


BEYOND MODERNITY: NIETZSCHE AND THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL

PARA ALÉM DA MODERNIDADE: NIETZSCHE E A ESCOLA DE FRANKFURT

MÁS ALLÁ DE LA MODERNIDAD: NIETZSCHE Y LA ESCUELA DE FRANKFURT

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RESUMO

Pretende-se desenvolver uma análise filosófica capaz de propor alternativas aos problemas sobre a modernidade, diagnosticados por Nietzsche e pelos filósofos frankfurtianos, Adorno e Benjamin. De acordo com a análise crítica do mundo moderno, feitas por tais filósofos, a vida humana segue o caminho da decadência e da pobreza. Propõe-se um desvio deste caminho, em busca de uma concepção de vida elevada, em que haja justo equilíbrio entre as condições espirituais e materiais. Este desvio deve ocorrer a partir da intensificação do estado de decadência e pobreza, proliferado em todos os componentes da cultura predominante.

Palavras-chave: Modernidade. Decadência. Pobreza. Niilismo. Ciência.

ABSTRACT

The aim is to develop a philosophical analysis capable of proposing alternatives to the problems of modernity diagnosed by Nietzsche and the Frankfurt philosophers Adorno and Benjamin. According to these philosophers' critical analysis of the modern world, human life follows a path of decadence and poverty. A deviation from this path is proposed, in search of a higher conception of life, in which there is a just balance between spiritual and material conditions. This deviation must occur through the intensification of the state of decadence and poverty, proliferated in all components of the prevailing culture.

Keywords: Modernity. Decadence. Poverty. Nihilism. Science.

RESUMEN

El objetivo es desarrollar un análisis filosófico capaz de proponer alternativas a los problemas de la modernidad diagnosticados por Nietzsche y los filósofos de Frankfurt Adorno y Benjamin. Según el análisis crítico del mundo moderno realizado por estos filósofos, la vida humana sigue un camino de decadencia y pobreza. Se propone una desviación de este camino, en busca de una concepción superior de la vida, en la que exista un equilibrio justo entre las condiciones espirituales y materiales. Esta desviación debe ocurrir mediante la intensificación del estado de decadencia y pobreza, proliferado en todos los componentes de la cultura dominante.

Palabras clave: Modernidad. Decadencia. Pobreza. Nihilismo. Ciencia.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The present study consists of the analysis of the works of Nietzsche, Adorno and Benjamin, more specifically in the reading of the works considered punctual for the development of the problem in question. Thus, the goal is to synthesize some basic concepts of these philosophers in order to then develop a philosophical understanding capable of proposing alternatives to the condition of poverty and decadence, typical of progressivist and scientific modernity, which proliferates in the dominant culture.

The Nietzschean concepts of nihilism, transvaluation of values, decadence and beyond man will be analyzed. As well as the concepts of dialectics, technique and *mimesis*, elaborated by Adorno. Next, the analysis focuses on Benjamin's concepts of destiny, civil law, and technique. And, to conclude, a synthesis of the conceptions of such philosophers will be carried out, with the aim of suggesting a conception of overcoming the poor and decadent modern condition, predominant in our culture. This postmodern proposition, which should emerge from the analysis of the diagnoses made by Nietzsche, Adorno and Benjamin, can be thought of as the intensification of the dominant values, which are manifested in democracy, civil law and science.

For Nietzsche, modern values, because they are only secular versions of Christian values, weaken and diminish human life. And, for Benjamin and Adorno, the modern, instrumental and methodical consciousness, responsible for the progress of science, increases the poverty and decadence of human beings, since it further facilitates the process of domination, disseminated by culture. In this way, from the critical deepening of this modern life, it is possible to achieve the necessary means for the cultivation of a future life, in which such conditions of decadence and poverty are overcome.

2 NIETZSCHE AND MODERN VALUES

According to Nietzsche's philosophy, Christian values have undergone, in modernity, a process of secularization. This process occurred from the intensification of the feeling of compassion and machine work, conceived by Christians as means by which it is possible to avoid suffering. Thus, with the exacerbation of aggregate work, in the modern world, religious consciousness loses space to scientific consciousness, of a positivist matrix.

For Nietzsche (1998), the man of "modern ideas", spokesman for the knowledge of his time, who calls himself independent of religious belief, is still a producer of fictions and continues to reproduce the superstitions of a certain type of religion predominant throughout

Europe, Christianity. The Europe of modernity, which exalts freedom in relation to Christian belief, is still attached to the truths of Christianity and now in an even more chronic and epidemic way, because it is circumscribed in moral values, present in philosophy, art, science and politics, that is, in all sectors of culture.

According to Nietzsche (1992), the progressivist diagnosis of Europe is proper to the erudite, the man of "modern ideas". A type of man who praises and glorifies his time, who sees the history of humanity as progress. In contrast to this optimistic conception of European culture, Nietzsche critically analyzes both the achievements of his time, as well as the institutions that represent them and the type of man responsible for carrying out such achievements. He considers that the culture of progress or civilization promotes a weakening of the European man, that is, modern Europe lives in a condition of generalized weakness.

From the critique of modernity, Nietzsche makes a reflection on the Europe of the future, united and strong, led by a new type of man, the philosopher of the future. But to do so, it is necessary to overcome the weakened and degenerated European culture, which is still predominant. In this way, the Nietzschean proposal of a new Europe presents itself as a response to the European culture of his time, which honors and reproduces weak and weakened values, which is expressed in the form of what is called by the German philosopher "modern ideas", whose most current and generalized manifestation is the democratic movement, which is already completely disseminated throughout Europe.

The critique of the modern world, present in Nietzsche's philosophy, indicates a path to overcoming, through the cultivation of new values, responsible for leading the will of the human being to assume high conditions of intensification. However, such intensification occurs from the opposite experience, the weakest state of fluidity of the will. This type of weakness is the current condition of human beings and their culture of progress, whose predominant values are those that manifest themselves as legal and scientific positivism and as capitalist democracy.

According to Nietzsche, the action of taking to the extreme all modern values, which make up culture, requires the human being to dive into the depths of his own decadence. A dive that tends towards total collapse. However, those who intensify their awareness of the condition of poverty and weakening in which they live, may reach a moment propitious to the destruction of these values. And, with that, to design the new path that will lead to the overcoming of the predominant culture.

In the opening pages of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche (1996, p. 211) states that we are "a rope over an abyss". This would be, in our view, his image of the moment capable of leading to the overcoming of modern values, a moment that is realized in the human being himself. But it needs to be cultivated, which requires a kind of understanding of this "abyss". And the key concept for such an understanding is the idea of nihilism, as a symptomatic manifestation of the decadence in which the man of modern values lives.

Nihilism is diagnosed by Nietzsche as a desire for radical rejection of value and meaning in life, arising from the suspicion that all conceptions of the world are false. This first manifestation of nihilism is characterized as pessimism in the face of life. Its first symptoms are: the tendency to compassion, resignation, stillness.

Pessimism, when intensified, leads the human being to sink even deeper into decadence, at which point he begins to aspire to nothingness. However, if even immersed in this abyss, the decadent nihilist manages to endure such torture, the greater the chances of his nihilism becoming active. It is in this condition of total disbelief and denial of the world and of life that a possibility arises, a path to its affirmation, which consists in the creation of new values.

The one who succeeds in attaining active nihilism transforms his decadence, his lack of goal and meaning, his pessimistic interpretation of the world, into a violent force of destruction, which leads the decadent to a non-definitive, momentary state, in which he frees himself from traditional values, beliefs, and faith in everything that refers to a previous stage that has already been exhausted and circumscribed.

The violent force of destruction, which manifests itself as nihilism, tends to the opposite, to the terrible and problematic side of existence, where pain is more real than pleasure. And it is from this dangerous "navigation" through the dark side of life that nihilism reaches its extreme condition. Only by radicalizing nihilism is it possible to cross the abyss. And, with this, to affirm existence, to sanction a new beginning, to reinvent the world dominated by the will to power, to create new values capable of overcoming the predominant moral duality, which is based on the conception of good and evil.

For Nietzsche, nihilism is a symptom of the collapse of meaning and degeneration of the values predominant in the European culture of his time. It is a symptom of the various manifestations of weakness and degeneration inscribed in the modern European. But, at the same time, it is also a movement, a march in which the instinct of destruction is intensified,

to the point of achieving the unconditional affirmation of the world and the creation of new values capable of surpassing those then in force.

The overcoming of the predominant values, which weaken and degenerate the modern human being, occurs, according to Nietzsche, from the cultivation of a new type of human life. A life capable of supporting modern consciousness and surpassing it, promoting the transvaluation of values. For those who can endure suffering without succumbing, their pessimism intensifies and reaches nihilism, which manifests itself as a condition of passage. Only through extreme nihilism is it possible to arrive at the supreme affirmation of the world and of life. In this extreme condition, the human being can rise and reach the condition of experienter.

3 ADORNO AND THE DIALECTIC OF THE SELF

Like Nietzsche, Adorno carries out a critical reading of the modern world, which borders on nihilism. But the solution pointed out by this philosopher is different from the Nietzschean proposal. For Adorno, human life that values, voluntarily or involuntarily, modern scientific progressivism and historicism, is moving towards a new type of barbarism. Thus, Adorno states (1985, p. 11): "What we set out to do was, in fact, nothing less than to discover why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism."

The modern world is, according to Adorno, a tenebrous abyss that, by absorbing our existence, promotes a mismatch between experience and the models of representation of objects, between thought and being, between the subject that conceptualizes and the object to be conceptualized, between form and content, between concept and intuition. We can affirm, then, that such a mismatch consists of the imbalance between the material and spiritual condition of human life.

Scientific progress, or the progress of thought, as Adorno conceives it, has made possible the emergence of a type of enlightenment whose objective is to free men from fear and attribute to them the position of masters. However, this conception, which has Bacon as its main representative, attributes to Cartesian instrumental reason the *status* of protagonist of history. The story of the victor, according to which the understanding that overcomes superstition must prevail over disenchanted nature. Such an understanding has, for Adorno (1985, p. 17 and 18), technique as its essence, since "it does not aim at concepts and images, nor at the pleasure of discernment, but at the method, the use of the work of others, capital".

The proposal presented by Adorno to this condition of barbarism in the modern world consists of a dialectical overcoming of the dichotomies originated from the mismatch between the material and spiritual conditions of human life. Such overcoming consists in experiencing all the dangerous seductions that deviate the Self from the trajectory of its logic, as Ulysses did in Homer's *Odyssey*, that is, boldly exposing oneself to the threats of death in order to become hard and strong for life.

Adorno intensifies instrumental reason when he proposes dialectics as a type of method capable of leading the human being to overcome modern dichotomies. Only in this way is it possible to make thought deviate the Self from the trajectory of its logic. This deviation is close to Nietzsche's nihilism, insofar as it consists of a kind of annihilation and destruction of the relationship of the Self with the world.

The future life would be, according to the Adornian dialectic, one in which all existing conciliations, both those that are sustained by absolute idealism, as well as logic, history and politics, are refuted and pressed by the irreconcilable, in order to open the way to another type of reconciliation, thought of as continuous processuality. This mediation, Adorno will call *mimesis*, a kind of assimilation of itself by the object, that is, the *mimesis* it is a regime of mediation through the extremes and in the extremes themselves.

Mimetic thought is, according to Adorno, understood as the transitive capacity to place oneself in an other and as an other. *Mimesis*, as the identification of the self with what seems to me to be the opposite, would be a way of overcoming the dichotomy between self and the other. And this production of *mimes* as mediation occurs through art. The most advanced sectors of artistic production can lead us to think about a new order for the world. In art we can find manifestations that, when unfolding, reach the sphere of social life, putting the self back on the natural path, from which it has deviated.

4 BENJAMIN AND THE REVOLUTIONARY EXPERIENCE

Modernity, for Benjamin, presents itself as a permanent state of exception, characterized by wars and catastrophes and by the objectification of humanity, in which the philosophical and existential role of culture has failed and has been replaced by a technical and scientific world with its logic of total domination of nature. The idea of humanity has been lost. Modern capitalism desecrates this idea and establishes a cult of the commodity. Benjamin (1994. p. 115) diagnoses the modern world as: "A new form of misery emerged with this monstrous development of technique, superimposing itself on man". This misery, which

is much more notorious from the material point of view, as a scarcity of the means necessary for the development of human life, is also from the spiritual point of view, a misery of experience.

The problem of experience is a fundamental theme in Benjamin's philosophy and is more linked to the sphere of corporeality than to that of rationality. Rationalism, like historicism, is directly linked to the philosophy of progress and its model of production typical of modernity, capitalism, in which everything seems to be transformed into a society of mass, consumption, technique and objectification. These are, for Benjamin (1994, p. 115), responsible for the end of the experiment: "A new form of misery arose with this monstrous development of technique, superimposing itself on man".

The end of the experience is a silent symptom of those who have seen the world become, under the impact of technology, with the two world wars, a great battlefield and in trenches. This symptom is manifested by a silent state of mind in which time is spatialized, homogeneous, empty and without quality, and also by the lack of a moral model and the desire for self-knowledge and self-improvement. For Benjamin, the ideal of culture [*Zuchtung*] has failed and has been replaced by an anti-genealogical, scientific, and technical world.

The consumer society and also the technological society is, according to Benjamin's philosophy, incapable of using technology for humanitarian purposes. It identifies the progress of science and technology with the progress of humanity, thus concealing its regressions. However, from this state of decadence it is possible to transform perception and consciousness into images capable of providing the revolutionary experience, which would be a preparatory stage for revolution.

Benjamin (1994, p. 25) refers to the revolutionary experience when quoting an important work of surrealism: "Not to mention Aragon's *Passage de l'opéra*, the couple Breton and Nadja managed to convert, if not into action, at least into revolutionary experience, everything we felt in sad train journeys". According to this statement, the revolutionary experience, for the philosopher, does not arise randomly, it must be worked on. It is possible to turn an everyday and habitual train journey into a revolutionary experience. And yet, according to the quote, we can infer that such an experience would be an inferior and preparatory stage for revolutionary action.

The revolutionary man is the one who has a certain experience of his own in this scientific and technical world of modernity, dominated by late capitalism which, by transforming the world into things, through the advance of technology and the overvaluation

of consumerism, reduces the possibility of politicization of man and, with that, also reduces the possibility of revolutionary experience. since this occurs in the field of politics. In this way, it is possible to affirm that the revolutionary experience has a temporality. It manifests itself at the moment of shock, from a certain accumulation of energy of the individual in a state of intoxication. The revolutionary man has the role of directing, of converting these energies of drunkenness into a revolutionary experience, just as the surrealists do, says Benjamin (1994, p.32): "In all his books and initiatives, the surrealist proposal tends to the same end: to mobilize the energies of drunkenness for the revolution. We can say that this is his most authentic task."

The revolutionary experience, according to Benjamin's reflection, has the capacity to elevate the human condition, through the extinction of evil. But such elevation requires us to think about the world from another perspective, starting with the idea of time. We must conceive a new form of temporality, another way of access to this human world, capable of counteracting the time of myth, dominant in modern historicism. The time of myth links the domain of destiny to the religious, from which it generates another relationship, of destiny and guilt, which is manifested, according to Benjamin, in the modern conception of law. It is through this that the conceptions of guilt and unhappiness arise. Modern human beings confuse law with justice, which inserts the idea of destiny in the domain of the religious. Benjamin recognizes in modern political jurisdiction secularized theological concepts. This brings him closer to the Nietzschean interpretation that modern values are secularized Christian values.

The elevated human being, capable of overcoming the modern condition, must, according to Benjamin, conceive temporality in a dialectical way, in the double register, epistemological and autobiographical, as a monad, in the Leibnizian sense, which allows us to apprehend the richness of the world and of becoming in an individualized structure, because each one of us is a universal history. This lofty man is, for Benjamin, the revolutionary, the prophet of pre- and post-history. And it is at the moment when these times are confined, in the small immovable instant, that we have the transitory moment, the messianic moment, an event on the threshold of time. However, this moment is so difficult that the average human cannot reach it, so it is necessary, says the thinker from Frankfurt, that the Messiah arrives.

5 THE SYNTHESIS OF MODERNITY

From a synthesis of the critique of modernity made by Nietzsche and also by Adorno and Benjamin, we can affirm that the decadence and poverty of the current world manifests itself in our culture as values of modernity. And such modern values, despite being praised by the scholars of our time as achievements that represent the progress of humanity, are nothing more than secular interpretations of Christian-capitalist domination, justified by positivist science. In this way, these constitutive elements of culture continue the process of decadence and impoverishment of human life.

The construction of the philosophical conception of another, higher life must arise from the extreme intensification, as a critical deepening, of the conception of democracy, civil law and science. From the highest degree of intensification of these conceptions, we can reach the elevated condition, a transitory state, a new path, capable of diverting the destiny of humanity. And the purpose of this deviation is to lead the human being to the correct adequacy between the spiritual and material conditions. This new path, however, goes against the progressivist and historicist conception of humanity. It is conceived from interpretations opposite to those dominant in our culture.

6 CONCLUSION

Therefore, from the Nietzschean critique of the predominant values in European culture and also from the critique of the Frankfurt philosophers about the loss of humanity of modern man and the failure of culture, which succumbed to the dictates of instrumental reason, responsible for the junction between science and technology, it was sought, in the light of the concepts of these philosophers, to propose a path for the future of human life in which the problem of material scarcity, of human decay and degeneration, be solved. This conception of future life is the one that arises from the overcoming of the current condition, a prisoner of the dominant modern values in every sphere of culture. Overcoming is what occurs through extremes. Which are achieved when modern values are intensified. These manifest themselves in our current culture as capitalist democracy, civil law, and modern science. It is necessary to take modern values to their extreme.

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