

OLD DILEMMAS RENEWED: FEAR OF FREEDOM VS. FREEDOM FROM FEAR

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Abstract: Contemporary societies are currently subjected to very rapid and radical social changes and, as a consequence, struggle with their outcomes. The results range from the unforeseen repercussions of globally shifting political powers, through rising nationalisms, to prolonged economic, environmental, political and humanitarian crises. Critical analysis of the theories focused on the phenomena of authoritarianism, escapism, political myth, and conformity allows for outlining a comprehensive picture of the universally recognized opposition between freedom and security. From the distinction between the positive and negative freedom to the ambiguity surrounding the concept of “freedom from fear”, the fundamental dilemma is viewed from a historical perspective and illustrated with modern examples, emphasizing its current validity, insightfulness and potential in analyzing contemporary global problems. This approach allows for in-depth analyses of diversified social and political issues, such as the North African-European refugee crisis, rising nationalisms in the Western world, or a marked shift in political and social perspectives worldwide, from modern escapism to the birth of new myths of state.

Keywords: authoritarianism, freedom, Fromm, political myth, security.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization is a phenomenon which can be perceived in many different ways – from an approach defining globalization as an ontological fact to the phenomenological perspective, viewing it as a matter of intersubjectively created convictions; within the confines of this article I propose to see globalization as a social fact in the meaning presented by Emile Durkheim: as a socially created phenomenon which has real consequences (Durkheim 1895). The size and scope of globalization remain the points of many heated discussions, but the fact that we live now in a “global village” (McLuhan 1962) reigns undisputed. Even the sheer amount of scientific journals devoted solely to globalization (the list of which makes a separate page on Wikipedia) and its many aspects

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proves not only the importance of this issue but also the universal conviction that globalization simply is, that it became a reality, that it affects our societies and the world we live in. If we agree with that statement, we also need to accept that the current globalization processes have a degree of influence over contemporary political decisions and to some extent shape the awareness of modern societies.

Our period of late modernity is a time of shifting perspectives and rapidly changing natural and social environment. The decisions made in one part of the world possess the ability to heavily influence the state of affairs in other states, continents or markets. The information became a modern currency, the control over it a new and very influential form of power. And yet, even in those novel times, people still are governed by emotions and beliefs that have existed long before. Foremost among them seems the universal and age-old dilemma between security and freedom. This article analyzes the recent consequences of the fundamental ontological distinction between freedom and security, studied closely by social thinkers such as Erich Fromm, Leszek Kołakowski, Stanley Milgram or Richard Grunberger. In our times of rapid, thorough change sociology is often accused of using outdated terminology and theories which have long outlived its usefulness. Sometimes the accusations seem well grounded. But then and again, when one looks closely at the traditions and the heritage of past sociologies, one can find rare gems of startling insightfulness, acutely compelling social commentary, moral and philosophical analyses which deal with contemporary problems with a clarity born from the advantage of distance. *Historia magistra vitae est*, claimed Cicero. History can really be a teacher, but the real question is, are we apt enough students?

FEAR OF FREEDOM

In 1941 Erich Fromm published a book called “Escape from Freedom”, or “The Fear of Freedom”. Rooted deeply in the critical theory paradigm of Frankfurt School (Held 1980), the book delved into different aspects of freedom and the historical changes in the reception of this very idea. Needless to say that it did so mainly from the Western European point of view, drawing from

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historical examples in order to better understand the unexpected lure of totalitarian ideologies. But the cultural or time limitations of this perspective should not serve as a cause to refute the importance of whole theory – on the contrary, I believe that Fromm’s analysis should serve today as a basis on which a broader understanding of the conflict between the concepts of freedom and security can be created.

Fromm starts his analysis with a differentiation between two distinct categories of freedom: positive and negative. Positive freedom is defined by him as the ability to fulfill one’s potential, a “realization of his individual self”, as an unhindered growth. Negative freedom, on the other hand, is defined as the freedom “from” something: from oppression, barriers and constraints, from preexisting bonds and structures. These two perspectives on freedom were not Fromm’s original idea; they are a traditional, and a uniquely Western concept, promoted by Isaiah Berlin (Berlin 1971) and rooted in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. There have been many attempts to overcome this division, the most notable coming from Gerald C. MacCallum, who proposes to look at freedom as a triadic relation between agent, certain preventing conditions, and certain actions of the agent (Carter 2012). The division, however, between negative and positive freedom (I will refrain from using the word “liberty” to avoid terminological ambiguities), still continues to prevail in the general social discourse and proves difficult to refute.

Fromm argues that in modern times people have acquired an abundance of freedom in the negative sense: old social structures and bonds have been overthrown or disassembled, and the new ones hadn’t yet fully emerged. People freed themselves from the constraints of old beliefs and traditions, from the constant scrutiny of tightly bound communities. As Zygmunt Bauman puts it, “the present-day situation emerged out of the radical melting of the fetters and manacles rightly or wrongly suspected of limiting the individual freedom to choose and to act” (Bauman 2000: 5). In such a world a person seems indeed free from old obligations, from old values, traditional loyalties and set ways of life, but for a price. Many social scientists, from Ferdinand Tönnies and his famous differentiation between community and society (Tönnies 2002) to already mentioned Bauman and Fromm, argue that the

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old structures may have limited the individual freedom, but at the same time they served as an anchor, a point of stability granting one a sense of security, of belonging, of meaning. The choice was made for one, not by one. Once these structures, or, to put it in more phenomenological terms, these frames of reference, perceived as real by their users, have been dismantled, this sense of security disappeared as well, leaving behind feelings of anxiety, loss and solitude. According to Fromm, the increase in the levels of individual negative freedom has not been followed by a corresponding rise in positive liberty. The contemporary man has not been able to fully realize his potential because the old structures, which bound and limited the scope of his negative freedom, at the same time fulfilled his needs of security and safety, necessary for one's growth. Once the old structures have fallen and the new have not yet emerged, these needs remained unfulfilled, thus blocking the achievement of the higher-order needs (Maslow 1943; 1954), like one's self-esteem or individual development.

Fromm looks for an explanation of this process into the history of the Western world – in the emergence of capitalism and Protestantism, in the birth of the social and cultural movement of Enlightenment. He creates a parallel between the individual human growth and the changes in the European culture in an effort of demonstrating how the negative human freedom is gained in a painful process of emancipation. But this aspect of Fromm's analysis is negligible for the needs of this article. Instead, I would like to concentrate on the universal facets of his theory.

We have already defined freedom in its both aspects, as proposed in Fromm's work. Thus, a need arises to similarly consider the meaning of security. It could be justly defined as freedom from danger, from fear or anxiety (Merriam-Webster 2015). Defined as such, security may be seen as a particular instance of negative freedom. How, then, freedom may be the opposite of itself?

FREEDOM FROM FEAR

Let's try to tentatively overcome the division in definitions of freedom. For the purpose of this article, let's define freedom as a possibility of an individual growth, limited only by one's internal restrictions. In this view, freedom, both negative and positive, is

an ability to choose, to act without constraints. Even more than that, in a contemporary world deprived of traditional structures this possibility becomes a necessity, a compulsion of choice. Old, set-in-stone ways of life have crumbled, leaving us in a world with almost no tangible limits, no everlasting, universally accepted authorities, routines, or rules; we live in liquid modernity, to use the term proposed by Bauman (Bauman 2000). We have now become our own creators, forced to choosing our ways of life, our identities and values, from immeasurable multitude of possibilities. We, the children of liquid modernity, believe in the saying that “every man is the architect of his own fortune” so deeply that the question of its trueness became extraneous. But this almost unlimited freedom of choice is weighed down by the awareness of inescapable responsibilities and of increasing risk, which is inseparable from the choice itself. Each possibility carries its own risk. Each choice is steeped in the ultimate uncertainty of the outcome. And so to us, the act of making a choice, any choice, is in essence an act of a deliberate choosing of risk, without full knowledge required for an informed decision, without full understanding of the responsibility entailed. Ulrich Beck claims that risk has become such an irremovable trait of contemporary times that it is a defining characteristic of modern society (Beck 1992). The compulsion of choice breeds anxiety and uncertainty; this act of free human will for many becomes something to be dreaded rather than treasured.

Security, on the other hand, is a state where choice is irrelevant and risk almost nonexistent. Security can indeed be interpreted as a form of freedom – a freedom from choice. Freedom from uncertainty, from fear and anxiety. In a secure environment most of the choices are already made for us and in these that are still to be made the risk is substantially mitigated. There are various “safety nets” minimizing the hazards of a wrong pick, there are socially accepted and promoted choices and decisions, there’s usually a developed social structure, “securing” an individual in more ways than one: binding him while at the same time protecting him from harm. However, in the act of obtaining a level of security one needs to put limits on one’s freedom. There are things one is no longer able to do, there are other things which he must do in order to remain safe. For every tiny piece of gained security we have to pay with freedom, as evidenced e.g. by the Patriot Act, by the NSA surveillance actions revealed by Edward Snowden, by

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the walls, both physical and psychological, being built even now in Europe and the USA, which are already breaking the fragile unity achieved in the last seventy years.

According to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954), the need of security is one of the fundamental human requirements, second in importance only to the most basic need of fulfilling physical necessities of life. It's a universal need, not dictated by changing times, cultures, nor ideologies. After all, the most famous wall in the world is the one in China, built for over two millennia (Britannica 2014). Maslow's theory has been partially confirmed in a 2011 research, conducted in 123 countries (Tai, Diener 2011), which indicated that the psychological significance of security is expressed universally by people from varied cultures and social backgrounds. Tai and Diener also confirmed Maslow's hypothesis that the need for security, together with the basic physical needs, tend to be achieved before other needs listed in Maslow's hierarchy. Among the other, secondary needs, there is also the need for self-actualization. Self-actualization was listed by Maslow at the top of his hierarchy, as the highest-order need which is fulfilled only after achieving all other needs – and it's a construct defined both by Maslow and by Tai and Diener in terms of autonomy, growth and individual freedom.

From the psychological standpoint it would seem that the continuing tug of war between security and freedom should easily be won by security as the embodiment of a more basic need. And indeed, Erich Fromm listed several most common ways of escape from freedom. The three main modes of action available to a modern man are: authoritarianism, destructiveness, and automaton conformity. All of them have one thing in common: a desperate need for security. And despite the fact that Fromm's book was written more than a half century ago, those three ways of escape still function, and again they become more and more important for our understanding of the modern world.

ESCAPE FROM FREEDOM

Authoritarianism depicted by Fromm, who heavily leant on Freud's psychoanalysis theory, is a complicated amalgam of sadistic and masochistic tendencies, defined not in the context of sexu-

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al desires but rather in the broader perspective of one's mastery over others (Fromm 1942: 155-157). These tendencies are an individual's response to the acute feelings of loneliness and anxiety, resulting from the drastic increase of his negative freedom and the toppling of old social structures. The sadistic impulse reveals itself in the attempts to gain control over others, to impose a resemblance of order on the reality surrounding an individual. At the same time the supplementing masochistic urge translates into a willingness to submit oneself to a superior force, one able to control an individual, to give him meaning and purpose. Authoritarianism as a psychological trait is then an individual's urge to become part of something bigger than himself; to lose one's individuality in something infinitely more powerful, more secure than oneself, be it a person, an idea, or an institution.

Fromm calls this urge "authoritarian"; but Leszek Kołakowski argues that this almost compulsive need to belong is something far from a sado-masochistic complex; it is rather an indispensable characteristic of man (Kołakowski 1972; 1989). In *The Presence of Myth* Kołakowski claims there is a universal human urge to find answers to ultimate questions, to understand one's place in the world, and that this need can appear in three separate forms. The first of them, according to Kołakowski, is a need to make the empirical reality understandable; to give the reality a purposeful order, a comprehensible structure. The second form of this urge is the need for faith in permanence of human values. This faith is inextricably interlinked with the belief that there must be such aspects of human existence which last longer than an individual lifespan and which are intersubjective. And on the heels of this belief comes the third version of the need – the desire to see the world as continuous. People are aware of the inescapable nature of change; this awareness prompts them to look for a gateway from this transient state; they wish to see the world at least partly immune to change.

According to Kołakowski, this need is born at the moment of an intellectual separation of self from the universe. The moment when one comprehends one's unique, separate individuality, and the world's indifference toward himself, heralds the arrival of fear, anxiety and insecurity. All attempts at uniting one with the universe are bound to fail, as one cannot go back to the state before consciousness and still see oneself as an individual, but that

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doesn't stop anyone from trying. According to Kołakowski, the ultimate human response to the world's indifference translates itself into the need to impose order and continuity on the world. To be in control. To comprehend. To own, in a biblical sense of mastery over the world. This need is fulfilled – although never completely – by myth; and nowadays the myth appears most often in the form of various ideologies.

At this point the theories of Kołakowski and Fromm meet once again. At the root of the universal human urge to mythologize the reality we can find the fear of a total freedom. Without structures, without stability, without continuity, the man is left with chaos; a reality which one cannot interpret in a meaningful way, a reality which deprives one of his own sense of existence. The authoritarian character, combining sadistic and masochistic impulses in his drive to become whole once more, to dissolve oneself in something greater than just a sum of parts, finds some solace in the communal act of imposing structure on reality. More often than not in our times this act becomes political in the original, ancient Greek meaning of this word – as something related to *polis*, to what concerns all citizens of the community.

Political myth

Incidentally, this is exactly the mechanism of action for political myths as described by Ernst Cassirer in his 1946 book *The Myth of the State*, in which he analyzed the rise of Nazism through the lenses of history and philosophy. According to Cassirer, the myths and mythical rituals are an entirely communal effort – they bind all the members of society together, giving them all one common identity and taking away any remaining traces of individual responsibility. The group becomes the only real moral actor, and its collective responsibility the only responsibility there is. Kołakowski claims that the reference to myth is an “act of total, entrusting acceptance with no sense of need for justification” (Kołakowski 1989: 45). This acceptance of myth is the act of relinquishing responsibility for one's own actions, an act of complete submission to something greater, something permanent and, hopefully, immutable. The form of the myth, the promises of sta-



bility and security, of some higher sense of existence, that myth offers, is to its followers more important than its actual content.

A political myth is a peculiar attempt at imposition of order on the social reality. To thrive, it must give an answer to the universal ontological problem described by Kołakowski: a confirmation of the structured meaning of human existence. It needs to bring with it an order imposed on the chaos of reality, especially the chaos resulting from a rapid change. Cassirer focused his analysis on the mythology of Nazism, but even today we may see many such myths at play – from the classical myths of the state being recreated and re-told at present by modern Russia or Hungary, through the rise of nationalistic ideologies throughout Europe and the U.S., to the social myths fuelling to some extent the most recent case of *migrātiō gentium* from the destabilized countries of Northern Africa. In the world of Bauman’s liquid modernity change is constant. Insecurity is the new reality, in which we all must find ourselves, must make ourselves anew. In this protean world political myths and collective identities promise salvation: security and belonging. When freedom of choice becomes a burden, paying with it for the treasure of safety seems like an easy way out.

Modern Russia is in a state of constant turmoil; since the fall of USSR in 1990 and the end of the Cold War, Russia has been struggling to reinvent itself. The newest attempt of Russian political elites seems to be based on the imperial traditions of the USSR – on creating so called “spheres of influence” (Britannica 2014), on using the threat of a global war as a political and economic tool, on bringing to life the old maxim of divide et impera. The myth of a strong and unified state, of a previous Golden Age, to which new Russia can and should aspire, fills modern Russian media and is welcomed by the Russian society. To that end, the USSR’s is not the only tradition to which modern Russia hearkens back; the Unity Day established in 2004 commemorates a popular uprising against the Polish occupation of Kremlin in 1612 and was created to replace the holiday commemorating the October Revolution. As an “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm, Ranger 1983) it serves to remind Russians of their political subjectivity and agency as citizens of the state, binding the image of new, post-USSR Russia with its imperial past. In line with the decisions concerning the symbolic identity of a nation come the political and military ac-

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tions, such the creation of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, a military alliance between six post-Soviet states: Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (2002), or the invasion on Ukraine (2014). In June 2015 the public approval for Vladimir Putin reached an all-time-high of 89 per cent, according to Levada Centre Polling (Nardelli, Rankin and Arnett, 2015). The rise of the popularity of the Russian president seems tightly linked with his decision to invade Ukraine. In the currently prevailing Russian myth of state, Ukraine is shown as an integral part of Great Russia, and Russian annexation of Crimea or of the eastern parts of Ukraine are viewed as a long-awaited reunion.

The Hungary under the rule of Viktor Órban revives a nationalistic dream of Greater Hungary from the period of Austro-Hungarian Empire, dissolution of which was a direct result of an armistice ending the World War I. Órban's political vision of a strong nation indirectly questions the political and social order rooted in the treaties from Versailles and Trianon, shaping myths of former glory and unity, from which a new nationalistic identity is supposed to emerge. The signs are subtle, but clear: in 2000, the head of the World Hungarian Congress, claimed that "A Hungarian is someone who is pained by Trianon" (The Globalist, 2000); the Hungarian president posted the Greater Hungary emblems on his Facebook page during the July 2015 diplomatic visit to Romania (Reuters 2015); the national Hungarian TV regularly shows a weather forecast for all the territories within the pre-Trianon borders of Greater Hungary (Hirado 2015), in 2004 a new national holiday was established to commemorate the signing of the Trianon treaty. In the bill establishing the National Unity Day the Parliament asserts that "all Hungarians and Hungarian communities are part of a unified Hungarian nation, which exists over state boundaries and is an essential element of the Hungarian identity." (Gulyas 2010).

The nationalistic movements are growing stronger not only in Hungary, but throughout the whole Europe – from Finland and Ukraine through Poland and Germany, to Scotland and Catalonia. Their activities and ideology vary greatly, from anti-immigrant movements growing in strength in Western Europe faced with a refugee crisis, through radical right-wing parties, such as Hungarian Jobbik, French National Front and Polish far-right National Movement, to openly neo-Nazi parties such as German NPD and



Greek Golden Dawn. The separatist movements across Europe consolidate and grow both in numbers and in importance: Scotland voted down a separatist referendum in September 2014 (BBC, 2016), and a few months later Catalonia's government organized a similar voting of their own, despite the Spanish Constitutional Court's ruling suspending the referendum (Noguer 2014).

The phenomenon of rising nationalisms and the bunker mentality is not limited to Europe. Acclaimed social scientist Samuel Huntington portends that the presence of Hispanic immigrants in the U.S. is supposed to inevitably lead to a deep social and cultural division, eventually resulting in creation of two separate nations (Huntington 2004), and his dire predictions are published in respected periodicals. One of the main Republican candidates in the upcoming U.S. presidential elections, Donald Trump, based his campaign on the demand of building a wall on the border with Mexico – and his proposition was met with a surprising amount of public enthusiasm (Trump 2015).

The myths of state created by the Europeans are so strong that they become a lure for others. The refugees and immigrants trying to reach Europe in their desperate escape from war and chaos in Syria, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Nigeria or Sub-Saharan Africa believe that in Europe they have a chance of a better life. They believe in Europe's own myths: the ever-continuing prosperity, the social and political security, a measure of order and stability denied them in their homeland, an opportunity to grow. They exchange detailed information about social welfare systems operating in different countries, they spend their lifetime savings and incur debts, they risk lives of whole families in order to get this chance at security and freedom (Yahya 2015). The question is, whether Europe believes her own myths as much as they do? And whether the myths created in the minds of people survive the crash with reality, the forced broadening of their subconscious exclusivity, the realization that "European" doesn't equal "human"?

Destructiveness

But the authoritarianism is only one of the three ways of escape from freedom analyzed by Erich Fromm. The second form Fromm called destructiveness and defined as an attempt to re-

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move the threat of insecurity by destroying the source of it – i.e. the empirical reality. As Fromm puts the difference between the two ways of escape, “Sadism tends to strengthen the atomized individual by the domination over others; destructiveness by the absence of any threat from the outside” (Fromm 1942: 153). The impulse of destructiveness allows one to actively fight against the threat of insecurity; we can see the results of it in the multiple acts of terroristic attacks conducted by radical fundamentalists, in the acts of bulldozing down ancient monuments by ISIS (Curry 2015), in the acts of destruction of plants containing GMO by radical environmentalists (von Mogel 2013; Nightingale 2013; Slezak 2013), etc. Erich Fromm claims that the objects of destruction are secondary in importance to the act of destructiveness itself, which allows its perpetrator to escape from the feeling of powerlessness and isolation. To be able to destroy is to have power. Fromm indicated that the inclination to destructiveness in the lower middle class in Nazi Germany has strongly factored in the rise of Nazism. The middle class in 1930s Germany, its economical position weakened by the Great Crisis, its way of life endangered by the drastic, post-Versailles political and demographic changes, was uniquely vulnerable to the Nazi promises of restoring a “proper order” and reviving the ideals of German empire. The unsettling fusion of a policeman and a criminal, their actions fueled by the desire of destroying to protect, was fully embodied in the members of armed forces of the Third Reich (Grunberger 1987: 49). Similarly, this destructive urge may play an important role in the current rise of nationalistic, anti-immigrant ideologies, driven by the recent economic crisis and the growing economic insecurity of large groups of Western societies. The 2014 terrorist attacks on the French satirical magazine “Charlie Hebdo” and the destruction of textile machines by Luddites in the XIX-th century may in fact be two sides of the same coin; they are two aspects of the drive to destruction of all that is not of “us”, that is alien and unwanted, that is perceived as a threat.

Conformity

The third of the main ways of escape from freedom analyzed by Fromm is the automaton conformity. Fromm describes it as a

peculiar form of protective mimicry, covering not only the surface, but extending also to the individual's identity. A conformist "adopts entirely the kind of personality offered to him by cultural patterns; and he therefore becomes exactly as all others are and as they expect him to be" (Fromm 1942: 158). For the price of giving up one's individual self one gains the much coveted security, removing the discrepancy between the world and "I", effectively erasing the fear of the world's indifference, so aptly described by Leszek Kołakowski. Conformity allows one to become an indistinguishable part of a greater whole. It takes away the individual identity and responsibility and gives one a sense of security. The consequences of the anonymity and indemnity gained in the process of conforming to the rules, authorities and expectations prevailing at any given time in a given society was thoroughly described many times before. One of the most vivid examples of the results of this process were given by Stanley Milgram in his famous experiment on obedience to authority figures, conducted back in 1961. In Milgram's experiment approximately 65 per cent of the subjects blindly followed the authority's orders up to the end, firmly believing that in the name of science they have been administering deadly 450-volt electric shocks to fellow human beings. Milgram's interpretation of the results was in line with Fromm's analysis when he wrote about the "capacity of man to abandon his humanity [...] as he merges his unique personality into larger institutional structures" (Milgram 1974: 188). Milgram's experiment has been conducted multiple times, in many environments, with similar results. Since then human conformity has been a focus of attention for many social scientists, among them Philip Zimbardo, the author of the Stanford prison experiment and a defense expert in the trial of Sgt Ivan "Chip" Frederick, one of the abusive guards at Abu Ghraib prison. Zimbardo, as well as other social scientists, claim that situational and external pressures very strongly influence human actions, regardless of their personality, beliefs or values (Zimbardo 2007; Nissani 1990).

Milgram's and Zimbardo's examples of conformity may come across as shocking; undoubtedly, they seem to form the more drastic end on a continuum of conformist behaviors. The everyday examples are much less brutal, but telling all the same: the rising tide of conservatism gaining popularity in the Western countries, especially among the young; the strong position of reality shows

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giving a peek into other people's lives and ever popular TV programs devoted exclusively to what is "norm" in a given society: what to do and how to behave; the social propensity for mass movements and demonstrations, from "Occupy Wall Street" to Podemos, Golden Dawn, etc. Fromm calls it "anonymous authority", "disguised as common sense, science, psychic health, normality, public opinion" (Fromm 1942: 145), and shows examples of some of the subtle trends pervading social life on all its levels, ranging from the category of what is "proper", or "preferred", to what is "right", or "normal". Perhaps the most evocative of all contemporary examples of conformity is the uniformed Western vision of what success should look like – in the world of liquid modernity and the never-ending possibilities it entails, the linear Western model of a successful life, treated as an axiom in Europe and North America, now sweeps through countries of Northern Africa and Asia alike, bringing to Europe masses of alternatively desperate and hopeful refugees and economic immigrants, and notions of war.

Escapism

Authoritarianism, destructiveness and automaton conformity are the three most famous ways of escape from freedom described by Erich Fromm. The most famous, but by no means the only ones. Among the less known strategies there's one considered inessential in Fromm's times, but increasingly valid nowadays – escapism. Fromm calls it a "withdrawal from the world so completely that it loses its threat" and judges it as culturally irrelevant. But Fromm wrote his book in times before "virtual reality", 3D cinema, or the Sims. Today escapism became a culturally accepted strategy, an established way of life in the Western world and many Asian countries, such as Japan, China or South Korea. Internet in its many incarnations created – and still creates – multiple new opportunities, but it also brings forth new addictions, such as pathological online game use. This phenomenon was already mentioned in the new Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders manual in Section III as a separate condition, warranting extensive clinical research which should determine if it ought to be included in the official list of disorders (DSM-5, 2013). A few

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years ago the Western media were electrified by pictures and stories from South Korean boot camps for internet addicts (Fackler 2007). What was then viewed as “exotic”, today became something mundane: more and more scientists claim that internet addiction as a form of escapism is no longer only a scientific idea, but rather a fact (Hussain, Griffiths 2009; Hilgard, Engelhardt, Bartholow 2013).

CONCLUSION

Why then, in these new and globalized times, among the multitude of competing perspectives, should we dig up all those white, male, and mostly long dead scientists? They are deeply rooted in the Western perspective, be it critical or not. Their theories may seem inaccurate, or at least seriously outdated. But in the days of a new Cold War brewing in the Middle East, of crumbling old powers, whose diminishing strength may make them even more desperate and dangerous than before, and when no new order is visible on the horizon, I posit an argument that the picture painted by Fromm, Kołakowski, Bauman, Cassirer, Grunberger and Milgram seems acutely valid. Their mostly forgotten ideas and analyses are now especially important, in the world of collapsing Northern African and Middle-East states, of a prolonged global economic crisis, of a looming threat of the European Union’s disintegration, where we must face the emergence of new political powers rooted in fundamentalist religions and/or ideologies, as well as a multitude of other rapid social, demographic and environmental changes. All around the world we are confronted with a reality-in-making, ephemeral, protean and ever-changing, while the majority of the old moulds have been broken or else simply lost their usefulness in forming, or in explaining, the current world. Ironically, it was Heraclitus who noticed first that “the only thing that is constant is change.” There could be no better motto of our times, fluid, fluctuating, and interconnected on a global scale. Since change is constant, and human nature remains basically the same regardless of race, age, religion, or gender, it’s high time that we look around us, back, forth, and sideways, and agree to some universal (or at the latest intersubjective) ideas and values – if not to better explain the world around us, then at least

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to find a measure of understanding for each other. If we don't want the history of the terrible and beautiful XXth century to repeat itself, we need to not only know it, but to comprehend it as well – and with it, ourselves. The old dilemma between security and freedom, one of the few so deeply and truly defining humanity as the representatives of a thinking species, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, seems like a good point to start.

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