise?*

B: I can say: the problem... To start with, I’m neither a psychotherapist nor an object of psychotherapy, so it’s not first-hand experience; it’s all about abstract ideas about the issue. But the problem with psychotherapy, like the problem with education in general, any kind of interaction between one person and another, is the instability of the subject. That’s something which changed very, very considerably since Sigmund Freud invented psychotherapy, or psychoanalysis. He was in a much more comfortable position than we are at the moment, because the world was a given, it was not a task; it was not something very unstable, which, in the course of psychotherapy and over the years, changes several times. So when you start it is different than when you finish, if you finish at all, then it is very different than it was at the start. When we read again *Civilisation and its discontents*, which for me, in all of Freud’s legacy, is the most important book, Here I borrowed from Freud, when he wrote that he conceived the world out there, behind the window, as very stiff, as very tough, very difficult to change. In this book and in *The future of an illusion*, as you remember, he presented the necessary prerogatives of society, of civilisation: you must be managed by that, you must surrender to that. And he knew what the individual man must surrender too, because norms were very clear, unambiguous, and one thing was for sure: everybody could safely assume that they won’t change before the therapy finishes. So you had the finishing line quite clearly delineated, it won’t move together with you. Now,

unfortunately, there is no finishing line, there is horizon. And, as you know, when you come nearer to the horizon it goes further away, so you never reach it. So that's a problem.

I think that to realize really how much this sense of psychotherapy has changed, one should read again *Buddenbrooks* by Thomas Mann (1901), as a description of the kind of psychological problems and behavioural problems people used to have at the beginning of the 20th century, when Sigmund Freud wrote his *Civilisation and Its Discontents*. The problem was that you were born, say, into middle class family, like the Buddenbrooks were, but it didn't guarantee that you died as a member of the middle class: you had to reconstruct your social position. In this sense, we are as Sigmund Freud and his contemporaries were, modern people. Identity and position in society is not given; it is a task, and a task that you have to re-start virtually every day, because memory of your last success, impact of your last success, wouldn't be durable, wouldn't last very long, and so you have to recreate your identity all the time.

Alright, but there is a difference; because the situations of the Buddenbrooks and our situation is *not the same*, they knew damn well what they had to do in order to remain respectable middle-class people, because all the world was a world of prescription and proscription. You could virtually have a list of what you must do and what you must avoid or desist from doing. Nothing comparable today, and that's a problem: *and leads* to instability. Instability of norms, instability of values. You probably know Pierre Bourdieu, a great sociologist, unfortunately not with us any longer, and he suggested that there is nothing any longer like normative regulation. To start with, there are no norms that are supported or sustained by very powerful authorities, so that both psychotherapist and patient must submit, as if they were the voice of God so that no human tinkering would be able to change it. So those authorities are unambiguous, uncontested, as the German say (unfortunately in English there is no such word) *Eindeutlich*, [unequivocal] one-meaning, there is no alternative, no ambiguity, no ambivalence. And the problem is that these authorities, according to Freud, are very demanding, and they demand to surrender something. There's no freelancer, as the English say, and so if you want to be secure in your society you need to surrender part of your freedom. It can be very painful, because you can't follow your impulse, you can't follow your instinct, you have to impose a steel cage to your self, in a sense. And you have to adjust it, to cheat it, to shape it to what society,

civilisation, determines. Freud suggest, in fact, that all the psychological problems by which people come to psychotherapy, are because of that, because of this conflict between the demands of the society and the propulsions, the inclinations dictated by their nature, by their instincts.

What is changed since then (this is my hypothesis, I have been writing obsessively about for the past 20 years now) is that, if Sigmund Freud was sitting here in front of you instead of me, I guess he would repeat his major statement, that between society and individual Self, the Id if you wish, there is a conflict, and being in a civilised society means making a trade-off, an exchange: I get something, and in exchange I give something. He would repeat that, that is still valid, in my view. What he however would change is his diagnosis of the situation. He wouldn't say, as he did in 1929, that the psychological problems of contemporary men, and of course of the women as well, come from the fact that they surrender too much freedom for the sake of security, now he would say probably that the problems of contemporary men and women come from the fact that they surrender too much security in exchange for more freedom. Here today, the purpose of therapy traditionally consisted in taming the pleasure principle in the name of adjustment to the reality principle. Now it is the other way round, it is bringing some reality principle, helping (*through the*) reality principle to bring some order into the realm of freedom which otherwise would be chaotic, would make you confused, lost, feel abandoned, not knowing what to do. So I would say that in this case psychotherapy probably acts as an unpaid agent of the reality principle. The reality principle needs to be restored; it is not as obvious as it once was. In the *Buddenbrooks* when people deviated from it a little bit, they are immediately punished, it comes automatically, you don't need really any specific artificial effort, it is just there, built into the setting. Nothing like that happens today. There's no mechanism lying there, and therefore spotting the requirements of society itself becomes very difficult.

Your major issue, the major question you ask is the ethics of psychotherapy. Ethics presumes a certain list of commandments, writing a code, an ethical code, which was pretty straightforward and clear 100 years ago, but not any longer. So I think that for every ethical commandment there is another which contradicts it. We are living in a cacophony of suggestions, and if you take for example, what has happened in the last 30-40 years, when you look at the ethical code, I don't know what appears under this name in that setting. But if they translate it into the art of life, the strategy of life, the know-how of how

to live, and so on, then if you take three successive generations, the Boom Generation – well, I've seen the Boom Generation, and diagnosed it also, the immediate post-war generation – I'm a pre-war product, but the Boom Generation is the first one of these three generations. Well some of them (that generation) are grandfathers now - at least they are old or old parents. Then you have Generation X. They were born after the post-war period in which people gathered together, remembering the atrocities, the tragedy of war and destruction, the massacres, but also pre-war unemployment, depression, hunger and whatever else, and they were interested in having as much security as possible. Now, what happens, I say, security and freedom, I think they are indispensable for human normal, healthy psychological condition. We need both. Probably that means they are damn difficult to reconcile, because the more security you have the less freedom there is, and the more freedom the less security, so it's just a pendulum, it's not a straight, not a linear progress, but rather a pendulum. In the so-called 30 glorious years immediately after the war (World War II) and its destruction, there was a pendulum going more and more toward security, and people really wanted that freedom from fear – the Roosevelt slogan. The Welfare state was introduced all over Europe and by Lord Beveridge in England, with his scheme of building safety nets under everybody's sheets, so they can engage in gymnastics under the roof, but they had the safety net, so that somebody would help. That's the atmosphere in which the Boom Generation was born, into that kind of warp, and at the same time they inherited from their parents the culture of the Saving book. We don't have the culture of the Saving book anymore; we have the culture of the credit card now. But that Saving book culture means that you have to put aside for a rainy day or something for your old age, you shouldn't spend money which you haven't earned yet.

And then came the Generation X. Generation X means people that are now between the age of 25 to 35 or 38. And they were born already into a relatively secure world, plenty of opportunities, a wisdom of life consisting in not closing options, but to open them... Do not commit yourself very much to very long-term obligations, because if you do then you will be in no condition to grasp the new opportunities. There is a lot that could be said about the setting in which they grew up, the way in which they adjusted as a normal society: fragmented life, living from one project to another. The meaning of the project, being able to secure the situation after the project, where even more projects are open for choice, that was the situation. So the result is a fragmented life, an individualist life, where the responsibility is mostly for myself, for my happiness. It was a

period when people believed that the purpose of life is to make yourself happy. And, if there is awkwardness, discomfort, not to mention pain or suffering, there's something wrong. You don't need conversation for that, not written down, anyway, it was like that. And there was a short, brief period, until quite recently, when the world and the human disposition, the human perceptions of the world, were winking to each other. You know why I understand, you know what I understand and I understand what you know... this sort of thing: mutual balance between the two.

But now, I warn you psychotherapists that the next bunch of your patients will be Generation Y, the sad generation, which was born without this cushion, without this foundation of enjoying the freedom which they inherited from the Boom Generation: depression, saving books, delay of satisfaction and so on. And they don't – Generation Y who are the children of Generation X. They don't have this basis. On the contrary – you are dealing with the psychology of the family – the role of parents is reduced in recent years to people who provide pocket money for children and enable them to start freedom of shopping early in their life, before they are 10. Before they are 10 they are already shoppers, they are already experts in shopping. Parents, if they want to pay for something, they ask their children for advice. This occurs not only when they want to operate computers, but also when they go to shop. So for the Y Generation, at its birth, the world is watched as a huge container of opportunities, plus a huge container of spare parts, so if something does not fit, throw it in the rubbish and buy another, as a replacement to things, and as a replacement to human beings as well, partners. So if they go away you just replace them with a spare part available out there. It could be available in a shop, it could be available in a singles bar, it could be available in dating agencies, or internet, but available it is. So there are endless opportunities, endless choices, it will be always like that. This Y Generation started this conviction that, well, this particular job I'm having now is not particularly satisfactory, there will always be another. They don't point in developing attachment, loyalty, commitment, and things like that, because commitment actually is harmful, because it narrows the number of choices you have in front of you. If you are specialised in something, then your freedom is limited, you can't really jump this way or that suddenly, once the profit you enjoy you can find in another place.

So, with this sort of background Generation Y enters society. But in September 2009, this is my cautious prediction, after a long, long, long interruption, we

will have dozens or perhaps hundred of thousands of highly educated people unemployed. This year. When they finish the last year of their established education, and they will look around and they will find no demand for their services. It will be a tremendous shock. I think, if they don't move in another direction, they will probably expect from psychotherapists to give them the obligatory code, in a sense, the reality principle. This would enable them to find a ground on which to put their feet. The ground is trembling, there's no ground, they are swimming. The fashionable word for Generation Y is they are surfing, not even swimming, surfing – on the surface. Gliding on through life. Well, they would look now; their children would have to look for islands, solid islands in this turbulent water.

So there will be a great demand for ethical codes. I don't know whether psychotherapists are prepared to spell out what the ethical code would be like in these circumstances. I found it tremendously difficult, working on it for 20 years; I'm as stupid now as I was 20 years ago. But it is clear that demand for that would be tremendous. You see symptoms of it around quite clearly. How people are willingly surrendering one by one the liberties, personal liberties, for which their great-grandfathers fought and died. They don't remember them. They give them away. Are you still flying? I stopped flying. But I was amazed, just to give an example, at the airport, at how people placidly, meekly accept humiliation, indignity, being sniffed all over by dogs, and subjected to personal checks which are really humiliating. Twenty, thirty years ago there would be an uprising, now they are happy, all because of insecurity. Liberty, that is not that important. They just want to get out. But I think there will be, we are probably facing another change this year, of work ethics, inter-human relationships. I wonder whether the frailty of human bonds, which is so prominent today, will outlive the collapse of economy, falling back into family life as a relatively secure enclave, a shelter. Relatively, because it is not very strong. Today everybody has his or her own room, the sitting room is just a room through which children, each one, pass when they arrive from school, and they lock into their rooms, and they have their personal computer in there, the I-pod, all the implements which combine into satisfactory life, they have individually. Very little is to be shared in the family. The sacred institution of family dinner around the table, when every member sits around, report to each other what happened, that world virtually disappeared. People are consuming fast food, each one separately; consumption becomes very much an individual matter, and also the culture of semi-products, half-products, fast food or take away food, which puts away another institution which kept

the family together, like sharing work in the kitchen. Family was not just the unit of consumption, but the unit of production. And all members consumed what they participated in producing. It all disappeared. I wonder whether it will return. I don't know. Depends how long the crisis will be, and whether it will return to this happy-go-lucky style of life that was before. That's more or less my argument. I don't think it's worthy of video, really. Scattered thoughts, simply.

Q: *But you don't have proposals. I don't know if you are thinking the same, I was thinking: We are family therapists, but today it is difficult to say what a family is, actually, so it's very difficult to define the object of therapy, actually. But, what I observed is that people, they create families all the same, and they want intimacy all the same, and they ask us to arrive at a better intimacy. So that's a question: to reach a better state of intimacy. They want to stay together anyway.*

B: Yes, the major problem people used to have, not very long ago, perhaps still they do, by inertia, not with tying together human relationships, but with breaking them, that was the problem. It was always traumatic, it was always painful: you live together and you want to break, of course there are a lot of apologies, justifications to make, a lot of lies to be said, and so on, it's all very, very painful. And, as you probably noted, the consumer market is reacting to the change of situation much quicker than psychotherapists do, because they are not confined by the rules of their profession, they just sniff where it is profitable. They specialise in giving people not a best choice to enjoy, but the easiest ways of throwing things away. That was the major saying point.] If you look, for example, recently, the last ten years or so, the single bars, where people were looking for partners in life, shy people, unlucky people, came there, because they knew that everybody who was in a single bar came there with the same purpose in life, so they can approach other people more easily than otherwise it would be. It would be easier for them to overcome their shyness. The interesting point happened, that singles bars are getting bankrupt one after another, closing down. Instead you have internet dating.

Internet dating: what is the advantage of it? People are arriving for help there, simply because... what is the difference between an internet dating agency and a singles bar? Internet dating agencies have a tremendous advantage over singles bars. The internet has available this key on the keyboard, called "delete". So it's just pushing your finger on the button and the most traumatic

aspect of all that occurs “I’ve made a mistake, I don’t like her”, or “she’s not what I expected, somewhere else the grass is greener, so why should I stick to it?”), all this rigmarole is put paid to. You stop sending Sms messages, you stop answering them, when you get a message you just push “delete”, and that’s the end of the story. And, interestingly, if you look at dating agencies – what psychotherapy should do, I do it because I learn quite a lot about what’s fashionable, what’s on the market, what people want, what people expect, what they are offered – what they advertise, how they advertise themselves to future clients, they underline, emphasise, precisely this point: that is so easy to erase traces of past mistakes, which in a simpler language means it is so easy to ‘dump’ (reject, leave) the other person.

I’m not... and I think... I suspect that this may change. I’m not a prophet, mind you, I don’t have any skills to predict what the future will be, but it stands to reason that other urgencies are on the agenda at the moment. There was a period when no acquisition of a thing, whether animate or inanimate, was at the topmost of human mind, but [with] the problem of clearing the sight, just to make room for other acquisitions in the future. The interesting point was that, during the triumph of consumer society, which was between 1970 and 2000, people were not gatherers, they didn’t want to accumulate. On the contrary, they wanted very quick, fast circulation of things. Even wallpapers or carpets were just for one year, and then they were torn back and replaced by something different, more fashionable, and so on. So it was the moment of acquisition, of enjoyment which was important, not the old-fashioned – for them – idea that, as I am growing older, I’m surrounded by more and more things. It is bulky, this whole quantity is now inconvenient: why should I burden myself, when I’ve new pleasures in front?

So it stands to reason that, when things are not becoming so easily available, when banks are not so obtrusive in pushing loads of credit towards you; on the contrary, people find it very hard now to get a mortgage, to get credit and so on. Credit cards won’t be as easily available as they were, and so on, so under these circumstances it stands to reason – it is not a prediction – that people will come to appreciate durability. Durability in most of human history was the topmost value over transience. The upper classes surrounded themselves with durable things: long pedigrees, you know, noble metals, which as you know never age, they are always young, they last forever, old masters’ paintings, which never lose value, and so on. And transient things, like Jackets which fall apart, very low quality second-hand cars, they were left

for the lower classes. The sign of social privilege in recent years was exactly the other way round. Really people at the top were proud of having all the recent acquisitions in their home, and getting rid of all the already old-fashioned, unfashionable things. I think that the value of duration, of durable things, of durable collections, of durable partnerships, and so on, will be coming back, because of the lack of adequacy in the adventurism of the self, on the one hand, and the richness of the world as supplier of opportunities on the other. Some of it must be let go. I just wonder, as I said before, Sigmund Freud, if he was sitting here, what he would say as to the change of the diagnosis. I'm not sure, whether you interviewed Sigmund Freud twenty years from now, perhaps he will repeat what he said in 1929, because the pendulum will be going in the other direction. So, the permanent, eternal ethics which would be valid for every situation is not here. Psychotherapists, like sociologists, like many, many other humanities, will need to understand that what they learned at the university when they were students does not necessarily hold permanently as a value. They will have to look around and analyse, I think that psychoanalysts, psychotherapists, not only teach to patients how they should live, but they learn something as well. For you every therapy session is a visit to a research laboratory, really. I'm not there, in these laboratories, so I can't really tell you anything which you don't know, but I think that roughly that it is outside the possible, the possibility of the durable, well-founded, once and for all, ethical norms.

Q: *So you mean that we have to re-create ethical norms all the time...?*

B: Yes, revise them, reform them. They are never of absolute value; they should always be subjected to critical scrutiny: whether they fit. Like every teacher – I was not a psychotherapist, but I taught to students for many, very many years – I had problems, always, conflicts. What should I do – influence them towards my ideal of an excellent academic while I taught postgraduate students, supervised PhDs, and so on, or should I rather help them to smoothly get themselves settled into a corporate society? Because these two demands were very often at cross-purposes. For example, I did peer reviews, you know, commissions which accept or reject PhD dissertations and so on. But they are always finishing up with wishy-washy conclusions, resolutions. The reason is that different views lead to a compromise of some sort, and if I encourage my PhD student to follow his originality, his creativity, even his rebellion against the extant rules of his discipline, well, that's how science was made, otherwise we would still be in the Palaeolithic age, so why shouldn't I

encourage him to do so? At the same time I knew that, if I encouraged him to do so, he will be failed, and his PhD never released. So, even then, there were, at the same time, two ethical commandments, which I could not follow at the same time. I had to make a choice. But if you think about, there are other dimensions. The dimension of time: how it changes, depending towards which society you should prepare your students, or towards what society you should prepare your patients. That means that we, in our professions, teachers or psychotherapists, should never stop learning. No amount of knowledge that we acquire is sufficient, it ages very, very quickly. So we are very much in the same position as our students are, or our patients: they are also exposed to this aging of norms, of rules. So if you want reassurance, you shouldn't come to me, you should come to somebody else.

Q: *I know I was just thinking a couple of things. As a father of Generation Y children I think it's the same in every level of education, probably, also with children or adolescents you have to adapt to what is there, something like that.*

B: Yes, that's a problem really, if you go to education there are extra problems, from which fortunately psychotherapy is free, like competition with information highways, as they are called, internet and so on. When I was a student, my professors were the gatekeepers of knowledge, the only place where I could acquire knowledge, really. Therefore their educating role was assured to them to a very great extent. They would have had to be particularly nasty or stupid in order to lose this aura. I wanted knowledge, the only address where I could get it were at my teachers. Now my teachers can tell me what was on the internet one year ago, I can tell them what there was yesterday. And so this natural hierarchy has been undermined. The problem of the authority of the teacher over the disciple, the pupil, is very shaky at the moment. Well, teachers still retain shreds of their authority because they are just people who sign the grades. That's power, but there is a difference between power and authority. How to make sure that students will accept what you are saying and what you believe, not just what you memorise until the paper is finished, but really make it part of his or her personality. It's a terribly difficult question, and I'm struggling with it. I believe that the only task that I can really entertain, for better or worse, is to make people alert to these problems. But I don't think that I'm able to offer answers here.

Q: *I think I have one little more question, and the question is: do you think that – in defining this modernity or post-modernity, you refer of course a lot to*

economical causes and dynamics – but do you think that the very existence of psychotherapy has modified society?

B: Well, I think that the existence of psychotherapy is an indispensable component of modernity; actually, I can't imagine it without that. You know, in Michel Foucault's history of psychiatry there were 'Narrenschiffen' [once upon a time. Persons who did not fit into normal life, for one reason or another were unable to adjust were just put on the ship and sent in the no man's land, which was the sea or ocean outside society. Modernity came into life together with the idea of amenability of human character. The Human self, the id, to great extent a creation, a creation which is produced during a long process of teaching and so on. It's something flexible: a human being was born into society not really as a human being; there is a long process of socialisation, of making it a human being, this potentiality into reality. And education and psychotherapy and psychology were absolutely necessary elements of this sort in the world]. If you have the concept of human self as being a human product, then you need psychology, you need psychiatry, you need psychotherapy in order to deal with failed citizens, cases which didn't work. Then came Freud, he expanded that: he said that, in fact, all our life is practically, potentially, to greater or smaller extent, pathological. So it is not just the question of treating the reject of society. The question is of entering the inner problems, you know, the difficulties of individual growth. But, one way or the other, in whatever form, I think I can't imagine, really, The modern spirit, modern way of life, without these institution. All of them by the way are in deep crisis, at the moment, including education...

Q: ... including psychotherapy...?

B: Yes. ... Alright...

B: Vaclav Havel, you know Vaclav Havel?

Q: Yes...

B: He used to say, he was a tremendously impressed, flabbergasted, actually, by the reaction of Czech people to the Russian invasion, how their mood and attitudes changed quickly to one pole to another And he metaphorically expressed it very nicely, really (I think it's a general rule that must be remembered, not only in Czechoslovakia, but all over the world). On the

occasion, he noted: If you want to do something in society, you want to change it, you must be aware what people are prepared to think – a metaphor, he’s a poet. The whole problem, he said, is that no one can predict what people are going to think the next year. And that applies, you know, not only to politicians, freedom fighters, but virtually anybody is dealing with changing human beings. You are dealing with changing human beings; I was dealing with changing human beings all my life because I was a teacher. So whoever does it must remember these words by Vaclav Havel.

Q: *Do you think there is a society, maybe in Europe, that is somehow a little bit better prepared to make changes out of this crisis that we are in?*

B: In Europe... Well, Europe is the oldest modernized part of the world. Two hundred years ago, it was the only modernized part of the world. We have already in our blood, perhaps we have genetically inherited the awareness that, whatever we want to have, we have to be active. I think that the kernel of the issue is that the idea of culture, the idea of identity, were born together with modernity. Now, looking retrospectively, with benefit of hindsight, we look at a very old, ancient age, and we say: well, people always had identities, people always had cultures. The whole problem is that both concepts were invented only in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. So people perhaps always had identities, always had cultures, but they were blissfully unaware of it. But there were no differences between the cycle of seasons in the year and norms that you shouldn’t sleep with your mother. One or the other were nature, were divine verdict, and you couldn’t distinguish between the two. St Paul wrote, as you remember, in the *Letter to Corinthians*, that nature declares that women should have their hair long. “Nature declares”, not a convention. Now, culture was born as an idea that people, like grain in a farmer’s field, should be cultivated. Culture was born as a name for an action, cultivation: agriculture and human culture. And the same identity: identity is something to be made, identity was born as the name for identification, not something given. So, with this awareness, we are obsessively seeking for new ways for finding resolution to problems. We don’t take them sitting down, you know, hunched down. Fate amounts to nothing. On the contrary, we move all the way in the opposite direction so that we are sure, we believe that for every problem there must be a solution. If you have a problem there must be a solution. If there is no solution, then that is somebody’s neglect, somebody must be put in jail and so on. But the idea that there might be problems without solution is totally alien to us. So in a sense, for better or worse, as you asked, you are right,

Europe, because of its long tradition of fighting problems, is better equipped to face new problems, but, on the other hand, we know very well how very often in the past believing that we can find resolutions to a problem led to catastrophes: the latest collapse of banks is a very, very telling example.

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