



**Ulrich Beck, Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *The Normal Chaos of Love*,
Wrocław 2013: University of Lower Silesia Press, pp. 249**

The belief that the privilege of freedom lies at the base of individualization prompted me to immerse in *The Normal Chaos of Love*—a title all the more interesting considering the fact that it deals with the subject of forming relationships based on love, which can be seen as form of subjugation. This subject has been examined in the following book written by Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim. The first of the co-authors is a professor of sociology at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich and the London School of Economics. He is the author of the term “risk society,” as well as the 1986 book of the same title, which has been translated into Polish in 2002. Another book of his, which has been translated to Polish, is *Power in the Global Age: A New Global Political Economy*. Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim, on the other hand, a professor at Friedrich-Aleksander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, is a sociologist, philosopher and psychologist. Beck-Gernsheim’s main research interests focus on the problems related to the family as a unit in modern times. Apart from the title discussed here, Beck-Gernsheim is also the author of other books concerning the subject of the family in the broad sense. The title reviewed here was published in German in year 1990. The Polish-language edition was translated by Tomasz Dominiak, and the foreword was written by Mirosława Nowak-Dziemianowicz.

The Normal Chaos of Love consists of preface to the Polish edition, an introduction written by both authors, and six chapters, each of which has been written by one of the authors. Chapter 1, written by Beck, is titled “Love or Freedom: Living together, apart or at war;” Chapters 2, 3 and 4, written by Beck-Gernsheim, are titled respectively “From Love to Liaison: Changing relationships in an individualized society,” “Free Fove, Free Divorce: The two sides of liberation” and “All for Love of a Child;” Chapters 5 and 6, written by Beck, are titled “Eve’s Late Apple: Or the future of love” and “Love, our Secular Religion.” The last pages contain the list of sources.

The main goal of the book is to persuade the reader to reflect upon the subject of forming a relationship between a woman and a man in times of “liquid modernity” (Bauman, 2000), and the chances of a relationship based on love entangled in the strive for freedom of both subjects who form the

relationship. The subject has been presented from two disparate perspectives—from the feminine perspective and the masculine perspective. The purpose of this strategy is the more thorough analysis of the matter discussed. The authors analyse the conflict of the possibility of fulfilling promises of freedom and independence with the conventional privacy and intimacy forms existent in the family. The family itself in its form typical for industrial society—the so called nuclear family—is the opposite of the concept of equality, depriving the individuals of equal opportunities for the development of the individual potential, especially female adults. Nowadays women are aware of their rights and, often-times under the pressure of their economic circumstances, do not accept this situation. Since 1960s, they, too, face the challenge that is the strive for individuality. A woman's financial independence allows her to make decisions about her life and at the same time relieves the man of the financial responsibility for the family. A plethora of men still believe that it is possible to reconcile the equal rights of women with the old-fashioned division of duties, and many of them are afraid that they might be displaced by women on the labour market. Such attitude results in a defensive stance whereby men put forward the laws of nature as an argument justifying the appropriateness of the traditional gender roles. On the other hand, the deeply rooted stereotypical commitment to providing for the family financially results in the man focusing on their work, and limits their capacity for development of emotional independence. This deficiency creates problems with the ability to recognize impending conflicts, helplessness, and lack of understanding, which results in the loneliness of an individual—loneliness not only of the man, but also of the woman, who, while economically active, still bears the burden of the traditional duties assigned to the role of the housewife. At the same time men, relieved of their duty of the supporters of the family, are neither willing to meet independent women half-way, nor can they accept the situation in which the woman makes her own decisions. This lack of understanding causes the bond between the spouses to weaken, and brings about the end of the relationship. The state policy does not facilitate reconciling individualistic aspirations of both partners either. According to Beck-Gernsheim, the aspects of life concerning work and workplace accommodate the man with a partner capable of continuous adaptation. This is especially visible in the case of high unemployment, which entitles the necessity of mobility. Such situation deprives one of the partners of opportunity, and this partner usually tends to be the woman. Consequently, various forms of support need to be introduced for emerging relationships alternative to the traditional family, such as the necessity of introducing system changes that would adjust, first and foremost, the labour market to the needs of dual-career relationships. However, no measures had been taken, and still one of the partners is

forced to conform and adjust their life to the career of the other. This continuous state of conforming, together with the realization of the necessity of procreation, places one of the partners in a position of dependence that often-times renders independent existence impossible. "Thinking a market economy through to the end, people would not have any family ties. (...) Correspondingly, this would be a society without any children unless they could grow up with mobile single fathers and/or mothers" (p. 45).

Paradoxically, individuality is a product of affluence, and as such its emergence depended on the situation on the labour market. However, this individuality is only apparent, since the labour market enforces its shape. Consequently, this seeming freedom of choice conceals, in fact, further subjugation. According to Beck, „the situations which arise are contradictory because double-faced: individual decisions are heavily dependent on outside influences. What looks like the outside world becomes the inside of an individual biography" (p. 51). Depending on the decisions of various institutions (including educational ones) specific generation preferences or discriminations emerge, which define life perspectives of the groups they concern. Institutional solutions to the problems resulting from those inequalities are still embedded in the traditional family model. As it is therefore evident, individuality does not go hand in hand with freedom—just as love is, according to Beck, more akin to subjugation rather than freedom, since love requires cooperation (p. 17), whereas freedom means "following the beat of one's own drum and falling out of step with the rest" (p. 17). This beat of one's own drum tends to be at odds with social expectations, which are still limited by gender stereotypes that prevent women from exercising their rights to being treated as equal to men. Therefore, "the prognosis is that we are in for a long and bitter battle; in the coming years there will be a war between men and women" (p. 19).

The almost obsessive search for ideal love leads to disappointments and compels the individual continuously to begin new relationships, which results in an emergence of a variety of new family forms: the negotiated family, the alternating family, the multiple family resulting from divorce and remarriage. Such relationships are characterized by temporariness, which entails the necessity of signing premarital contracts. As Beck aptly puts it, the marriage becomes "a tenancy for temporarily satisfying mutual needs" (p. 185). This sort of calculated entering a relationship does not serve love, destroys its individuality. The everyday struggle to reconcile the needs of two individualities forces the partners into continuous renegotiation of the conditions of the relationship. Unfortunately, Beck questions a relationship in which all everyday matters must be continuously negotiated, and believes that love has become wordy. Instead of loving each other, people only talk about it.

An additional problem stems from reconciling the marital and parental roles. The conflict between individualization and the sacrifices required by parenthood prompts the partners to reducing the „costs” of carrying out this developmental task. The need of procreation must be satisfied by just one child, so that child must be ideal. It becomes, therefore, necessary to make every effort to form a perfect child, a flawless product, so to say, going even as far as terminating foetuses whose examination results might so much as even hint at tiniest imperfections. The impermanence of relationships, as well as manipulating the process of programming the perfect child, including artificial insemination, result in the separation of biological, social and legal parenthood. The lack of stability in relationships and the disappointment at the child, who does not live up to the parent’s expectations, leads to aggression of the parent towards the child as a failed product. This way not only love is included in the commercialization of the individual’s life, but also parenthood. Together with a growing desire for a child, a sense of responsibility for that child, its development and future, is also greater. Such situation may sometimes cause the prospective parents feel unable to rise to the occasion and give up on the reproductive aspirations altogether.

The disappointment with the relationship based on the strive for ideal love, and therefore based on utopian, that is impossible to realize, ideas, sometimes leads to search for an emotional substitute in the form of love of a child, who is to fill the void of lacking a partner who would meet all those unattainable conditions. Single parenthood is, in case of a woman, a goal reasonably easy to attain, but also one that makes the man face a twofold loss, condemning him to a life of loneliness. The authors, assuming the position that love has become the foundation on which relationships are formed, conclude that it is not love but rather an obsessive need to escape loneliness. Beck-Gernsheim sums up this section by saying that love remains an utopia, referring to romantic love. The need, or rather the pressure for individualization, which leads to “living with an oversupply of options” (p. 63). is the common origin of both the increasing yearning for love and the constant lack of success in realizing it. The multitude of options leads to ill-considered choices and to discarding those choices if they fall short of expectations, and seeking out new alternatives.

The analysis of the subject is concluded by the general thoughts concerning the essence of love as an emotion connecting a man and a woman; following this, the authors state that obsessive pursuit of love is, among others, the result of leaving religious faith, which in turn prompts individuals intuitively to attempt to realize their need for transcendence through love. “[L]onging for a home and trust to counteract the doubts and anxieties modern life generates. If nothing seems certain or safe, if even breathing is risky in a polluted world, then people chase after the misleading dreams of

love until they suddenly turn into nightmares" (p. 205). Beck sums the above up by stating that love has started to function as a drug consumed without limitations, an addiction that must be fought. He predicts that love will become an emotion that will take the form of an epidemic that shall render the society unable to function.

The structure of the book is coherent and the content of the chapters conforms to the overall premise of the work. The chapters are logically consistent, and their volume is evenly balanced. A weak point of the title is the repetition of some of the same content in various chapters. Furthermore, the authors present this content in a contradictory manner. This may result from the premise of the analysis itself which concerns two separate perspectives—a feminine one and masculine one, i.e. the perspective of Beck and perspective of Beck-Gernsheim. It might have been beneficial to compare the subject matter of individual chapters, dismiss the repeated content, and aim at a more coherent presentation of the message. I believe that the presented thought would have been clearer in this way. The authors use understandable language, adequate for a text of academic purposes. However, one might have some reservation concerning the chapters written by Beck—the overuse of metaphors makes it difficult to understand some of the thoughts he tries to convey, and unnecessarily inflates the page count of the volume, not to mention the fact that it has a detrimental effect on its coherence.

The content itself raises no reservations. The authors worked towards a clearly set goal which was the exploration of the phenomenon of love in the context of striving for freedom and person's individualization. This goal has been accomplished. There are, however, some faults in the manner in which they arrive at their conclusion. The major objection would be the lack of conceptualization of the discussed problems. It would have proved helpful to define the phenomena that are the main subject of the analysis, namely love, freedom, individuality. Although Beck does engage in some speculations regarding the essence of love, those speculations are in fact the author's own thoughts which do not facilitate comprehension of the subject. Beck-Gernsheim does quote the definition of infatuation by Alberoni, who writes that "[b]eing in love is the search for one's own destiny... a search for one's own self, to the very bottom. This is achieved through the other person, in dialogue with her, in the encounter where each person seeks recognition in the other, in accepting, in understanding, in the confrontation and liberation of what was and of what is" (p. 61). This, however, is not a definition of love but the definition of the infatuation, and it represents an egoistic approach to this matter. Beck did attempt to define the relevant concepts, but only in the last chapter of the book. Following Beck's reasoning, one might have the impression that the author mistakes love for passion. It

might have been worth to mention that people in their pursuit of love tend to mistake it for one of its elements that is passion, while complete love includes also intimacy and commitment (Wojciszke, 2003, p. 8n.). Perhaps Beck did not take into account Sternberg's triangular theory of love, neither did he challenge the Giddens's notion of the pure relationship. This would explain the perception of love presented by Beck, according to which love is an escape from loneliness in the risk society. It can be concluded that the basis of forming relationships is an escape from loneliness. It is worth to contrast this notion with another, more mature, view on the bond on which relationships are based, proposed by Joanna Ostrouch-Kamińska, who states that „fairness and awareness of it in relationships seem to set up a (new?) foundation of stability in the relationship, especially in a partnership” (Ostrouch-Kamińska, 2011, p. 338). Freedom based on moral values interiorised in childhood, on the other hand, need not be at odds with the development of the potential of a person's individuality (Nawroczyński, 1987). Since human beings are social animals, the development of their individuality can only take place in the context of relationships with other individuals. It is, therefore, absolute freedom and individuality, not love, that are a utopia. The main problem seems to be not so much the impossibility of satisfying the need for as much as the immaturity of the present-day individual regarding mature love. The authors do not address this problem. They do not recognize the potential of the human beings themselves, but instead point to the necessity of institutional changes that would support dual-career families.

It would have also been beneficial to juxtapose the discussed matter with family system theories which could facilitate the analysis of the transient nature of relationships. It is the partnership that should be regarded as a way to problem solving and the pursue of realizing ones own potential—as growth towards another human being. The development of characteristics necessary for life in a stable relationship of people pursuing careers can be considered as an element of the individual's development. “The tension which emerges out of the contact with people displaying disparate aptitude is the primary (key) factor of development” (Brzezińska, 2010, p. 237), and it is overcoming such crises that constitutes development. Freedom means opportunity for autonomous choices, including choices concerning the manner of realising developmental tasks related to early adulthood as well further stages of life. Such tasks include, among others, learning to live with a marriage partner, rearing children and managing a home (Brzezińska, 2010, p. 235). This problem is not addressed in the book—Beck leaves the reader with a horrifying vision of the future of the humanity as a society of single people, because, according to Beck, love is needed more that ever before and equally impossible (p. 4). Such punchline leaves the reader with

a sense of helplessness in regard to the discussed problem, and juxtaposed with the catastrophic vision of the future of the society obsessed with love which would, according to Beck, resemble an epidemic preventing that society from functioning (p. 233n), presented at the end, might evoke ejection and a sense inevitable failure. This gap could be filled by an additional chapter that would summarize the Polish-language edition, and analyse the prospects of being in a partnership as a means of avoiding the enonimise chaos of love. Therefore, I strongly recommend the prospective readers of *The Normal Chaos of Love* to supplement it with a title that complements the former in an ideal fashion, i.e. Ostrouch-Kamińska's *Rodzina partnerska jako relacja współzależnych podmiotów* (*Partnership in family as a relationship between co-dependent subjects*).

Despite the aforementioned shortcomings, I can beyond doubt recommend *The Normal Chaos of Love* not only to people who specialize in the subject which the book examines but also any and every reader who would be interested in this topic. The subject alone deserves attention. The strongest point of this title is the innovative perspective on the family, which is not a functionalist point of view but a perspective of a conflict between distinct human beings striving for individualization, which is embedded in the still stereotypical understanding of gender roles. The inclusion of the problem of double discrimination—of both the woman as well as the man fulfilling the role of a breadwinner—is also innovative. The authors' conclusions might encourage the readers to reflect upon their own life and, consequently, better to understand their own problems and better to deal with them. For the readers who are also scholars, on the other hand, they might be an inspiration for further study.

Janina Duszyńska

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun (Poland)

REFERENCES

- BAUMAN, Z. (2000) *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.
- BECK, U. & BECK-GERNSHEIM, E. (2013). *Całkiem zwyczajny chaos miłości*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo DSW.
- BRZEZIŃSKA, A. (2010) *Społeczna psychologia rozwoju*. Warszawa: Scholar.
- OSTROUCH-KAMIŃSKA, J. (2011) *Rodzina partnerska jako relacja współzależnych podmiotów*. Kraków: Impuls.
- NAWROCZYŃSKI, B. (1987) *Dzieła wybrane*. Warszawa: WSiP.
- WOJCISZKE, B. (2003) *Psychologia miłości*. Gdańsk: GWP.