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**Ulrich Beck (2016). *The Metamorphosis of the World*.
London: Polity Press, pp. 223**

The Metamorphosis of the World has often been called *The Unfinished Book*, since it was finished and published only after the author's death. Ulrich Beck died of a heart attack during a winter walk with his wife. The subject they discussed during the walk were the reviews of the first version of *The Metamorphosis* sent back by the publishing house. Beck was not happy with them, and together with his wife they were considering how to make the book more expressive, when he suddenly had a heart attack. Although she claims she does not remember much about that conversation, Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim decided to finish the book, and with the help of a few people, the text was finally published by the Polity Press a year later, in 2016.

The book consists of three parts divided into chapters. The first part is an introduction that prepares the reader for the discussion in the following chapters and outlines the main themes of the book. Using examples from contemporary life and from history, the author manages to stir our curiosity, and explains how he understands the metamorphosis.

In the second part of the book, the threads announced in the introduction are further developed. The author describes the world in which we live, points out to what he deems significant and potentially transformational and finally presents a proposal for a new policy relating to climate change; the only policy that – in the author's opinion – could deal with the current challenges involving a global risk.

The third part is a brief summary and a view of the future. The author points out that young people now feel comfortable within the digital world, perceiving the older generation as the 'Neanderthals' in this respect.

The whole text offers a reflection on the current state of the world. The issues discussed in the book are weaved together, and where he considers it necessary, Beck refers to what has already been discussed or indicates what will be discussed later in more detail. In general, the text provides clarity and has a great potential to stimulate the reader's reflection. The book, as a whole, represents an attempt to grasp and to demonstrate what metamorphosis is, to draw the reader's attention to its different aspects that confirm that we are now dealing with completely new

structures, i.e. that the world has not so much changed as it has been metamorphosed. In order to understand the author's message, it is necessary for the reader to focus on the subtle difference between change and metamorphosis.

What exactly is this metamorphosis? First of all, it concerns positive side effects of dangers and bad actions (the 'bads'), in which it differs from the world phenomena outlined in the theory of world risk society, which focuses on negative side effects of good actions and implemented changes (p. 4). Secondly, the author emphasizes that **metamorphosis is not a change**. The term *change* suggests that something has been replaced by something else, but this new thing somehow resembles the previous one, in that some of its aspects remain unchanged. A metamorphosis occurs in a situation where something that was so far taken for granted collapses and something completely new appears in its place (p. 3). It is precisely this distinction between metamorphosis and change that can assist the reader in understanding what metamorphosis is. Numerous examples discussed by the author elucidate the subtle difference between the phenomena referred to by of these two concepts.

In *The Metamorphosis* we read that metamorphosis manifests itself in a sudden feeling that we no longer understand the world. Such lack of understanding is the starting point for further deliberations, where the author asks: In what world do we live?, leading to the conclusion that people now do not understand the world in which they are forced to live. This is related to the metamorphosis of reality, the emergence of new structures in which the existing ways of acting are not sufficient. The knowledge people have about reality is no longer sufficient for them to function in it without any problems¹.

Ten years ago, in the introduction to her book, Alicja Kargulowa pointed out – the helplessness and powerlessness of people in the face of the changes taking place in all areas of life and the consequences of this powerlessness, e.g. confusion as to one's own life direction, withdrawal or repeated, persistent search for information and advice (Kargulowa, 2009, p. 7). According to Bożena Wojtasik, the fact that counselling is there, in these difficult times, may seem natural: "In today's ambiguous world, where randomness, risk and pluralism prevail, people often seek the help of counsellors who are ready to provide information, advice, encouragement, to alleviate fears and support them in solving various identity problems". (Wojtasik, 2009, p. 190). Those who decide not to seek a professional counsellor, usually look for help in other places. Various forms of counselling and guidance are provided not only by professionals but also by people lacking appropriate qualifications. The evidence of this may be the extraordinary popularity of various types of guidance literature in recent years.

A quick visit to any bookshop will reveal the whole section of 'how to' literature, where one can find information on a number of issues, ranging from how to raise

¹ Here the book refers to the concept of social construction of reality developed by P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann. It states that knowledge held by an individual is sufficient until a problem emerges, for which there is no solution available within this knowledge. (Berger & Luckmann, 2010).

a dog, clean the apartment, to the ways through which success can be achieved in life.

As a response to the contemporary problems experienced by people living within liquid modernity, Jean Guichard proposes a new form of support: counselling interventions based on the concept of Life Design dialogues. He exhaustively describes applications of this method in a cycle of three articles (Guichard, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). From them, we learn that the purpose of Life Design dialogues is to assist people in constructing future prospects, both professional and private, for life in general (Guichard, 2018b, p. 268). Guichard, like Beck, refers to the sense of confusion and uncertainty by asking about the ways in which human existence may be made meaningful (Guichard, 2018a, p. 253). In his opinion, Life Design dialogues may be the answer. According to Guichard, the foundations of this concept and the general orientation of counselling were put forward by the UN General Assembly resolution adopted in 2015 titled *Transforming Our World* (Guichard, 2018a, 241; United Nations [UN], 2015). Counselling activities should be forms of support anchored in the future, providing assistance and designed to “transform our world”, thus contributing to the “just and sustainable development of humanity” (Guichard, 2018a, p. 262, 2018c, p. 318). Both Beck and Guichard thus address the issue of global risk management (see p. 1). Perhaps Life Design dialogues may be our response to Beck’s observations on the metamorphosis of today’s world, especially, but not exclusively, for the benefit of young people.

Another issue raised by Beck in relation to the metamorphosis is an enormous gap between the new and the old generations. The new generation of young people tends to get by in the world undergoing a metamorphosis, demonstrating their adaptability to the changing conditions. The current interwoven values, ways of thinking and perceptions of the world shape young people and their worldview, which is not always the case for older people. But are these intergenerational differences a contemporary phenomenon, or are they an integral part of any reality? It is possible that the perspective adopted by the author stems from a subjective sense of not understanding the contemporary world. He compares the emergence of new structures to the emergence of those well known to him. In the backdrop of the issues discussed in *The Metamorphosis* there is an in-depth reflection based on the author’s personal life experiences. Ulrich Beck was born in 1944. The environment in which he grew up, in which he lived through his youth was undeniably different from what he observed towards the end of his life. This does not diminish the enormous potential of the book. It was due to these experiences and his keen sense of observation that the author noticed that the world was undergoing a metamorphosis, and not merely a change. However, I would recommend the readers to develop their own critical perspective on the functioning of today’s world.

The Metamorphosis is one of those texts whose reception depends on the reader, his or her attitude towards self, others and the surrounding world. It is a source of inspiration, apt remarks and observations, which makes it impossible to ignore.

The topics touched upon in the book are not detached from reality. The observations made by the author can be confirmed in reality. Introducing the reader to the concept of metamorphosis, Beck relies on examples of ubiquitous globalization, metamorphosis of values, metamorphosis of the sphere of intimacy or the so-called cultural pessimism, manifesting in predictions of a catastrophe. We can all observe these phenomena. The cultural pessimism can be detected, for example, in the current scenarios (e.g. in movies), which depict not only the destruction caused by a global weather-related catastrophe, but also by a highly destructive technology, developing at an accelerated rate. From the robots that destroy humanity, to the total control over human life exercised through digital technologies – the Internet – the scenarios ultimately lead to a tragedy.

I share Beck's view that we are now dealing with brand new structures. People transform their own distinctions guided by impulses from the outer, cosmopolitan world. Everything happens on a global scale, and norms and values have become temporary, only valid for the places where they were created. However, I have doubts as to the author's claim that we are now experiencing a new take on motherhood. According to the author, the possibility of in-vitro conception generates a completely new understanding of terms such as 'mother', 'father', and 'fertilization', even though the expressions like 'in-vitro child' may only reflect a violation of a certain taboo. Certainly, the technology provides humanity with opportunities it has never had before, but does it significantly change the whole picture of motherhood? The caring and educational role of a mother and a father remains the same. The author may have meant that the mere presence of such possibilities testifies to the emergence of something completely new, something unthinkable so far, incomprehensible, and thus difficult to name. In my opinion, however, we are dealing here with an uneasiness related to the unknown, rather than a real change of motherhood ideal. We need to distinguish between what is really brand new and what has only reappeared in a different form, undergone a metamorphosis. In some cases, in-vitro conception has replaced natural conception, but the claim that it generated a new understanding of motherhood requires verification.

In conclusion, I would like to stress, once again, that the book by Beck is a source of inspiration and reflection. In the course of reading it, the reader may develop a new perspective and see familiar themes in a new light. This opportunity stems from the author's strategy to refer to familiar things, which can be observed by everyone in their everyday life. Climate change, global warming and natural disasters related to them are now considered hot topics. The author sheds new light on them, seeing them as emancipatory for humanity. He asks: Will the global climate risk, just like the Second World War, lead to emancipatory catastrophism and the emergence of cosmopolitan institutions? (p. 115). He sees a huge emancipatory potential in the unification of humanity across national borders. The so-called 'United Cities' can play an important role in such unification. Beck stresses the metamorphosis of cities that are beginning to take steps favoring environmental protection. In his

opinion, it is the cooperation between cities, their unification, that can save humanity, as the cities may actually be able to cope with challenges that cannot be overcome by the unification of nations (e.g. the European Union, Chapter 11). From the cities' perspective, we see dangers that are not visible at the level of the state, such as the issue of smog, which has been widely discussed in recent years. Statistical data demonstrate in which cities the level of air pollution is higher and where it is lower. They also demonstrate that it is no longer the state, but the cities that need to cope with this problem. This is yet another example of the author's perceptiveness, based on a thorough observation of reality. An open-minded attitude during reading may lead the reader to see the taken-for-granted in a completely new perspective and find ample inspiration for further reflection.

Translated by Katarzyna Byłów-Antkowiak

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