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# Crowded Deserts – Deserted oases

Zatłoczone pustynie – opuszczone oazy

## ABSTRACT

The article will attempt to describe the situation of the young modern man through the symbolism of the desert. In both oral tradition and written tradition (e.g. the Bible), the desert is depicted as a place of disorder that threatens man, and as a seat of evil spirits and malevolent forces. The Author refers to the description of a specific traumatic experience that Israelites had during their journey after they had escaped from Egypt. The Author also refers to the place of the temptations of Christ but, nevertheless, the article also presents another view of the desert, in which it is understood as a place of spiritual revival, a space for human freedom and the place where the need for solitude can be fulfilled. Wandering through the desert, without any signposts, any lasting traces in the sand, or any landmarks is, according to the Author, an accurate metaphor for the condition of the modern man. How many temptations and dangers await us out on the desert? What are the ways out or, perhaps more accurately, what are the means of escape? This text is also a dialogue with E. Fromm's concept and quasi-concepts referring to magic, and an attempt to determine how many forms of escape from freedom can be specified. The Author will discuss the essence of freedom and its limits, when faced with helplessness and solitude. Are we bound to be forever torn between dependency and unrestrained freedom of the possible life styles? The author argues that individuals who are constantly tempted and allured by the "oases of happiness" become "people with hollow eyes". This category is discussed by the author from the perspective of the challenges of modern education and the essence of man.

## KEY WORDS

meaning of life,  
helplessness, bereaved,  
the condition of the modern man, metaphor

## SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

sens życia, bezradność,  
osamotnienie, kondycja  
współczesnego człowieka,  
metafora



## ABSTRAKT

Artykuł stanowi próbę opisaną sytuacji współczesnego młodego człowieka z perspektywy symboliki pustyni. Zarówno w tradycji ustnej, jak i spisanej (np. Biblia) pustynia jest przedstawiana jako miejsce nieuporządkowane, niebezpieczne dla człowieka, jako siedlisko złych mocy i demonów. Autor odwołuje się do opisu specyficznego i traumatycznego doświadczenia Izraelitów w trakcie ich wędrówki po ucieczce z Egiptu. Odnosi się również do pustyni jako miejsca kuszenia Jezusa. Artykuł prezentuje jednak również drugie oblicze pustyni, rozumianej jako miejsce odnowy duchowej, swoistej przestrzeni dla ludzkiej wolności i potrzeby przebywania w samotności. Błądzenie na pustkowiu, bez kierunkowskazów, bez trwałych śladów na piasku, bez żadnych odniesień – to wedle Autora doskonała metafora kondycji współczesnego człowieka. Jak wiele pokus i niebezpieczeństw czeka na nas na pustkowiu? Jak są drogi wyjścia, a może jedynie ucieczki? Niniejszy tekst to również dialog z koncepcją Ericha Fromma oraz quasi-koncepcjami odwołującymi się do magii, to także próba odpowiedzi na pytania jak wiele jest obecnie form „ucieczki od wolności”. Na czym polega istota i jakie są granice wolności w obliczu naszej bezradności i osamotnienia? Czy już ciągle będziemy się szamotać się pomiędzy zależnością a nieskrępowaną swobodą możliwych stylów życia? Zdaniem Autora, osoby nieustannie kuszone i wabione „oazami szczęścia” stają się „ludźmi o pustych oczach”. Tę kategorię Autor ujmuję perspektywie współczesnego wyzwania dla edukacji i istoty człowieka.

A desert is an area of land located within the dry climate zone, devoid of vegetation or with sparse vegetation covering less than 10 percent of the area. A desert (desolate area) is an uninhabited land or wilderness. In the Old Testament, a desert or a desolate area is expressed by one Hebrew word *midbar* which stands for “a desolate and deserted place” and “a place outside”; that is, outside settlements and thus, beyond the control of authorities. Basically, it is something perceived by both city dwellers and villagers as a disorderly and dangerous habitat of wild animals and wild nomadic tribes. During times of war or persecution, refugees found a safe place in a midbar (Isaiah 21:13–15; Revelation 12:6.14). “And they shall pass through it sorely beset and hungry; and it shall come to pass that, when they

shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves and curse their king and their God”<sup>1</sup> (Isaiah 8:21–22) but “They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them” (Psalm 107:4–5).

A desert most often carries negative connotations in the Bible. It is a poor place of hunger, thirst, and degradation of life; it is uninhabited, barren, exposed to winds, visited by night animals and demons, and full of scary sounds.

It is the land of Cain, Ishmael, Esau, as well as robbers and invaders. Apart from nomads and outlaws, only madmen and those who find there their last hiding place to live in a desert. The basic experience of Israel was undoubtedly the escape from Egypt through the uninhabited desert of Sinai and the unity with Yahweh that was formed there. However, the people remembered their distress related to walking through the desert and they were not willing to do it again (Exodus 15:22–25; 16:3; Psalm 78:40; 95:8). For them, the desert was forever a “great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions and drought; where there was no water” (Deuteronomy 8:15). To Israelites, *midbar* is a horrifying desolate area where one is terrified and lost.

To the authors of the New Testament, a desert was a similar place—they perceived “dry places” as “rest of the unclean spirit”, (Luke 11:24, cf. Isaiah 34:14). No wonder, it was the wilderness where Satan tempted Jesus to abandon his vocation of suffering Son of God (Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13). Having fed crowds of people in the wilderness (e.g. Mark 8:4) Jesus proved that he can overcome both its physical and supernatural dangers.

A desert is also a place of spiritual renewal. Hagar, Moses, and Elias escape to a desert and encounter God there. Jesus looks for solitude in the desert.

A desert is also a space. It is the space that makes one free.

Let us this day name three places: the island, the Promised Land, the desert.

The third place, neither the Island, nor the Promised Land but the desert—and not the desert of revelation, but a desert in the desert,

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<sup>1</sup> All Bible quotes come from the 21st Century King James Version, Available at: <<https://www.biblegateway.com>>.



the one that makes it possible, opens it, penetrates the other one and contributes to infinity.<sup>2</sup>

When we talk about a desert, we often think of some terrifying emptiness (...). A desert is emptiness—this image has stuck in our minds. Indeed, it is not a false image. A desert is neither beaming with life—nor is it lifeless.

What is most terrifying about the desert are thousands of footprints which lead to nowhere, intersect and create labyrinths with no way out. Sometimes they seem to be back on track but it is just an illusion. The footprints have already been covered; the track has been lost. Nothing permanent can be built in a desert. No sand dune can be a lodestar—it was here yesterday but now it is gone. A desert has its chaos. Chaos and flux. Creatures of the desert cannot establish a community, tradition, or moral and political support.

The desert means never-ending wandering. One encounters the same footprints over and over again. They refer to nothing else. Wandering does not make sense and it never will. Sense is produced when a thought meets something new. These footprints refer to neither the past, nor the future. Time stays still in the desert; it is a place of permanent presence, idle and empty presence which does not put anybody on their guard anymore. Nothing can be expected in this suspension.

The experience of the desert can be similar to the exceptional experience of the anonymity of existence.

From the moment one is riveted there, one loses all notion of a starting or finishing point. The present is welded to the past, is entirely the heritage of the past: it renews nothing. It is always the same present or the same past that endures. A memory would already be a liberation with regard to the past. Here, time begins nowhere, nothing moves away or shades off.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Source of English translation: J. Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, p. 26, Available at: <<https://books.google.pl/books?id=LNOUMLAtYqIC&printsec=frontcover&hl=pl#v=onepage&q&cf=false>>.

<sup>3</sup> Source of English translation: E. Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 48, Available at: <[http://www.monoskop.org/images/7/7f/Levinas\\_Emanuel\\_Time\\_and\\_the\\_Other\\_1987.Pdf](http://www.monoskop.org/images/7/7f/Levinas_Emanuel_Time_and_the_Other_1987.Pdf)>.

The experience of the desert shows wandering thoughts and words, a lack of any stability, a lack of reference, hopelessness of the same, unstable and undefined presence. However, the desert also shows something extremely important. The desert whets one's thirst. The thirst arouses expectation that the right track will finally be found among these tangled footprints.

There are three ways out of the desert. The first one leads to mirages, different apparitions, mentioned by Plato in *Timaeus*: "[...] they are destitute of mind and reason", "[they are] the causes of things which are moved by others, and which work by chance and without order."<sup>4</sup>

Mirages are enticing, often beautiful, but very elusive. A mirage will not quench one's thirst, will not abound in lasting thoughts or words. However, despite the fact that these words and thoughts do not bring anything that would give them meaning, they sometimes gain strange, nearly unexplainable power.

The humankind has been feeding on mirages for centuries and these mirages have sometimes released incredible energies, more powerful ones than those triggered by knowledge and rational analyses of facts and possibilities. They have been able to galvanize whole nations into seemingly frantic and sometimes great actions. However, they usually have not brought anything but disappointment, defeat, and the most horrifying crimes.

The power of mirages is especially visible when a social or cultural situation actually shows clearer and clearer signs of lifelessness, pointlessness of mental habits and, most of all, a strong feeling of injustice and distress.

We find hope in mirages when a craving for a change becomes as strong as the desire to drink in the desert. Then, every germ of new thought, new action stimulates and attracts us. We are willing to follow pioneers blindly, without even considering to stop and question own choices. Criticism is unwanted. If we encounter it, we simply do not listen. The new is supposed to do away with the presence and introduce us to some long-awaited and desired future. We usually come to our senses when it is too late.

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<sup>4</sup> Source of English translation: Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, Available at: <<https://pl.scribd.com/read/240099943/Timaeus-and-Critias>>.



The humankind probably cannot do without mirages. These stimulate movement, provoke changes, shatter paradigms. Still, the constant reaching into the mirages may easily cause chaos and may destroy what has been built. Generally, mirages do not build anything. They are only able to destroy things.

Admittedly, mirages demolish patterns, fall outside any rational arguments and can open new unexpected worlds to us, questioning the established systems of values and beliefs. Still, simultaneously, in a society which lived on mirages, the notion of rightness would disappear; different judgements, even absurd ones, could be used to fight for recognition as powerfully as with other ones. Hierarchies of values would fade away and, maybe, life would eventually go on beyond the good and the evil. In the societies of that kind, if they are even imaginable at all, tolerance would not thrive, contrary to some people's delusions. Tolerance cannot be found in a moral vacuum. Mirages lead straight to despotism and cruelty of terror.

By order of the Spirit, Jesus is led to the desert "to be tempted by the devil" (Matthew 4:1).

Bringing order to the world on our own, without God, on the foundations of own premises and rules, recognizing political and material matters as the only reality, and rejecting God as imaginary and dismantled one—it is a temptation that threatens us with its different varieties.

The essence of a temptation is its moral aspect: it is not tempting us to do evil directly—it would be too simple. A temptation creates a mirage of showing something better: to finally give up the illusion and focus all of one's energy on making the world a better place. One sets about doing it under the excuse of authentic realism: only tangible things are real—power and bread; and God's things seem to be unreal, secondary and practically redundant.

"If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread" (Mt 4:3). Should it not be the first test of the Redeemer, before the world's gaze and on the world's behalf, to give it bread and to end all hunger? During their wandering through the desert, God fed the people of Israel with bread from heaven, manna. [...] Isn't the problem of feeding the world—and, more generally, are the social problems—the primary, true yardstick by which redemption has to be measured? Does someone who fails to measure up to this standard

have any right to be called a redeemer? Marxism—quite understandably—made this very point the core of its promise of salvation: it would see to it that no one went hungry anymore and that the “desert would become bread”.<sup>5</sup>

The aid offered by the West to the developing countries has been purely technical and material based, and has not only left God out of the picture, but has driven men away from god (...) [It] is itself what first turned the third world into what we mean today by that term. It has thrust aside indigenous religious, ethical and social structures and filled the resulting vacuum with its technical mindset. The idea was that we could turn stones to bread; instead, our aid has only given stones in place of bread. (...) History cannot be detached from God and then run smoothly on purely material lines. If man's heart is not good, then nothing else can turn out good, either.<sup>6</sup>

Humanity, ideas of equality, possibilities of development and opportunities of self-fulfilment are considered equivalent with democracy. This allows us to believe that democratic conditions, by themselves, mould democratic people who are capable of perceiving other individuals as human beings and equal partners. We can cling to the belief that everyone has the same and evident influence on the existence of a community, group or, finally, a society. Therefore, we strongly believe that democratic conditions, by themselves, constitute foundations for mutual respect, showing respect for the opinions, experiences and behaviours of others; that this democratic approach to each other leads to equality in relation to rights and duties, gives a sense of freedom and underlies freedom. Or, perhaps, it is only a mirage?

It turns out that a belief in democracy and hopes vested in it are often excessive. Believing solely in humanism brought by democracy might be and is an illusion. People increasingly conclude that democracy and, especially, an excessive belief in it, carries threats of dehumanization: the terms specific for democracy, as freedom and equality might stand for, and actually stand for, loneliness and emptiness. What is more, the catchphrases of democracy as: “You are a free

<sup>5</sup> Source of English translation: J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 33, Available at: <<https://books.google.pl/books?id=hgTXwmwFKbIC&pg=PA34&dpq=PA34&dq#v=onepage&q&cf=false>>.

<sup>6</sup> Source of English translation: *ibidem*, p. 34.



human being”, “Do whatever it is you think is right” often has a second meaning: “You are alone”, “Don’t count on me, don’t count on others”. This dualism of meaning is additionally reinforced by the processes of economic, social, civilisation and cultural transformations.

The contemporary world identifies a democratic system as a social and political system with a system of free market economy or, in other words, a capitalist economy. Still, it is difficult not to notice that this form of economy is strongly related to the mechanisms which are far from democratic ones, that this constitutes a serious threat of dehumanization. Let us first of all consider that this form of economy together with its laws, significantly determines social relationships in the contemporary democratic world. Therefore, these relationships gain specific exploitive or even mercantile attributes.

The mythical nature of the belief that freedom, moulded by and related to democracy, somehow automatically guarantees individuals possibilities of social development and good public relations is mentioned by Erich Fromm who analyses freedom, its deformities and different forms of political and social enslavement, emphasizing significant threats related to the excess of this delusive belief:

modern man, freed from the bonds of pre-individualistic society, which simultaneously gave him security and limited him, has not gained freedom in the positive sense of the realization of his individual self; that is, the expression of his intellectual, emotional and sensuous potentialities. Freedom, though it has brought him independence and rationality, has made him isolated and, thereby, anxious and powerless.<sup>7</sup>

In this situation, an individual is faced with a choice which is either to escape from the burden of freedom into new dependencies and submission or to advance to the full realization of freedom. In the first case, a human being searches for replacement for the lost primary bond, finding it in secondary bonds which take on forms of subordination and submission. Here one can find specific psychosocial origins of establishment of authoritarian or even totalitarian systems. Obviously, this provides justification for many behaviours resulting from the previous political system. However, it is difficult

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<sup>7</sup> Source of English translation: E. Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, Available at: <<https://books.google.pl/books?id=LJiJeT7-9UUC&pg=PT5&clpg=PT5&dq#v=onepage&q&cf=false>>.

not to notice new, clearly visible in our reality, signs of escaping from freedom into subordination or domination. From the psychological perspective, subordination has its parallel with masochistic tendencies through which an individual frees himself from the necessity of making decision and the responsibility for his own fate. Among others, this provides answers to the questions concerning the reasons for making particular decisions. This is also one of many answers to the question of a growing number of tendencies related to existence and establishment of sects, especially among youth. It is a specific weave of escaping from freedom into submission to the Perfect Being, or rather Causative Being, with escaping from domination of an autocratic institution. This weave is paradoxical insofar as the sects are also characterised by certain elements of autocratic domination. However, to a great extent, it is also about rebellion against an institution established by adults, which is a frequent perception of the Catholic Church.

One can also escape from freedom, its burden, into domination which, from the psychological perspective, is accompanied by sadism and different signs of the desire for power, coming not from strength but weakness. Brutalization of our political and social lives, supremacy of force and many pathological phenomena are also effects of escaping from freedom. Traits of personality defined as authoritarian ones are sadomasochistic tendencies found in normal people. The trait of this personality is an ambivalent attitude towards the authority. An authoritarian individual is submissive to authority and, simultaneously, would gladly be in power and gain authority himself.

Among more extreme signs of escaping from freedom are pathological phenomena, from addicts (alcohol, drug and work addicts or those addicted to other people or institutions) to utmost sadism, and also mass sadism, which is terrorism.

This form of economy is also related to the issue of divergence between the resulting requirements of high professional qualifications, narrow specialisation and a pursuit of humanistic values in teaching and education. A feeling of work alienation and dehumanisation of production and human relationships occurs. Universal and humanistic values are more and more often being marginalised and subjected to technicistic and instrumentalistic transformations. Yet there is another aspect of this issue concerning a drive for westernization of



broadly understood education. The model of education and training offered to young entrepreneurs, marketing and management specialists, representatives and advisors is worth emphasizing here. In most general terms, this model consists in an especially strong focus on the external image of a competent, determined, kind, straightforward and satisfied person. An individual undergoes specific training which leads to internal burnout. It is the effect which the author of this article calls a “nature monument”—by analogy to a formerly used method of burning the inside of the trees of historical or natural value and sealing them to make them be admired forever as examples of the beauty, life force, and excellence of the nature. In relation to human beings, the same effect is obtained through a manipulation of personality leading to a belief in the reality of mirages—you are beautiful, you are creative, you are the best.

How can one deny oneself the pleasure of pouring hot wax into cold water the night before Saint Andrew’s Day? It is a lot of fun, it is tradition—everyone has their own, more or less rational explanation for this custom. Wreaths on St. John’s Eve, shoes on St. Catherine’s Day—this is simply what our grandmothers and grandfathers did, and there is the spiritual consent of patron saints. The fact of their pagan origin is irrelevant.

“I take it with a grain of salt”—one can say about reading horoscopes, sending a short text message with a date of birth, calling EzoTv medium. Isn’t this really fascinating? Knowing your future and finding the answer to the burning questions like: will I get a raise? Will I find my prince charming? Will I...? Will I...? Will I...?

Although we flinch at the very thought of the dark cave where Macbeth speaks (Act 4, scene 1) to the witches, his call appears to be very alluring:

I conjure you by that which you profess –  
Howe’er you come to know it – answer me.  
(...) answer me.  
To what I ask you.

The abundance of titles filling up bookstore shelves labelled “psychotronics”, “parapsychology”, etc., a multitude of magazines, often difficult to get, and a *d i v e r s i t y* of commercials and websites confirm that, like the Ancient Greeks, we would gladly visit a contemporary

semblance of Apollo's temple to get to know what Pythia, who descended into the adyton, has to say. We do not have to hike for months on the hills of Parnassus to reach Delphi. And we will not find her on a stone in the shade of olive trees, but just right around a corner, in the privacy of velvety curtains filled with the scent of Sri Sai Baba joss sticks. And instead of gifts usually presented to high priests—we can bring cash or even pay by credit card.

There is even a simpler way. Rhonda Byrne is tempting you with her *Secret*, thanks to which you “will come to know how you can have, be and do anything you want. You will come to know who you really are. You will come to know the true magnificence that awaits you.”<sup>8</sup> The words of Lisa Nichols sound interesting—“place your order with the Universe. Let it know what you want. The Universe will answer your thoughts.”<sup>9</sup> Does it not sound like an incantation? It is one. Incantations are the foundations for magic. Pleading is of no significance here—the only things that matter are the will, strong demand, and order. Magic is a primeval skill of the alleged mastering of the natural forces by means of incantations, gestures and other actions. Magic searches for the ways of taking possession of the supernatural and forcing it to act—that is the secret of magic.

There is also fortune-telling—practices connected with predicting the future or telling the unknown, based on a belief in the existence of the supernatural world and a possibility of communicating with it to receive information in a form of signs and signals of different kinds.

The contemporary popularity of magic and fortune-telling seems to be in contradiction to the thesis of some anthropologists who claim that the above-mentioned perform a psychological function because of a lack of knowledge. According to them, magic is an emotional reaction of no significance to the unknown phenomena that cannot be controlled in any other way. Still, today, no one will deny the wealth of knowledge that enables one to control the surrounding world.

But perhaps the situation is quite different. Perhaps because of the wealth of knowledge gathered in the uncontrollable amount of

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<sup>8</sup> R. Byrne, *The Secret*, Available at: <<https://pl.scribd.com/read/224407927/The-Secret>>.

<sup>9</sup> Own translation.



information we get the impression we have found ourselves in the desert of an infinite number of sand grains.

A specific effect of globalization enters the picture here—the so-called *human gap*—a growing distance between the rapidly changing and increasingly complicated world, and a human ability to adapt to it. A human is *anxious and powerless* and constantly tries to find well-known signs, regain at least a poor substitute for control over his and others' faith.

Isn't this *human gap* also visible in relation to transformations of religiousness? This is process of the privatisation of religion or new forms of religiousness, which are often therapy-oriented and focused on helping others going through a rough time, relieving stress, reducing anxiety and existential void, and giving a feeling of security and regaining the control. Oh, and it is not really important that Joseph Ratzinger warns us that the contemporary Tempter “merely suggests that we opt for the reasonable decision, that we choose to give priority to a planned and thoroughly organized world, where God may have his place as a private concern but must not interfere in our essential purposes.”<sup>10</sup>

This *new religiousness*, giving us the impression of an ability of controlling the world, reinforces the sense of authenticity of the words of the ideologist of *the Secret*, a Dr Joe Vitale: “The Universe starts adjusting to help you get what you want.”<sup>11</sup> This *new religiousness* often refers to tradition as the tempter is not so crude as to encourage us to do something wrong. He only suggests—command that these stones be made bread. Press “Enter”, put your “PIN” code, order your clone offspring, “place your order with the Universe.”

As if by magic, after saying incantations, invoking good and evil spirits. In the old times, magic and religion were so closely connected that it was impossible to separate them. At present, the magic is alien or even hostile to religion although one can find many religious references in the declarations of magic which mention Angels, Gospels or, for instance, formulate almost New Age notions of religiousness. How can we find support in religion seeing that even Son of Man did

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<sup>10</sup> Source of English translation: J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Available at: <<https://books.google.pl/books?id=hgTXwmwFKbIC&pg=PA34&lp-g=PA34&dq#v=onepage&q>>.

<sup>11</sup> Own translation.

not change the world overnight? We demand some easily noticeable sign of God's presence in the Universe but we cannot see it. "God did not leave his fingerprints in the Universe"<sup>12</sup>, claims Michał Heller—a quantum physicist.

On the one hand, in religion, a prayer, which is only a request, is a principal matter. On the other hand, there is no such thing as a request in magic—there is only a magical formula, strong demand, order. God has to be asked without any guarantee of satisfaction or a visible sign. Thanks to magic, everything becomes almost real, visible and so rational. After saying incantations, reading prophecies and performing rituals—we regain the Power. It seems that everything is under control.

According to sociologists and ethnologists, in this age of post-modernity, increasing numbers of well-educated city residents, both male and female, are visiting fortune-tellers or healers. Still, these are more willingly called mediums, therapists, or natural medicine specialists. We smile at such research results, sometimes finding justification in the history of science: after all, macrospace physics is rooted in astrology, chemistry originates from alchemy, pharmacy, including pheromones and aphrodisiacs, has its roots in herb collecting. But when we are asked about it after seeing a fortune-teller, or if we are caught reading horoscopes or burning herbs, we will put on a Gioconda's smile and answer: "I take it all with a grain of salt...".

We can only wonder why there is a little voice in our heads, coming from vapours of hot wax, saying:

Black spirits and white, red spirits and grey  
Mingle, mingle, mingle, you that mingle may.  
(Macbeth, Act IV, scene I)

With the use of economic empowerment (when you are with us—your earnings and life are better), an individual consciously escapes from freedom, falls into an addiction and, simultaneously, burns himself out by focusing on being accepted by a group which cannot be left due to serious consequences.

Among these "normal" (that is, not showing signs of pathological behaviour in their typical meaning) escapees from freedom, those

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<sup>12</sup> Own translation.



entangled in the situation, feeling alienated at work, finding themselves among the unequal in the name of equality and justice, there are members of a new psychosocial category, called the “people with blank eyes”. This term stands for a growing number of individuals who, being free and equal, living in the democratic society, communities and families, increasingly suffer from loneliness, isolation, an inability to really connect with other people. These feelings are intensified by a second meaning of the democratic, freedom catchphrases as “self” and “Do whatever it is you think is right.”

An oasis is an area of vegetation in a desert thanks to the presence of a spring water source or the one provided by artesian wells. An oasis is a place, it means coming to a standstill in a space. Our body or mind can be an oasis.

Let’s enter an oasis. First, we need to quench our thirst. Drink our fill. We are happy that we are finally safe. We are convinced that, after long search, we have finally found what is lasting and important. The oasis means peace, stabilization, reinforcement of the previously assumed values and established truths. However, the moment we stick our necks out the prevailing morals and the theories adopted by its community, we are banished. The oasis is a hotbed of dogmas. It is constantly threatened by its surroundings so it forces its community to be disciplined and subject to the established principles of thought and action, faith and authority of this place. The oasis is a bastion—it is walled-off and lives in fear of a possible enemy or saboteur. It is the cradle of different types of religious and intellectual fundamentalisms; it is a safe haven for doctrinarism. One cannot drink water only from one source.<sup>13</sup>

Our body or mind can be an oasis. Or maybe it is just a mirage? In 1850, Henryk Barth set off from Tripoli to the town of Murzuk in Fezzan, taking the route leading through the rocky desert—al-Hamada al-Hamra—the totally waterless upland. The desert, located to the south of Ghat, was untrodden by white man.

The city of Agadez, more beautiful and abundant than Timbuktu, is located in the heart of the desert. The city was established by the Berbers in 1460. The city was once walled, had towers, castella and

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<sup>13</sup> B. Skarga, “Pustynia”, *Tygodnik Powszechny. Kontrapunkt* 2001, no. 3–4 (53–54), Available at: <<http://www.tygodnik.com.pl/kontrapunkt/52-53/skarga.html#top>>. Own translation.

forts; it is the seat of different Mahometan universities and famous libraries, with a population of 50.000.

One who leads a miserable life, surrounded by the ruins, and knows that, sooner or later, he will have to set off from a mother town, which was once so beautiful, for a lonely journey, usually tries to quaff the cup of delight to the dregs. Or at least he does not care much about (or for) the rigidity of customs. Doomed to shopping malls, pubs and spa resorts. And then he can boldly set off for a desert, for other mirages or, perhaps, other oases?

The desert is like absolute time and space—ranging from minus infinity to plus infinity; according to Newton's idea of the creation in time and space. Before the creation, there was an empty space and an empty time.

And what if Leibniz, for whom time and space are only relations ordering events, was right? When there are no events—there is no time and space. The world was created together with time and space.

Isn't a desert, unlimited alluring freedom, the representation of eternity? Long live freedom... One can misunderstand the words of Boethius that the eternity is the simultaneously-whole and perfect possession of interminable life. By giving in to mirages, we perceive life as we know it, divided into years, hours and minutes. However, eternity is life, life's fullest, great activity, but not passing away, not divided into moments—it is the simultaneously-whole.

Or, perhaps, eternity is a mirage and God is an illusion? I am a human. And that means... "Know thyself" maxim inscribed in the Temple of Delphi may constitute a testimony of the highest principle of a human being; that is, the one who knows himself.

What is your name? It is unspoken. So it is Eli, Elohim, Adonai.

What is my name, a name as a testimony of who I am, what my body and my mind—the oases—are?

A human. And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul (Genesis 2:7). A name of human is Adam. What is my name? A human number.

Among wanderers, and not wayfarers anymore, nomads in the desert. Not a pilgrim, not a tourist, not a tramp<sup>14</sup>. No one, or rather,

<sup>14</sup> Z. Bokszański, *Tożsamości zbiorowe*, Warszawa 2015, p. 242, 256–257.



someone who comes from nowhere, stays nowhere and heads towards nowhere. My name is a number. A set of repeated symbols—numeric characters. My name is 560 627... it is not even a date of birth but only a symbol of it. A number is like a desert sand dune—it is here today and gone tomorrow. It even cannot be a lodestar.

I have found myself in the desert, tempted by a mirage; looking out for an oasis and cuddling up to others, I'm escaping from freedom. I am in the crowd wandering through the desert. My name is 560 627. The first man's name was Adam. Am I his heir? The heir of Adam?

If so, then, with my lips, dry and cracked from desert heat, longing for forgotten spring water, I cry anxiously and hopefully: Show me the testament of Adam.

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