Death and Society

A methodological critique of Zygmunt Bauman's
"psychoanalytic" approach to sociology

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Bachelor's thesis: SOCK01, 15 hp

Autumn 2011

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Abstract

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This essay examines Zygmunt Bauman's *Mortality, Immortality, and Other Life Strategies* from a methodological perspective. Bauman's method is influenced by phenomenology and psychoanalysis, and has many followers in different fields. I provide a critique of this method, and show it to be inadequate for explaining or drawing conclusions about the world. Instead, I propose a return to classical sociological method as based on observation, conceptualisation, and logical deduction.

KEYWORDS: Zygmunt Bauman, denial of death, culture, sociological method

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1. Introduction

Zygmunt Bauman is one of the most well known proponents of the sociology of postmodernity. He has mounted a sustained attack on modernity and the rationalistic approaches to understanding. In books such as *Modernity and the Holocaust* and *Modernity and Ambivalence* he argues that modernity and the enlightenment are major factors in totalitarianism and the genocidal drive that caused the Holocaust.

In this essay I will discuss his book *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (Bauman 1992, all further citations will be from this book unless otherwise noted), which is the book that Bauman himself considers to be his favourite (Beilharz 2002, p. 146). Its method is, as he describes it, "that of the 'psychoanalysis' of the 'collective unconscious' concealed in, but also analytically recoverable from, culturally created and sustained life" (p. 8). His conclusions are that culture is the product of man's need to suppress his awareness of mortality, and serves its main purpose as a device for such suppression. This is done through the provision of meaning. Furthermore, it is equally important that society hides this fact from its members.

Since Bauman is considered as a prominent and important contemporary sociologist, an analysis of his method holds particular relevance. Students as well as working social scientists are influenced by him, and methods like his have a significant impact on both theoretical and practical levels. For instance, the University of Leeds established *The Bauman Institute* in 2010, dedicated to research and teaching in Bauman's fields of interest.

Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies touches on areas in philosophy, psychology, history and sociology. This makes it open for criticism primarily from the perspective of a general theory of science. Nevertheless, it is also susceptible to objections coming from these different fields. Philosophical critique is first and foremost about the logical validity and coherence of his arguments. On the other hand, since the other fields concern the empirical world, empirical evidence is essential to their evaluation.

I will not attempt to decide whether Bauman's conclusions are true or false. Indeed one of my main criticisms of Bauman concerns his disinterest in empirical evidence. If I were to argue for or against the truthfulness of his statements without relying on such research, I would be facing the same objections. This essay is a contribution to the discussion of sociological *method*, using Bauman's book as a case study.

The body of this essay is divided into four sections. In the first section, I give an account of Bauman's view of knowledge, mortality, and human nature. This constitutes the

foundation of his theory of culture and society, and consists mostly of philosophical and psychoanalytic ideas. In the second section, I turn to Bauman's theory of the development and function of culture and society. The contents of this part mainly revolve around sociological and psychoanalytical premises, but the function of human nature is also apparent. In the third section, I examine Bauman's theory of the growth of modernity, the modern project, and the consequences that follows. Lastly, there is a section where I evaluate Bauman's method of choice. Here I also propose a more classical sociological method for contructing theories, which is based on empirical evidence and logical deduction.

1.1 *Aims and Purpose*

Bauman contends that culture is the product of man's need to suppress his awareness of death, and that it is the purpose of culture as such to conceal mortality. These are extraordinary claims, and therefore it seems that they would need extraordinary evidence, as well as strong argumentation. In this paper I want to examine to what degree such evidence and arguments are valid and to what extent the method chosen by Bauman permits him to draw the conclusions he does.

1.2 *Method*

Bauman's theory is a causal theory. He puts forward claims about the causes of certain features of the human predicament, our society, and of society as a whole. Since both humans and society are parts of the world, an investigation of their causal structure is an investigation of the causal structure of the world. The only way to proceed if one wants to conduct this kind of research is by empirical methods, as Émile Durkheim clearly stated:

> We have only one way of demonstrating that one phenomenon is the cause of another. This is to compare the cases where they are both simultaneously present or absent, so as to discover whether the variations they display in these different combinations of circumstances provide evidence that one depends upon the other. When the phenomena can be artificially produced at will by the observer, the method is that of experimentation proper. When, on the other hand, the production of facts is something beyond our power to command, and we can only bring them together as they have been spontaneously produced, the method used is one of indirect experimentation, or the comparative method. (Durkheim 1895, p. 147)

An updated version of the Durkheimian strategy is described by the sociologist Arthur L. Stinchcombe (1968). Stinchcombe starts off by noting that if we want to construct a theory,

we must bear in mind the logical requirements needed for testing it against empirical data. To construct a scientific theory we must begin with a theoretical statement. Thereafter, we derive an empirical statement by using logical deduction and operational definitions of concepts. Finally, we must make observations to evaluate if the empirical statement in question is true or false (Stinchcombe 1968, ch. 2).

In fact, Durkheim and Stinchcombe are only applying to sociology what is colloquially known as *scientific method*. Since Bauman makes the claims he does he is susceptible to criticism from a scientific-methodological angle, and this essay will largely be concerned with giving such criticism.[1]

As a methodological study this essay is not itself empirical, and neither does it conform to any specific method. There is at yet no fully developed method for doing methodology, and the development of such method is more of a philosophical than a sociological task. There are however some things that will always be relevant. Logical validity must hold, and statements about empirical reality cannot be based on non-empirical evidence.[2] These are the kind of features of Bauman's work I will investigate.

2. Bauman's phenomenological and psychoanalytical foundations

Bauman bases his main arguments on a specific theory of human nature, influenced by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and the philosophical school of phenomenology. There is a close connection between psychoanalysis and phenomenology, since Freud was deeply influenced by the philosopher and psychologist Franz Brentano, who was also a forerunner of phenomenology and a teacher of Edmund Husserl (Toews 1991). Although my main focus does not lie on the phenomenological aspect of Bauman's theory, it is important to grasp some of it, since Bauman uses the phenomenological and psychological features of psychoanalysis as a starting point when deriving the nature of society and culture. In this section I will summarise and comment on these fundamental premises of his sociological theory.

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[1] Durkheim and Stinchcombe are of course only two of the many sociologists who consider sociology to be an empirical science. When using the term "scientific method" I do not mean to take a stand on whether such method is best described as positivist, deductivist, inductivist, falsificationist or otherwise (cf. Chalmers 1999).

[2] By *logical validity* I mean validity in classical first-order logic. In this I follow Popper, who holds this to be the universal logic of science (Popper 1959, ch. 1 and 2).

2.1 *The knowledge of mortality*

According to Bauman (pp. 2, 10-13) death is impossible to define since it signifies the final void of non-existence. He also asserts that all perception is *intentional,* that is, it is directed towards some object. You cannot conceive your own death and therefore death cannot be perceived. Instead death is an absolute *Nothing*, and an absolute Nothing has no meaning. Man's fear of death, says Bauman, is actually the fear of the void and the non-being.

But, Bauman's claim that death is impossible to define does not hold water. For instance, death has been defined and conceptualised in the fields of biology and medicine. Furthermore, the layman seems to use a definition of death on a daily basis. This is not to imply that there is only *one* definition of the concept. However, one can argue that *some* definition is adequate, or that the failure to produce an adequate definition does not entail that it is impossible to produce such a definition (DeGrazia 2008).

Bauman relies on an epistemology based on phenomenology, a philosophical discipline that emerged from premodern psychology in the late 19th century. A principal feature of the phenomenological view of thought is the presumption that every act of consciousness requires an *intentional object* (i.e., something it is directed towards). Among some phenomenologists (and it appears that Bauman is included in these) it is assumed that these intentional objects have to be experienceable (Smith 2009).

According to Bauman, the fact that we cannot experience our own death implies that it cannot be an intentional object. And since every thought requires an intentional object, we cannot think of our own death. But, how can Bauman explain the fact that people apparently do think of things that do not exist, such as unicorns or world peace? Furthermore, it becomes impossible to think about others' experiences or thoughts since this would require first-person experience of these. If we cannot think about the thoughts of others, we cannot wonder what they are thinking (and not even wish that they think well of us).

When Bauman describes death as an absolute *Nothing* he uses Martin Heidegger's terminology. Nothing, for Heidegger, cannot be thought of rationally. Instead it shows itself through a feeling of anxiety (Heidegger 1929). This is why Bauman says that Nothing does not have a meaning. Since Bauman interprets death as Nothing, he can explain man's fear of death in terms of Heidegger's fear of Nothing.

But why does Bauman use a concept such as Nothing if it has no meaning? Objects cannot have the property of being Nothing. Even if it was possible for things to have that property, there are no objective methods to decide if they fall under the concept or not, since

Nothing cannot be observed and thought about. In addition, Nothing can only be perceived if perception is absent. But to perceive something that demands an absence of perception is contradictive. To explain a phenomenon such as death, which we have some understanding of, through the concept of Nothing, which is utterly mysterious, is a deeply flawed strategy. Rather, it makes death even harder to grasp.

2.2 *Consciousness of death*

According to Bauman man cannot escape or forget the knowledge of death, "it can only not to be thought about for a while" (p. 3). He holds that the human being is the only self-conscious animal, that is to say, he has knowledge of his knowledge, which he cannot make unknown (pp. 3-4).

Here Bauman assumes that it is an empirical truth that self-consciousness is a uniquely human characteristic. Hence, man is the only animal that can be aware of death and his own mortality. This kind of statement is a common view held by many thinkers. For instance, Norbert Elias argues that "[…] they [humans] alone of all living beings *know* that they shall die […]" (Elias 1985, p. 3, emphasis in original). The cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker asserts that "[t]he lower animals […] lack a symbolic identity and self-consciousness that goes with it" (Becker 1973, p. 26). But there is no conclusive evidence that the human animal is the only species having self-consciousness. On the contrary, many studies actually indicate the opposite and the scientific community has in fact not reached consensus in the matter of animal metacognition (Allen 2010; Andrews 2010). Hence, Bauman lacks sufficient evidence to state that man is unique in having self-consciousness. Furthermore, *what is the purpose of this argument?* Bauman constantly uses human uniqueness as an argument for his theory about human nature, mortality and society, without giving an account for its relevance.

Bauman (pp. 12-15) claims that the consciousness of death and mortality is and will always be a traumatic experience because of the nature of thought. Thought cannot grasp its own non-existence, neither conceive time or place that does not contain it. Death is a state without thought – an inconceivability. Death is real and humans know it, but nevertheless it is impossible to think of an existence which does not contain thought. Therefore, a death that causes the loss of consciousness is both the "ultimate absurdity" and the "ultimate truth" (p. 15). For Bauman, it is absurd and impossible to *really* imagine the non-being of mind, since this would entail the existence of the mind after death. Thus, the only way to think about death is as an event where one is a spectator, present in the picture. As support, Bauman refers

to the famous quote by Freud, "[i]t is indeed impossible to imagine our own death; and whenever we attempt to do so we can percieve that we are in fact still present as spectators" (Freud 1915, p. 289). Hence, this kind of non-being can only be thought of in its negation, in its denial, or as Bauman puts it, "[t]he very act of thinking death is already its denial" (p. 15). Consequently, consciousness about mortality will always remain a traumatic experience (pp.13-14).

To sum up Bauman's argument: the nature of thought implies that it cannot have its own non-existence as an intentional object. To be able to think about death, thought must be present in death. Bauman's phenomenological foundations imply that death can only be conceivable through first-person experience. Since you cannot experience death as it really is, it is impossible to imagine it.

Once again, the presupposition Bauman makes about the nature of thought and thinking boils down to a phenomenological argument about intentionality. As previous phenomenological arguments, its main flaw lies in the assumption that events can only be understood through first-person experience. In holding this view of thought, Bauman is obliged to accept ideas that do not seem plausible. For instance, he would have to accept the claim that it is impossible for man to imagine that he is ever in a state of dreamless sleep, since he cannot experience it from a first-person view (cf. Kagan 2007, ch. 15).

Bauman also claims that it is only possible to think about death in terms of what it is *not*. From this he draws the conclusion that when we think of death we thereby deny it. This conclusion does not follow and the argument is clearly not valid. To think about something in terms of a negation is hardly the same as denying it. For instance, we can think about non-violence as the negation of violence without denying its existence. Since Bauman's thesis about the nature of thought is incoherent, there is no reason to accept his claim that consciousness of mortality is *always* a traumatic experience. On the contrary, post-Freudian research rather indicates that it is more frequently not (see Feifel and Branscombe 1973; Kastenbaum and Costa 1977).

According to Bauman, death does not only defy the nature of thought and imagination, it also "defies the power of reason" (p. 15). It is the ultimate defeat of reason, since reason cannot think death. The power of reason helps man to make good choices. However, death does not take choice into consideration and is therefore the outmost humiliation of reason. Death impairs humanity's trust in reason, and declares reason's promise of security untruthful. The exposure of absurdity, at the root of reason's logic, is the ultimate scandal. As Bauman says, death is not a problem, as many think, because a problem is defined by having

solutions. The most significant source of horror lies in the discovery that death is absent of a solution (pp. 15-16).

How should we respond to this argument? First and foremost, to claim that death is the ultimate humiliation of reason implies that reason actually has the intention to provide an escape from death. To declare reason's promise of security mendacious presupposes that reason has given that promise. Bauman does not give any arguments or evidence for that being the case. Is it not more plausible that religion, for example, has given humanity that promise through the prospect of eternal life in heaven? The absurdity Bauman mentions is once again derived from the presumption that phenomena require intentional objects. Since reason has no intentional object when thinking of death, it cannot do so, and therefore absurdity lies in its foundation.

As for Bauman's interpretation of the word "problem", the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) gives the definition "[a] difficult or demanding question; (now, more usually) a matter or situation regarded as unwelcome, harmful, or wrong and needing to be overcome; a difficulty" (OED Online, March 2011). So according to the OED, a problem can definitely be defined as a "problem" without it having a solution. Bauman's definition of a "problem" is not the usual one, and it has severe disadvantages. For instance, it implies that a terminally ill person cannot be considered as having a problem, which is quite unreasonable.

In this section we have examined Bauman's epistemological presuppositions. To sum up, he states that it is impossible think about death, because it cannot be an intentional object. Nevertheless, we still know that we will die, and this leads to absurdity and trauma. To cope with these problems, we deny our own mortality.

2.3 *The ambivalence of being*

According to Bauman (pp. 18-19), people know that their *individual* bodies are mortal and will demise, and that *individual* thinking probably will cease to exist at the moment of their death. But at the same time, *bodily* existence cannot really end because thought is, as Bauman says, *extemporal* (i.e., not bound to a specific time). Bodily existence continues in the form of the "bodily presence" of other people – in this case, predecessors and successors (p. 18). There is no absolute beginning or absolute end. Bauman claims that the body, as well as the spirit, are irreparably torn between mortality and immortality. In one way they will cease to be, and in another they will continue. Both body and spirit are *ambivalent in their being*,

since there are no reasons or absence of reasons that give meaning for their whereabouts.

Bauman's statement regarding ambivalence is unfortunately vague and hard to interpret consistently. To grasp at least parts of his line of thinking, the phenomenological aspect of his argument must be re-examined. As Bauman has already stated, thought is extemporal and requires intentional objects or else it cannot be experienced. But there is no need for oneself to imagine another person's *thinking* to have a thought (knowledge) about his *body*.[3]

But what does Bauman mean when he states that bodily existence has no absolute end or beginning? How can it be both mortal and immortal? It is possible that he simply wants to say that the bodies of others will live on while mine dies. But in that case one wonders why this gives rise to ambivalence about *my* body. Bauman claims that body and spirit are both mortal and immortal. Perhaps he just wants to give a poetic picture of common feelings of ambivalence and therefore develops this paradox. Nevertheless, it is highly questionable to use a paradox such as this to explain the nature of man.

Bauman (p. 19-20) claims that the ambivalence of being is a waste product of society. However, it is another form of ambivalence, an *ambivalence of existence*, that supplies the raw material, which gives rise to the organisations of society and sculpts cultures. According to Bauman, human existence is fundamentally contradictory because of conflicting in-built drives (the life and death instincts). Biologically, these instincts collaborate closely to achieve a cohesive accomplishment which can secure the preservation and continuation of the species. But in the individual human the instincts are in direct conflict. They send contradictory signals (i.e., the striving towards continuance of life and the striving towards death), and thus have different aims. Man is constantly trying to satisfy these contradictory biological signals of the instincts. This human condition leads to the ambivalence of existence.

Bauman derives this theory from the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud. It is obvious that he attempts to validate his claim that human beings are ambivalent in their being (i.e., "irreparably torn between mortality and immortality" (p. 19)) on the basis of Freud's claim that human nature is ambivalent in itself because of conflicting instincts. He also follows Freud when taking these to be the death and life instincts.

According to Bauman (p. 21-22), modern man sees the contradictory characteristics of human nature as "absurd", and the ambivalence as "tormenting". However, he concurs with many of Freud's disciples and successors (in opposition to Freud) that "[n]ature's way of

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[3] This differs from the thought (knowledge) of one's own death, which he claims that it is necessary to imagine how it would be to *experience it* to have knowledge of it.

pursuing collective perpetuity of the species through individual mortality of its members appears incongruous only when *known* […]" (p. 22, emphasis in original). That is to say, the contradictory functional cohesion of human nature is not responsible for the ambivalence being tormenting. The ambivalence, which naturally exists in the human being, is only tormenting if one has an *awareness* of it. Although nature's decree appears to be absurd in itself, it is actually *modern culture* that discovers and reveals this absurdity of human nature. The absurdity reforges into tormenting ambivalence or subconscious anguish in the human consciousness because of man's awareness of it. Thus man's awareness of the absurdity and the torments of ambivalence is a consequence of culture, not nature.

After discovering the absurdity of the human condition, culture is obligated to improvise a solution to the absurdity and the anguish. In a way nature determines the indeterminacy of man (the ambivalence), whereas culture is given the obligatory task of reducing and hiding the absurdity, the tormenting ambivalence and the anguish, which is self-created (pp. 19-23).

Claims like Bauman's–that man is suffering from tormenting ambivalence, has subconscious anguish and an awareness of human nature's absurdity–have been put forward several times by psychoanalysts and also by existentialist philosophers like Sartre and Kierkegaard. It is justifiable to say that their credibility depends on the validity of psychoanalysis and existentialistic psychology. Since we are interested mainly in Bauman's sociological method, this essay will not attempt to settle this question.

Bauman's statement about the role and function of culture is, on the other hand, of great concern. It is here he introduces the sociological element of his theory. To fully comprehend his argument we need to investigate his approach to culture in more detail.

3. Culture

Bauman employs his philosophical and psychological theory as a foundation for his theory of culture and society. In this section I will investigate his main points about why culture exists and how it operates.

3.1 *Culture as suppression*

According to Bauman "[…] the constant risk of death–the risk always *knowable* even if flushed down into the murky depths of the subconscious–is, arguably, the very foundation of

culture" (p. 31, emphasis in original). For Bauman, culture is an exclusively humanly quality which functions as a device for suppressing the awareness of mortality. However, suppression of death is not the origin of *all* the creative drive of the human culture, because cultural inventiveness also "develops because it develops" (p. 4). Nevertheless, it is death, in the sense of *awareness* of mortality, that is the ultimate cause for the development of culture and cultural creativity. Or as Bauman (p. 31) states:

> There would probably be no culture were humans unaware of their mortality; culture is an elaborate counter-mnemotechnic device to forget what they are aware of. Culture would be useless if not for the devouring need of forgetting [...] (p. 31)

As I indicated above, Bauman's claim that culture is a universal device for suppression is made on the basis of his phenomenological and psychoanalytic view of human psychology. The denial of death, the horror of the void, and the traumatic experience that follows from an awareness of mortality, are all taken to be universal traits in the human being. For this reason, Bauman seems to assume that there is a universal causal correlation between these and the suppressing function of culture.

The human characteristics that Bauman deems to be universal and a part of the human predicament have as I mentioned, not been validated by psychological evidence. But even if we should accept Bauman's claim about the human predicament, it is not necessarily *those* universal human psychological traits that have caused the development of cultural creativity. There is also a possibility that there does not exist something like an altogether universal development of culture. Culture can have developed and evolved differently for different groups of people because of their specific beliefs, needs and desires.

The concept of suppression, which Bauman uses, emanates from Freud. However there are significant problems involved in deciding whether something is really suppressed, or simply was never there. Of course, followers and supporters of psychoanalytic method may always claim that their critics suppress or repress their consciousness of the truthfulness of the arguments in question. By formulating arguments that are based on the concept of suppression, it is impossible to lose, regardless of how strong evidence there may be against them. This is not to imply that suppression cannot be present in specific individuals. It is the idea of suppression as a *universal* characteristic of the human being that is preposterous, since applying it so widely makes it meaningless and useless for making distinctions (cf. Popper 1963, ch. 1).

3.2 *The task of life-meaning*

According to Bauman, nature has only given man *one* task, which is to propagate. However, "[…] humans must first stay alive to become able to propagate – and being *human* beings, *thinking* beings, the *awareness of mortality* beings, they must therefore *wish* to remain alive, they must *have a purpose* to make them wish" (p. 89). But, as Bauman states, life has no intrinsical value or purpose, and nature has neither supplied man with a wish to survive, nor with the purpose needed for him to even want to wish that. On the contrary, "[t]he idea of life-meaning (of life *having* a meaning, and *needing* a meaning in the first place) may only appear once that meaning (...) has already been construed as a task" (p. 92, emphasis in original).

    With the rise of culture[4], man is given the task and the responsibility of inducing the important and worthy things of life with durability, to make them persevere even after biological death. Consequently, man reaches beyond a purely animal existence. Biological needs like eating, defecating and copulating cease to be the real life content for man. Death stops to be merely a finality of biological life. Instead, fulfilment of tasks that have the feature of reaching beyond man's biological life, constitutes the real life content, the meaning of life (p. 4-5). And so, Bauman concludes, if man had no purpose or need to make life worth living, there would be no need for culture. Life would only be about borrowing time from death. Human culture is thus a two-folded effort to suppress the awareness of mortality and give meaning to human life (pp. 4-8).

    For Bauman (pp. 7-8) it is a solely human achievement to live a life forgetful of death, with meaning, worth and purpose. Social organisation and human culture (with the exception of certain functionally specialised institutions and cultural precepts) collaborate to make this achievement possible. However, these institutions would never admit their part in this activity, or that a great majority of all human actions ultimately serve the purpose of making life meaningful in a world where meaning is intrinsically nonexistent. The true reasons for acting cannot be revealed. Otherwise the human achievement of making life meaningful would lose its effectiveness since it mostly consists of forgetting those reasons. Man, says Bauman, is therefore socially determined and culturally trained to believe that human acting is due to other purposes. Thus human culture is both the effort to give life meaning and the effort to suppress the awareness of the fragile character of such a meaning.

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[4] Bauman never specifies when culture appears. He sometimes seems to suggests that it is contemporary with modernity since he contrasts it with "religious" society, which comes before (p. 91).

Bauman's central claim in *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* is that awareness of mortality gives rise to culture. Culture is the effort to suppress that awareness but also to give man "life-meaning" (p. 88). As usual, no tangible evidence is given for this claim. The argument is also full of contradictions and *non sequiturs*, some of which are the following:

1. Bauman states that before the rise of culture, man saw death only as a finality of biological life. But this entails that there was a time when there was no *reason* for man to suppress the awareness of mortality. Hence, cultural development cannot be a result of man's need to suppress the awareness of mortality, since it did not constitute a problem in the first place.

2. According to Bauman, nature has not supplied man with an intrinsic reason for living. Nevertheless, if man had no need to make life worth living, there would not be any need for culture. He clearly states that the idea of life-meaning is culturally constructed, and that it is culture that is responsible for giving man the task to make life worth while. However, he never explains where the idea of life-meaning originally comes from. What is it that prompts culture to give man the task of life-meaning? Culture is not a thinking or autonomous entity that has shaped the human predicament. If it is really the case that man needs a wish to live (to be able to propagate), and also needs a purpose in order to be able to have this wish, then there are many reasons to believe that it is nature and not culture that has supplied these. For example, man is not a unique species when it comes to having the task to propagate and to stay alive long enough to do so. On the contrary, all living entities have that characteristic. Hence, it is more likely that the biological need for propagation constitutes the meaning of life.

3. Rather than taking propagation to give life meaning, one can also deny the need for meaning as a means to survive at all. Perhaps man has survived because the need to propagate is enough to give the human being the wish to survive – without taking a detour through meaning. Of course, Bauman would reject these explanations on the basis that the human species consists of "… human beings, thinking beings, the awareness of mortality beings […]" (p. 89). He completely ignores the fact that there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that other animals cannot think or be aware of mortality.

4. Furthermore, how is it possible for culture to develop if man did not think life was worth living before the existence of culture? Bauman clearly states that man's need for life to have a meaning, and the wish to make life worth living, are crucial for the emergence of culture. The idea of life-meaning cannot exist before culture, since it is a result of culture. But at the same time he also states that man must have a need for life-meaning, and a need to make life worth living, to survive biologically. The causal structure that Bauman describes is contradictory. Biological survival of man is a concept that *precedes* culture. Therefore it cannot depend on the need to make life worthwhile, or the need for life-meaning, since Bauman claims that these needs did not exist before culture.

The purpose of these points of criticism is not to suggest alternative explanations for the emergence of culture. I am merely showing that there are severe logical errors in Bauman's argument. Indeed, to enter into speculation about such an emergence without more evidence would be, as I mentioned in the introduction, be to submit to the same kind of fallacious methodology as the one I am criticising.

Bauman's theory of the origin of culture forms the centrepiece of his arguments about the role of mortality in society. However, it has severe shortcomings and we have not so far been given any valid reasons for accepting in it. Bauman defends his thesis in spite of the obvious lack of evidence, by postulating that culture and social organisations conspire to keep their true purpose hidden. Again, it seems that Bauman not only relies on claims that are impossible to validate but also uses them actively to avoid the possibility of being falsified.

3.3 *Transcendence and culture activities*

Bauman (p. 25) claims that the act of denying the finality of death is a common technique to keep the awareness of mortality at bay, and to conceal the absurdity and tormenting ambivalence that follows. Therefore, culture is all about *transcendence*, which is the act of "[…] expanding temporal and spatial boundaries of being, with a view to dismantling them altogether" (p. 5). In other words, transcendence is the act of going beyond the biological limitations of man.

Culture's ways and means to pursue transcendence consist in two partly specialised and overlapping activities. The first is the activity of *survival*, which is about "… pushing back the moment of death, extending life-span, increasing life expectation and thus life's content-absorbing capacity […]" (p. 5). This capacity strives towards lifting death over the mundane,

making it more than a biological urge and modifying it into a significant event. More important, it makes the "job of death somewhat more difficult" (pp. 5-6).

Influenced by the novelist Elias Canetti, Bauman (pp. 33-35) states that in almost every culture there is a desire to live a long life, but the reason for this desire is not that man has an inner tendency of self-preservation, but that he has an inner tendency to want to survive *others*. Thus, living a long life is simply a means to outlive others. Normally this wish is silenced or even denied by man's consciousness. To survive as an individual, death of others is essential, but at the same time life and well-being of others is crucial for giving one's own life meaning. This is because the success of survival is not desirable or worth the effort if there are no other beings to share it with. The impulse to survive is an inbuilt quality and not a societal creation, although it is manipulated and socially managed by society.

Culture's second activity relates to *immortality,* and concerns the act of denying death's finality and thus removing some of its horrifying significance. Bauman says that "we all have to die, and we know it" (p. 6). This predicament originates from the most sinister and creative paradox, namely the fact that mortality condemns all attempts of survival, while the knowledge of mortality can make human projects absurd. The greatest curse of the human condition, according to Bauman, is the question "what is the meaning of life?" This question is the source for all agony in man, but also for the prospects of life. Since purpose and meaning are not something given, humans have to choose purpose and create meaning (i.e., fill life with contents). The knowledge of mortality is the very reason why mankind is busy "making life" (pp. 6-7). Bauman asserts that

> [i]mmortality is not a mere absence of death; it is *defiance* and denial of death. It is meaningful only because there is death, that implacable reality which is to be defied. There would be no immortality without mortality. Without mortality, no history, no culture – no humanity. Mortality 'created' the opportunity: all the rest has been created by beings aware of that they are mortal. (p. 7)

Thus the awareness of mortality causes man to preserve the past and create the future. Mortality is a fact whether humans want it or not. Immortality, on the other hand, is something they have to create themselves.

According to Bauman, the activity of survival and immortality obviously depend on each other. The striving for immortality relies on secure survival, and the act of transcending immortal values into specific human actions, objects and memories is a condition for life-expansion. From this, Bauman draws the conclusion that if culture's suggestions lose all–or some–of their transcending quality, or if its proposals cease to be viable, life will lose its

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meaning. Consequently, death will be the only cure for its own self-creating anguish and misery, resulting in anomic suicide.

However, Bauman adduces no arguments for his theory about transcendence and cultural activities. Moreover, the activity of survival and immortality can be explained in other terms without invoking concepts like denial or suppression. For another perspective we may look to Allan Kellehear's (Kellehear 2007) usage of sociological, historical, evolutionary, ethnographic, anthropological and archaeological evidence to explain the development of the human being and the relation between mortality and the function of culture.

The basic premise in Kellehear's theory is that most Stone Age people (from 200 000 years ago) were certain that they would experience an otherworld journey, but also uncertain if they would survive it. Hence, the most significant challenge that faced them probably was one of *anticipation* (Kellehear 2007, p. 26). The uncertain and frightening otherworld journey, and the challenge to anticipate death most likely played an essential role by creating defensive and accepting anticipatory responses. The defensive responses might have included the desire to predict death (documenting observations of illness and disease), the desire to prevent death (developing military and security defences), as well as the desire to identify death risks (developing long-ranged weapons and managing risks). The accepting responses could have involved the desire to acknowledge the inevitability of death (performing rituals and shamanism), the desire to prepare for death (clarifying moral values in the community), and the desire to plan for death (succession planning, food-gathering in case of unexpected death, conflict managing, establishing oral laws). Kellehear (Kellehear 2007, pp. 44-60) states that it probably were these anticipatory responses that paved the way for future societies. Therefore it is more likely that

> […] a belief in another but not necessarily better life […] might encourage survival, quality of life, altruism, and imbuing objects and activities with immortal meaning and memory not to *create immortality* but to *assist and anticipate its eventuality in another place beyond this life*. (Kellehear 2007, p. 58, emphasis in original)

According to Kellehear it is easy to see that Stone Age peoples' anticipatory view of death, as a result of specific religious beliefs, may be the most important drive for cultural activity and development. Consequently it is also plausible that the development of laws, new organisations, technologies and science is a result of anticipation of death. Kellehear claims

that by ignoring that "[…] most people, in most time, in human history and pre-history, held religions to be repositories of important truths […]" (p. 61), sociologists like Bauman neglect the most plausible reason for why cultures exist. Moreover, present scientific reflections and observations seem to suggest that it is *anticipation of death* that has been the most crucial creative social force, not denial of death (Kellehear 2007, pp. 53-54).

Regardless of whether one concurs with Kellehear or not, he uses a method far more suitable for explaining the role of death in the development and function of culture. In contrast to Bauman, he takes into account the available evidence and basis his theory on empirical findings rather on *a priori* speculations.

4. Modernity and the deconstruction of mortality

We have seen that Bauman holds culture to be both a cause and a result of man's need to suppress her awareness of mortality. Different eras have coped with death in different ways, but one of Bauman's main interest is an era he calls *modernity*.

4.1 *The premodern and the modern attitude towards death*

Bauman employs Philippe Ariès's historical theory of death and dying (Ariès 1974) to describe the difference between the traditional and modern perspective on death. Before the age of modernity death was, according to Bauman, accepted. The whole world, including death, was therefore *tame*. Violations of routine were seen as normal and inescapable and therefore humans did not see the world or fate as a challenge, nor did they interfere with the nature of the world (pp. 94-5).

As Bauman reads Ariès, it was not until the "Age of Reason" that modernity and its practice transformed death into *wild*. Life became nothing more than a routine – self-repeating. Death was now a challenge, the major scandal of humanity which had to be defeated and controlled by reason. Instead of accepting death, man began to deny it. Death became the denial of everything that modernity stood for, and its shamefulness had to be prevented by the method of silence. Death turned into something unmentionable, unacceptable, which resulted in an inability to speak of it in a meaningful way (pp. 133-4).

Modernity, according to Bauman (pp. 132-3), is the drive towards mastery of nature: the emancipation (liberation) from necessity (i.e., the emancipation from ignorance, parochiality, exploitation and poverty etc.). This mode becomes dominant in Europe around the 18th

century. Through the means of cultural crusade, uniformity of law, revolution, scientific-technological and other tools, modernity strives towards universal liberty. Human reason is the ultimate activity in the world where the unexpected, the unpredicted and unpredictable will cease to be. But reason determines what is permitted, and universal liberty is exclusively for the invited ones.

It is clear that Bauman's approach to history is quite essentialistic. He divides it into fixed eras even though he never gives a time frame for any of them.[5] Each era is described as having its own particular, essential and universal attitude towards death. In this, it is likely that he misinterprets Ariès's theory of death attitudes. Ariès saw the development from a tame to a wild death as a continuous process, rather than a radical shift. Furthermore, as social historians have pointed out, attitudes towards death were not universal across society. Many social variables played a part in forming these, such as wealth and class (Dollimore 1998, ch. 8; Howarths 2007, pp. 20-3; Kellehear 2007, pp. 172-84).

A recurring theme in Bauman's historical comparisons is the depiction of the "premodern" attitude towards death as somehow more natural and healthy than the modern one. It is however difficult to know what this could mean. Perhaps this is just an expression of Bauman's conservativist leanings and his universalist view of man's interpretation of death.

4.2 *Expressing and coping with death during modernity*

In modern times, as Bauman views it, death has been reduced to an exit, a private ending to a private life. Death can only be expressed in the available vocabulary man is trained in and allowed to use, the *language of survival*. This language is an *instrumental* language, with the sole purpose to serve and guide instrumental actions. It is a part of culture and established for avoiding death. The language of survival accommodates all phenomena of instrumentalised life (including death) as objects of practise. These are initiated, goal-oriented and focused efforts, specific events with a specific and avoidable cause. These specific events only get their meaning through the task of prompting or preventing it. To express death in an instrumental language requires a translation into the vocabulary of *potentially* terminal and curable diseases. Hence, Bauman concludes, the most inevitable event of all life events must

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[5] The following usage of the concepts "modern" and "modernity" is therefore undefined, although it seems most plausible that Bauman wants to describe a period beginning with the Enlightenment (around 1750 BCE). Furthermore, Bauman does not distinguish between "modern" and "modernity".

be represented as an *abnormality* (pp. 129-130).

But the concepts of normality and abnormality are notoriously difficult to apply. In one sense death *is* an abnormality since it happens to an individual at most once in a life time. On the other hand, it is a biological process that happens naturally. Thus, on a species level it is very reasonable to call it normal, but when it comes to one's own death, there is every reason to treat is as an abnormality. For example, personal construct theory (Tomer 1994, pp. 9-11) interprets the psychological reaction to death mainly as a reaction to its threat to one's normal functioning.

According to Bauman (pp. 130-131) metaphysical concerns about death are forced out by practical concerns about specific dangers in life, which can be seen as problem-solving tasks. The instrumentalisation of death is successful in fulfilling the needs to avoid facing death. This serves the needs of all people except the dying. The living cannot communicate with the dying because the latter have no use for the language of survival, as they have no task that requires action or making action meaningful. Death has become an embarrassment filled with shameful feelings.

Bauman sees language as purely instrumental. This is however far from the only alternative, and it also fraught with problems. For example, what instrumental purpose does poetry serve? More systematically, the limitations of this kind of theory of language have been highlighted by philosophers such as John Austin (1975) and Jürgen Habermas (1981). Since Bauman's interpretation of the function of language is fairly radical, it is unfortunate that he does not motivate it.

4.3 *The modern solution to mortality*

The inability to communicate with the dying is, for Bauman, the price to pay for modernity and the luxury of life. The modern instrumentalised world has *deconstructed* mortality. Death has been deprived of its significance and is merely a waste product discharged from life (p. 131). Here Bauman speaks of mortality as an existential and unavoidable human predicament, which modernity has deconstructed into outcomes of human actions. Every individual more or less feels guilty for the cessation of life. Thus dying is conceived as "killing".

But people *do* die from natural causes, and most people accept this. If someone dies from a disease, this does not entail that we need to find a scapegoat. To see each death as an act of killing resembles the thinking of a highly paranoid person rather than that of the population in general. Again Bauman attributes what is usually seen as a pathological trait to

the whole of society.

Bauman claims that although modern man tries to deny death, he cannot deny the inevitability of it. Instead, the modern solution lies in reducing death into *specific* cases of death. Resisting, postponing and avoiding each particular death becomes the *modus operandi* to hold off death at large. In that way, every specific case of death becomes contingent. Each death has a cause and no one dies of mortality, only of individual causes. To die is not just about dying; it is about dying of a disease or of murder. To fight the *causes of dying* becomes the meaning of life because fighting *death* can never be meaningful (pp. 137-140).

It is highly questionable to state that resisting, postponing and avoiding specific cases of death is a form of denial of death, since Bauman gives no evidence or historical records to support this claim. Kellehear (2007, ch. 2), on the other hand, states that there are a wide range of evidence (for instance, archaeological, historical, ethnographic) to suggest that man already during the Stone Age tried to avoid, predict and ward off death. People during that time had a desire to ward of death because of the uncertainty of the otherworld.

Furthermore, Bauman's claim that modern man only sees disease and murder as causes of death, and not mortality, is quite bizarre. First, there is a difference between a *cause* of death and the *reason* for why one dies. The opinion that you either die of a disease or by murder, does not entail that you deny the fact that the fundamental reason for dying, is the one of mortality. Second, biologically we die of a disease or injuries caused by violence or accidents, which we have always done. Thus, the view of death that Bauman calls "modern", is actually a process that started long before.

According to Bauman, a privatisation and medicalisation of society transforms death into a daily nightmare where life serves the purpose of fighting the war against death causes – a war that can never be won. The transcendence of mortality is now about transcending the technical capacity of living. Health is the prime focus and goal in life, and with a world-view like that existential worries fade out. Anxiety over health can be dealt with therapeutically and is not paralysing, rather, it spurs one into action. To abolish death is not a realistic goal, though avoiding health risks is. Even if protection of one's health is a time consuming act, it succeeds in decreasing the time spent on metaphysical worry. Nevertheless, exchanging immortality for health is a fight that results in surrendering life. Since health is a survival strategy that construes death as an individual affair, where each death is a personal, individual and lonely experience, life itself becomes individual, self-enclosed, separated, unshared and lonely. After all, says Bauman, the act of avoiding health risks in order to prevent death causes is a private matter and a private responsibility (pp. 140-142).

The main problem with this argument is the causal link Bauman postulates between modernity and the privatisation and medicalisation of society. This is not to imply that Bauman's description of our current state of affairs cannot be accurate. Rather it seems very plausible. But to state that it is solely a consequence of modernity is quite odd, since he does not give any actual evidence for this being the case. How can one possibly assert such a thing when one has not excluded other possible causal variables? Again, Kellehear offers a different explanation, and claims that the source of modern[6] epidemiology can be traced back to the early days of the Pastoral Age (around 6500 BPE). Since people were without biological explanations for the epidemics during this time, waves of recrimination and scapegoating often followed. Furthermore, the use of medicine, knowledge about symptoms, prediction of death and administrating pain relief through alcohol and opium, already existed thousands of years ago (Kellehear 2007, p. 69-74, 147). The foundation of modern ways of handling death and behaving in the face of it, is therefore more likely to be a result of a process that started millennia ago.

In the past there was no such thing as advanced medicine. However, this does not mean that the same problems and attitudes did not exist. Even if Bauman gives a somewhat plausible description of modern society, he totally ignores the huge hole in the causal aspects of his argument. Furthermore, he does not pay any attention to the historical development, which seems quite essential for explaining contemporary society. Therefore, it seems more reasonable to accept a theory as Kellehear's, since he gives an account of the historical development and also provides empirical evidence to support it.

4.4 *Stratification of medical services*

According to Bauman (pp. 143-144) the rising costs of advanced medical techniques result in a stratification of medical services. Advanced medicine becomes the ultimate combat weapon against disease. However, relatively few patients can benefit from it, since potential users are divided into those who are "deserving" and those who are "less deserving" of the treatment (p. 144). Thus the medical resources are unevenly distributed due to discrimination. Consequently, individual lives are valued differently. Bauman also states that

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[6] The modern era, as Kellehear defines it, starts somewhere between 1600 and the 1800s.

Even if the contemporary distribution of medicine is flawed, this hardly means that this is a result of modernity. Does Bauman really think that the available medicine was more evenly distributed before modernity? As for the current inequality has emerged, there could be other social factors that influence this outcome, or factors that have been present before "modernity". By not even examining these potential factors, Bauman makes a significant error, since a causal correlation cannot be proven without examining these. The current stratification of medical services does not give any support to Bauman's theory.

4.5 *Modernity and degeneration*

Bauman (pp. 145-149) asserts that during the 19th century reason-dictated reforms gradually smothered the original optimism that existed before the age of modernity. The most fundamental feature was the idea of degeneration, in the form of a radical medicalisation. Vices were redefined as illnesses. Social problems and personal misfortune became pathological concepts which could only be solved with surgery, regime, drug prescription or hospital confinement. Bauman proposes that

[t]he conceptual pathologization of daily life (with 'medicalization' or 'psychiatrization' as its inalienable companions), this most protruding accomplishment of the discourse of 'degeneration' was an unavoidable outcome of the fear of death which the deconstruction of mortality, as the prime strategy of modern times, could only suppress – yet never dispel. (p. 149)

According to Bauman, this pathologisation is the main reason for man being preoccupied with health and with "killing disease" (pp. 154-158).

Once again, Bauman implies that before the 1800s, the attitude towards death was more healthy than the modern one, and that there was a general "optimistic" attitude during those times. But does Bauman really take into consideration the fact that man constantly had to struggle with challenges like famine, starvation, floods, drought, epidemics, wars, and infant mortality? Furthermore, people lived and died in different ways depending on class, wealth, status and power. With that in mind, is it not more plausible that man, during that time, saw death as negative, or just as negative as modern man? Thus, regardless of which technologies and methods used to stave it off death, people can still have the same emotions concerning

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death. Today we can call a feeling "anxiety", while in the past we did not use that word for that very feeling.[7] However, people still experienced those emotions, simply using other words to describe them. The rise of a specific term does not determine when a phenomenon in itself comes into existence.

Bauman's thesis that we now live in a privatised and medicalised era might very well be true. However, this does not mean that it is a development that started in the wake of the Enlightenment. Even such things like privatisation and medicalisation have their progress. The same goes for pathologisation, which is not a specifically modern invention. The source of all three lies before modernity. Once again Bauman ignores that his theory is filled with claims about causal laws, which should be validated on both a deductive and an empirical level.

The concept of a universal "fear of death" is problematic in many senses. First, Bauman does not give any proof of a causal link between modernity and the fear of death. Second, how do you differentiate between fear of death and fear of dying? Third, is it not possible that a fear of death is actually a fear of those specific things that man associate with death, and not death in itself? Fourth, for Bauman to state that fear of death is a universal fact, without taking into account the many studies that have been done on this subject, seems unreasonable. Especially as those studies have presented substantial evidence that largely individual variables and circumstances determine if a person has a fear of death, and how he responds to it (cf. Kellehear 1984; Neimeyer 1994).

Furthermore, Bauman holds that with medicalisation and rationalisation of mortality, racial discourse becomes tightly interwoven with that of disease and pathology. Man tries to disguise and separate disease from the "healthy" part of society through the modern technology of hygiene. Hygiene becomes the "realistic surrogate for the irrealistic dream of death-avoidance" (p. 155). The killing of bacteria and viruses is not seen as murdering life, but as saving life. Hence, killing of disease carriers is a symbolic surrogate of death killing. This action of "cleaning up" consequently leads to the idea of racial hygiene which grows into a social movement in the modern era.

Bauman (p. 158) claims that modern medicine has established a special strategy to cope with disease. By identifying the causes of death, pinpointing their whereabouts in social space, and managing them through surveillance, treatment and isolation, the healthy core can remain unharmed. For that reason

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[7] The psychiatric use of the term stems from the 20th century, the common from the 16th (OED Online 2011/03).

> [...] destruction of the causes of death looms constantly on the horizon as the ultimate, radical, final solution. It also provides a ready-made, tempting model for the 'final solution' to the deadly horrors of tribal infiltration. (p. 159)

Thus it is inevitable that the dream of killing death transforms into the killing of people. After all, the modern project of deconstructing mortality is the very reason for why modern society is infused with a genocidal drive (p. 159).

Here Bauman states that modern medicalisation and rationalisation of mortality leads to *medical* hygiene, which results in the concept of *racial* hygiene. However, there is a wide range of evidence that man was concerned about hygiene already a long time ago. Hygiene artefacts have been found in the ancient Egypt (an ivory comb), the Indus Valley civilisation (drainage and toilet structures) Babylonian times (soap), ancient Greece (strigil, i.e., a metal tool to scrape off dirt and sweat from the body) and Rome (strigil, Roman plumbing, public baths and toilet facilities). Also, there were ideas of hygiene that were manifested in purification rituals in Mesopotamian times and recorded in the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran (Curtis 2007).

The main point is that there is a recorded history of hygiene that predates modernity, which indicates that Bauman's statement that hygiene is a modern concept is simply false. Consequently, Bauman's claim that hygiene is a result of the deconstruction of mortality appears to be unfounded, since he holds that this deconstruction is a modern phenomenon.

No one can argue against the fact that modern medicine was used as a means to spread racism. However, the same goes for the printing press, films, and most recently, the Internet. Thus to draw an analogy between killing bacteria and viruses with killing people, as Bauman does, is far-fetched. There is a big difference between being a means, and being a cause. Since there is proof that the idea of hygiene existed long before modernity this cannot be the variable that has caused racial hygiene.

From his statement concerning medical and racial hygiene, Bauman draws the conclusion that medical discourse is a "ready-made" model for those that are tempted by the idea of a "final solution". I am not going to analyse the substantial contents of this argument since Bauman has given a whole account of it in *Modernity and the Holocaust*, and it goes far beyond the limits of this essay. However, his line of reasoning is clearly a form of "guilt by association", as can be seen if one puts his argument in the following way:

1. The modern way of denying death consists in the deconstruction of mortality into specific causes of death.

2. To avoid, prevent and postpone causes of death, modernity (in form of modern medicine) uses a special strategy (identifying the causes of death, pinpointing their whereabouts in social space, and managing them through surveillance, treatment and isolation) to cope with death.

3. Advocates of genocide uses this strategic model as a means for eliminating certain ethnic groups.

4. Since this coping model is a consequence of the modern way of denying death (through the project of deconstructing mortality), modernity has paved the way for a modern genocidal drive. Thus modernity is a causal factor in the occurrence of the Holocaust.

But, of course, the modern way of coping with death through the science of medicine cannot be the cause of genocide merely because of an association. If we apply Bauman's logical aspect of his argument on something else than modern medicine, say for instance, sociology, it would follow that

1. Lenin was influenced by Marx, who was a sociologist.
2. Stalin was influenced by Lenin (and Marx).
3. Stalin's politics led to genocide.
4. Therefore, sociology is a causal factor in the genocide of millions during Stalin's reign.

The argument is no more valid in this case than it is in Bauman's.

5. Conclusion

I have given an account of Zygmunt Bauman's theory of the roots of culture and its relation to mortality, as presented in *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*. He starts out from a phenomenological approach to epistemology. From this he draws the conclusion that the awareness of mortality is traumatic and that we need to deny it. Culture is invented to institutionalise this denial by giving man the task of making life worthwhile. Modern society facilitates this denial by deconstructing death into specific cases of death. Medicalisation and

pathologisation become the modern way of taming mortality. Through the means of modern medicine a modern genocidal drive emerges. Bauman interprets this supposed development as a contributing cause of the Holocaust.

As I have indicated, Bauman relies on outdated pre-psychology and philosophy instead of contemporary science as a basis for his theory. This is highly remarkable since he aims to draw conclusions about the world. The advantage for him is that this frees him from any requirement to take the actual world into account.

The fundamental problem with Bauman's phenomenological foundation is the indisputable relativism and individualism that lies at the bottom of every argument. When we all have to go on is first-person experience, intersubjectivity (to say nothing of objectivity) becomes impossible. Every single statement about the world can be seen merely as another interpretation, from the interpreter's viewpoint. But when it comes to statements about human nature there cannot be any compromises concerning the necessity of objectivity. Actually, it is fair to say that many of the generalisations about humanity that have been made without any support of evidence have had highly destructive consequences.

Bauman's theory about human nature depends on the validity of the psychoanalytic theory of mind. Its scientific status as a theory for explaining the human psyche is still a matter of contention. More generally, it is peculiar and quite inadequate to explain human nature through a method that is first and foremost used for explaining human pathology. As Durkheim pointed out, "[…] in no way can sociology borrow purely and simply from psychology this or that proposition in order to apply it as such to social facts" (1895, p. 42). That is, you cannot derive social facts from individual premises. Durkheim holds this to be a fundamental rule of sociological method:

> *The determining cause of a social fact must be sought among antecedent social facts and not among the states of the individual consciousness.* (1895, p. 134, emphasis in original)

He holds that violations of this rule have led to sociological theories that are too vague, and too distant from the distinguishing features of the phenomena that have been studied. Furthermore, pathological concepts are such that they can only be applied to minorities. Applying them to the whole of society robs them of their meaning. It is almost ironic that Bauman complains about the pathologisation of modern society, while he himself bases his theory of the whole of society and all its members on the pathological concepts of suppression and denial.

When it comes to Bauman's account of the development and function of culture, he makes a fundamental error when asserting that culture is mainly a result of man's need to suppress the awareness of mortality. To make such a statement is clearly unwarranted as there is no substantial evidence to support it. These kind of arguments rely more on assumptions than scientific evidence, which makes it hard to entirely validate or dispute them.

Bauman constantly uses pathological concepts and various assumptions to explain the functioning of man, culture and society. Furthermore, he never explains why this method is more apt than a method that for instance uses sociological data to draw its conclusions. However, it is certainly a convenient choice of method since Bauman's whole theory is derived out of *a priori* statements about his own interpretation of the world. It is highly inappropriate, not to mention meaningless, to rely solely on this type of statement when one is studying social phenomena with the intention of tracing causal relationships and constructing social theories.

I mentioned Durkheim's rules for inferring causal relationships in the introduction. He separates direct from indirect experimentation, and notes that, in sociology, one can often only draw conclusions by a comparative method (Durkheim 1895, p. 147). But Bauman's method is neither direct nor indirect. He cannot compare cases where modernity has led to genocide with those that have not. Instead he uses his imagination to invent hidden motives of culture. This is not a more reliable method than astrology would have been.

As for Stinchcombe's version of scientific method, it is obvious that Bauman has started with a theoretical statement but ignored logical deduction, operational definitions of concepts, or the possibility of verification or falsification. This is why his theory cannot say anything about the actual world.

Of course, it may be that Bauman does not want to talk about the actual world, but is more interested in simply giving his own interpretation. But in that case one may wonder why he should be more relevant to sociology than should any other author of fiction. Sociology is a social *science*, and therefore it should always strive to maintain an objective approach to social phenomena. In doing so there is no alternative to something at least resembling methods such as Durkheim's or Stinchcombe's. It is tragic (and may be a symptom of the neglect of method by many sociologists) that a theory such as Bauman's, which is developed entirely from Bauman's own *a priori* assumptions, is considered an important contribution to sociology.

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