# On the future of the moral subject: A dialogue between Zygmunt Bauman and Lilie Chouliaraki

**Edited by Ksenija Vidmar Horvat**

*KVH:* To begin this conversation in writing, I will pose a most general, yet quite critical question of our time: are ethical codes and moral conducts still a coherent subject to philosophical/scholarly consideration (and potentially pedagogical guidance); or has the postmodern liquidity (together with the mentality of irony) disposed of the grounds to provide arguments that would seem pertinent to the realities of our fragmented society? You seem to suggest that the crisis refers to the (modern type) management of morality, not the morality itself.

*ZB:* In Kant's wording, the "categorical imperative" – the principle of conduct that each human, armed as we all are with Reason, need/must/ought to obey to avoid logical contradiction – tells us: 'Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law.' That formulation re-states, reaffirms and endorses what the popular wisdom holds to be true and advisable to be obeyed: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you' – or, conversely, 'Don't do unto others, what you wouldn't want done unto you.' It shares, alas, the notorious weakness of the popular, lay wisdom: the *a priori* (dictated by pure practical reason) "universality" of the moral *maxim* would be fully and truly convincing (could be trusted as the sufficient condition of the universality of moral *practice*) where it not, as empirical experience abundantly demonstrates, systematically violated. However logically flawless the verdicts of reason, they are obviously bound to confront other factors, effectively opposing reason's call to avoid contradiction, as Pope Francis pointed out in his 2015 Encyclical:

> Instead of resolving the problems of the poor and thinking of how the world can be different, some can only propose a reduction in the birth rate. ... To blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues. It is an attempt to legitimize the present model of distribution, in which a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized, since the planet could not contain the waste products of such consumption.

*ANTHROPOLOGICAL NOTEBOOKS* 23 (1): 129–140.
ISSN 1408-032X

Another "maxim" of practical reason, fit to ignore supervision by the *pure* practical reason and guided instead by promptings of *personal interest* (comfort, convenience, pleasure, well-being) – the maxim 'I *can* do it, and so I *will* and *shall*' – obliterates the considerations of universality from the list of factors determining the choice of behavioural patterns. That maxim derives its effective power from the reality of inequality of human capabilities and consequently the contradictory human interests, rather than from the universality of the objective human condition. It strives, all too successfully, to render null and void the impact of that universality (or its awareness) on the probabilities of the 'really existing' motivation of human behavioural choices.

*LC*: Questions of ethics remain important, and it is the job of academics and public intellectuals to articulate the moral challenges involved in the big issues of our times. This job includes the critical task of clearing out the space in which moral questions today appear to be so entangled with politics, in ways that obfuscate what is at stake in these questions. And this job starts with identifying a key paradox at the heart of contemporary social life. On the one hand, more and more political problems become increasingly ethicalised, i.e. cast in ethical rather than political terms: where and why to wage war has become a matter of humanitarian care and concern for the wellbeing of distant others; population control in the US is cast in the pro- and against-life vocabulary, displacing questions of social (gender, class, etc.) injustice and the need for welfare structures; neo-liberal policies of rolling-back the state in the UK have been cast in the name of re-inventing the values of civic action and volunteerism or placing the responsibility of bettering one's life solely on individuals only, etc.

On the other hand, ethical questions are becoming more explicitly politicised than ever; for instance, the humanitarian movement of impartial good-doing is increasingly entangled with politics insofar as humanitarian organisations find themselves in decision-making and deal-breaking businesses with local (and corrupt) regimes that are dubious and corrosive both for the local population and their own long-term survival; offering refuge to Syrians fleeing a brutal war in their country (and protected by international law) becomes a matter of the European Union closing borders to protect national political interests in the light of extreme right-wing electorate bodies and threats of social unrest. Even though the critical task of disentangling ethics from politics does not necessarily offer a definitive way out, it is the beginning of a necessary critical process. In the absence of "universalist" codes for reading what is ethical and what is normatively good, all we have is our capacity to ask the right questions. This requires a more modest approach to ethics that starts from the concrete problem and the particular situation in which these questions are posed and that relies on our analytical capacities to disentangle them and offer the best possible response under the circumstances. This is our practical wisdom (Aristotle's *phronesis*), and it should be guiding our judgments and evaluations, crucially including those of politicians and decision-makers, more than it has done so far.

*KVH*: In your work, there is a strong sense that the agent of 'moral renaissance' would be the very individual who, under neoliberalism, has suffered a most dramatic

reconstitution of the self. In many critical accounts, the contemporary subject is an entrepreneurial human, spread between narcissistic lifestyle altruism and the neoliberal morality of success. How do late modern psychology and ethics coincide and how (if at all) can they be merged to create an alternative disposition for, to quote from *Postmodern ethics*, "active utopias"? Are utopias even possible anymore?

*ZB:* It is the excess, not the dearth of information that stands nowadays in the way to an ethically informed and morally saturated self; and not ethical codes brandished and by a monopoly-obsessed enforcement agency, but the cacophony of fragmented and dissipated, synthesis-resenting and short-lived decoys, baits and allurements that stop the moral imagination well short of design-and-build of utopias.

This transcends the average human capacity of absorption, digestion, recycling, putting top use. This is also confusing and thus bars all chance of long-term consistency. The mass communication universe like ours, so Umberto Eco insisted in his volume *Faith in Fakes*, is full of 'discordant interpretations; I would say that variability of interpretation is the constant law of mass communications' – the sole constant in the sea of perpetually a-changing variables:

> The messages set out from the Source and arrive in distinct sociological situations, where different codes operate. For a Milanese bank clerk a TV ad for a refrigerator represents a stimulus to buy, but for an unemployed peasant in Calabria the same image means the confirmation of a world of prosperity that doesn't belong to him and that he must conquer ... The problem of mass communication is that until now this variability of interpretation has been random ... If the apocalyptic says, 'The medium does not transmit ideologies: It itself is ideology' ... we could now only reply: 'The medium transmits those ideologies which the addressee receives according to codes originating in his social situation, in his previous education, and in the psychological tendencies of the moment.'

Politicians, educators, and communication experts who 'believe that to control the power of the media you must control two communicating moments of the chain: the Source and the Channel' – 'control only an empty form that each addressee will fill by his own cultural models' – so Eco sums up his extensive argument. And he concludes: 'The battle for the survival of man as a responsible being is not to be won where the communication originates, but where it arrives.' To avoid the possible misinterpretation of the above conclusion, Eco hurries to emphaside: 'I am not proposing a new and more terrible form of control of public opinion. I am proposing an action to urge the audience to control the message and its multiple possibilities of interpretation.'

Well, the first impression is not unlike that generated by Kant's categorical imperative: easier said than done. As you rightly observed, narcissistic lifestyles aided and abetted by the neoliberal cult of personal success and its reversed – self-referential and centripetal – ethics of I-owe-it-to-myself, are difficult if at all possible to square with the Levinas/Løgstrup-style unspoken moral demand and the assumption of unconditional

responsibility for the Other (always one step ahead, as Levinas insisted, from its reciprocation). The neo-liberal world of consumers, notorious for seducing and forcing its members into the game of mutual competition, mistrust and suspicion, is hardly hospitable to the maturation of human selves into moral subjects.

*LC*: Social subjectivities are shaped by the time and place in which they emerge; it follows that the contemporary subjectivities of ironic subjects are inherently related to a particular 'spirit' (we might call it neo-liberal) that today infuses the dominant narratives, spectacles and imaginations of public life across Western cultures – though inevitably there are variations. This is a largely market-driven spirit that remains skeptical of all grand visions of social change in the name of fairer, more egalitarian societies and is content with the management of the present, the pursuit of personal interest and minor gratifications of the self ('because I deserve it' claims being one of the manifestations of this ethics of individualist entitlement and its utilitarian pragmatism of the everyday). However, to stick to this claim as the only possible diagnosis of contemporary subjectivities would be a somewhat reductive truism. As critical social scientists, we should also be interested in better understanding how we got here and what could make alternatives possible; we should search, in other words, for the historical conditions of possibility for subjectivity and its potentials for change. There are, in my view, at least three key historical forces that have contributed to the formation of ironic moral sensibilities. The first is the fall of grand narratives, that is the collapse of the great ideological visions of the past. These visions were either salvation, which took the form of faith in Christian *agape* or in the impartial benevolence of humanitarian good-doing; or revolution, which took the form of social change in the name of a classless society and a peaceful and egalitarian international order. The second reason is the marketisation of key professional fields that articulate the moral messages of solidarity. For instance, humanitarian NGOs are today turning towards branding or celebrity marketing rather than focusing on the cause they stand for; International Development agencies focus on the micro-financial management of poverty rather than on macro-economic issues, such as fairer market regulations and distribution of resources; political parties of the left tend to "professionalise" their messages and often privilege cynical pragmatism over realistic vision. The third factor contributing to the rise of ironic sensibilities is the mediatisation of culture, which refers to the rise of digital media and their self-referential forms of communication. Even though digital communication has obvious advantages, it also tends to give voice to those who are already voiced, largely the citizens of the West, and, as a result of digital and symbolic divides, tends to deprive distant and often vulnerable others of their own voice.

All three – the fall of grand narratives, marketisation, and mediatisation – are major historical forces that appear difficult to challenge in their systemic form. Nevertheless, social change can start from concrete particulars and minor situations. We need to remember that the ironic subjectivities of today are not pure subjectivities of neo-liberal morality but hybrid subjectivities that contain contradictions. Their utilitarian and self-centred orientation is mixed with realisations that the world is unfair, that human suffering needs to be addressed and that minor actions can make a difference. As I argue in the *Ironic Spectator:*

> Irony refers to a disposition of detached knowingness, a self-conscious suspicion vis a vis all claims to truth, which comes from acknowledging that there is always a disjunction between what is said and what exists – that there are no longer 'grand narratives' to hold the two together (Rorty 1989). Whilst irony is often translated into 'post-modern' postures of cool cynicism that reject moral attachment in favour of playful agnosticism, the spectacle of vulnerable others, I argue, complicates this posture in that, by virtue of confronting us with their suffering, it continues to raise the question of 'what to do' – it continues to call upon us as moral actors. The ironic spectator is, in this sense, an impure or ambivalent figure that stands, at once, sceptical towards any moral appeal to solidary action and, yet, open to doing something about those who suffer.

How can we tap into this latent potential of irony so as to imagine alternative forms of morality? One starting point would be to be more reflexive about the narratives and spectacles of the media – both as producers and as receivers. Media representations matter immensely for the ways we, as publics, think and act. How stories are presented, who speaks and what is being said are not just chunks of information disseminated by technology but human-made, social constructions that can be criticised and changed. In my work, for instance, I take issue with how major NGOs communicate messages of solidarity in their permanent campaigns. Their market-driven strategies exclude the voices of distant others and encourage people in the West to become more self-centred and narcissistic. This, I argue, is not doing much to raise awareness, improve judgment and establish longer-term bonds of solidarity with the world that needs our support. Could we use digital media in ways that foster rather than break down such bonds? Could we use them to give voice to and listen carefully to others? Can we imagine other ways of relating and conversing with them? Posing such questions is one of many possible starting points for challenging neo-liberal ethics and cultivating alternative, more engaged and socially aware subjectivities.

*KVH*: There is a consensus today that the modern welfare state is in a historical decline, if not on the verge of complete disappearance – hence the widening gap of inequality, pauperisation of working and middle classes and proliferation of dehumanisation of the most vulnerable. Underlining this argument is a moral perception that the modern nation state was the guardian of justice and that this legacy has been destroyed by voracious capitalism. Could it not be stipulated, though, that it was precisely the social state that, by transferring issues of justice, equality, solidarity onto the managerial plane of social policies, triggered the processes of depolitisation of moral concerns? In brief, what is the relationship between politics and ethics today – is the turn to the individual an announcement of a new wave of anti-politics or should we think of different conceptualisations of polity altogether?

*ZB*: Old tune, recorded in the old days on an old disc, played over and over again and by now worn beyond refreshing. No flawless solution to the bane of social inequal-

ity has been found thus far – but the essential point is that the social state conceived by Lord Beveridge as the ultimate fulfilment of the liberal programme remains thus far the sole, however imperfect, attempt to make the values of existential security and personal freedom to support each other and cooperate, instead of setting them against each other, as supposedly irreconcilable. Without the basic income being guaranteed by the communal authority capable of delivering on its promise, formally declared individual freedom remains a mockery while the split of society into the 'haves' and 'have nots' overlaps with the split between the "cans" and "can nots". Another essential point is that social state started, in the times of mutuality of the capital-labour interdependency, as an issue "beyond left and right", while under the present condition of unilateral termination of that interdependence (globalisation of finances coupled with territorial fixation of labour) it is its dismantling that is cast beyond left and right (whatever the arguments invented to legitimise it). But please read Daniel Raventós' *Basic Income: The Material Conditions of Freedom*, Pluto Press 2007.

*LC*: It would perhaps be more useful to conceive of managerialism and the "anti-political" tendency of administration as socio-political processes that, at specific historical moments, gained dominance as logics for the justification of government. As Boltanski and Chiapello have shown, managerialism is a particular market-driven mode of organisational governance (such as the state) that tactically appropriates cultural critiques of the bureaucratic organisation as an oppressive structure that alienates individuals, in ways that leave social critique untouched: poverty, inequality, insecurity of labour force. The key point here is the *historicity* of the argument: modes of governance are not informed by singular logics but these logics may change under the force of various social pressures – including of course their progressive critiques. This historicised outlook nuances the 'ontological' argument that, by definition, the state operates as a monolithic technocracy, removing moral justification from its exercise of welfare. The replacement of charity by state policy, in the course of the 18th century, did increasingly bureaucratise welfare but the process was neither straightforward nor homogenous. In fact, it allowed for considerable variation in the degrees of professionalisation and the involvement of citizen engagement in the care of poor both across nations and across time. This suggests that the ethical justification of welfare politics is a major site of symbolic struggle over the meanings of welfare, the role of citizens and the contribution of the global community in practices of care. And this is a struggle we should be attentive to and participate in – particularly at the current juncture where arguments about the inevitability of economic globalisation and technocratic policy-making abound.

*KVH*: It may be that the modern politics of change, which relied on collective action, is lost to us postmodern consumers-citizens. However, to restore the utopian mind, you seem to have proposed two historically opposite sources, a pre-modern morality (Bauman), with all its uncertainties and doubts; and post-humanitarian cosmopolitanism, based on irony and spectacle (Chouliaraki). Interestingly, though, emotions play an important role in both your arguments, in *Postmodern ethics* as a way to reinstate enchantment that was

defeated by the Enlightenment; in *Ironic spectator* as a sentimental push necessary to install humanitarian imaginary. In *Inventing human rights*, American historian Lynn Hunt has shown convincingly, though, that the sentimental aspect – together with the capacity to identify with the suffering and distant (or even fabricated in literature) Other was a precondition to the historical institutionalisation of human rights. How to deal with emotions, passionate reactions, sentimental protest, knowing well ahead that our argument could be turned against us, for instance by the defenders of the "right to intolerance"? Should the recent spread of neo-tribalism, including of neo-Nazi "tribes", not force us to rethink the anti-Reason argument? Where has the "sentimental education" failed us?

*ZB*: Disenchanted of investing hopes of justice and decency in the future blatantly out of control and out of reach of the instruments of collective action at our disposal, we increasingly shift our utopian longings and leanings into the (genuine or putative) past. Certainty once fed by trust in progress (now orphaned by the collapse of that trust), drifts back to the regions which that cult stripped of trustworthiness. "Back to the past" (the currently prevailing trend) pulls behind it the present-day utopian sentiments – best branded as "Retrotopias". But "back" means as well "back to Hobbes", "back to Tribes" (on that point, read Bruce Rozenblit's *Us against Them: How Tribalism affects the way we think*), and "back to self": 'The purpose of the tribe is to determine whom to support and whom to kill ... My tribe is superior to your tribe because we do "this", and you do "that", no matter what this or that represent'). This is, as the Americans would say, "a totally new ball game", while Walzer's premonition/warning has acquired quite a sinister tinge.

*LC*: The trajectories of human rights and humanitarianism, distinct as they may be, are connected by a shared genealogy: their origins in the 18th century culture of sympathy. Indeed, even though the Enlightenment is predominantly thought of as "the age of reason", we need to stress emphatically that it was also the age of a particular class of emotions: sympathy, pity and, compassion. These were not just auxiliary to but absolutely necessary in the formation of modern citizenship and Western culture as a whole. Today, they are still taken to be key markers of civility and, as such, cornerstones in the socialisation of contemporary publics. This is evident, among others, in the influential work of American pragmatist philosopher, Richard Rorty who, in his effort to reinvigorate civic engagement after the end of ideologies and the rise of post-modern cynicism, turns precisely to these emotions so as to call for new forms of "sentimental education". Just like the dramatic plays of Athenian theatre, he argues, today's stories and spectacles of suffering have the power to cultivate empathy and encourage us to care for the only truly important question of our times: are you in pain? what can I do to help you?

Whilst I have full sympathy with Rorty's argument, I am suspicious of this reliance on emotion as the one and only source of public morality. Indeed, emotion alone can and has been proven to be a driver of contradictory social forces, often inimical or even detrimental to the benevolent spirit of modernity. After all, the constructive and the destructive are constitutive features of, what Bauman has aptly named, the "ambivalence of modernity". What is missing from Rorty's account, and any similar account, is the

importance of public judgment in forming social subjectivities and civic dispositions. Rather than being antithetical to emotion, judgment, the capacity of the mind to engage with argument and differentiate between good from bad or fair from unfair, is itself an inherent aspect of the Athenian theatre and democratic publicity. Together with sympathetic identification, judgment therefore has always formed part of the power of the spectacle. By extension, it can also, potentially, arise from contemporary forms of mediated publicity beyond the strictly speaking theatrical stage: the frame of a film, or a television or mobile phone screen.

So, unlike negative accounts of the spectacle as corroding of moral sensibilities, I firmly believe in the moralising potential of the spectacles available in our mediated societies – on the important pre-condition that they engage both our affective and our cognitive faculties. With regard to the key question of modernity, the 'are you in pain?' question, it is the combination of emotion (empathy or indignation) with judgment (why is this happening? why is it important that I care?) that becomes instrumental in cultivating virtuous modes of being in today's global "mediapolis". The pedagogical principle of these spectacles is, in Marta Nussbaum's words, 'the viewing of pitiable and fearful things and our response of pity and fear themselves can serve to show us something of importance about the human good.' If there is a utopia, therefore, for me it starts with (but is by no means exhausted to) the utopia of representation: the never-ending struggle to give voice, psychological depth and historicity to suffering others and to provide the contexts within which the busy, multi-tasking, ironic Western spectator might be able to feel for, think about and interact with those others with empathy, understanding and a sense of fairness.

*KVH*: A recent issue of *History and Anthropology* has provided a very interesting and revealing ethnographic account of the everyday practices of "living with austerity" in Southern Europe. Victims of the financial crisis share a sense of betrayal and humiliation, caused by their states; at the same time, new bonds of solidarity are being formed. This would probably fit into communitarianism, which you both dismiss because it is a moral response bounded by the proximity of the "likes". At the same time, we are witnessing the realisation of Walzer's announcement, quoted in *Postmodern ethics*, that if, due to globalisation, states become large neighbourhoods, it is equally likely that 'neighbourhoods will become little states. Their members will organize to defend their local politics and culture against strangers'. This is the scenario that is unfolding at the present, with refugees encountering in Europe both a compassionate hand of help and the worst kind of anti-humanitarianism of local border guards.

Which of the two kinds of citizen will be the future? And what is needed for the "awakening" that also strikes those who spread hatred and fear, and who, under ordinary circumstances, are just ordinary people? Is this yet another "Eichmann in Jerusalem" repetition of history?

*ZB*: The post-2008 austerity crisis around the world and particularly in Europe has placed under strain the solidarity bonds that existed both within Western welfare

states and among them, as well as between the West and the global South. The latter is the unfortunate result of the tightening of Western budgets, which led to a re-hierarchisation of priorities in the governance of Development and thus reconfirmed the power asymmetry between the proximal "self" over the distant, non-Western "other". Even though, considering the needs-distribution on a planetary scale, this development may not be justifiable, it is understandable in the light of the continuing, historical dependency relations between the West and global South. The former, however, has presented itself as one of the biggest challenges to Western publics since the 2nd World War – with deeply ambivalent effects.

At the national level, particularly in Southern Europe (notably the austerity regimes of Greece but also Spain, Italy, Portugal), we observe, on the one hand, the formation of local solidarity networks, which help the economically weak survive under conditions of financial bankruptcy and, on the other, the violent rise of extreme right-wing, or even Nazi, parties (see Greece's Golden Dawn), which challenge the rules of democratic civility. The contingent and voluntary character of solidarity networks renders them an important but relatively fragile part of the political landscape of austerity whilst the institutionalisation of the far right and Nazi parties, through their parliamentary participation and entitlements to state funding and media visibility, pose a stable and pressing risk to public life.

At a trans-national, European level, we see a reconfirmation and a deepening of existing divisions between the rich North and the poor South, with the rich North in the role of the prudent economic manager and the poor South in the role of the undisciplined spender. Whilst these are obviously stereotypes, they do reflect the crystallisation of existing antagonisms that have not, in the past years, helped to move either party towards a constructive rethinking both of the economic and political malfunctions of the European Union and of the institutional and administrative weaknesses of the South. On the one hand, the structures of European and global governance (EU, ECB and IMF) have insisted, somewhat dogmatically, on neo-liberal policies of austerity (cutting down incomes and increasing taxation), even when the impact on the local markets (consumption, investments) proved to be detrimental rather than beneficial. On the other hand, in varying degrees, local governments of some Southern European states did less than enough to protect their weakest citizens, perpetuating instead networks of pervasive statism and clientelism that protected certain groups over others and left those who were not under the wings of party political protection to bear the brunt of the cuts – this is particularly the case in Greece, which is today the only country under an austerity memorandum (its third) with no sight of escaping the vicious circle. Popular disappointment and frustration with the failures of EU institutions to mitigate the effects of the crisis, fed by populist parties, has consequently led to centrifugal tendencies across Europe. However, Grexit and, more recently Brexit, movements should not be seen as simply threatening the administrative structures of the EU. They also pose a deeper risk of disintegration in Europe, insofar as they signal a cultural and moral skepticism towards the very idea of transnational co-operation and peaceful co-existence that inspired the idea of United Europe in the first place.

In the light of continuing economic crisis, war and increasing instability in the Middle East, impending threats of terrorism throughout Europe and the new humanitarian challenge of refugee arrivals, three age-old imperatives become of paramount importance: the imperative of memory; the imperative of communication and the imperative of hospitality.

The imperative of memory urges us to remember the past – the wars of the 20th century. This is not an imperative to commemoration only but one that compels us to confront the horrors of those who came just before us (our great-grandfathers, grand-fathers and parents). It is the tragedy and loss experienced by Europe in the 20th century that led to the institutionalisation of the peaceful co-existence of its nation-states with a view to mutual benefit not destruction. Let us remember this and ask the question of the consequences of a new fragmentation and disintegration of the European Union, before major decisions about exit are taken. The imperative of communication urges us to continue struggling to understand other points of view. Part of the problem with the continuing austerity regimes is precisely this lack, on the part of all parties, of a fundamental openness to listen, reflect and change. Even though communication is not a Habermasian ideal speech situation where power relations have been removed, the struggle to communicate, to speak and to be heard, should become more than a dialogue of the deaf.

On the one hand, Greece needs to start implementing structural reforms and change the dominant mentality of statist protectionism that cannot bring the country out of its debt obligations; on the other, the EU institutions need to be more flexible in their approach and rethink aspects of it that have clearly not worked. In any case, exiting or pushing to exit should not be regarded as a solution. The imperative to hospitality urges us to find ways to receive those who, by international law, are entitled to protection from persecution and war in their own countries. This does not mean that entry to Europe should be unconditional for all. It means, however, that, instead of implementing a uniform closed border approach, we need to commit to working together in order to accommodate the persecuted, according to the capacities and resources of each member state. Given that the arriving refugee populations are no more than 1.6% of the existing European, it is possible and makes practical as well as moral sense to do so. Both memory and communication can help to accomplish this. We need to remember not only the trials of the persecuted in the Second World War but also the hospitality gift that was offered to them then. We need to decide, plan and organise this reception in ways that are both fair to the individual capacities of each European country and compassionate to those who arrive, after long and traumatic journeys to a new home.

To conclude, I return to the question on subjectivities and its prevailing forms in the future. The struggle over subjectivities in contemporary Europe is played out around these three claims: the claim to memory, between those that erase and those that remember and learn about the atrocities of the 20th century; to communication, moving from conflicting agendas to mutual understanding; and to hospitality, between excluding refugees and acknowledging their right to human dignity. Our own humanity depends, in the end, on the outcomes of this struggle.

*KVH*: Related to the above question, in *Postmodern ethics*, it is argued that the only morality that we have we inherited from the pre-modern times, and that one was based on proximity whereas today it is the distance that defines our contact with the vulnerable other, as, for instance, in the post-humanitarian cause (Chouliaraki). But now, with the refugees with us, in "our" space, the distance has been suspended. The response has been, so far, to repeat Bauman's distinction, anthropoemic, that is 'to lock them [refugees, strangers] up in guarded enclaves.' At the same time, critical migration theory sees in border subjects the future, new citizens in the making. Can we anticipate what will be the relationship between the citizen and the stranger in the future?

And last but not least, how can the view from the future help in curtailing the humanitarian disgrace of the present when, as it seems now, in Europe, both the 'duty to visualise the future impact' of our conduct, as well as lessons from history, have been completely abandoned as bases of our morality?

ZB: On this topic, I attach a quote from my forthcoming book 'Strangers at our Doors' (to be published in May) – not on the solution, but the reasons for finding it and putting into operation appearing so difficult:

> … we have already characterised the recently emerged kind of society (still in the process of replacing its predecessor, 'society of dicipline'), as one of 'performers' (that is, to deploy Louis Althusser terms, a society 'interpellating' its members first and foremost in their capacity of 'performers').

Let me add now that just as the internauts are 'loners in constant touch', today's performers are in constant competition with each other. Being cast in the capacity of performer is the outcome of individualisation: of the progressive erosion of communal bonds leading to the vulnerability, volatility and eventual dismantling of integrated collectivities and abandoning therefore their individual members to the burdensome duties of self-definition, self-assertion and (total) self-care – relying all alone on one's own resources, capabilities and industry. For the absence of realistic alternatives, all those duties need to be performed in a market setting. Being a performer equals therefore being involved in the market-centred buying/selling of commodities – and it is their individual performance that the performers must bring to the market for sale, having made them first a sellable commodity – that is, an offer attractive to its potential buyers. To do that, they must out-bid and out-sell the other sellers – whom they cannot but regard as actual or potential competitors in the essentially zero-sum game; because other people around – neighbours, workmates or passers-by – have been destined to participate in the same game, they tend to be spontaneously suspected of being ill-intentioned, malevolent rivals and to continue to be so regarded until proven otherwise. The first reaction to the presence of an-Other tends to be therefore one of vigilance and suspicion – a moment of a vague anxiety, of an impulse to search for an anchor all the more nervously for the menace being under-defined. For the duration, following moral imperatives is suspended. Instead of prompting to awake them, reason advices circumspection.

And, so, we are nowadays residing much of the time in a resurrected Hobbesian world of *bellum omnium contra omnes*. Perhaps we are not really there – but it feels as

if we were. Fear has many eyes, and danger has many entries. Walls are spattered with holes; as safe as threadbare nets rather than ramparts. Life feels indeed nasty and brutish – the nastier and more brutish the longer it lasts. Facebooked friends are fun to shout together, alas of little if any use when it comes to doing things together – not to mention the moments (rare if you are lucky, plentiful if you are not) when it comes to *experimentum crucis*: when according to immortal folk wisdom they would need to prove being friends indeed: for instance, to the next round of cuts, outsourcings, contracting outs, redundancies. At such instant(s) you are left to stew in your own juice and to discover that juice to be in a horribly short supply.

It feels like being a victim... Of what? Of circumstances on which you have little in any influence, let alone control. We tend to call them "fate". But calling them by such name only adds offence to an injury: you are not just a failure, but to double your humiliation you are in addition a myopic or ignorant or clumsy and blundering failure: fate has no face, and most often than not you try to put a face on it in vain. To escape such offence and to rescue something of their own dignity and self-respect, victims must locate, pinpoint and name their victimisers; and the victimisers must need have recognisable faces amenable to locating, pinpointing and name-attaching. Migrants, and particularly the fresh arrivals among them, meet all those conditions very well indeed. Names (at least a generic name) they have been given already (there are plenty of politicians or journalists around, vying to rule over spirits and thoughts, all too ready and in a hurry to supply them), while as to the job of locating them, they do it, obligingly, for you. And the results are as easy to reach and as trustworthy (indeed, self-evident) as two and two making four: before their appearance on the street, you don't remember knowing your job being fragile and your well-being volatile – and now, once they arrived or are on their way in, you know all too well.