

# Global Hazards of Reflexive Modernity An Ethological Perspective

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## Abstract

*Exploding development of knowledge and the more and more extended market have required and accompanied the transition from industrial society, of simple modernity, characterized by redistribution of wealth, to postmodern society, of reflexive modernity, characterized by the redistribution of risk. Risk society is facing many dangers, both at individual and organizational top level, threats from new social and organizational activities. Regardless of the perspective from which these hazards are identified and analyzed, the approach, based in particular on the radiography of society from the ethological perspective of Konrad Lorenz, is to contribute to the difficult process of collective awareness of these issues - prerequisite for shaping initiatives, programs and ways of their solution.*

## Keywords

social evolution; contemporary society; risk society; simple modernity; reflexive modernity

## The Risk Society and the Distribution of „Evils”

The periodization of social changes, following the disappearance of the traditional society in the Western world, includes, in Ulrich Beck's vision<sup>1</sup>, two major stages: simple modernity, synonymous with the development of industrial society and reflexive modernity, characterized by the slow dissolution of social structures and relationships based on forms of collective consciousness (social class, family roles, etc.) in parallel with the accentuation of market-driven individualization. The explosive development of knowledge and the ever-widening market imposed and accompanied the transition from the industrial society, of simple modernity, characterized by redistribution of wealth, to postmodern society, or reflexive modernity, characterized by redistribution of risk. It is not just about the risk that every individual has to take in this contemporary world of accelerated changes, a world where he has to find his own sense of life, to build his own biography, facing up a lot of uncertainties but also opportunities that force him to make fundamental decisions; it is also about the risks of the society as a whole, confronted with the phenomenon of globalization, in which

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1 Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1991).

the national states diminish their corporate character and national identity until their disappearance. The risk society faces numerous threats, both at the individual and at the higher organizational level, dangers generated by the new social relationships and organizational activities.

The increasing individualization, obliging the individual to take on new roles and identities, to change them depending on opportunities and interests, generates fierce competition, new challenges and dilemmas, significant personality changes, with immediate effect on the personal life, relationships with others, groups, communities and with the institutions of the new modernity. At the same time, the accelerated development of science and cutting-edge technology in this global fluid society, the expansion and development of the market at an unprecedented level in history, based on strong, transnational, corporate and specific interests, generate not only a suffocating competition, at both individual and organizational level, but also numerous and serious conflicts. An analysis, even a partial one, of these major hazards of reflexive modernity is absolutely necessary for their collective awareness and for finding solutions to overcome them or at least to diminish their potential to cause conflict to the limit of avoiding irreversible catastrophic consequences. In the following, we will present a possible assessment of these global threats from an ethological perspective.

Konrad Lorenz - after a lifetime dedicated to the study of animals, whose behavior is logically subsumed to an organic transformation, in which the crucial role belongs to the two major architects of species conservation and also evolution: mutation and selection - expresses a deep concern when it comes to studying the human behavior in the contemporary world.<sup>2</sup> The wars, continued arming, breaking traditions, competing to the edge of absurdity in parallel with the atomization of the society are to him signs of serious social diseases resulting from the pathological disturbances of human behavior, which should normally serve to maintain human species, not to destroy it.

The man has, with certitude, innate urges, impulses, instincts, but he cannot be reduced to them. If in the case of animals the behavior is overwhelmingly phylogenetically determined, in the case of man, the cultural component is decisive. Common to animals and humans are the regulating mechanisms, which, depending on the signal received from external stimuli (negative or positive *feedback*), produce behavioral changes, adjustments capable of serving the same end goal: perpetuation of species.

It seems that, in the case of man, these regulating cycles suffer major disturbances, mainly due to the social context characteristic of the new, ever-expanding modernity.

### **Overpopulation and alienation**

Crowding more and more people on a limited physical territory, large urban agglomerations with their vibrant rhythm of life sometimes dilute natural feelings, such as love for our neighbor, the ability to build and cultivate lasting friendships, the simple communication with the neighbors, until extinction. Overcrowding leads to an instinctive selection of friends, the man being structurally unable to maintain close relationships with too many fellow humans. Thus appears the need to not get emotionally involved in the problems of others in order to avoid too many sentimental burdens. This ultimately leads to isolation, to an atomized society, to the submergence of the individual in the vast mass of anonymous peers, to an increased

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<sup>2</sup> Konrad Lorenz, *Cele opt păcate capitale ale lumii civilizate* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1996).

aggression in overcrowded areas, and finally, leads to a harmful indifference towards others, synonymous with dehumanization. „The greater the overcrowding, the more urgent becomes the need for the individual not to get involved; thus today, in the largest cities, robbery, murder, and rape take place in broad daylight, and in crowded streets, without the intervention of any passer-by.”<sup>3</sup>

The issue of overpopulation has been the subject of a famous but controversial theory launched in 1798 by Thomas Robert Malthus in *An Essay on Population Principle*<sup>4</sup>, a theory that counteracts the optimistic visions of those times, regarding the unlimited capacity for improvement of the society, visions shared by William Godwin or the Marquis of Condorcet. Malthus claimed that the power of growth of the population is far superior to the planet's power to ensure the subsistence of mankind, as the population grows in geometric progression, while resources increase in arithmetic progression. The increasing poverty will cause a population decline trend, but also a pressure on productivity growth that can raise the general standard of living, leading to another population growth, and so the cycle is resumed.

The productivity growth will not be able to support the population's geometric growth, so the ever-increasing poverty and misery, as well as human vices will inevitably generate humanitarian catastrophes: pandemics, famines, wars, that will lead to major population declines. Although he considers these as necessary, positive adjustments, Malthus does not remain a cynical spectator but offers solutions that could have a similar effect in reducing the population growth rate in order to decrease as much as possible the magnitude of the premature mortality generated by those disasters. For example, population growth can be kept under control with: an increased marriage age, premarital abstinence, birth control, abortion, cultivation of celibacy. He does not propose, nor excludes the possibility of generalizing the imposed celibacy for disabled people (bad specimens) in the future, an idea that anticipates the theory of Eugenics, launched in 1886 by Francis Galton.

Heavily criticized by some, enthusiastically appreciated by others, Malthus turned out to be a visionary. The last centuries of the second millennium have been marked by a sudden decline in mortality, caused by inventions such as penicillin, DDT and methods to clean polluted water<sup>5</sup> which was not accompanied by a corresponding decrease in birth rates, so population growth has continued rapidly. The industrial revolution and then the scientific revolution made it possible to eradicate terrible diseases and to improve the quality of life, but on the other hand, the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by unprecedented wars and dictatorships. The beginning of the third millennium marks an attenuation of the population growth rate, among other things also through ways foreseen by Malthus: an increased marriage age, contraception, etc. However, the problem of overpopulation remains. The isolation and alienation of the individual, the atomization of society in the great urban agglomerations can be explained by the fact that man is a territorial animal and has an inborn fear of strangers. The invasion of his personal space, especially in the great agglomerations, the multitude of unknown faces he meets continuously, push him towards self-isolation, reluctance, and increase his aggressiveness.

The society receives this negative feedback and tries to find ways to overcome the impasse. The categorical imposition of civilized cohabitation rules, the development of civic spirit, the community involvement, the development of huge leisure complexes, with multiple functions, but also with a clear role in social networking,

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<sup>3</sup> Lorenz, *Cele opt*, 22.

<sup>4</sup> Published in six revised and updated editions between 1798 and 1826.

<sup>5</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă. Reîntoarcere în minunata lume nouă* (Iași: Polirom, 2003), 347.

are all attempts to get the individual out of anonymity, to get him used to living in great agglomerations, to facilitate the natural contact with fellow humans.

### **Affecting the ecological balance**

The animal world has adapted to environmental conditions, and species are able to coexist with each other on the same territory without destroying each other. The predator does not hunt more than he can eat because he himself is favored by the perpetuation of the species he hunts so to have food provided. The only causes of major disturbances, excepting human intervention, are the unfavorable climatic phenomena or unpredictable catastrophes (volcanic eruptions, fires, earthquakes, etc.). The old human communities of hunters and farmers have adapted to the environment in a similar way to the animal, realizing empirically that the biological resources of the areas in which they lived were not inexhaustible. But overpopulation has led to a destructive, globalized action on the environment of the people. Illegal exploits, the pursuit of profit at all costs, lack of responsibility and care for the next generations, excessive pollution, fishing and hunting without limits have caused ecological disasters with dramatic consequences on the environment and implicitly on the future of mankind. „When civilized man destroys in blind vandalism the natural habitat surrounding and sustaining him, he threatens himself with ecological ruin.“<sup>6</sup>

Greed, as a pathological manifestation of aggression in Lorenz, Fromm, and even Adler's vision, the continuous and insatiable accumulation of goods that exceeds by far the vital and comfort needs of some people, no matter how sophisticated these needs are, in parallel with the other form of aggression - the desire for power and the exercise of this power without judgement and scruples, lead to a generalized, destructive action on the environment, endangering the very survival of the planet. The global warming is just one of the phenomena that mankind faces today, and the USA's refuse to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, signed by the vast majority of the world's states and designed to reduce pollutant emissions, cannot be dissociated by the position of great power, including, or above all, the military power, of the world.

However, the last decades have marked a strong offensive of ecological movements and initiatives, both civic and governmental, but especially at international level, which have led to a significant decrease in the pollution of the planet. It is an optimistic start, but the big issues are far from being resolved.

### **The atrophy of social life**

The great urban agglomerations, developed under the urgency of building houses rapidly for as many people as possible, led to an ugliness of old cities. Neighborhoods with dull, identical blocks, repeated indefinitely, without a personality, called with bitter irony by Lorenz „batteries for utility people,“ have nothing in common with the traditional house concept. The chaotic, cramped, devoid of any elegance, inexpensive and fast urbanism developed like a malignant tumor, obliterating traditions by the endless repetition of poor taste constructions have as immediate effect the atrophy of aesthetic and ethical senses of man. The dweller of the „utility battery“ is instinctively isolated from „his fellow sufferer“. „One cannot, and will not, come in contact with him „across the fence“, for one is afraid of

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<sup>6</sup> Lorenz, *Cele opt*, 30.

seeing one's own frustrated face reflected in his. In this way, living in masses leads in loneliness and to apathy toward one's neighbor."<sup>7</sup> The identical, dull blocks, which do not offer the minimum intimacy necessary for reflection, are a characteristic of the former communist countries, whose leaders sought to immerse the citizen in the huge, anonymous and obedient mass of party soldiers.

Today, in the developed countries, the situation has changed remarkably, many local communities being deeply concerned with the appearance of their own homes, the preservation of historical heritage and the enhancement of tourism potential, the general increase of the quality of life. It is true that these concerns are primarily about old or touristic centers, because the big neighborhoods offer too little chances of being radically restructured. But there is much to do to bring people closer. Even if the standard of living increases, man gets used to it quickly, and the fear of strangers remains. The emotional involvement it's much more than simply reshaping the habitat; it requires a sustained cultivation of empathy, of that noble sense of *social communion* that Adler spoke of.

### **The absurd competition and the new fears of the individual**

In addition to the regulating cycles with negative *feedback*, designed to adapt the behavior of individuals to external stimuli, the ultimate goal being to maintain the species, there are also regulating mechanisms with reverse positive connection, that can generate single changes, in avalanche, so the final result might be even the extinction of the species. Such a harmful behavior for the human species is the fierce, ruthless competition of the individual with the other fellow humans, and with himself.

The modern man is in constant agitation, in a permanent and aberrant competition with his fellow humans to earn money and time (the two notions will get to be perceived as equivalent: time is money). Money and time are no longer the necessary means to achieve a certain goal, but have become goals in themselves, have become the new values of the modern society. More serious is the fact that this money-driven race against time incites to the modern man an increasingly acute sense of fear: „the fear of being overtaken in the race, fear of poverty, fear of making wrong decisions, fear of not being able to keep up with the nerve-racking situation“.<sup>8</sup> Fear and stress have multiplied to an alarming number the coronary and psychiatric illnesses and, ultimately, the premature deaths.

In this fearful agitation, man has lost one of his essential qualities: reflection. Subject to a continuous flow of false information, terrified that any hesitation can pull him out of this absurd competition, the individual can no longer think objectively, reflect on the values, the meaning of life, and thus becomes very vulnerable and easy to manipulate. The anonymous and cowardly man is an easy prey for the big companies who manage to convince him to buy unnecessary or more expensive products through an avalanche of advertisements, as well as to political propaganda.

A striking manifestation of this stressful competition is the „noise vice“. Some individuals find no other way to overcome their inferiority complex than to outflank his fellow humans through the volume of the noise they make. Their innate aggressiveness increases in the face of serious social imbalances. Overcrowding, lack of clear rules and laws, the spread of anomie, plus the strong feeling of frustration felt in this chaotic competition, are all factors that increase the aggressive behavior.

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<sup>7</sup> Lorenz, *Cele opt*, 32-33.

<sup>8</sup> Lorenz, *Cele opt*, 39.

Their only way of self-affirmation, of imposing, of domination over the fellow humans is this „noise vice“. Because they cannot or do not want to „scream in despair“ in the face of their own human misery, they make noise by any other means.

The aberrant aspects of the race can be criticized, but competition itself is fundamental for the evolution of the human being. It can be guided by laws and specific rules that limit the excesses. A moderate society in which competition takes place on numerous levels, not only on that of rapid enrichment, may inhibit, through the laws and rules it imposes, the latent or active aggression of the citizens, or can channel it to acceptable and even useful manifestations.

### **Existential Triad: Pleasure, Comfort, Apathy / Going soft**

The survival of man and the maintenance of the human species are conditioned by a continuous adaptation to the external environment and to the social situations that come across. The adaptation is made through the dual action of cycles with positive *feedback*, which determines the individual to accustom with a certain behavior that is useful to him, and cycles with negative *feedback* that makes the individual unaccustomed to behaviors that are not useful, triggering inhibitory mechanisms. Habituation and dishabituation are directly related to the sensations of pleasure, and unpleasure (pain).

Freud claimed that the principle of pleasure motivates all human actions. The *instinct of life* is, in essence, an uninterrupted search for pleasure. Before him, the founding fathers of utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, identified the good with pleasure, and claimed as a fundamental moral principle of the society the maximizing of good for the benefit of as many people as possible. For Bentham<sup>9</sup>, seeking pleasure and avoiding pain determines what a man does, says and thinks.

From the perspective of the strong cultural component of human behavior, pleasure and unpleasure are stimulated by the dual action of reward and punishment. In general, pleasure and unpleasure, reward, and punishment can lead to a stable or changing behavior based on the value of the gain-loss ratio. An animal, just like a man, does not risk freezing to death to seek food unless he is in danger of starving.

In the case of people, the strong development of science and technology, of society in general, has focused on eliminating as much as possible the sources of unpleasurable experiences. The habituation, doubled by inertia, makes the man to gradually lose his phylogenetic mechanisms of adaptation to the environment. The consequences are extremely serious. History offers many examples of societies or social groups with an intense concern to diversify and maximize the sources of pleasure that have come to a state of self-sufficiency, stagnation, decadence, thus becoming extremely vulnerable. „In many of the highly civilized societies of the past, people became greatly adept in the Avoidance of *unpleasurable* experience-producing stimulus situations, a state that often led to a dangerous going soft, and even to the fall of a civilization.“<sup>10</sup>

It has not always been so. In time immemorial, the rulers and wise men of the people understood that avoiding unpleasure could have dramatic consequences, so they tried to limit pleasures and alter pleasure with unpleasure. So the notion of *sin* appeared. The fasting, for example, in addition to the beneficial effects on the organism, keeps intact the pleasure of returning to meat consumption.

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<sup>9</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation. Chapter I: On principle of Utility* (1789), <http://www.econlib.org/library/Bentham/bnth PML1.html>

<sup>10</sup> Lorenz, *Cele opt*, 50.

In the contemporary society, the exponential development of the pharmaceutical, clothing industry, consumer goods industry, the development of the infrastructure, the extension of utilities, all together, permanently raises the degree of comfort of the individual and makes him accustomed to such a degree with the pleasure that even this feeling disappears precisely because there is no longer the opposite feeling, the unpleasure, to which it could be related with. Only an infinite boredom remains.

Moreover, not only the pleasure disappears, but also the joy, that extraordinary feeling, most often felt after a painful but successful effort. „This „emotional entropy” seems to threaten particularly those pleasures and pains that are inherent in our social ties, ties between married partners and children, between parents, relations and friends.”<sup>11</sup>

Increasing the degree of comfort, and consequently, diminishing the pleasure resulting from the satisfaction of fundamental needs leads to the emergence of new desires, whose satisfaction is to offer new pleasures. „Man is a wanting animal and rarely reaches a state of complete satisfaction except for a short time. As one desire is satisfied, another pops up to take its place, etc.”<sup>12</sup> Bored with the comfort he takes for granted, the modern man becomes extremely receptive to those who offer him new stimuli, new pleasures, new joys. Or new ideals. The increasing and without discernment receptivity of man (and of masses in general) to the „new” is heavily exploited by manipulation specialists, whether their interests are of a commercial or political nature.

### A possible genetic degeneration

If at animal level there are no mechanisms for counteracting asocial individuals, the maintenance of species is regulated by its two fundamental pillars: mutation and selection, at cellular level and at the level of human society, such mechanisms exist. Any vertebrate body develops antibodies capable of fighting against „asociative” cells. In the absence of antibodies, malignant tumors would wreak havoc. In the case of human society, from the mist of the times a certain moral identity, essentially common to all cultures, has crystallized. The mythic commandments, based on which morality has developed, result from the reorientation of aggressiveness towards inhibitory behaviors, common in essence - and of course, with specific differences - to all human cultures. Morality and its practical extension, ethics, developed in law systems, require the isolation and punishment of asocial individuals. Lorenz accuses the pseudo democratic doctrines claiming that there is no phylogenetic determination of human behavior, but only cultural, the consequence being a blind and absurd belief in the possibility of re-educating any criminal. This leads to an increased tolerance of justice and, implicitly, to an increased crime rate. He advocates for a balance between the two „genuine values: on the „left” the value of the free, individual development, on the „right” the value of social and cultural soundness. It is the excesses in *both* that lead to inhumanity.”<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, the public opinion is not driven by reason, but by feelings, by emotions, being extremely oscillating depending on those who have greater power of persuasion. The exclusive, extremist trends, with high-adherence to the masses at some point, can easily lead to reprehensible deeds and even to humanitarian catastrophes. Moreover,

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<sup>11</sup> Lorenz, *Cele opt*, 54.

<sup>12</sup> Abraham H Maslow, *Motivație și personalitate*, translation of Andreea Rauceanu (Iași: Trei, 2007), 70.

<sup>13</sup> Lorenz, *Cele opt*, 69.

by annihilation of some innate inhibitions, it can lead even to the genetic decay of the human species.

An example of a dangerous genetic mutation, in Lorenz's view, is the „remarkable combination of sexual precociousness and persistent youthfulness”<sup>14</sup> encountered both in pet animals and the modern man. The importance of the childish character as a premise of becoming a man, in the sense of the desire for exploration, learning, innovation, creativity, but some negative impulses caused by other sins of civilized mankind such as the entropy of senses, is in no way disputed. Thus, the desire for immediate satisfaction of pleasures, lack of responsibility or lack of interest in peoples' problems marks a harmful infantilism of the modern man. On the other side is the common sense, the responsibility, the respect for traditional values. These characteristics of the mature man, reflecting phylogenetic and cultural behaviors, are in danger of being lost in the modern world. The most vulnerable are the young generations exposed to pseudo-values on behalf of which they are willing even to fight or revolt. As long as no vigorous and sustained educational revival of the pseudo values, dismantling of pseudo democracy is made, the danger of genetic decay remains.

### The Growing Clash of Generations

The selection of information that deserves to be retained in the collective memory of mankind is different from the one made phylogenetically in the case of other animals, and because man retains a great deal of knowledge that is not necessarily useful, such as those related to maximizing the degree of comfort or various pleasures at the risk of entropy of senses or even genetic degeneration. However, in the evolution of species and culture, the basic criterion of selection is repeated verification. The chosen variant will enter into the cultural heritage of mankind, becoming, throughout the historical age, a unanimously accepted norm, a doctrine or a belief. „It seems also that inventions and discoveries arrived at by insight and rational exploration, assume a ritual, even religious character, if they have been transmitted long enough.”<sup>15</sup>

The fact that in the present society the development of science and technology can induce the idea that it is or remains valid only what can be scientifically verified or rationally understood, the rest being rejected, leads to unfavorable consequences. Traditions of inestimable value for certain cultures are lost, which leads to their vulnerability. The danger is all the more so as the arrogant rationalism causes a clash of generations, often even marked by hatred. The younger generations, in Lorenz's vision, come to look at the elderly, who preserve traditions, even with a hatred characteristic of cultural pseudospeciation. As if the young and the elderly are part of two different and irreconcilable species. Eibl-Eibesfeldt<sup>16</sup> is more reserved and more realistic: the intergenerational conflict is necessary, as long as it does not have a winner. The elderly are the conservative forces that defend the tradition and thus provide the point of support, the landmarks of a society, as well as a valuable treasure of experience that provides security and is useful in solving the various problems that arise in the life of society; young people are the progressive forces that bring renewal and are willing to risk to find new solutions or development paths. The victory of one or another of these forces would either

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14 Lorenz, *Cele opt*, 75.

15 Lorenz, *Cele opt*, 83.

16 Irenaus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, *Agresivitatea umană*, translation of Vasile Dem Zamfirescu (Bucharest: Trei, 2009), 48-49.

lead to the ossification of society or to instability, both generating serious vulnerabilities to the entire society.

Another cause of pseudospeciation that separates elderly from the young people is the diminishing of affective ties between parents and children in modern society, where adults are always busy and in constant competitive agitation, having no time to deal with their young children. The affective connection of the child with the mother is seriously disturbed, the paternal pattern is in danger of extinction, the consequence being that young people, frustrated by the absence of these phylogenetically determined ties and, at the same time, driven by the instinctive desire to fight for something, to consume energy, to channel the aggressiveness in some way, refuse violently the teachings of the elders, becoming extremely receptive to the various current trends - new forms of ritualization - some of them extremely harmful or premeditated by the masters of manipulation.

The renewal and enrichment of a culture are unquestionable needs, while the denial of traditional heritage in favor of a whole new culture often has catastrophic consequences for both the individual and society.

### **Increased vulnerability to manipulation**

The knowledge process, in the case of man, implies the assumption of hypotheses on seemingly incomprehensible phenomena, followed by their verification. Generally, this process translates into a progressive approach to the reality by updating or modifying initial hypotheses as a consequence of the checks' results. Often, the man, in the desire to satisfy his need for knowledge and in the absence of factual material or means of verification, accepts certain hypotheses as valid, and refers to them as absolute truths which need to be defended, even with vehemence, against any challengers.<sup>17</sup> The hierarchy instinct expressed by accepting the wise man - disciple relationship, as well as the instinct of belonging to a certain group, manifested by the instinctive desire to identify with the members of this group, at a behavior, experiences and way of thinking level, make the individual to consolidate his belief system, doctrines, or truths above all doubt if these are delivered to him by charismatic leaders and are shared with the same conviction by as many of his fellow humans.

Overcrowding has led to the formation of large masses of people who have no time for reflection. More specifically, reflexivity is mainly reduced at the continued effort to satisfy its own, immediate, vital needs, disregarding the general social context. That is why, in the crowd, the individual no longer behaves rationally, but he abandons himself to the primary impulses of the crowd. In the modern world, the exponential development of mass media no longer requires direct contact. They maintain the cohesion of the masses and form public opinion. „Strictly speaking, the mass, as a psychological fact, can be defined without waiting for individuals to appear in mass formation. In the presence of one individual we can decide whether he is „mass“ or not. The mass is all that which sets no value on itself - good or ill - based on specific grounds, but which feels itself „just like everybody“, and nevertheless is not concerned about it; is, in fact, quite happy to feel itself as one with everybody else.”<sup>18</sup>

The great crowds are the most receptive to indoctrination. Moreover, the sharing of a doctrine by many people inevitably leads to cultural pseudospeciation.

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<sup>17</sup> Lorenz, *Cele opt*, 103-105.

<sup>18</sup> Jose Ortega Y Gasset, *Cunoașterea omului*, translation of Leonard Gavriliu (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 2002), 51.

Those who do not adhere to the doctrine in question are automatically qualified as heretics, enemies, reactionaries, associalists, strangers, etc., having an inevitable tide of hatred falling upon them.

In the consumer society, where the market makes the rules, the dehumanized and standardized masses are an easy prey for the big manufacturers who constantly manipulate them to make them buy new *fashionable* products or even products they do not even need. A dramatic and representative example: aggressive advertising of fast-food networks, grafted onto the state of insecurity, uncertainty and vulnerability of large category of people, has led to a true epidemic of obesity with dramatic effects on health and hope of life for tens of millions of people. Smoking, vice encouraged by fabulous advertising budgets, is responsible, according to some statistics, for the death of approximately eight million people a year.

### Conclusions and modest hopes

This ethological perspective, based in particular on the analysis of the Nobel Prize laureate Konrad Lorenz, highlights the main problems faced by the postmodern society, characterized by market dominance and risk distribution. Even though the vision seems pessimistic, even with fatalistic accents, there are hopes for overcoming major global dangers. Even Lorenz noticed, more than four decades ago, the visible progress in the field of ecology, a trend that is maintained and accentuated globally, with beneficial effects but still far from solving the problem. Also, the end of the Cold War marked the end of the aberrant race of nuclear arming that endangered the very existence of the planet. The problem, however, is not definitively settled as long as some totalitarian or dictatorial governments defy international regulations and continue various nuclear programs, intensifying conflictual states with resonance across the world.

Regardless of the perspective from which these global dangers of the second modernity are identified and analyzed, the action is necessary to contribute to the difficult process of collective awareness of these issues - a mandatory condition for shaping initiatives, ways and programs for their solution.<sup>19</sup>

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