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Mihaela Gavrila, Marco Cilento

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1. Author information
Mihaela Gavrila
Department of Communication and Social Research, Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy

Marco Cilento
Department of Communication and Social Research, Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy

2. Author e-mail address
Mihaela Gavrila
E-mail: mihaela.gavrila@uniroma1.it

Marco Cilento
E-mail: marco.cilento@uniroma1.it

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Memories of the Future. Ulrich Beck, Risk and Prevention: The Difference that Defeats Indifference

Mihaela Gavrila*, Marco Cilento*

Corresponding author:
Mihaela Gavrila
E-mail: mihaela.gavrila@uniroma1.it

Corresponding author:
Marco Cilento
E-mail: marco.cilento@uniroma1.it

'The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference.
The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference.
The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference.
And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference'.
(Elie Wiesel)

Abstract

The aim of this contribution is to demonstrate the relevance of Ulrich Beck's thought with regards to the interpretation of complex phenomena such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. In this perspective, the social function of his thought on risk as a way to think about the future and as a strategy for the anticipation of emerging global problems is explored. The reflection on risk as an intrinsic dimension of contemporary societies is associated with the call for the development of a collective and individual future more attentive to the cultivation of empathy, solidarity and a new humanism as a dimension of the solidity of a society.

Keywords: global risk society, social foresight, ethical and cosmopolitan governance.

* Department of Communication and Social Research, Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy.

1. Introduction. Risk, memory and knowledge in Ulrich Beck's thought and beyond

The 'society of risk', a prophetic concept that emerged at the end of the 1980s and was then addressed in many of Ulrich Beck's most far-sighted volumes, the subject of this Special Issue of the Italian Sociological Review, now seems more relevant than ever to the present time, two years after the outbreak of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and in the midst of the global crisis generated by the war in Ukraine. Risk awareness, effectively theorized by Beck, has been taken up by the perspectives of sociology, political science, and social psychology, by authors such as Giddens, Luhmann, Bauman, Sofsky and Furedi, Glassner, Robin, and Castells (Silei, 2015), using key words that have completed the map of the postmodern condition, such as uncertainty, risk, anxiety, fear, insecurity, and vulnerability.

These are concepts that can also be applied to the experience of epidemics and pandemics, which act as a warning to reflect on the past and, above all, on the future, moving towards the rediscovery of a future which should be made a welcoming symbolic space of habitation, requiring the predictive capacity of those who live in the present to be able to substantiate themselves as such.

Therefore, what might seem to be the pessimistic thinking of a sociologist who has dedicated most of his works to the theorization of 'risk', turns out to be the greatest lesson in optimism and survival for modernity, an call 'for enthusiasm and adventure' (Yates, 2016: 213), which presupposes the courage of innovation and the assumption of risk awareness as a strategy of prediction and containment of dangers. Becoming aware of the effects of individual and institutional actions, assessing the opportunities of technological innovations in the face of possible consequences, including negative ones, means navigating the seas of the future with the compass of culture and knowledge as tools to prevent risk from turning into disaster.

The national and global experiences of recent years, from environmental catastrophes to Islamic terrorism, pandemic and war reveal that the future proves to be increasingly uncertain; the shadow of optimism that survived the various threats of modern times is being replaced with even greater force by fear of what the future holds for us (Appadurai, 2013; transl. it., 2014). The society 'will be' and promise is transformed into a 'society of may be' and uncertainty (Beck, 1986, 1997, 2000; Benasayag, Smith, 2003; Luhmann, 1991). Uncertainty, however, is based on the lack of planning, analysis and knowledge, the only ones able to guarantee a safe navigation of the seas of the future.

> …today we have to constantly anticipate catastrophes that could happen tomorrow. The conditional of catastrophes violently bursts forth in the midst

> of institutions and the everyday life of men: it is unpredictable, it does not care about the Constitution and the rules of democracy, it is charged with the explosive absence of knowledge and erases away all points of orientation (Beck, 2013: 6-7).

Beck's prophecy, on the other hand, is substantiated by the difficulties and humanitarian catastrophes of recent decades: terrorism, earthquakes, tsunamis, pandemics and wars are all problems to which we have reacted too slowly, suffering the shock of fear and the inhibition generated by not having learned from similar experiences in the past, demagnetizing memory and starting again from scratch and increasingly devastated by the fears and wounds inflicted by the broken promises of modernity.

Beck, more than any other sociologist of risk, invites us to reflect on this and to make the renewal and design of institutions a strategy of disaster prevention. In this direction, the reform of institutions and politics should be accompanied by a change of attitude in the social sciences and sociology themselves. The replacement of the 'national gaze', typical of a vision that accepts the nation as the main horizon of its activity, with a 'cosmopolitan gaze', based on the understanding of national problems within a global vision shared with other states, should also lead to a change of perspective in sociology: replacing the research categories associated with the nation (Beck, 2004, transl. it. 2005: 38) and 'methodological nationalism' with a 'cosmopolitan social science', open to an understanding of the global through a new frame of reference, willing to reformulate an alternative epistemological and methodological framework, a necessary condition to grasp increasingly transnational dynamics (Pendenza, 2016: 92-94).

The aim, then, is to provide answers to those situations in which '[t]he expectations of human kind are no longer aligned with the institutional structures that are supposed to realize them' (Beck, 2013: 10). And a first and elementary solution, consistent also with the call for a rethinking of sociology and its research perspective, can be found in the proposal evoked in the conclusion of one of Ulrich Beck's last books: *'Put society back in!* Don't forget society!' (Beck, 2013: XI).

This slogan will be our guide in understanding the latest trials that humanity and Europe in particular are facing: the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Assuming risk as a compass of orientation in the future, always having at the center of reflection the survival of society, implies the assumption of responsibility beyond the narrow vision of nation-states. The invitation is to engage in the promotion of a critical cosmopolitanism, based on the 'recognition of otherness' on 'new democratic forms of political sovereignty

beyond nation-states' (Beck, Grande, 2004: 26) and on the 'regime of human rights' (Beck, 2004).

2. COVID-19, war, and risk as a sociological and communicative meta-category

Among the various events of recent years, the spread of SARS-COV-2 has overwhelmingly imposed the theme of the relationship between pandemics/catastrophes, society, and collective memory (Snowden, 2019). In its social function, memory selects, orders, and hierarchizes the unstoppable flow of life (Bergson, 1896; Kandel, 2006; Montesperelli, 2003). This is as true for the individual as it is for an entire society. Maurice Halbwachs (1924) - in the wake of Durkheim (1898) - argued that 'the collective frameworks of memory' serve to recompose, by reconstructing it, an image of the past in a manner consistent with the organization of society (Jedlowski, 2001). The construction of collective memory involves such a wide range of components (language, conceptions of time and space, narratives, symbols, social relations, institutions, etc.) that it calls for an interdisciplinary perspective and implies the involvement of a multitude of subjects at national and transnational level.

In this context, a reflection on the role and responsibilities of the social sciences and sociology as a cosmopolitan discipline, but also attentive to the exploration of the future and the possible, is again useful. A sociology able to

> make at least imaginable those changes that are not yet imaginable [...] To this end sociology should, at least in part, transform itself into a sociology of the possible. I do not see what other discipline could be asked to identify which social forms, which ways of living together, which individual and collective behaviors that do not exist today, but are realistically possible, could allow the world to get off the one-way track that it seems to have taken (Gallino, 2002: 32).

We have become so accustomed to social complexity, conflict, disease, discrimination and poverty that we have even gone so far as to immunize ourselves from pain and assume positions of indifference. In this context, can sociology still play a role in guaranteeing the problematization, knowledge, interpretation and accompaniment of society in a process of understanding the errors of the past, of containing the shocks of the present and, above all, in anticipating and preventing future problems? What are the cognitive tools

needed to counter the 'globalization of indifference'[1] and the normalization of evil and pain to the point of 'anesthetizing' our reactive capacity and even denying its very existence? 'The permanent anaesthesia of society prevents discovery and reflection, oppresses truth' (Han, 2021: 14) inhibiting awareness of reality and objective truths, as German-speaking Korean philosopher Han himself reminds us, citing Adorno's 'Negative Dialectics': 'The need to let pain become eloquent is the condition of all truth. For pain is objectivity that weighs on the subject' (Adorno, 2004: 18).

Totalitarianisms, wars, genetic technologies and climate change are part of the 'painful' dimension of 'counter-modernity', that is, they are the consequences of modernization itself, of which we are having a continuous symbolic experience, through continuous narration, to the point of annihilating the sense of pain and, therefore, of reaction and rebellion of our individual and social bodies.

Therefore, in order to awaken the spirit and allow the humanization of the processes that involve us in these complex times, often marked by risk, we shall attempt to adopt the guidance of the thought of Ulrich Beck, to whom we pay homage in this Special Issue of the Italian Sociological Review. Part of the rich cultural heritage that Beck gives us through his idea of 'reflective modernity' is precisely the salvation intrinsic in the presence of doubt in the co-presence of alternatives for action. Doubt and uncertainty are posed as a strategy for anticipating the risk generated by technological development and the lack of care for the consequences of modern life. The same awareness of risk becomes an engine of social innovation and leads to the need for political experimentation through a kind of revitalization of the Enlightenment in all institutions of the state and the market, allowing the triumph of cosmopolitan imagination based on the universal interest of humanity for itself (Beck, 2010).

The goal becomes that of a return to reflection on and anticipation of risk of every kind in order to pursue the common good, applied in each case according to the individual addendums of a society in the making. Among the

[1] The reference is, inevitably, to many of the messages launched since the beginning of his pontificate by Pope Francis (see in particular the Message of the Holy Father Francis for the celebration of the XLIX World Day of Peace, 'Overcome indifference and conquer peace', 1 January 2016 (https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20151208_messaggio-xlix-giornata-mondiale-pace-2016.html). These messages are exalted with the force of the March 27, 2020 Supplication, which restores a Pope who, in the desert of the great St. Peter's Square, takes on the pain of the world, calls out one by one 'all the evils that afflict humanity' and prays that no one be left alone, so that the 'globalization of indifference' may be replaced by the 'globalization of solidarity'.

conceptual categories that have most characterized Ulrich Beck's thought, that of risk represents a leitmotiv that allows the German sociologist to reflect deeply on the ways in which our time relates to itself. Reflection on the difficulties and the uncertain future of a society (uncertainty society) represents the keystone of Beck's intellectual parabola. Initially received with a certain reticence by the sociological community, it then gave life to a successful interpretative paradigm, which took shape in a significant and fruitful line of research, the 'sociology of risk'. The risk is located in a multitude of situational and social networks, which require complexity and hermeneutic depth, leading Beck to critically interrelate with other classics of sociological thought and beyond, some that preceded him, others contemporary. In a certain sense, the risk is framed by Beck in a Gadamerian perspective, that is, as the consequence of a concatenation of events, of which it is necessary to propose an interpretation in depth by virtue of an anamnesis conducted through the 'history of effects/*Wirkungsgeschichte*' (Gadamer, 1983 [1960]).

The same *principle of responsibility* thematized by Hans Jonas (1979), for example, is evidently not foreign to theoretical suggestions, but even more to deep existential concerns, in which Beck's sociology of risk has its roots. Never in the past, in fact, has the possibility been tested, today largely part of everyday experience, that local or individual actions were able to trigger consequences, often uncontrollable and beyond imagination, on a global scale and at a collective level as a result of technological progress. If the human being has become 'fatally antiquated' with respect to the power of the technological apparatus he himself has developed (Anders, 1956, 1980), Beck identifies in the awareness of risk the decisive factor capable of promoting an updating of the existential condition of contemporary man through the strengthening of his faculty of imagining the consequences of his courses of action. In this way, the sociology of risk proposes itself as the project, so to speak, of a new anthropological *release*, a sort of humanity 2.0, up to the challenges of the present. Dialoguing with contemporary sociologists such as Luhmann, Giddens and even with the anthropological studies of Mary Douglas, Beck places risk among the priorities of the agendas of the social sciences, but also of national and international policies. Thematizing risk essentially means situating the 'future as a cultural fact' with all its imaginative, predictive and aspirational dimensions at the center of reflection, and if – as anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has observed – 'the social sciences have never excelled in capturing these properties of human life [...] it is never too late to improve' (2013: 394). As it is intertwined with *issues* such as the quality of life, relationships and individual, national and supranational futures, risk has become a kind of cultural meta-category that is indispensable for addressing all other issues currently affecting humanity: authentic terrain on which to solicit the objective *inter-*

solidarity of humanity (Morin, 2005: 161), it stimulates interdisciplinary sensitivities and reflections, ranging from economic and political dimensions to ethics, morality and the sociology of complexity.

Risk, as a consequence of the ongoing 'evolution' of a state or a social situation, raises complex technological, ethical, cultural and political questions, and calls into question both individual and collective responsibilities. It is intrinsic to the paradox of modern societies, founded on the rhetoric of sovereign citizens and, yet, governed by a collective subject that 'transforms with sovereign gesture its social environment' (Privitera, 2016: 14). The risk is nested in the very nature of a society like the current one, based on administrative action, which functions as a 'machine [that] has thrown the driver to the ground and runs blindly through space' (Horkheimer, 1947: 113). Intrinsic to the interpretation of modern society as overexposed to risk is the dimension of insecurity: through an increasing complexity and autonomy of its systems of production and distribution, of living, of the organization of transport and communication, it has itself become a generator of risk and lack of security. A phenomenon that could be called the 'syndrome of acquired insecurity': modern society, through its own existence and functioning, but also because of the absence of knowledge and the need to 'proceed by trial and error' accredits itself in Beck's thinking as *'the society of the might'* (Beck, 2013: 6).

> Nuclear power plants, whose complex internal life we do not understand, could fail; financial markets, which even stock market players no longer seem to adequately grasp, could collapse. The conditional as a verbal mode that connotes a permanent condition: we are today constantly anticipating catastrophes that could occur tomorrow. The conditional of catastrophes violently bursts forth in the midst of institutions and the everyday life of men: it is unpredictable, it does not care about the Constitution and the rules of democracy, it is charged with the explosive absence of knowledge and erases away all points of orientation (Beck, 2013: 6-7).

In fact, what was experienced during the pandemic period and, subsequently, with the war involving not only Russia and Ukraine, but 'planetary society' (Beck, 1999 [1997]) goes to confirm the dimension of unpredictability of risk and, above all, the need to anticipate problems and to govern technical-scientific progress and its consequences with 'the intellectual resources of civil tradition' (Cerroni, 2001: 104). COVID-19 affected not only people but also the entire global public sphere, democratically altering both the equilibrium of the most evolved social systems and the most economically and socio-culturally fragile countries. Old problems that have never been healed resurface with greater force, accentuated by the stratification of fears: poverty, social gaps,

marginality, immigration, underfunding of education, university and research have been silenced by the cries of pain of an Italy and a Europe brought to its knees by the epidemic, only to re-emerge now even more dramatically under the further weight of the fear of war in Ukraine, which has poured mercilessly into every home and into the European and global imagination.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which began with the invasion of Ukraine by Russia on February 24, 2022 has erased the fear of the virus, suddenly catapulting the whole world into a new reality, even more violent and far from any rational explanation: the war.

Health or military pressures, with relevant economic, political, psychological consequences are based on what Beck intuited in relation to the world society of risk:

> ...previously depoliticized areas of decision-making are now being politicized by the perception of risks at the level of public opinion; they are - mostly unintentionally and against the opposition of the powerful institutions that monopolize these decisions - being opened up to public controversy and debate (Beck, 1999: 122).

Indeed, the years of studies on the relationship between narratives and the perception of uncertainty testify that the politicization of the public media space causes the represented risk to be transformed into fragments of the imaginary and into symbols that affect individual histories and the social and political history of a country and of Europe as a whole. This connection in turn raises the question of communication in situations of risk or emergency, connected by a copious literature to the paradigm of the 'social construction of reality' (Berger, Luckmann, 1969 [1966]), applied to the study of the media (DeFleur, Ball-Rokeach, 1975; Gerbner, 1969; Wolf, 1985).

The media and their representatives implicitly hold a concentration of socially legitimized and recognized 'symbolic power' (Bourdieu, 1982): the 'mediated center' of the social world is occupied and represented by the media and its protagonists, who speak on its behalf (Couldry, 2003), proposing, as Edelman anticipated, 'symbolic stimuli' capable of:

> [...] calming, tempering but also greatly agitating [...]. Indeed, the most commonly used, but also the most abstract, terms are, as is natural, those that reassure people concerned that the 'public interest' or 'national security' or the nation's well-being and safety will be preserved. These words mean different things to different groups and that is why they are usually effective (Edelman, 1987: 183).

We are faced with a mediatic, political and even scientific system oriented to the 'social production' of risk (Beck, 1986; Giddens, 1994), which requires the research and experimentation of cognitive tools useful for countering irrational behavior caused by fear and the unpreparedness of individuals, institutions, and the media. This need was further exacerbated in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic and especially in the aftermath of the lockdown. After the 'first wave' in particular, the initial insecurity subsided in public opinion. However, fueled by media sensationalism and their constant search for novelty - an uncertainty regarding the future, a fear of a catastrophic, chaotic, conflictual tomorrow has arisen (Cilento, Gavrila, 2020; Gavrila, Morcellini 2020, 2022). There is therefore the risk of symbolic terrorism, against which the study of social and communicative processes in a pandemic reality can also perform the function of 'national security service', to use a far-sighted expression of Ettore Bernabei in the era of political terrorism. In the period of pandemics, as in war and other contexts of social, cultural, health and economic crisis, it is necessary to activate concrete strategies and the ability to dispel legends and myths, to reassure and accompany people. This is a possible 'counter-narrative', capable of addressing these issues with the right language, avoiding the tendency to give them an excessive qualitative and quantitative relevance and to 'colonize' the palimpsests, to the detriment of the most fragile subjects and therefore most vulnerable to the prospect of continuous exposure to risk and uncertainty, such as children, adolescents, the elderly or the culturally weak (Gavrila, Minestroni, 2019).

3. Overcoming fear with knowledge. Foresight as a function of social knowledge

Insecurity, as demonstrated by the vulnerability of certain social groups or age groups (Gavrila, 2021), is an evil that can be defeated as long as social and cultural capital is restored enabling people to interpret and manage emotions, fears and all those things that feed hostile feelings and visions of disintegration of society and its moral assumptions. It could, therefore, be asserted that one of the possible cures is the cultivation of a cultural framework oriented towards sociality and the progressive development of social ties that - always and by definition - function as a securitarian resource (Gavrila, 2016). In opposing conditions, isolationism wins and fear in the face of various dangers (crime, migration, terrorism, natural disasters, pandemics, wars) spreads over those closest to them, leading to the transformation of securitarian policies themselves from a resource to an syndrome of insecurity (Morcellini, Mosca, 2014) and thus undermining the efforts of other traditional institutions as well.

Post-traditional society (Giddens, 1994) requires interpretive systems that consider information and knowledge as the basis for reflexivity and tools for survival amid modern complexity and the overcoming of uncertainty. It is also for this reason that, once we have come to terms with the mythology of technological progress and with the tendency of 'autonomous' systems to be ungovernable, the individual has returned to exploring, navigating and questioning themselves and the real or imagined community. They have returned to engaging in the construction of their own identity and participating in the preservation, enhancement and even edification of the communities they belong to (Bauman, 2001). Even the technologies 'guilty' of the same elusive reproducibility of risk, become again habitats and tools for the enhancement of knowledge and relationships, to overcome humanity's loss of control over social life, the cause of the uncontrollable amplification of risks (Beck, 1986: 42).

Indeed, risk as understood in Beck's entire work paves the way for a sociological diagnosis of the broader phenomenon of crisis. One of the easiest causes to identify, and therefore cited in all analyses of the crisis, refers to the *excesses* that create a progressive dyscrasia between what is and what will be, that is, between *substantial and predictive*, making any forecast more improbable (Proietti, Quattrociocchi, 2011: 83). These are excesses at all levels that modify the very sense of reality: in managers' salaries, in property valuations, in the use of financial leverage, in society's valuations, in poverty and wealth and even, paradoxically, in the very rhetoric on waste and excesses. The crisis, therefore, stands as an extraordinary event, which reveals the latent, the virtual, the invisible, the possible and the unconscious, playing them off against the manifest, the real, the visible, the actual and the conscious; it has the effect of the general transformation of society, of which it becomes a decisive fulcrum (Morin, 1985: 191-192). It is the revealing occasion of a state otherwise not apparent to analysts and decision-makers, risk, the trigger for change, an issue that has always been central to all social sciences. Depending on the intensity or severity of the effects, the *theory of change* proposes the distinction between *traumatic crises and normative or transitional crises*. This dichotomy is also valid for the analysis of the environmental phenomenon from the point of view of the social sciences. Disasters and natural catastrophes can be traced back to traumatic crises, while the category of transitional crises includes *latent side effects* induced by scientific progress, ascribable to the complex of factors that define the society of risk (Luhmann, 1996 [1991]). We are currently faced with an inverted continuity between the perception, recognition and management of risk as 'categories connected to and filtered by the specific culture, symbolic horizon and social organization within which subjects move' (Douglas, 1991), and disaster or catastrophe. A transitional crisis (i.e. inadequate or non-existent

risk management), in other words, can result in a traumatic crisis, such as a natural disaster.

It is no coincidence, Beck points out in a testimony of 2007, that in Western societies in particular, a sensitive link and a widespread awareness of the ecological crisis is beginning to emerge as both cause and effect of an interweaving of risks that call for adequate reflection and management:

> With the collapse of the Berlin Wall, states without enemies have arisen in search of bogeymen. Some fear or hope that the bogeyman of 'terrorism' will replace the bogeyman of communism in order to keep the West united [...] a historical alternative is emerging: the glue sans bogeyman that in the future will keep the West together could be constituted by the challenges of the ecological crisis, which form the basis of the commonality of danger. Indeed, there is no greater threat to the Western way of life than the combination of climate change, environmental destruction, energy supply, and the wars that can ensue (Beck, 2007).

After 1990, in fact, the whole of humanity has been called upon to participate in the management of the greatest of risks: its history, as a 'condemnation' and source of becoming and salvation at the same time. It is not by chance that, for Ulrich Beck, the idea of the 'end of history' is unrealistic: humanity cannot remain locked in a single project, however attractive and apparently comfortable it may be. On the contrary, the urgency that is looming and that Beck is well aware of is that of a 'responsible modernity', which attempts to achieve a problematic but indispensable reconciliation between the systemic imperatives of industrial and technological development and the enhancement of individual sovereignty, in the form of a kind of *technological citizenship*.

Effectively, in Beck's perspective, technological citizenship constitutes a stake that is both political and cultural in nature. 'Here, the image of a society debating the consequences of technical and economic development is outlined, before fundamental decisions have been made' (Beck, 1999: 123), mobilizing collectively to seek alternatives and thus averting the risk induced by the 'cage of modernity' (Beck, 1999: 122). It is a social, cultural and even moral management of risk, even before the institutional one, that Beck hopes for, which refers to the anthropological thought of Mary Douglas and her reading of the phenomenon in a cultural key. According to Douglas, effectively interpreted by Bucchi (Bucchi, Neresini, 2002: 187), the concept of risk incorporates a moral and cultural dimension that is intertwined with the technical one, it offers 'a neutral vocabulary to build a bridge between the facts we learn about and the construction of a moral community' (Douglas, 1992: 5). From this perspective, risk discourse is also a way in which contemporary

society relates to sin, politicizing and moralizing hazards. It is also through this brief reflection that we observe the extent to which Beck's thought appears inscribed on a continuum with his predecessors, contemporaries, and epigones.

The society of risk presents itself as the effect of the inflation of media content, images and information, accredited by a hyper-representation of post-modern risks. Aware of the great opportunities of digital media since the late 1990s, Beck warns instead of the risks and the capacity of influence of mainstream media, often subjected to uncontrolled political use. Quoting Baudelaire, he sees man as a child lost in the 'forests of symbols'.

> In other words he is subject to the symbolic politics of the media. This is especially true in the abstractness and omnipresence of destruction that runs through the global risk society. Here the recognizable and simplified symbols, with which the 'nerve bundles' of culture are touched and laid bare, acquire a central political significance (Beck, 1999: 93).

The emotion of fear, and with it the feeling that something threatens our existence or our biological integrity or that of those closest to us, become an integral part of a social life conditioned by the production of risk: 'The dynamic set in motion by the society of risk is expressed instead by the phrase: I am afraid! Instead of the commonality induced by scarcity, the commonality induced by fear takes over' (Beck, 2015: 65).

The concept of risk, entirely projected into the future and intrinsically linked to the unpredictability of tomorrow, does nothing but shift and jostle emotional states related to uncertainty: anxiety, worry, anguish, panic, fear of loss. Loss of loved ones, of health, of home and, ultimately, loss of control over facts, objects, subjects and situations of strict emotional relevance for individuals. It is precisely these emotional states that permeate contemporary public discourse, be it linked to news (crime), pandemic, war and even political rhetoric (see, for example, the concept of security linked to immigration issues).

As a result, in contemporary Western cultures and societies, widespread and generalized risk is no longer (and not only) linked to merely unpredictable catastrophic-natural events (volcanoes, earthquakes, floods, epidemics/pandemics) or, at the limit, supernatural events (divine justice, punishment from heaven...) but is closely linked to events caused by human activity (think of hydrogeological risk, toxic clouds generated by production processes, war) and therefore a consequence of the process of modernization and globalization of the planet: Territorial, ethnic or religious conflicts, terrorist events, environmental disasters, and so on. Events, that is, in which the destructive and out-of-control force belongs to man: these are what have been

called 'manufactured risks' (Giddens, 1994) in a social condition of 'manufactured uncertainty' (Beck, 2006).

Generalized risk and uncertainty thus pervade, in their cultural ubiquity, the experience of individuals in Western societies, traversing a whole series of cultural practices and daily experiences ranging from work to interpersonal relationships, from food choices to recreational and leisure activities, from the consumption of goods and services, to personal health (Beck, 1992; Culpitt, 1999; Caplan, 2000; Denney, 2005; Mythen, 2014). In such daily practices and experiences, the continuous references to negative emotions (fear, in particular) through the identification, each and every time, of a phantom enemy to be taken down, most recently the viruses and wars that are upon us, or a monster to be defeated, or a threat to be averted, are increasingly evident in discursive practices and media narratives.

Hyper-communication, indeed, does not present itself as a guarantee of the quality of communication (Wolton, 2016). On the contrary, it cultivates a greater sense of inadequacy and places us in a condition of deficit of real connection with others: sicker, lonelier, more afraid, more confident in our insecurities and, therefore, more unhappy, as also demonstrated by the categories underlying the various world reports on happiness for which we recall in this article only the last one, published in March 2021 (Helliwell, Layard, Sachs, De Neve, 2021). Nonetheless, even the language of marketing and advertising, oriented as it is to generating insecurities and shortcomings in order to sell products capable of filling them, seems to promote the need for security as a social value.

It is no coincidence that the issue of the quality of communication and its impact on the human psyche was also posed by Carl R. Rogers, a humanist psychologist of the post-war era, considered by Peters in his 'Talking to the wind' (transl. it. 2005: 50) 'the best example of a theoretical communication therapist'. For Rogers, failure to communicate was the fate of the neurotic whose relationship with self and with others suffered a blockage in the relationship between unconscious and ego, while 'good communication, free communication on both intrapersonal and interpersonal levels, is always therapeutic' (Rogers, 1961). Therefore, the therapist's role was to dissolve this passage: a process that stands as a parable of good communication, with decidedly therapeutic and functional effects to 'overcome fear' (Gavrila, Morcellini, 2022).

Polyphonic social representations strove to find meaning, reason, practical suggestions and a reorientation of values, building a broad social consensus on the most effective behaviors to resist contagion or resolve conflict. Because they were conventional and prescriptive, social representations were crucial in explaining, reshaping, and communicating new social priorities as a partly

unexpected collective resilience emerged. Returning to the recent pandemic experience, it can be argued that the link between pandemic and past dramatic events mobilized and enhanced community resilience by building a communicative bridge between shared community social representations and expert knowledge. Devastating epidemics and pandemics, often present in history, effectively leave relevant traces in collective memory, easily repurposed to frame new challenges within the protective lens of past struggles and achievements (Erll, 2020; Ghilani et al.; 2017; Jovchelovitch, 2007).

Adding to this layering of memories is the opportunity to expand and utilize the 'database' of global experiences, implementing a global response based on cosmopolitan governance of risk as much as normality.

Unlike Luhmann, for whom the ability to act can only be protected by the trust placed in systems such as science, technology and government, while all other forms of expression, such as protests, and new forms of claims can cause difficulties for the social system, being perceived by it as a source of ungovernable complexity, Beck entrusts the solution to the social macro-process of reflexive modernization. Within this process, the concept of risk has a dual function: on the one hand, it enters into the daily life of the individual by directing the formation of new norms of individual behavior; on the other, society increasingly requires forms of democratic participation to govern research and techno-scientific innovation, calling for a cosmopolitan governance. The two theoretical positions imply methodological perspectives apparently opposed, but in fact complementary, to approach risk situations. Food risks, climate change, nuclear accidents, health epidemics are some of the challenges that modernity faces on a daily basis. A fundamental choice for sociological theory that intends to contribute to providing useful guidance to *policy makers* and institutions that are faced with choices, including communication, on increasingly controversial issues and that are confronted with a growing demand for democratic participation, even by audiences not necessarily experts on the subject, but increasingly interested in taking charge of the future. From this point of view, risk takes on an implicit predictive vocation. In order to arrive at the ethical imperative of a necessary path of conciliation between *risk claimers* (linked to local movements, to a part of the press and to some political and economic stakeholders) and representatives of so-called official science (researchers, academics, scientific journalists and representatives of different political and economic interests). Precisely on this front there is more need than ever for a common culture and self-reflexivity, which can also allow the virtuous encounter between scientific points of view, individual experiences, economic interests and future projects.

4. Conclusions. Beyond Risk, Towards Ethical Care for the Societies of the Future

The memory of pandemics, wars and catastrophes helps to heighten awareness of the presence of risk in the design of society, but also of the possibility of controlling and anticipating it by making previous experiences one's own, studying the representations, behaviors and policies that facilitated the resolution of problems. In other words, the present and the future have their own "memory". Becoming aware of the "history of effects" (Gadamer, 1983 [1960] can help, on the one hand, to recover the historical depth and the causes of some of the problems of the present, on the other hand, to imagine the risks and to prevent their underestimation generating real catastrophes. Once a socio-cultural, political and economic system of knowledge and protection from risk has been developed, in the ways theorized by Ulrich Beck, the greatest challenge becomes that of a collective construction of peace and a feeling of security, of the contrast of war, of processes of safeguarding and valorization of common goods, based on the awareness that global problems must be given global answers. This, however, does not imply a standardization of the responses of individual nations to risks of all kinds, nor, much less, endogenous possibilities for crisis management, as demonstrated by the recent situations briefly illustrated in this contribution: the responses to the issue of the pandemic were provided through specific resources and vaccines often produced at an extra-national level, while the war forced Ukraine to request foreign support, particularly European and American. In particular, it has accelerated processes of international multilaterality, for example the status of EU accession candidate for Ukraine and Moldova and the NATO accession of Sweden and Finland. Beck recalls in an interview with Joshua Yates in 2016, at the time of the Islamic terrorist attacks that

> Global risk society should not be confused with a homogenization of the world[...]. On the contrary, global risks are themselves inequitably distributed. They unfold differently in each concrete context, mediated by different historical contexts and different cultural and political models. In the so-called periphery, global risks do not appear as an endogenous process, which can be combated through autonomous national decision-making processes, but as an exogenous process, activated through decisions made in other countries, particularly in the center (Yates, 2016: 96-107).

However, in the face of an unequal distribution of risks and, above all, of ways to prevent them, the antidote envisioned by Beck is solidarity between states, which passes through international cooperation, understood not as the

creation of a transnational or world state, but in the 'moving forward together' of nation-states (Beck, 1999 [1997]: 159). In other words, encouraging solidarities, rethinking and diversifying 'the idea of development so that it preserves the solidarity inherent in community realities' (Hessel, Morin, 2012).

In fact, the opposite of liquidity is solidity, the word from which solidarity comes, as if it were the antidote to the disintegrated society of our times. There is no development of individuality if not from the recognition of what we have in common. If we were totally integrated, there would be no personal identity, and the same situation would occur if we were totally isolated: because identity is the munus (the gift) of communitas, that is, it is the recognition that we are implicated in others, and starting from this original debt we elaborate our own difference. A difference that makes a difference (in that it generates identity) but is not in-different (it does not make us closed and deaf to the other).

Adam Smith, in his 'Theory of Moral Sentiments' stated that, at the basis of humanitarian policies, each human being has 'some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it, except the pleasure of seeing it' (Smith, 1759 [transl. it. 2009]: 253).

From this perspective, Ulrich Beck's thinking on risk is, at its core, an ethical thought and even an 'occasion for a re-moralization of society' (Di Nicola, 2016: 9), which opens up to the rediscovery of a concept of common good to be defended and preserved in the different forms it can take. Above all, it seems more evident than ever that the awareness of risk leads to a different semantization of the future, of responsibilities, of a new widespread moral commitment (Bandura, 1999) and even of compassion as an integral part of understanding as a founding principle of the risk society.

> What unites the ethics of compassion with the ethics of understanding is resistance to the cruelty of the world, of life, of society to human barbarism [...] To seek to reduce human cruelty is to elevate the mind, the conscience, to obviate the unconsciousness and ignorance that produce evil, it is to introduce reason into passion to prevent the transition to the delirium and disproportion of homo demens, and at the same time it is to take issue with the conditions that bring out subjective cruelty (Morin, 2005: 206).

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