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Morality is not a recipe for a happy and trouble-free life: Interview with Zygmunt Bauman and Aleksandra Jasińska-Kania

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Abstract

The following text is a transcript of a conversation I had with Prof. Zygmunt Bauman and Prof. Aleksandra Jasińska-Kania in the spring of 2014. At that time I was finishing writing my doctoral dissertation on Karl Popper's social theory. I was just grappling with one of the most serious objections raised against it when – quite by accident – I came across Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* and quickly realized that a number of arguments formulated in it by Bauman, could be used in defense of Popper's theory. Without thinking too much, I wrote a letter to Professor Bauman asking whether my intuitions were correct. Just a few hours later, I received a comprehensive reply, along with an invitation to the professor's home in Leeds for an interview, a transcript of which I present below. During the conversation we discussed topics including moral choice, the relationship between freedom and safety, distinction between ethics and morality and animal rights. Although almost a decade has passed since the following conversation was conducted, I firmly believe that the thoughts contained in this talk are of such a universal nature that they will interest the reader also, and perhaps especially today.

Key words

Liquid modernity; open society; value pluralism

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Resumen

El siguiente texto es la transcripción de una conversación que mantuve con el profesor Zygmunt Bauman y la profesora Aleksandra Jasińska-Kania en la primavera de 2014. Por aquel entonces estaba terminando de escribir mi tesis doctoral sobre la teoría social de Karl Popper. Estaba lidiando con una de las objeciones más serias planteadas en contra de ella cuando –casualmente– me encontré con *Modernidad líquida* de Bauman y rápidamente me di cuenta de que una serie de argumentos formulados en ella por Bauman, podrían ser utilizados en defensa de la teoría de Popper. Sin pensarlo demasiado, escribí una carta al profesor Bauman preguntándole si mis intuiciones eran correctas. Apenas unas horas después, recibí una exhaustiva respuesta, junto con una invitación a la casa del profesor en Leeds para una entrevista, cuya transcripción presento a continuación. Durante la conversación tratamos temas como la elección moral, la relación entre libertad y seguridad, la distinción entre ética y moral y los derechos de los animales. Aunque ha transcurrido casi una década desde que se mantuvo la siguiente conversación, creo firmemente que las reflexiones contenidas en ella son de carácter tan universal que interesarán al lector también, y quizá especialmente hoy.

Palabras clave

Modernidad líquida; sociedad abierta; pluralismo de valores

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Introduction

The delimitation of boundaries between sociology of law and other scientific disciplines is undoubtedly a challenging task. Sociology of law is a discipline that not only functions at the intersection of law and sociology but also it tackles problems that are faced by representatives of other scientific fields, including legal dogmatics, legal theory, philosophy, psychology, sociology, economics etc. However, it is unquestionably possible to distinguish a core of issues typical for socio-legal scientific discourse. These include questions about the ontological status of law, the impact of law on the functioning of society and the influence of society on the shape of legal norms, or about the relationship between positive law and other normative systems. The interview, the transcript of which is published below, touches on the subjects that are relevant for the contemporary socio-legal discourse and hopefully will attract the reader's attention.

I came across Zygmunt Bauman's philosophical reflections accidently but, as it later turned out, it was one of those "accidents" that changed my life for good. Of course, I was familiar with the name of the world-famous sociologist. I had also read some of his minor pieces. It was 2014, and I was finishing my doctoral dissertation on Karl Popper's[1] theory of the open society, fascinated by the figure of Viennese philosopher who I thought was one of the most interesting political thinkers of the 20th century. His *The Open Society and its Enemies* (Popper 2013) is certainly one of the most insightful analyses of totalitarianism I have ever come across. Still, my fascination with Popper did not mean I was lacking in criticism; on the contrary, I saw an important flaw in Popper's political theory. While considering it an asset, Popper deliberately omitted from it all discussions related to axiology and I thought that this "axiological vacuum" was his work's most significant weakness. So, with this in mind, my dissertation was an attempt to modify (improve?) the open society theory through its titular "openness to values". I was convinced that it would make the theory better, more practical, and also more relevant to the real world.

Popper's social theory was obviously criticized from more than one perspective but none of the charges against it seemed sufficiently convincing. It was claimed, among other things, that while the open society was a perfect weapon in combating the 20th-century totalitarianism, it "came to an end" or was "worn out" by the time the Soviet Union collapsed, so there was nothing it had to offer to the modern world with its qualitatively new problems of globalization, Internet anonymity or the war on terror. I was well aware that, as an advocate of Popper's political theory, sooner or later I would have to face these accusations. And this was about the time I came across Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* (2000).

Even though I knew little about Bauman's views, my intuition was that they had nothing to do with the issues with which I was so involved at the time. After all, Bauman was widely regarded as a postmodernist and ethical relativist, so what could he have had in common with Karl Popper, a critical rationalist who left values aside altogether? Reading *Liquid Modernity,* followed by a dozen or so other books by Bauman, made me

[1] The title of my PhD dissertation was: *Społeczeństwo otwarte na wartości. Propozycja modyfikacji teorii społecznej Karla Poppera w duchu pluralizmu etycznego Isaiaha Berlina* (in English: Society open to values. Proposition of a modification of Karl Popper's social theory in the spirit of Isaiah Berlin's ethical pluralism.).

realize how wrong I had been. It turned out that although the two thinkers came from different intellectual backgrounds and adopted radically different research perspectives (Bauman's typically sociological approach was based on the description of the reality observed, while Popper's was rendered as if "from above" through his construction of general and abstract explanatory theory), although for the purposes of their analyses they used different languages, their perceptions of reality converged surprisingly.[2] Indeed, I came to the conclusion that Bauman's modern-day societies of the liquid modern age were open, in the sense that Karl Popper gave to the notion. This conclusion certainly came as a surprise, so I decided to go back to the source to see if my intuitions could be confirmed. I wrote Professor Bauman a letter in which I asked him to help dispel my doubts. He wrote back, clarifying a lot of things for me, but he also invited me to visit him at his home in Leeds to talk about some of these problems. I visited Professor Bauman on April 5, 2014, in his modest home, the main decorative elements in which were the endless shelves of books. He welcomed me with some pastries and strawberries in cream, and we ended up having a long talk, joined by Professor Aleksandra Jasińska-Kania, who later became Professor Bauman's wife. The text that follows is a record of the conversation the three of us had on that April day.

Krzysztof Sielski: *Professor Bauman, thank you again for the invitation and for your time. It is a great privilege to be able to talk about some fundamental existential and moral problems with you as the person who has devoted so much time and attention to thinking about these matters.*

Let us begin with a question about the nature of the moral dilemmas that people constantly face, for it seems that we now live through times in which the belief that there is one good solution for every situation in life definitely prevails, and that when you can't see it, well... you can only blame yourself - your own imperfections, flaws, stupidity. Leszek Kołakowski, for example, in one of his essays [1980] described this phenomenon as the innate optimism of the liberal philosophy of life. In his opinion, it is, to put it mildly, a manifestation of a rather naive perception of reality, since life affects us in radically different ways and often the only choice we have is the lesser evil, which is sometimes very difficult, at other times even tragic. Additionally, particularly in the case of moral choices, it turns out to be an almost dramatic experience for most of us. I can also confirm this based on my own experiences, so I would like to ask about your opinion on this issue, and especially whether we should strive to get rid of this optimistic but perhaps naive belief once and for all?

Zygmunt Bauman: I agree in principle with everything you have said so far, with just the reservation that I would eliminate words like optimism and pessimism because they do not really apply to these positions. The position that there is a solution for every problem is not necessarily optimistic. And its opposite, the belief that it is not true that there is a solution to every problem, is not necessarily pessimistic. It is just a recognition of the human condition. I keep repeating obsessively that the natural habitat of a moral man is the situation of uncertainty. This is because certainty gives rise to conformism, but not to morality. Morality is precisely the belief in the responsibility of making a choice, and having a choice implies the possibility of making a mistake. This is organically included in the concept of choice. A free man is a man who takes risks. To have freedom and eliminate risk is *contradictio in adiecto*. It does not happen. It is

[2] I have written more on this in my book *Społeczeństwo otwarte na wartości*…

impossible, even logically. You rightly refer this to human experience, but even in theory, even in logic, these are contradictory concepts. And therefore, the dichotomy of pessimism and optimism does not apply here at all, but rather the dichotomy of the quietistic, resigned man on the one hand, and the hopeful man on the other. This is the dichotomy that I recognize. Well, the acceptance of Kołakowski's position, with which I completely agree, does not imply a pessimistic attitude; on the contrary. Another thing I keep repeating is Goethe's answer to the question "Have you had a happy life?" He replied, when he was already a very old man, in two sentences, first "Yes my life was very happy" and second, "But I cannot remember a single happy week". The point these words convey is so powerful; it contains the answer to virtually all the existential problems of philosophy. The message that happiness or successful, fulfilling, gratifying life that gives you the feeling of self-satisfaction etc. is not a life without troubles or problems but one life in which troubles are overcome and problems are solved. Also, when it comes to the problem with which you are concerned, let us shift it from ontology to the art of life. It is not a property of the world but more of a choice between human attitudes towards the world.

On the other hand, Kołakowski, in his exceptional little book on Husserl, deals with the myth of certainty and with the postulate, with the desiderate, that one should achieve certainty. Both are, in his opinion, unattainable. Alright, then, that's the way it is! But does the analysis in terms of optimism - pessimism apply to this existential situation? I guess not. This is our condition, given by God, nature, evolution... I don't know what. However, the fact is that we are constantly confronted by situations in which there is more than one choice, with choices being always made under conditions of considerable uncertainty. Even in concentration camps or gulags people were still facing the situations of standing at the crossroads, facing a choice. They always had a choice of throwing themselves on the electric barbed wire, which meant that if they did not, they agreed to being exposed to controversial or depraved conduct. I once came across someone's memory from a concentration camp of a kapo hitting a prisoner without any reason. He was asked "Why?", to which he responded, "There is no such thing as 'why'!" - and that's how it was. The idea behind the concentration camps was to take normal situations to their limits, to extremes. This was a final experiment in how far you could deprive people of choice. Well, it turned out you could not deprive man of choice.

Aleksandra Jasińska-Kania: I would like to add that while we obviously always make choices in situations of risk, we are also trying to assess the degree of risk, and psychologists find certain regularities here. For example, when we are in a situation in which punishment or reward are deferred in time, we are willing to take on more risk. In other situations, we expect more immediate gratifications, without considering what happens next.

Z.B.: I agree, but I also think that risk, even when you make attempts to assess its degree, can never be eliminated.

A.J.K.: Yes, of course. It is only when you anticipate the long-term consequences of these choices that the risk still increases.

Z.B.: Yes, and this is when my second rule enters the stage, which is that if a task is unsolvable, it does not mean that we must stop trying to solve it. And that's what we do. My favorite example is the conflict between two fundamental values, without which it

is hard to imagine a decent human life, i.e. the value of safety (certainty) and the value of freedom. They need one another, as you know, because safety without freedom is slavery, so in this sense slaves would be happy if it was possible, but on the other hand, freedom without elementary safety means being condemned to chaos, powerlessness and impotence. So, we must figure it out, even though none of the alternatives has turned out to be flawless as yet. Every single one is flawed in some way, and that's why I think that progress does not take place along a straight line, but it is a pendulum. First, we don't have enough freedom, and we're ready to get rid of many aspects of safety in the name of having more freedom. And when we get there, the pendulum immediately starts to shift the other way. Why do I need all that freedom when I also feel insecure, threatened, and hardly know what to do with myself? But we are already doomed to it. Still, assuming that this is the human condition, we can still live very sensibly and do a lot. Similarly, this does not mean that if there is no such thing as a perfect society, there is absolutely no need to try and improve it. I don't know if it's pessimism or optimism. I don't know if this is a recipe for resignation or a call to action, but in my opinion it depends on a human choice. If we have a choice, we must choose. In a small book I wrote about the art of living, I said that there were two things that worked together to define human life, though they are not always on friendly terms. One is fate, which is a collective name for everything we cannot control, things that happen to us rather than things we do. And on the other hand, there is character, that is everything that comes out of us. Therefore, we can polish our character, improve it, and are very often critical of it. We wish to change it and assume that we can. And these two things coexist and none can be crossed out. Fate creates a set of realistic options for you and me even though the set is not up to us. It is fate that creates them for us. For example, you were born in Przemyśl, not in Hawaii, and you have no influence over this. You were also born in a family that owned plenty of books, not in a family where paper was only used for wrapping gifts. This is fate. And character makes choices from these realistic options.

K.S.: *Professor Bauman, you have referred to freedom and safety, saying that we must constantly figure things out, pick our way between the two. I wanted to ask you therefore about the relationships between values; some claim that they form a hierarchically ordered system, while others dismiss that as a fantasy. For example, Kołakowski, whom we already mentioned here today, says that the immanent feature of values is that there is an inevitable, constant tension between them, and following any one value at all costs would turn the human world into ruins.*

Z.B.: Yes. This would be criminal. All totalitarianisms were of this kind - this was their felony; that one ideal was supposed to invalidate all others, but we hesitate all the time, like in the example of safety and freedom. As soon as we've achieved a lot in one direction, we immediately become excited about the other. There is no objective relationship between values at all. They are, as Leszek says, very beautiful and in constant, mutual tension. We can use the German expression *Hassliebe,* which means love-hate, or hate-love - each requires a certain dose of the other to be sustainable at all, but they also clash at some point and begin interfering with each other, as in the case of freedom and safety.

K.S.: *Similarly to the right to abortion.*

Z.B.: Yes, the value of life and the value of choice - of course the two are in continuous conflict. Their followers argue, but neither party can prove that they are absolutely right

and say that the other value is imaginary. No, each of these values is very real. We want to be able to choose and at the same time we respect life.

A.J.K.: We recently attended a conference at which the Hungarian philosopher Agnes Heller gave a paper about beauty. She reminded us that in Plato's philosophy, beauty was integrated into an ideal that somehow incorporated truth, good and beauty. But then, with time, as philosophy developed, these values gained autonomy and became distinct. On the surface, what could be better than a combination of truth, beauty and good? But these values could also be in great tension with each other. What is beautiful does not necessarily have to be good, what is true does not have to be good; truth can also bring suffering and pain.

Z.B.: Yes. Truth isn't always good, and good isn't always beautiful. Personally, I've struggled terribly with these three old Greek values. I wrote about it a lot in *Postmodern Ethics* [1993]. Aesthetizing morality or de-moralizing the world through aesthetics is a huge problem today. And contrariwise, there is morality in relation to aesthetics. Kant wrote as many as three different criticisms to answer the question about these three values, their construction and functioning, but these are eternal questions, Krzysztof, and do not think that you will solve those contradictions, although one must try...

K.S.: Hassliebe, *I didn't know the term, but it's actually perfectly suited to describe this relationship. So, in striving for a moral life, should we, by definition, be inconsistent, that is, just, sincere or merciful, but always to a certain limit, without losing ourselves in any of these values? And if so, where should we look for that boundary? In our moral intuition perhaps?*

Z.B.: My teacher of ethics, though he didn't know it, was Emmanuel Levinas. He was not aware of being my teacher, but I am well aware of it. Well, his first rule is that my duties towards the Other are always one step ahead of the duties of the Other towards me. I mean, I am always more responsible for the other person than the other person is for me. So, we reject the positivist explanation of morality that it is worth being good to the Other, because then the Other will be good to me. No, the issue of reciprocity in general is completely removed from this way of thinking. Morality is my responsibility, that's it, full stop.

Furthermore, I am responsible for the other person, not to the other person. Because if you are responsible to your boss, for example, it is not a moral relationship. It is a relationship of power or subordination. And here in our way of thinking, the Other doesn't force me to do anything, neither am I responsible for that person because he is stronger than me. On the contrary, I am responsible for him because he is weaker than me, because he cannot command me, and so on. And this is one problem that Levinas solves.

The second issue is that every moral relationship with *the Other* includes an internal contradiction. Because I feel responsible for the Other, I must be able to imagine what I must do to meet this responsibility; I mean, I must imagine what situation would be good for this person. But fancy that the rascal is a subjective entity and he also has his own ideas about what is good and what is bad, and then the two ideals may easily clash. Therefore, the line between serving the Other and imposing on him is very fragile. It is actually impossible to avoid breaking it. Writing about this, I often use a metaphor of thinking of moral attitudes in terms of the senses of sight, hearing or touch. And I

concluded that touch or even caress is a good metaphor, because a caress can very easily turn into rape. In this case, the fragility of the boundary is essential. So you cannot assume that you have an answer to what your responsibility should express itself in because a normal person, being entangled in relationships with other people, involved in their circumstances etc., must always try and understand, never quite being certain. The uncertainty is always there.

Regardless of Levinas, Knud Løgstrup, a Danish pastor and then professor of theology at the University of Aarhus, came to a similar conclusion, but named it differently. He used the term 'unspoken order'. We have a moral warrant in us. Pascal had already called it "The moral law in me", but that moral injunction wasn't spoken of. Something is pressing on us, but we don't know which way to go or how to do it. Although Løgstrup was a pastor, he opposed the concept of Christian morality. He said that if Jesus Christ had left us a code of moral conduct, such a code would only have educated conformists, not moral selves, because the moral self is about accepting responsibility and the risk of error goes with every responsibility. And the awareness that I might not have done as much as I should have, or that I might not have done what I should have, will be always with us. Please remember, morality is not a recipe for a happy and trouble-free life, and this also has to be accepted.

K.S.: *Well, yes, but doesn't reaching for Levinas' famous statement that ethics precedes ontology sound metaphysical?*

Z.B.: Yes, but what's wrong with that?

K.S.: Nothing. I'm only a little surprised because, in my opinion, sociology is a descriptive science: we observe social reality and describe what we have observed. And here, as it were, at the very center of thinking about morality, we have a profound metaphysical thesis! So, the question is: have you not felt tempted to seek an answer to the question of what is morality beyond metaphysics?

Z.B.: You know, I haven't created any general method for philosophers, but when they put pressure on me, I define the way I practice sociology as sociological hermeneutics, which must not be confused with hermeneutical sociology. Hermeneutical sociology is a certain school of thought, but I think the nature of sociology is that we practice sociological hermeneutics. It differs from the hermeneutics of philologists in that it does not refer to the structure of the text, but to the structure of the human situation. And it interprets people's behaviour and opinions by referring to situations in which they find themselves (the pressures and problems they have to face, etc.) and not to the internal consistency or inconsistency, logic and rationalism of the text, which is in this case their behaviours and their utterances. And in order to practice sociological hermeneutics, one must, of course, be familiar with the social system in which people find themselves.

And although sometimes they call me a philosopher, I am not. In fact, I am not really interested in such problems as whether something is metaphysical or not, but I am interested in the ontology of the human condition. And the fact that the condition is internally inconsistent. I'm interested in that if I don't have an answer to a problem; it doesn't mean that I don't have enough knowledge but that the problem is unresolvable, that this contradiction will last forever, no matter what we do. And even so, knowing all this, we are still trying to solve the contradiction.

A.J.K.: I would add that, as a sociologist, Zygmunt tries to give a description of social reality. The description is a constructed vision of this context, structure, situation etc., but the vision always refers to a certain fragment of reality, meaning that it is within some framework of reality distinguished in a given situation, and this framework is changeable and unstable. What's more, this vision is always based on a certain choice of parameters for the description of the reality. So, this inconsistency and contradiction are linked with something appearing every now and then from the outside of the framework that we are considering, from the outside of the dimensions that we choose for ourselves. And so, this 'something' comes in and interferes with what is already inside the framework. Sociological hermeneutics always involves a kind of sociological imagination. Therefore, the description in question is not of the kind here we have reality and we, sociologists, describe it correctly or incorrectly in compliance with the classical theory of truth, and our judgments are either compliant or not with reality. The compliance is always assessed within a certain model.

Z.B.: And please note, that the hermeneutics that we practice is secondary because we interpret things that have already been interpreted, such as family, nation, state, society, or community. Whatever you might mention, when it comes to sociological terms, it has been already pre-interpreted by the reason of human actors and we always begin with what they've already arrived at. We enter a dialogue with these popular interpretations. When I was a student, they taught me that sociology was supposed to correct so-called common sense, which is fundamentally wrong. And that's not true. We live off this common sense. Sociology is in a constant dialogue with common sense. Physicists have the advantage over sociologists in that they don't have to be in a dialogue with electrons. In fact, electrons don't care at all what is said about them, so physicists have total power and authority over how they will describe their movement. They might consult their lab, but they don't have to consult the electrons about anything. But we, and our objects, speak the same language, live in similar conditions, face similar problems. You remember when Stańczyk asked what the most popular profession in Poland was, and it turned out to be physician. To prove it, he tied his mouth with a rag, sat down outside on the stairs and shouted out that his tooth hurt. As it turned out every passer-by stopped to give him advice. We sociologists are in the same spot, sociology being the most popular profession in the world. Everyone is a sociologist, everyone knows whether to trust people or not, who is good and who is bad, who is the oppressor and who are the oppressed, and so on. And suddenly we come in, trying to get things in order. That is not easy. I don't know if it's always right. I don't know whose interpretation is better. But in any case, the dialogue goes on.

K.S.: *Now I would like to ask your opinion on Karl Popper's political theory. Has it influenced your own views to any extent?*

Z.B.: In 1956-57 I was at the London School of Economics together with a logician from Poznan, who was full of praise for Popper. Well... as for me, I didn't quite share his admiration. Anyway, I didn't attend any of Popper's lectures at the time. Of course, I read *The Open Society*, I even used it in my lectures, but I never considered it to be of fundamental importance. What I certainly took from Popper was his concept of partial improvements, although, to tell you the truth, I was more comfortable with Richard Rorty's later approach to the same problem. Rorty, as you know, distinguishes between

campaign politics and movement politics. The movement politics is all about planning steps and actions and evaluating what happens, according to whether it brings us closer to a certain goal or takes us away from it. In other words, we can tell if something is valuable and commendable from the point of view of getting closer to the goal. In fact, movement politics is not interested at all in the current costs of the process, for example, whether you must sacrifice the very important needs of a lot of people to get closer to the goal. Of course, all totalitarianisms were like that. When it came to be getting closer to the goal, they didn't care at all about human sacrifices.

On the other hand, we have campaign politics. In this case, the assumption is that there is no such thing as a perfect, just society, so the only sensible and morally worthy call is to fight the evil that you come across. For example, there are plenty of illegal immigrants from Mexico in California who are virtually defenseless against exploiters, if only because, being illegal, they are not allowed to join trade unions. So, the idea is to fight for trade union rights for illegal immigrants, to get rid of at least one injustice in the world. Rorty also mentions the example of homosexuals who have no right to have families, so the fight for those rights is to remove another injustice from the world. This does not mean that there are a thousand of injustices and that if you deal with one there will be only nine hundred and nighty nine left. Each time we try to deal with one injustice, we somehow inadvertently produce two new ones, so the number will not be reduced but somewhere, some people will for one reason or another stop suffering. This is, I think, a better version of what Popper advocated as partial improvement. But there is something in it, I guess.

K.S.: *Let us return to axiology for a moment. As you know, Lawrence Kohlberg distinguishes three levels of human moral reasoning - pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional. The first is based on a system of punishments and rewards, the second is made up of social conventions, and the most interesting is the third level, according to which a morally mature individual can already see that the commonly accepted moral norms are, in a way, made up by conventions, so some can be accepted and some rejected, and an individual moral structure is shaped in this way. Yet Kohlberg's conclusion is pessimistic. This is because it turns out that the post-conventional level is available only to a handful of selected, morally most sensitive people, while most of us never reach this stage, being stuck instead at the conventional level.*

I would like to relate this to you own distinction between ethics and morality, which I find very interesting. Is it not that in the era of liquid modernity, the morality that you are writing about, is accessible only to the chosen few? Obviously, if it were to be so, this would also mean that the remaining people would suffer because of it. On the one hand, in the liquid, post-modern world, they would lose their ethics (i.e. safety, codes, conventions, etc.), and on the other, would will never rise to the post-conventional level, because it will always be beyond their reach in a way?

Z.B.: Yes. This was also what Levinas was concerned about. Like Husserl, he spent the last years of his life trying to find his way back to his ideal type. In Husserl's case, it was certainty, and in Levinas' morality, and he didn't manage to solve it by the end of his life. As you know, Husserl's attempts found their way to print only after his death, because he had been unsatisfied with them and hadn't dared to publish them. Similarly, Levinas did not leave a solution for us. Unlike Hobbes, who said that society is absolutely inevitable and necessary, because otherwise human life would be short, miserable and cruel, that is, to save people from their innate aggressiveness, according

to Levinas society is absolutely necessary and inevitable to save people from their moral impulse. This is because the moral impulse is absolute, and therefore is addressed only to saints. A normal person like you and me, entangled in the necessities of life, is unable to cope with it. Therefore, society is here to adjust this absolute responsibility to the size of the human possibilities of normal people, not saints. And so moral codes get created, which say: "you have a duty to do this and that, and once you have done it, you can sleep peacefully". This is the whole sense of these moral codes; it is what Kohlberg calls conventional ethics. The conventions are there to enable us to live with that unrestricted, stammering, unrelenting moral impulse that makes us constantly feel guilty, even if you are charitable, you still think you could do more than you have done, and you experience anxiety and self-loathing. And Kohlberg beautifully described the relationship in what I call the moral party of two. Two people meet face-to-face; this is when a relatively ideal moral situation can be achieved. A moral situation is when I do something because I feel responsible for this other person, and I don't care at all how much I will be paid for it or whether that person will repay me in some way. But now, the third man comes in and it's not just me and you anymore. Now it's me, you and him. And then what? Then I must compare the two. Which one is more entitled to my time, my attention, my care or help? And so, the comparisons begin. For example, when we move from two to three, the possibility of a coalition of two against one begins, and so do complications. And poor Levinas tried to solve this contradiction in his old age. Just as Husserl arrived at transcendental subjectivity, which is the inviolable fortress of truth, certainty, etc. by means of phenomenological reduction, Levinas - Husserl's disciple, by the way – arrived at transcendental morality. Okay, but this morality is transcendental. So how do we reconcile it with the local, current morality that people must live by every day? And in this way, I suppose, because I don't know for sure, Kołakowski arrived at the concept of morality without a code, and I came to the concept of morality without ethics, because for me ethics is a code - it is a convention. So, we came to a very similar conclusion. I don't know if Kołakowski reached it in the same way I did, but I suppose it involved more or less the same reasoning. The two of us used to work with at the same faculty in Poland, and later here in England, we were very often in contact. Admittedly, he was in Oxford, and we were here in Leeds, but we visited each other often. But please remember what Hannah Arendt said, that thinking is the loneliest of all human endeavors. He was thinking and I was thinking, but we were thinking separately. No matter how much we talked to each other, thinking remained a lonely activity for each of us. It's best done when there is no one else around.

K.S.: *In conclusion, I would like to ask for your opinion on animal rights. To be more precise, I would like to ask you whether speaking of concern for the fate of the Other, you mean only people, or, for example, all living beings that can feel suffering?*

Z.B.: This is something that I'm missing, in a way. Undoubtedly, there is one fundamental difference between the concepts of "human rights" and "animal rights". After all, animal rights are determined by man not by animals. These are the rights imposed by man and we undeniably give rights to animal beings from the point of view of human interests, and not necessarily from the point of view of animal interests. We cannot speak of the immanence of animal rights either. Besides, we are terribly inconsistent in this matter. Do we grant the rights of living beings to cockroaches, lice, fleas? An essential element of the definition of humanity is that it recognizes human

rights. There is no humanity without respect for human rights, but when you try to translate it into animals, it turns out that it is no longer so easy. Animals devour each other and we devour animals. Okay, but when it came to the mad cow epidemic in England, hundreds of thousands of cows were slaughtered without hesitation and burned without any scruples; the stench of these burned bodies spread all over England. Besides, if it had not been for the human desire to eat these cows, they would have never been born, because they were in fact artificially bred, so they owed their lives to us. They owed us the slaughterhouse, but at the same time, they owed us the fact that they could have been born to the world. As you can see, there are a lot of things in this context that are altogether unrelated to human rights. I would say that we understand the term "rights" differently when talking about people and animals. Anyway, since cannibalism has been abolished – you could perhaps compare these rights when cannibalism was in place but today "human rights" and "animal rights" are two different legal terms. These are two different matters.

K.S.: *Thank you very much for this conversation.*

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