

## LET'S TAKE A RISK!

Frank Furedi



FRANK FUREDI is a social scientist, publicist, and professor at the University of Kent (UK), where he deals extensively with the sociology of fear. Frank Furedi has authored a number of works, including *Therapy Culture* (2003), *The Politics of Fear. Beyond Left and Right* (2005), *Where Have all the Intellectuals Gone?* (2006), and *Wasted: Why Education Isn't Educating* (2009)

**RJ** *In your works you claim that fear has shaped the cultural imagination of the 21st century. What is the reason for this development?*

What is interesting about today is that there is no longer any one commanding interpretation of society that gives us meaning. What we have is a kind of fragmented and very arbitrary way in which we make sense of our experiences. Under these circumstances, fear has acquired a much more ominous and powerful dimension. It is not something that we can easily interpret or deal with adequately.

**RJ** *So, obsession with fear is an inevitable problem?*

Absolutely not. It seems to me that the really important process is to determine how every culture deals with uncertainty. In contemporary society, and particularly in the West, we find it very difficult to give meaning to uncertainty, and therefore we try to look for shortcuts and create artificial ways of gaining certainty. **We gain a powerful feeling of fear exactly because we begin to interpret what we don't know as dangerous**, rather than as just a set of different possibilities. One of the pathological results of this is the cessation of experiments and the minimization of our tolerance towards everything that is unknown.

**RJ** *How can we diminish this obsession with fear?*

I think the key is to actually create a more positive orientation towards risk taking, and more generally towards liberty and freedom. While they are all for it on paper, Western societies are actually quite hesitant when it comes to practicing freedom in real life. As a result, the desire to avoid all risk is now a very strong tendency in the West. But I think **risk taking is important. Almost every advance in human history has come as a result of taking some sort of risk.**

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There has never been any kind of positive development, whether socially, politically, scientifically, or technologically, without someone first saying, 'Well, let's take a chance, let's see what will happen, let's experiment. Let's try

something out that we haven't tried before.'

**RJ** *Would you agree that fear today has become one of the best commodities on the political and economic market, and that there are in fact a lot of people who sell fear?*

I think that you are right. I think that fear has become a resource, a political resource, that everybody uses from left to right. Basically, **the difference between all political parties at the moment is the type of fear they seek to mobilize.** In the West, if you are on the political right, you likely have fears about terrorism, immigrants, or crime. If you are on the left, you talk about fears relating to the environment, global warming, health, or economic insecurity.

When you actually look at it, the difference is really minimal between the two political parties. It is simply a matter of playing to different audiences and to different fears. I think that's how parties have become captives of fear. And, as you suggest, fear sells in many ways in a lot of different companies. I like to refer to what I call fear entrepreneurs, who make products because they make us feel safe or they give us the illu-

sion that we are somehow more secure. They have become very important for the promotion and advertising of this process. ■

*Frank Furedi was speaking with Dmitry Uzlaner*