

Crisis or Fluidity? Florian Znaniecki's Theory of Civilization

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Krize, nebo tekutost? Teorie civilizace Floriana Znanieckého

Abstract: The preoccupation with the processes of globalization, which has become a key concept in the analysis of the sociocultural condition of postmodernity, has led to a decreased interest in the theory of civilization. The ideological burden of the concept of civilization and its stigmatization by critics of post-Enlightenment modernity also contribute to this current state. However, issues associated with the processes of civilization have once again come to the fore, as shown by the reconstruction of threads associated with civilization in social theory, including sociological works. The views on civilization presented by Weber, Durkheim and Mauss, by their successors Sorokin, Elias and Nelson, down to the contemporary publications of Huntington and Eisenstadt are widely known, whereas works published on this subject in Polish by Florian Znaniecki are not. On a backdrop of the genesis of civilization-associated discourse and its antinomy as regards religion, the article presents Znaniecki's concept of civilization processes as the social integration of culture, developed on the basis of his theory of cultural and social systems. Two types of human participation in culture are significant here: cultural communities and social groups which create a cultural bond. The de-civilizing processes which Znaniecki described are shown. The article analyzes Znaniecki's idea of a fluid civilization and the conditions which are necessary for its existence, in the shape of reflexive cultural knowledge as the answer to a cultural crisis. The new type of cultural crisis stems from cultural innovations. The article shows the differences between Znaniecki's concept of fluidity and Bauman's liquid modernity. It presents the concept of "civilization of the future" as a pan-human civilization, which requires the formation of a new type of cultural community – the world culture society.

Keywords: civilizational discourse; cultural crisis; fluid civilization; Florian Znaniecki

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Introduction

The works of Florian Znaniecki (1882–1958) were completed over several decades, from the beginning of the 20th century to the late 1950s. They dealt with philosophical and sociological themes, as well as with issues of cultural sciences. Znaniecki believed that the cultural sciences (including sociology), if properly developed and pursued, will make it possible to meet the growing challenges of global processes. He was one of the first researchers to study those processes [*Halas 2010: 181–188*]. He developed his own philosophy of culturalism, and used it as the foundation for building his own theoretical system in humanistic sociology, based on the categories of social actions and values. Social reality sui generis is made from emergent social systems of varying complexity, built upon social actions and social values. These are linked with other cultural systems of actions and

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values, e.g. technical or religious ones. However, those cultural systems possess relative autonomy, which means that Znaniecki's theory never became embroiled in various types of conflation of society and culture [Archer 1996]. Both the philosophy of culturalism and the theory of cultural and social systems were proposed as a solution to the dispute between neo-Kantians and pragmatists, advocates of idealism or realism, as an attempt to overcome these and other dualisms [Halas 2010: 49–64]. In the field of sociology, Znaniecki likewise sought to create a theory that would dispense with one-sidedness and with the oppositions between the standpoints of Max Weber, Émile Durkheim and Georg Simmel.

Znaniecki, a Polish and American sociologist, published most of his works in English, from *Cultural Reality* (1919), through *The Method of Sociology* (1934) and *Social Actions* (1936), up to *Modern Nationalities* (1952) and *Cultural Sciences* (1952). His unfinished book of systematic sociology was published posthumously as *Social Relations and Social Roles* (1964). It shows Znaniecki's processual, relational and simultaneously historical approach; he focuses on changes understood as social and cultural becoming. This approach was already present in Znaniecki's *Methodological Note to The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, a book co-authored with William I. Thomas.

The issue of civilization is also a significant topic in Znaniecki's works and he gave civilization a new meaning in his theory of social and cultural systems. He views civilization as processual, defining it as the processes of social integration of culture. Two of Znaniecki's books dealt exclusively with the issue of civilization. However, since they were written in Polish, they went largely unnoticed around the world. Furthermore, the popularity of new paradigms after World War II, including the structural functionalism of Talcott Parsons, was not conducive to making Znaniecki's works widely known [Halas 2006]. In this article, I will discuss the above-mentioned two books about civilizational processes, focusing on key questions associated with the crisis of civilization and Znaniecki's idea of a fluid civilization, in order to show that these works remain pertinent today. The first book, *Upadek cywilizacji zachodniej* [*The Fall of Western Civilization*], was published in 1921, and the second one, *Ludzie terażniejsi a cywilizacja przyszłości* [*Contemporary People and the Civilization of the Future*], appeared in 1934. While an analysis of the content and structure of cultural systems in order to present their duration and their changes over time does not focus on specific social collectivities, the concept of civilization introduced by Znaniecki allowed him to include spatiality in the relations between groups. As he wrote in *Cultural Reality*, "each group with its total civilization becomes geographically localized" [Znaniecki 1919: 293]. The geographical environment is endowed with a humanistic coefficient, since it is meaningful and valued in human historical experience. It must be emphasized that, unlike Arnold Toynbee, Znaniecki did not attempt to determine a specific number of civilizations – he took the radical stance that there is an unspecified multitude of them, while his theory regarding the civilizational process precluded treating civilizations as closed entities, inevitably doomed to clash [Huntington 1996].

Znaniecki's approach was also completely different from the stance popularized by Alfred Weber and Robert M. MacIver: perceiving culture and civilization as two separate and different orders, where civilization is utilitarian in character, ruled by the criterion of efficacy, and where the products of civilization can be classed as superior or inferior depending on their usefulness as means to an end [MacIver 1937: 274]. On the other hand, in this popular approach, culture refers to the order of autotelic values and their

expression as an antithesis of civilization [MacIver 1937: 273]. Znaniecki rejected this distinction, since in the light of his theory, cultural systems are based on various criteria of valuation. His concept of civilizational processes also differs from that of Norbert Elias, developed later, because it is not limited to “the idea of a standard of morals and manners” [Elias 1998: 48].

Znaniecki did not adhere to the post-Enlightenment concept brought to sociology by Auguste Comte, which defines civilization as the process of progress in humanity's development [Hałas 2010: 163]. Unlike analytical studies of various cultural systems (such as religious or social systems), which are the domain of specialized disciplines, studying civilizational processes is always a synthetic undertaking in cultural sciences [Znaniecki 1971: 642–643]. According to Znaniecki, civilization is the historical entirety of many systems of cultural actions and values, created, maintained and changed by distinct and organized social collectivities.

Cultural ideals play a key role in civilizational processes. They make cultural systems not only persist, but also develop over time, since ideals carry a transgressive potential in regard to the shaped axionormative order.

This article discusses Znaniecki's views on civilization, presented in the interwar period, which was marked by the experience of the Great War and the appearance of new totalitarian regimes. After World War II, Znaniecki continued to bring up civilizational issues, particularly the prospect of the civilization of the future. His views will be presented on the backdrop of the history of civilization as an idea and an outline of the problem of civilization in sociology, in order to highlight the originality of his approach.

The genesis and ambiguities of civilizational discourse

The appearance of the idea of civilization marks the point when the processes of collective life became reflexive [Mazlish 2005: 5]. This was associated with the shaping of historical consciousness and the development of social sciences. The issue of reflexivity, so intensely discussed today, was an object of Znaniecki's scientific curiosity. Znaniecki associated the key processes that change cultural reality with the development of cultural knowledge, and thus, he considered the quality of cultural sciences a key factor that shapes the future. This social scientist's views on civilization have rarely been commented upon, especially in English [Burakowski 1986; Hałas 1989; Szczepański 1989]; thus, they deserve particular attention.

When exploring the history of the word and idea of civilization, one immediately notices the diversity of discourses which have influenced the concept of civilization formulated on the basis of various social theories, including Znaniecki's. His thoughts on civilization ought to be made known to a wider audience, especially in light of the recent trend to reconstruct the reflections on civilization present in sociology. Pointing out the pressing need to return to a sociological analysis of civilization following September 11, 2001, Edward Tiryakian distinguished three stages of their development: the ideas of the classics – Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss – followed by the works of Pitirim A. Sorokin, Norbert Elias, Benjamin Nelson, and more recently – Samuel Huntington and Shmuel Eisenstadt [Tiryakian 2004: 36–40]. I argue that one more classic should be added to the list – namely, Znaniecki.

When discussing the theory of civilization formulated by this philosopher, sociologist and cultural scientist, in the context of the ideas characteristic for the first half of the 20th century and those formulated during the interwar period, as well as in the light of today's newest discourses, one must take into account key semantic turning points in the understanding of the concept of civilization during the European periods of Enlightenment and Romanticism. When we look at how the meaning of "civilization" changed through the ages, our attention should be drawn to the initial period in the history of this idea. As a noun, this word first appeared around the half of the 18th century. The ideology of Enlightenment gradually crystallized; however, it soon became a vehicle for radically different beliefs as well. Thus, from the very beginning, the word "civilization" demonstrated its mobilizing power, becoming the tool for conflicts, especially since it had a sort of sacred aura [Starobinski 1993: 17].

Interestingly, the first dictionary entry for "civilization" appeared in the *Dictionnaire universel français et latin*, better known as the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, an 18th century lexicographic undertaking realized by the Jesuits. The word "civilization" soon became an ambiguous symbol, and ideologists who claimed the right to authoritatively define the attributes of the "civilized" and "uncivilized" contended for its interpretation. In the name of civilization, one could defend both traditional religious values and the wholly secular which were to take their place [Starobinski 1993: 17]. Although the term "Christian civilization" appeared much later, at the beginning of the 19th century, experts show that this idea had originated from the 18th-century current of political theology [Plongeron 1978: 11]. However, the values of the French Revolution were also identified with civilization and sanctified. Hence, the concept of civilization, strongly tinged with ideology, was associated with valuation criteria that led to the condemnation of anything which might threaten such a civilization, and for this reason had to be perceived as absolute evil [Starobinski 1993: 18–19]. Thus, civilizational fears were never, and will never be, unequivocal. As Jean Starobinski astutely notes, they can signify complaints stemming from external causes, but also those caused by civilization itself. In the history of ideas, civilization always appears as either a threat or something threatened [Starobinski 1993: 30–31]. Thus, from the outset, controversies appeared as regards the nature of civilizational achievements or the hazards associated with civilization. As early as 1756, the physiocrat Victor de Riqueti, marquis de Mirabeau, wrote critically about the barbarity of our civilization, or about a false civilization, in his work *L'ami des hommes*. As a concept developed in the West, modern civilization has become an object for criticism and fierce disputes, in which the problem of European colonialism remains the main issue [Mazlish 2005]. Thus, civilization may on the one hand be considered a source of moral norms and political rules, and on the other, in contrast to the sphere of civilizing duties, this concept was also applied to civilization understood as the observable facts of collective life; the criteria of their evaluation were drawn from other, external sources [Starobinski 1993: 31]. Thus, the concept of civilization was used both as an instrument of criticism and in regard to facts being subjected to critical evaluation. As Jean Starobinski emphasizes, it was, however, not enough for civilization to be some described reality; it should be an authentic civilization. In the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, the 18th-century Jesuit lexicographers quoted the marquis de Mirabeau, who considered religion a necessary condition for the birth of civilization. The same de Mirabeau, when contrasting civilization with barbarity, also treated civilization as something

that actually exists. Thus, the new word “civilization” did not herald the strengthening of the axio-normative order of civilized society; on the contrary, it signaled the start of a crisis, or even, according to some, the last phase of what had been termed “Western civilization” [Mazlish 2005]. The echo of these discourses can be recognized in Znaniecki’s works as well, although he tried to avoid ideological bias.

Research on the history of the word and idea of civilization has continued for a long time, and whenever we study this subject, we are able to see modern civilizational thought in a different light and evaluate it from a detached stance. In the English language, the word “civilization” was introduced by the Scottish diarist and Samuel Johnson’s biographer – James Boswell [Tiryakian 2004: 30]. However, its appearance in French writings took place earlier, since in the 16th century the verb *civiliser* was already in use, and it had been preceded by the words *civil* and *civilité*, dating from the 13th and 14th centuries. The verb *civiliser* had two meanings, one of which referred to manners and customs becoming more restrained and gentler over time, while the other one, which later disappeared, was a legal term referring to the transfer of criminal cases to the jurisdiction of civil courts. The first use of the noun *civilisation* was connected with this second meaning [Starobinski 1993: 2]. As mentioned earlier, this expression appeared in the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* in 1771. Citing de Mirabeau’s *L’ami des hommes* from 1756, the dictionary’s authors explain the meaning of civilization as *sociabilité* (socialization), stressing that the first source of civilization is religion, since it calls for brotherhood, counteracting obduracy².

De Mirabeau was the first to use the word “civilization” in a non-judicial context. Thus, although this word became popularized during the French Revolution, we can see that it was being used in its modern sense much earlier. It is an interesting observation that the idea of civilization, although popularized by the encyclopédistes, could also be used in arguments against the views presented by Enlightenment philosophers, because the first use of the word “civilization” by de Mirabeau, repeated in the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, was in essence a praise of religion. In the Enlightenment discourse, on the other hand, civilization became a secularized substitute of religion and the synonym of emancipation. Thus, the meanings associated with civilization kept changing and, with time, became polarized. Soon, civilization became identified with Christianity, while simultaneously others tried to equate Christianity with barbarity which should be eradicated [Starobinski 1993: 3]. In his theory of civilizational processes, Znaniecki moved beyond the opposition between religion and secularity, introducing the notion of spirituality.

In the title of his famous work, Norbert Elias stressed that civilization is a process (Elias 2000), but in fact civilization means the process itself, and the result of the process has only secondary significance. This process involves individuals as well as nations and humanity as a whole [Starobinski 1993: 3] and it is well exemplified in Znaniecki’s work. From the beginning, disputes revolved around the question about the content of civilization. Contrasting civilization with the Other in order to bring out the content that defines its identity or essence made civilization resemble an unified entity, even if it was simultaneously seen as a changeable historical phenomenon [Mazlish 2005: 5]. As Bruce Mazlish notes, natural

² “La Religion est sans contredit le premier et les plus util frein de l’humanité: c’est le premier ressort de la *civilisation*. Elle nous prêche, et nous rappelle sans cesse la confraternite, adoucit notre coeur” (Dictionnaire universel français et latin, 1771, vol. II, p. 617).

history – in other words, the scientific depiction of nature and its evolution, as well as the taxonomic classification of organisms – influenced views on civilization. Studies on civilizations were conducted analogously to studies on natural history. In this way, the universal concept of civilization gained particular meanings, leading to the idea of a multitude of civilizations and their disparity [Huntington 1996]. Znaniecki introduced his culturalism in contrast to such a naturalistic approach.

In later times, as mentioned above, culture and civilization were often set in opposition to each other: the latter was linked with instrumental and utilitarian control over the conditions of social life [MacIver 1937: 272]. However, at its roots, the concept of civilization (as understood by de Mirabeau) is associated with the spiritual, mental and moral dimension. Turning to reflections on Znaniecki's theory, one must remember these varied meanings of the expression "civilization". Znaniecki upheld the distinction between civilization and culture, but without contrasting them with each other. One can see the continuity of inspirations coming from the author of *L'ami des hommes*, as well as, presumably, from François Guizot; the latter, in his 1828 work *Histoire de la civilisation en France*, drew attention to the link between two dimensions: the social and the individual; in other words, the external and internal dimension of civilization [Starobinski, 1993: 4]. These two sides of the civilizational process were astutely analyzed by Znaniecki, as shown by the title of his work from 1934, *Ludzie terażniejsi i cywilizacja przyszłości* [Contemporary People and the Civilization of the Future].

Civilizational processes and the social integration of culture

Along with criticism aimed at the idea of progress as a determinant of modernity, post-modern controversies also surround the concept of civilization, a characteristic for progressive discourse. It should be admitted that Znaniecki's works contain certain hallmarks of the idea of the human spirit's progress. One example is the contrast he draws between civilization and barbarity or savagery. Like the Enlightenment philosophers, Znaniecki is optimistic as to the possibility of humanity's creative development. Although his works show little interest in those theories which attempted to distinguish universal stages of the evolution of social organization, he upholds the vision of creative evolution in his reflections on the past and future of civilization. He also raises the issue of the reflexivity of this process – the possibility of purposefully directing social evolution. As Jerzy Szacki states, it seems that Znaniecki regarded this task as the most important one [Szacki 1986: 174]. Civilization should be viewed as a universal process, in which all human societies are involved through the ages. However, besides this neutral, descriptive meaning of civilization, there is also its normative sense. The key issue here is not the contrast between civilized forms of collective life and uncivilized ones, nor some single, exclusive frame of normative reference, like Western civilization, but a humanistic ideal projected into the future. This is a significant feature of Znaniecki's theory, since the concept of civilization was usually associated with a depiction of its opposite [Starobinski 1993: 8].

As we noted earlier, reflection on civilization very quickly transformed into critical reflection, in which the poles of evaluating the state of nature and the state of civilization changed over the years; Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept is a good example. Besides the association with the term *sociabilité*, the concept of civilization was explained by referring

to the word *politesse*, where the words *polie* (polite) and *policé* (orderly), similar but etymologically different, were used interchangeably, linking the Latin etymology of *polire* (to polish) with the Greek words *polis* and *politea*. In other words, beautifying and perfecting something was associated with creating order through legal regulations [Starobinski 1993: 11]. Having said that, it must be emphasized that Znaniecki does not allude to those popular ideas; instead, he stresses the phenomenon of creativity. However, in this thinker's works, the concept of civilization is also accompanied by somewhat of an aura of sanctity. It refers to values which the concept of civilization used to be associated with before the French Revolution – humanism, charity and the civic spirit [Starobinski 1993: 17]. If one trusts Starobinski's research, the word “civilization” was not used by de Mirabeau the younger, Danton, Robespierre, Marat, Desmoulins or Saint-Just in their political texts. For these activists, the key words of the French Revolution were “fatherland”, “the people”, “freedom”, “equality” and “civic virtue”.

Znaniecki's interest in the dilemma of civilization is already noticeable in his early philosophical works, as well as in the essay *Znaczenie rozwoju świata i człowieka* [*The Significance of the Evolution of the World and of Man*] (1913) and in the work that presents, in English, a synthesis of his philosophy of culture – *Cultural Reality* (1919). As noted above, I focus on the concepts regarding civilization which Znaniecki formulated more systematically after World War I, at a time when the question of civilization became pertinent not only in this scholar's philosophy of culture, but also in the humanistic sociological theory which he was building. An analysis of the ongoing changes consists in a confrontation with the dramatic crisis of modernity. Thus, I will focus on two key works: one concerning the fall of Western civilization, described as a sketch that combines elements of philosophy of culture and sociology, and a work on the civilization of the future, published after Znaniecki's second stay in the U. S. in the early 1930s. Some ideas contained in the latter can be also found in English in the newly discovered report *Education and Social Change* (Znaniecki 1998). It must be noted that civilizational problems also appear in Znaniecki's later works, published after World War II – especially in *Cultural Sciences* (1952) and in *Modern Nationalities* (1952), but also in *Social Relations and Social Roles* (1965), although they are presented in a less systematic fashion, and mostly pertain to the problems of communism, Nazism and totalitarianism.

Cultural reality, as well as civilization, cannot be reduced to objects or states of things, since they consist of processes of becoming, as already stressed by Hegel [Hegel 2010: 316]. In his theory, Znaniecki specified that cultural becoming is not a single process, but a multitude of different cultural processes consisting of the development and cultural changes of systems of actions and values [Znaniecki 1991: 933]. The distinguishing characteristic of Znaniecki's theory is the statement that the cultural world is marked by creative activities which can be presented by philosophy of culture as a continuity of creative development, as opposed to the repetitive and causally conditioned social processes studied by sociology. Significantly, Znaniecki's reflections on civilization grow out of the philosophy of pragmatism; they are based on the assumption that accurate predictions of the future depend on the ability to shape it. In other words, accurate predictions require the ability to formulate and propagate the ideals which one wishes to realize [Znaniecki 1991: 917].

In his analysis of civilizational processes, Znaniecki reveals the reciprocal relations of social and cultural phenomena, thanks to his theory of cultural systems of actions and

values. On the highest level of generality, all human reality is cultural reality, but social values – above all, humans as individuals and collectivities, as well as their actions in regard to those values – form social systems, have their own regularities and their own history, not identical with the regularities of other cultural systems. They have their own rules for existence and changes. Significant here is the distinction between two types of participation in culture – cultural communities participate in a different way than social groups. In the case of the former, a social tie forms on the basis of common cultural values, whereas in the case of the latter, a common culture shapes itself on the basis of social ties formed earlier. This distinction is important, since Znaniecki understands civilization as a process in which the creation of cultural communities occurs concomitantly with the formation of social groups, and as a result, the emergent entirety of social life includes the whole cultural experience. Thus, in Znaniecki's theory the people and the nation, or – as we might say today – the ethnos and the nation are cultural groups which transform into folk civilizations and national civilizations; the former on the basis of genetic groups such as lines of descent, the latter on the basis of territorial groups.

In Znaniecki's view, the most significant element of civilizational processes was the transformation of tendencies to maintain uniformity and immutability, to rely on unchanging tradition – a trait typical for folk civilizations – into a dynamic of evolving continuity, an organic unity and growing diversity in the case of national civilization. Znaniecki did not deal in detail with the nature of the earliest cultural communities and social groups which preceded the birth of folk civilizations. He was, however, interested in the modern transformation of folk civilizations within national civilizations – in other words, the disintegration of the people in terms of the form which the ancestral social group used to give to it, but simultaneously its continued existence as a cultural community. Znaniecki speaks of a national civilization, which may indicate the influence of Montesquieu's ideas; for Montesquieu, civilization was *l'esprit de la nation*, the spirit of a nation [Mazlish 2005: 15]. Znaniecki predicted that the formation of national civilizations is merely another stage in history, certainly not the last one.

Thus, the civilizational process consists of the social integration of culture [Znaniecki 2001: 18–19]. The modern researcher, when searching for the most general, abstract concept, finds that civilization is an extended form of cultural and social order [Mazlish 2005: 18]. Znaniecki astutely characterized civilization as a process of the social integration of culture, without the conflation of culture and society. He did not commit the error of those theories which focused solely on the integrative function of culture in regard to society [Archer 1996: 3].

Thus, one may conclude that Znaniecki's vision of a world culture society [Halas 2010] is an expanded concept of a cultural community based on a bond that shapes itself on the basis of a common world culture, which may subsequently change into a pan-human civilization if the social base is conducive to such a transformation – in other words, if new types of global social ties and organizations take shape. Modern communication technology may facilitate this. Znaniecki certainly did not refer to a global super state, since from his culturalist perspective, progress always involves the restriction of state dominance through the creation of a state-independent network of social relations [Znaniecki 2001: 14–15].

The phenomena of the social integration of culture – as Znaniecki wrote – were present earlier in empires, on a broader scale than the modern formation of national civilizations.

The social integration of culture was also mediated by great religions and ecclesiastical societies. Today, economical and technical organizations with a global reach perform the same function. It must, however, be noted that neither so-called “Christian civilization” nor “technical civilization” fully justify being termed as “civilization”, in the sense in which Znaniecki used it. Both these expressions, frequently used in public discourse, refer to the partial social integration of particular cultural values – religious or technical, respectively. Znaniecki investigated the potential for the development of a new global civilization of the future.

De-civilizing processes and the crisis of modernity

Upadek cywilizacji zachodniej [*The Fall of Western Civilization*] – an essay published in 1921, the fruit of Znaniecki's experiences of the Great War, the Bolshevik revolution and Soviet invasion of Poland – fits the discourse, widespread at that time, of a Western civilization under threat. Focusing on the diagnosis of Bolshevism as a phenomenon and on its catastrophic consequences for society and for Western culture, Znaniecki expresses his conviction about the value of Western civilization [Znaniecki 1991: 932]. This affirmation adopts a different view to the widespread concept of Western civilization which had both defensive and triumphant connotations, symbolized by the fall of Constantinople (1453) on one hand, and by the discovery of America (1492) on the other [Mazlish 2005].

Civilization as the social integration of culture becomes the property of particular societies; thus, Znaniecki states that a multitude of civilizations exists and their common trait is the propensity to work out their own ideas which make it possible to control primitive instincts [Znaniecki 1991: 942]. He particularly emphasizes the significance of creative tendencies in civilizational processes; on the grounds of gradually emerging cultural systems of activities and values, these tendencies take on an autonomous purpose. The birth of notions – ideals which shape new forms of life and give a new organization to activities aimed at making those ideals real – is crucial. Culture, as opposed to nature, is a product of conscious activity, whereas civilization is some part of human culture in general, created by particular societies or by groups of societies. Civilization gains unity thanks to some set of ideals; its patterns and developments are socially conditioned and reflexively influence that conditioning [Znaniecki 1991: 943].

Thus, according to Znaniecki's theory, the fundamental difference between civilizations becomes visible when some of them become reflexive; in other words, when a “conscious awareness of ideals” awakens [Znaniecki 1991: 943]. This is the reason why the elite, whom Znaniecki calls the intellectual aristocracy, plays a particularly important role. It possesses the ability to create new ideals and give new meaning to hitherto relevant values, as well as to create new cultural resources instead of simply preserving the existing ones. Every war and every revolution derails civilizational processes, especially when they lead to the eradication of the intellectual elite [Znaniecki 1991: 949]. It is interesting to review the characterization of the main ideals of Western civilization, to which Znaniecki ascribed its vitality, searching for cultural resources and a new, global civilization of the future. This will also make it possible to understand his interpretation of the historical disasters of the 20th century, caused by the totalitarian ideologies of Bolshevism and Nazism; in other words – his view on the sources of civilizational crisis and the ways to manage it.

Znanięcki evaluated Western civilization in a positive light because of its propensity for inventions and productivity, which become autonomous purposes – both rooted in the aspiration to gain control over natural hazards. Another idea which he judged positively is the principle of increasing individual and social wealth, on the condition that they are used as means to attain more important goals. These goals translate into resources, of which the value producers – the human capital – are the most important. In other words, cultural resources, factors and tools of cultural production, as well as striving to increase their store, are all desirable. Znanięcki also evaluates the European national ideal positively, since in his interpretation it requires conscious social solidarity that is founded on the grounds of a common culture [Znanięcki 1991: 959]. Hence, he also praises the formation of nation-states, on condition that the state's interests remain subordinate to the values of a national culture society. He considered the great cultural diversity and unique identities of European nations a valuable potential contribution to a pan-human culture, or – as he wrote later – to the shaping of a world culture society. Like Oskar Halecki, the widely known author of classical studies on European history, Znanięcki emphasized the process of parallel birth of different national cultures which shape European civilization through cultural unifying factors – in other words, the seemingly paradoxical European unity in diversity [Halecki 1994: 33].

Znanięcki considered the shaping of ethos, a moral core, as a universal trait of all civilizations. He claimed, though, that the development of the ideal of overcoming human suffering to the extent of embodying it in institutions is particularly characteristic for Western civilization. However, he considered that all religions play a similar role in its shaping. Simultaneously, he emphasized the increasing autonomy and secularization of this humanistic ideal in Europe. As he wrote: “The prevalent and usually active compassion toward suffering is an actual acquisition of modern Western life” [Znanięcki 1991: 961]. Despite the observed crisis of traditional religious institutions and against the sociological secularization thesis which was to dominate in the 20th century, Znanięcki – like Georg Simmel, who set spirituality in contrast to an objectivized religious system [Simmel 1997: 21] – was of the opinion that this process will not constitute a serious threat to religion understood as active faith and moral solidarity [Znanięcki 1991: 963]. According to Znanięcki, the essence of religion consists in developing a sense of human dignity and, as he wrote, on creating “the consciousness that one is an active and responsible member of a great spiritual community” [Znanięcki 1991: 964].

In Western art, Znanięcki saw, above all, an enormous diversity of esthetic ideals, necessitating that both creators and recipients possess highly developed taste. Thus, as he declared, art cannot be popular. Importantly, he also stated that systems of knowledge, and above all the formation of a new scientific ideal of cognition, represent the culmination of the developmental processes of modern civilization. Such a new ideal of cognition consists not in reaching an unchangeable given truth, but in the constant progress of knowledge, characteristic for the West [Znanięcki 1991: 967]. Thus, he ascribed great significance to the principle of free creative activity – a distinguishing trait of modern civilization, as opposed to the heritage of earlier civilizations with their disciplining forms of social life and dogmatic belief systems.

The dynamic given to modern civilization by these ideals contrasts with the earlier, static rules of sociocultural order. Thus, the main problem is an inability to accept those

changes, demonstrated by the masses and by widespread conservative tendencies. In consequence, creative civilizational ideals become the source of modernity's fears as well [Znaniecki 1991: 974]. However, it is not the opposition between conservative tendencies and dynamic ideals of change characteristic for modern civilization which lies at the very root of the crisis.

Upadek cywilizacji zachodniej presents a study of the social catastrophe and de-civilizing processes caused by the Bolshevik revolution. Znaniecki describes the three most dangerous tendencies: materialism, ochlocracy and racism. He criticizes historical materialism, which he does not count among scientific theories, but rather considers it a social dogma – an ideology which enables its followers to organize their beliefs and aims [Znaniecki 1991: 985]. He states that when this doctrine contrasts physical work with intellectual work and sets economic activity above all other fields of culture, its views are fundamentally mistaken and constitute a source of civilizational crisis. Znaniecki also expresses the opinion that the philosophy of materialism justifies anti-civilizational tendencies which reduce humanity to the basic level of animal behavior. One manifestation of this, he declares, is a primitive interpretation of sexuality [Znaniecki 1991: 997; 1000].

Znaniecki considered modern democracy the great ideal of Western civilization. He wrote that democracy is the best social system, but also the one which is hardest to implement and maintain. Thus, he pointed out another danger: the degeneration of democracy. In Znaniecki's opinion, ochlocracy – a pathology of democracy as a political system, consisting in the rule of the masses – is also a problem in other fields of organized cultural activity. He mentioned that ochlocracy can also be a threat to economy, religion, art and science [Znaniecki 1991: 1053]. Recognizing and emphasizing the moral dignity of every human being, he saw a danger of ochlocracy in every manifestation of negating cultural supremacy, in the rejection of elites, in the underestimation of talents, in the inability to recognize the supremacy of outstanding minds. Thus, like José Ortega y Gasset, he mistrusted the masses – especially half-educated people, who may be prepared for acquiring knowledge, but leave school “convinced that they have already acquired it” [Znaniecki 1991: 1007]. In 1921, he predicted the expansion of organized ochlocracy – communism, proclaimed as a positive political and social program [Znaniecki 1991: 1021].

According to Znaniecki, the third threat to civilization after the materialist worldview and ochlocracy was aggressive nationalism, which he termed “racial imperialism”. Immediately after World War I he warned that this war's disastrous consequences were yet to come to light, and that the conflict between nationalities in Europe had not ended when the Treaty of Versailles was signed; on the contrary, it had only just begun. For Znaniecki, racial imperialism consisted in the regressive ethnification of the idea of nationhood, brought down to the level of a genetic group based on blood ties, and was a complete contradiction of the national ideal. Nationalities are communities of cultural values originating in the past, constantly transformed in a creative fashion through interaction with many national civilizations, which is a necessary condition for their development. According to Znaniecki, modern Western civilization, unlike ancient civilizations, “is a combination of the civilizations of numerous, diverse national groups, which develop more or less in parallel and fertilize each other” [Znaniecki 1991: 1030].

An inability to understand and accept an open, dynamic concept of nation, coupled with the unceasing ethnification of this entity – the cultivation of a myth of common

ancestry accompanied by hostility towards strangers – led to the barbarization of national civilizations, as Znaniecki astutely predicted.

That which we have termed racial imperialism has its source in that culturally lower type of nationalism which prevails among the masses and among political leaders schooled in the old tradition of the state as the ultimate value [Znaniecki 1991: 1033].

According to Znaniecki, a coupling of materialistic and ochlocratic tendencies with racial imperialism is what culminated in the phenomenon of Bolshevism.

Bolshevism is the ultimate expression and test of the strength and significance of those anti-cultural tendencies which the Western civilization has as yet been unable to subdue, and which have, under the conditions created by the rupture of all traditional restraints, condensed into social forces and turned into a mass movement [Znaniecki 1991: 1069].

In Znaniecki's opinion, Bolshevism is not a unique phenomenon which could only appear under specific historical conditions in Russia. Furthermore, he considered it a mistake to perceive Bolshevism exclusively as "an attempt to implement the communist system" [Znaniecki 1991: 1069]. He claimed that Bolshevism "by its nature is not a system, a form of social organization, but a complicated social process that leads to the disintegration of existing systems" [Znaniecki 1991: 1069]. As opposed to the later works of the philosopher and sovietologist Józef Bocheński, Znaniecki did not analyze Bolshevism as a theoretical thought system – the Bolshevik philosophy [Bocheński 2008], but as the ideology of a social movement, focusing on the flow of this doctrine through networks of small revolutionary groups which specialized in mobilizing the masses [Znaniecki 1991: 1084]. The Russian experiment was described by Znaniecki in considerable detail in the work *Upadek cywilizacji zachodniej*. However, his hypothesis that the current of Bolshevism appears in all Western societies, spawning anti-civilizational tendencies, seems original.

Znaniecki characterized Bolshevism as a negation of the ideals of Western civilization, as well as an attempt to overthrow its institutions by force if necessary. Directed against the principle of voluntary creative cooperation, it was judged as remarkably destructive. Znaniecki claimed that revolution, which consists in the total negation of the existing system, needs no preparation for creative activity and ruins all that civilization has achieved. The subsequent stages of the Bolshevik movement's influence distinguished by Znaniecki include the removal of the elites' influence through the hitherto existing institutions, centralization of the power exerted by the group that leads the revolutionary movement, anarchy associated with the revolution and the physical as well as moral losses which it causes [Znaniecki 1991: 1090–1091].

In the light of these reflections it becomes clear that Bolshevism is a form which any fierce revolution of the masses against the dominant spheres must take in modern times, in the light of the present state of civilization and the existing social currents; it is a type and is becoming an example of the modern social upheaval in general, despite those traits which it owes, in particular, to the Russian conditions [Znaniecki 1991: 1097].

Znaniecki considered Bolshevism inherently unable to create a new civilization. He disagreed with the opinion that the negative consequences of the Bolshevik movement are only a result of using the wrong methods to achieve a worthy ideal. He also considered any analogies between the French Revolution and the Bolshevik revolution, presenting them “as two stages of the same historical process” [Znaniecki 1991: 1098], unfounded. In Znaniecki's opinion, the French Revolution had certain constructive elements, whereas “Bolshevism contains none” [Znaniecki 1991: 1098]. The slogan of social justice does not justify this movement in any way – on the contrary, it is an ostensible validation, and thus in fact becomes “only an instrument of destruction” [Znaniecki 1991: 1094]. Znaniecki was convinced that Bolshevism can lead to the destructive reversal of lengthy civilizational processes and to the annihilation of the ideals of Western culture. Foreseeing such enormous threats, he emphasized the crucial role of reflexivity, which makes it possible to shape social consciousness [Znaniecki 1991: 1108] and counteract anti-civilizational trends.

The idea of a fluid civilization

The motive of a great breakthrough, so characteristic for Znaniecki's works [Szacki 1986: 174], the “either-or” of unusual civilizational threats and, simultaneously, possibilities mean that his concept of a future civilization represents a critical analysis of a cultural crisis. As Znaniecki wrote in one of his studies within the framework of the Columbia University project *Education and Social Change*, “whatever the future may bring it will certainly be unlike any of our ideas of it” [Znaniecki 1998: 107].

Znaniecki pointed out three dimensions in which civilizational processes should be steered under these critical conditions with the help of reflexive cultural knowledge. Here, we will pay particular attention to his innovative concept of a fluid civilization. It is also closely linked with the two others – the humanization and harmonization of civilization. Thus, making civilization fluid goes hand in hand with placing the spiritual values of human culture higher than material values and with the superiority of solidary cooperation over antagonisms. By stating that the rising pace of innovation is not limited to technical inventions, but encompasses all areas of meanings and values, Znaniecki indicated the core issue of the cultural crisis [Znaniecki 2001: 58]. He reminded his readers that when cultural systems encounter a crisis, it may stimulate their further development, or – in his words – their becoming. The term “crisis” thus acquired positive overtones, like the crisis of some scientific theory, caused by some new invention (as discussed later by Thomas Kuhn) or the crisis in family life caused by the birth of a child. Such crises, even if only local, always force us to rebuild the existing cultural systems [Znaniecki 2001: 59]. However, crises – whether individual or collective – usually have a negative connotation, as when an economic crisis causes fear. Znaniecki also focused on the negative aspects of cultural crises. His original contribution consists in the accurate recognition of the exceptional character of modern cultural crises caused by cultural creative activity as such. Znaniecki pointed out that constant innovations in all systems of meanings, values and actions inevitably cause crises. It seems that he was one of the first to note this new cultural trait of modernity – in other words, the cultural character of the crisis, as opposed to crises caused by natural disasters or social catastrophes, which are a constant sources of trauma. He stated that “the dangers inherently associated with creative activity itself seem

to increase” [Znaniński 2001: 60]. Cultural crises appear as a result of introducing new elements into cultural systems. However, Znaniński considered the increase in cultural innovations unavoidable and predicted that as a result, not only primitive, but also highly developed cultural systems will face the threat of collapse. He astutely stated:

We have entered a period when the changeability caused by new ideas becomes an ordinary trait of cultural life and not only is it improbable that this changeability will diminish, but on the contrary, everything suggests that it will continue to increase [Znaniński 2001: 67].

Cultural orders shaped earlier are subject to many different changes, which can create the impression that no order can emerge from the rising chaos. However, after looking at the stages of cultural evolution, having distinguished folk civilizations and national civilizations, Znaniński examines the possibility of the birth of a new, pan-human civilization in the future. Up till now, civilizations had initially been based on the principle of stable equilibrium – in other words, the principle of avoiding cultural crises by resisting all innovations – and later on the principle of static equilibrium, which consists in embedding innovative elements into the system and adapting the system to new values. Thus, static equilibrium means that innovations are assimilated into the system and accommodated by it. Finally, the need for a new principle, the principle of dynamic equilibrium, becomes apparent. Znaniński wrote:

We must openly admit that precisely because the cultural systems existing today are organized on the principle of static equilibrium, in other words – they transform only when the introduction of new elements renders transformation necessary, none of them can survive the flood of innovations. No present-day state, no economic system, no technical organization, no religion, no scientific theory which only wish to “adapt to the new trends” will survive. Conservatives and moderate reformers can console themselves with the certainty that no system built by revolutionaries upon similar principles will last long [Znaniński 2001: 68–69].

Thus, Znaniński’s innovative concept of the fluidity of cultural systems calls for deeper analysis, since its author was convinced that precisely this principle of fluidity is the key to limiting the negative consequences of contemporary cultural crises. The idea of cultural fluidity presented in the work *Ludzie terażniejsi a cywilizacja przyszłości* [Contemporary People and the Civilization of the Future] reappears later in English in *Modern Nationalities*, where Znaniński sketches out the perspective of a world culture society [Znaniński 1952: 184].

To express the idea of fluidity, the English language uses the adjective *fluid* and the noun *fluidity*, both derived from the Latin *fluo*, *fluxi*, *fluxum*, meaning “to flow”, “flow”, “fluidity”, as well as the word *fluxus* – “volatile”, “changing”. Zygmunt Bauman has fairly recently used the metaphor of fluidity when discussing liquid modernity, liquid society and liquid culture [Bauman 2000a]. Despite the synonymy of the words *fluid* and *liquid*, the concepts used by Znaniński and by Bauman are very different. Znaniński’s concept of the fluidity of civilization refers to simultaneous change and continuity – to the persistence of cultural and social systems in a state of creative evolution and to their creation by human agency. Both the concept of fluidity and the becoming of cultural reality were inspired by Henri Bergson’s philosophy of “fluid persistence” [Bergson 2004: 11] – this is

how Znaniecki himself translated into Polish the French philosopher's idea of the fluidity (*fluidité*) of time and consciousness.

Bauman's concept of liquidity has an entirely different origin and sense. Znaniecki's idea of a fluid civilization remains known to a relatively small number of scholars, whereas Bauman's metaphor has become famous as an ideological vehicle of postmodernism – in other words, a new, radical phase of modernism, interpreted as the emancipation from the existing social order. Liquid modernity supposedly manifests itself on the level of interactions between individuals free from permanent ties, from the currently valid truths, rules and meanings [Bauman 2000a: 212]. As Margaret S. Archer argues, this idea of liquidity translates into a sort of “theoretical nihilism” – the rejection of the characteristics and regularities of social structure, of objectivized culture and subjective agency, making it impossible to analyze the interactions of society, culture and agency [Archer 2013: 6]. “Liquid modernity” interpreted as a distinguishing characteristic of a thinker's outlook meets with criticism too, as shown by Pope Benedict XVI's speech in Venice on May 8, 2011. Alluding to the symbolic meaning of water and using that city, built on water, as a metaphor for civilization, he addressed Bauman's expressions “liquid modernity” and “liquid society”:

It is about choosing between a “liquid” city, homeland of a culture that seems to be increasingly the culture of the relative and ephemeral, and a city that constantly renews its beauty, taking recourse to the beneficent resources of art, learning, of relations between man and nations [Benedict XVI: 2011].

Bauman perceives modern civilization not only in an entirely different way from Znaniecki, but from Elias as well [Smith 2001: 128]. He presents a critical vision of the bureaucratic process of imposing rules. Like Lucien Fébre, he considers the concept of civilization an element of the rhetoric of power, which helps reproduce social order [Bauman 1998: 115–118]. Thus, Bauman's criticism of the order of modernity can be interpreted as a criticism of modern society, also known as the Western society. However, it pertains to globalization processes as well. Since reconstructing Bauman's views on civilization is not my aim here, the focus is on the dominant content of the concept of liquid modernity, in contrast to Znaniecki's idea of a fluid civilization of the future. Bauman is familiar with Znaniecki's views, although he rarely refers to them. In *Culture as Praxis* he emphasizes the accuracy of Znaniecki's culturalist perspective [Bauman 1999: 93–94]. He also notes Znaniecki's influence on modern sociology [Bauman 2000b]. In his version of cultural Marxism, Bauman – like Znaniecki and Simmel – treats cultural transformations as the core issue. However, significant differences must be noted in the sphere of axiology and interpretations of humanism. They center on differing perceptions of the processuality and fluidity of social and cultural reality. What Znaniecki considered the source of a civilizational crisis, Bauman considers a source of inspiration. In the concept of liquid modernity, Bauman included the contemporary interpretation of Marx and Engels's theses presented in the Communist Manifesto [Bauman 2000a: 6; Beilharz 2005: 36]. Bauman took up this thread of thought in his work *Legislators and Interpreters* [Bauman 1987]. The idea of liquid modernity doesn't just mean that established institutions are to be replaced by provisional relations; the change of the semantics of culture and the transformation of existing systems of meaning are significant here. As a critic of modernity, Bauman is

considered by some authors to be a critic of Marxism; however, his stance is ambivalent, since he sees Marxism both as a source of the problems of modernity and as their solution [Beilharz 2005: 27].

Beilharz even goes so far as to consider the work *Legislators and Interpreters* to be a hidden criticism of Bolshevism, but one can just as legitimately see it as a sign of nostalgia, since the proletariat party is presented as the thinking elite's identification with the suffering of the masses [Bauman 1998: 226]. Assuming the synonymous character of the words *fluid* and *liquid*, Bauman chose the expression *liquid* [Bauman 2000a: 3], referring to the rhetoric of the *Communist Manifesto*:

All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned and man is at last compelled to face, with sober senses, his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind [Marx, Engels 1998: 38–39].

Commentators say that this passage of the *Communist Manifesto* alludes to a verse from the witches scene in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: "Into the air; and what seem'd corporal melted / As breath into wind" [Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, act 1, scene 3, verses 81–82].

The liquid modernity discussed by Bauman and the fluid civilization proposed by Znaniecki are, in fact, opposites. The fluid civilization – as Znaniecki wrote – is not a dizzying rush of chaotic changes, but the fluidity of the constant creation of new cultural deeds, the fluidity of selection of the existing cultural legacy with future development in mind, as well as the fluidity of the process of cultural development itself, which does not follow ready-made patterns or plans; it is a process that creates many open possibilities, which can also change and improve its guiding idea [Znaniecki 2001: 81].

Establishing the principle of dynamic equilibrium of the cultural systems of a future civilization, which is not a functionalist principle of homeostatic equilibrium, Znaniecki was convinced that the model of scientific cognition may be an example of such principle. If one views science from the perspective of the logic of discovery – in other words, from the perspective of innovative cognitive activities – the scientific system is constantly open to change. Znaniecki stressed that this system is not closed, and thus, it offers a potential for creative development in new directions [Znaniecki 2001: 74]. Analogously, a new logic of the creative development of culture appeared in the historical process. Thus, Znaniecki alludes to Hegel, having stated that this philosopher was the first to note the internal regularities of historical development. However, he considered Hegel's attempts to logically explain these processes unsatisfactory [Znaniecki 2001: 73].

It is necessary to achieve reflexivity of civilizational processes. A fluid civilization requires the presence of appropriate cognitive reflection and conscious management of the processes of change – "the help of science and of science-based practical art" [Znaniecki 2001: 82–83]. Nevertheless, Znaniecki viewed technocracy, together with communism, fascism and Nazism, as regressive, de-civilizing currents which not only endanger the existing cultural systems, but also preclude humanization, harmonization and a fluid civilization. He associated humanization with the ideal of a spiritualized culture, while criticizing the dogmatism of beliefs. His views are similar to Simmel's in this respect [Simmel 1997: 9]. Thus, he expressed skepticism regarding the projects of a new civilization

founded upon some established religious system. He wrote: "It is high time to realize that the very origination of a new civilization must, in its course, be consistent with its future essence" [Znaniecki 2001: 84].

Despite the prevalent conviction that cultural conflicts are inevitable, and thus against the opinion that culture is a battlefield [Wallerstein 1990], Znaniecki stated that cultural systems as such are autonomous and do not generate antagonism by themselves. He wrote:

There can be no contradiction between religions, e.g. between Christianity and the polytheism of ancient Greece or Confucianism. Each is a structurally different synthesis of diverse religious values, diverse as regards content as well as meaning. Even if we find that certain myths or rites are similar, they are experienced quite differently in each system. Each of these systems in itself is religiously significant from the perspective of its own tests; the fact that it doesn't pass the tests of another system has nothing to do with its internal significance, since those other tests do not pertain to it. The statement that Greek polytheism or Confucianism conflict with Christianity because they do not pass its religious tests is, from an objective point of view, as unfounded as the statement that a dye factory conflicts with an automobile factory because one doesn't follow the principles of technical structure which characterize the other [Znaniecki 2001: 40-41].

Cultural conflicts stem from social relations of strangeness and social hostility. They are a result of rivalry over the expansion of cultural systems which groups consider their own. However, harmonizing social relations becomes possible along with rising social mobility, migrations and the increasingly voluntary character of forming associations [Znaniecki 2001: 56-57]. In Znaniecki's opinion, the fact that social relations are becoming increasingly independent from territorial proximity creates new chances as regards the harmonization of civilization, rather than risks.

Znaniecki did not base his analysis of civilizational processes upon value systems and institutions which constitute a separate sphere from culture itself, as proposed by Alfred Weber, who placed spiritual values in the cultural sphere and technical and/or material values in the sphere of civilization [MacIver 1937: 273]. According to Znaniecki, spiritual culture and material culture are twin aspects of civilizational processes, where – as he wrote – the first one has usually been but a complement to the other, and thus to those values, activities and institutions which enable us to fulfill our organic needs. Observing the changes which took place in the industrial era, Znaniecki predicted the advent of a postindustrial one. In contrast to technocratic tendencies, as well as the strong tendency of critics of civilization to focus on the threats of materialism, hedonism and consumerism, Znaniecki believed that a new spiritual culture may develop, inducing a rebirth of art, knowledge and religion, possibly in entirely new forms.

Conclusion: towards a civilization of the future

The theory of civilization has for some time been met with a dwindling interest. This is because social sciences have focused strongly on globalization processes and globalization, like postmodernity, that now function as key concepts in the depiction of contemporary sociocultural conditions. A further contributing factor is the ideological burden of the term "civilization" and the stigmatization of this concept by contemporary critics of European, post-Enlightenment modernity. One of the contemporary analysts of globalization processes, Roland Robertson, considers the cultural dimension of globalization the most

significant one. He claims that a crucial step in the globalization process was the popularization of the image of the world as a whole, which took place at the beginning of the 20th century [Robertson 1991]. Long before Robertson, Znaniecki predicted the formation of a world culture society and the weakening significance of nation-states. There are some indications that Znaniecki's conception of a pan-human civilization pertains to a more distant stage of globalization than the formation of a world culture society. His predicted conception of a fluid civilization of the future refers to a global formation which could arise on the basis of a new type of cultural community – a world culture society. Znaniecki is among those few thinkers of the first half of the 20th century for whom the image of the world as a whole and a pan-human ecumene was an object of serious study and not only a more or less imaginary utopia.

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