

RATIONALITY IN THE TECHNOLOGICAL EDEN

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Abstract: In the postmodern world, the transition from the unconditional trust in human reason and power to the hope in moral responsibility is justified by the criteria that have been more and more insistently formulated over the past two decades. Rationality, underlying the understanding of the phenomenological world, can be seen as an expression of the will of power, with an emphasis on its instrumental and technical side. According to this approach, reason is a threat to mankind, its aggressive function being felt not only by the instruments of technique, by machines, but by the fact that technique separates the being from its essence. Algorithmic rationality is radicalized in a powerful irrational sense, being represented as the most stubborn opponent of thought. Reasoning, like science, is based on concepts.

Keywords: rationality, technique, approach, knowledge, essence

1. Introduction

Analyzed in light of the principles that govern reasoning, Popper's theoryⁱ that rational choice stems from an irrational decision, considered ultimately as an act of faith, seems to be a contradiction, because a rational choice cannot be irrational at the same time. If we consider that the neuro-cerebral activity is the common source of both the rational-empirical thinking (that is the basis of logic, science and technology) and of the irrational or mythical-symbolic thinking - the autonomous and irreducible expression of beliefs and affectivity, we cannot deny that the rational and the irrational co-exist. The latter, defined by Rudolf Otto as an obscure depth accessible only to the sentiment, cannot be transgressed, so we cannot take it out of the calculation. It expresses, in fact, the duality of human knowledge.

2. The Categorical Imperative

It is true that the affectivity and the pulses that the knowledge always mobilizes can detach it from the objective, critical examination of the phenomena. The irrational can impose unmanageable rational deviations, but also less serious deviations, which can even be made aware after they have been committed. Who did not feel, for example, an acute spiritual discomfort or even remorse when that person made a choice against his or her will? Free will evaporates when we turn away from the way of reason. For today's man, deviance means letting a person be manipulated in various ways, conquered by ridiculous myths, or become an unconditional partisan of untrue ideologies.

The moral norm is an impulse that drives a tense jump from the exemplary form of behavior to the monumental, in which the moral obligation acquires an absolute character. The process of moving from the constraining existential state, subjected to all sorts of conditioning, to what the human being feels should be, that is, to the

monumental state of human behavior, is not exclusively psychological, but relates to the ontology of the human being. Within this process, will becomes an unconditional command only when acting in complete freedom, according to the moral law, which requires not to consider others as tools. Kant concentrated this desirable state in this categorical imperative, which is to behave so that your conduct can be established as a universal normⁱⁱ. The categorical imperative concerns the moral conscience which, in the anxiety of today's world, is seen by philosophers as *the ultimate stimulus of the moral and the root of moral responsibility*ⁱⁱⁱ. Baumann's definition is not a set of common places. Instead, it is based on an argument in which the refinement of intellectual distinctions is obvious. In his opinion, rationality and morality do not converge. Reason cannot help the moral self without depriving the self of what makes it moral: the unwarranted, irrational, indisputable, impartial and incalculable impulse to move towards others, to comfort. Reason deals with making the right decisions, whereas moral responsibility precedes any reflection on decisions, because it does not take and cannot consider any logic that would allow the approval of a right action.

3. Criteria for transition to progressive thinking

Paul Cornea proposes a solution of *the moral commitment* to discard the current neuroses, even if the voice of the interior whispers that *the alliance of reason in good faith is not at all safe, and finding a way to reconcile rationality with values sounds utopic*^{iv}. The conclusion of Paul Cornea's book is a consoling update of a definite concept: *In order to save our dignity as free individuals, there is no exchange solution, the bet on the moral responsibility does not have an alternative, it is the only way possible*^v.

In the postmodern world, the transition from the unconditional trust in human reason and power to the hope in moral responsibility is justified by the criteria that have been more and more insistently formulated over the past two decades for the insufficiencies of reason, the dangers of idolatry and triumphalism. It is memorable, therefore, the harsh indictment of an almost nihilist vehemence, which reminds of Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morality*, in which Horkheimer and Adorno present an apocalyptic vision of reason in the broad sense of the progressive thinking:

Myth becomes Reason and pure nature objectivity. People pay for their own power, becoming estranged from the objects they are exercising their power upon. Reason acts like a dictator in relationship with things; it knows them to the extent that it can manipulate them. Anything that does not conform to the calculation and utility criteria becomes suspicious. When development is not deprived of any external constraint, it becomes totalitarian^{vi}.

The analysis performed by the two above-mentioned authors draws attention to the various forms of instrumentalisation of reason:

What is not said is that the field on which technique acquires its power over society is the power of those who dominate it economically. Nowadays, technical rationality is the very rationality of domination. It forms the coercive character of the alienated society; automobiles, bombs and films provide the cohesion of the system, so that their leveling function is reflected in the unfairness itself that favored it^{vii}.

Another pervasive critical approach to this phenomenon is encountered in Davis Ehrenfeld's book, *The Arrogance of Humanism*, in which Humanism is depicted as the dominant religion of our times, a religion without God, involving ideas such as that humanity must seek its own goals, that man has the absolute ability to control his destiny and that technology becomes the means by which man rules over nature: *We have to worship our car if we want to keep the fiction that the control myth is true. Technology is our primary religious achievement, our spring of miracles*^{viii}.

According to the author's perspective, the claim of science of cloning, in the approaching technological Eden, a better species than homo sapiens lacks objectivity, because the limits of human knowledge and power are attested by man's inability to discern the future in the long run, by directing modern civilization to increasingly violent societies, increasingly destructive weapons, and techniques for human suppression, by using control technologies: *As our computers and means of communication are improving more and more, the less responsible, decent and even coherent the institutions that use them become*^{ix}.

Even though the author suggests that the vulnerability of Humanism is represented by the fear of emotion and irrational worship of reason, the solution he sees remains, however, the rational way of thinking, the practice of reasoning to put the useful emotions in order. The ordering of these emotions is all the more necessary as the availability of irrational structures prevails in the contemporary society. It is a desirable, yet difficult task. Those who manage to dominate their inclinations and appeal to reason are fewer and more hesitant than those who act with sympathy and resentment, taking into account their pride and frustration.

We believe, however, that the rational ordering of useful emotions is desirable, provided that the utility meets a criterion of morality, namely, to integrate utility into the paradigm of moral responsibility. When utility takes the form of absurd totalitarianism, then one cannot discuss the criterion of morality: no one can guarantee that a top-ranked technology-addicted chief of state might not find it useful, at some point, to launch a nuclear missile.

4. Overlapped boundaries as consequences of technology

The effects of the rational ordering of emotions are now visible, at the present time, when the consequences of technology are present in everyday life, when humanity progresses, propelled by spectacular technological innovations and digital worlds. Machine reconfiguration has transformed many aspects of our daily life, starting from the way we think, read, write, transfer knowledge to other people, or understand the surrounding world. As we advance in this highly technologized era, characterized by unceasing automation at the expense of mechanization, the boundaries between natural and artificial, organic and mechanical, spiritual and material, conceptual and real, traditional and postmodern become more and more overlapped.

Man has relationships with himself and with the environment. He reacts spontaneously or consciously, which, in fact, is a conditional reflex. The conditional reflex is the one in which an excitant of the normal non-cessation has been experimentally substituted. Reflexology was defined by Vladimir Mikhailovich Bechterew as the science of objective biosociological research of the human personality in its relations with the cosmic and social environment.

5. Man as a rational being in the technologized era

Starting from the hypothesis that man is endowed with reason, the following question naturally arises: *What is reason?* One answer might be: the sphere of great principles, in Kantian language. Outside of experience, pure ideas and heuristic fiction can be produced. The use of non-thinking concepts is transcendent. This form of expression occurs when thinking is not real, of superior materiality. Man sees himself forced to investigate the processes of thought and to establish constant regularities and irregularities. Only when we design the psycho-physio-logico-somatic Man, this unit becomes a field of research that can be thought of as a vast reflexology system. Then the processes of thought and the affective ones appear as necessary forms within a system. However, in this reflexological vision, there are great difficulties: spiritual processes that are beyond reflexes and even preservation of the species: chastity, asceticism, heroism, holiness, the appearance of nuances and the idea of unity involved in concepts, in these abstract units of knowledge, which are attributed to a metaphysical character. Any notion is an abstract unity of knowledge, which helps us approximate the concrete area determined by it. Without the idea of unity, things appear mixed or juxtaposed. Psycho-physiology must determine the material layer of this unit. Philosophical systems are conveniently built in the hypothesis area, where illusory certainty can dominate. When science advances in this area, uncertainty arises. Science and philosophy are threatened by caducity in their constructions of instincts, feelings, passions, intellect and reason. A certain inertia keeps words that do not cover reality. The compelling force of facts leads them to the field of application and meanings.

Unexpected associations and dissociations, in an extremely varied combination game, enrich the psychology and philosophy of nuances and increase the anxiety reflected in the theoretical consciousness, the forms of uncertainty. This aporetic vision, or, metaphorically speaking, this *sisifism* shows us the painful and seemingly glorious march of man in time and space, in his attempt to escape from captivity. Man has always had to associate and break down phenomena, thought processes and concepts. Here we see the contribution of rationality, which uses the epistemological attribute of language. The logical multiplicity of words has the advantage of reducing the number of signs, but also of creating semantic ambiguities. They are filled with empirical impurities, and in order to regain their nocturnal precision and purity, they need these additions. Man's need to explain and clarify everything and to understand the phenomena of the real world has forced us to conceptualize, to create new notions. Science is based on concepts and hypotheses. When the assumptions are confirmed, it is a success for humanity.

Rationality, underlying the understanding of the phenomenological world, can be seen as an expression of the will of power, with an emphasis on its instrumental and technical side. According to this approach, reason is a threat to mankind, its aggressive function being felt not only by the instruments of technique, by robots and machines, but by the fact that technique separates the being from its essence. Algorithmic rationality is radicalized in a powerful irrational sense, being represented as the most stubborn opponent of thought. Reasoning, like science, is based on concepts. The concept is defined by uncertainty, precision, approximation and logical discursivity. By this discursivity, the logical concept of absolute idea is subordinated to certainty.

The notions which reason works with either make us the possessors of the nature of things or they are simple abstract units of knowledge by which we approximate reality, having a limited area of application. Unfortunately, the universe can not be enclosed in a single notion. Rationality, applied even in the field of technique, works on the basis of subliminal cognitive processes of perception. The interaction between superior mental activities and the affective system has not been fully understood so far. And yet, this interaction is felt by every individual.

Man's ability to understand phenomena is a complex psychic fact, a central function of intelligence, consisting in sensing the notional content of a situation, a state of things that necessarily implies a cognitive effort. It mobilizes levels of superior activities of the intellect (pure thinking) and inferior levels that lead to the comprehension linked to the cognitive processes. From this perspective of the structure of rationality, the concept of reason can be equated with the reflexive subject.

The cult for the objective demystification of our rationalist civilization is in a deadlock, as Gilbert Durand claims in *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*^x, under the assault of vexed subjectivity and irrationality. From this perspective, we can deduce that the diversity of opinions is necessary for objective knowledge, showing an increasing interest in the irrational aspects of the human soul.

In this technological era, scientists tackle concepts that are too difficult to be verbally transmitted and build visual models of mathematical and chemical formulas. Albert Einstein, trying to explain his more difficult concepts of modern science, used to call on familiar images such as trains or lifts. Therefore, comprehension is accomplished by trying to bring concepts to an intuitive level, to represent the real-world images. Man expresses himself through representations that have sources in the objects of the sensitive world. This process keeps the modern man in the limits of experience, as the phenomena are interdependent and having some similarities that allow generalizing conclusions.

Particular attention should be paid to the power of intuition and arbitrary game of hypotheses, to the formation of concepts and systems built with them, thus only avoiding the errors of intuition and reason. The symbolism of modern thinking is dominated by two opposite tendencies: simplification and nuance. Also, within the symbolism of modern thinking, we meet the theory of comprehension in Gadamer's assertions of prejudice. These appraisals are remarkable breakthroughs of the analytic philosophy of language that bring convincing arguments that any kind of knowledge is rooted in a historical context and depends on forward-looking structures. The illusions of positivism are that objectivity is a tangible target, or that there is a neutral, impartial language of observation. Today, largely because of researchers such as Popper, Wittgenstein, Kuhn or Rorty, we know that man is subjective by excellence and objectivity must be questioned, as any evidence, because access to things is not possible, but mediated by concepts, patterns and schemes, which are common tools at our convenience.

6. Models and dimension of scientific imagination

The actual epistemological dimension of scientific imagination does not arise unless we first distinguish the models according to their constitution and the function they perform. Max Black distributes the three-tier models hierarchy: scale models, analogue models and theoretical models. These three types of models, along with the logical

processes and logical reasoning in the sphere of mental constructs that the denomination implies, require a research effort. Any kind of analogy calls for additional efforts of comparative-conceptual analysis. In the technological, medical, mathematical and physical sciences, conceptualization by analogy has become a universal phenomenon. An important source of conceptualization is represented by principles, for example the function that the object belonging to the source domain fulfills. The analogy between the entity in the source domain and the notion claimed by the target domain is also based on the principle of functionality.

The primary perception associated with imagination runs on the basis of similarity, contiguity in time and space and causality produced by the habit of associating repeatedly with the cause effect. So, in the end, all experience, through constancy and consistency of perceptions, activates the imagination, which induces our irresistible faith into the unity and persistence of our self-consciousness in the reality of the world we are confronted with.

The circumstances of this technological world compel us to look for coherence in the rational symbolism of the objects under investigation. This is the method that deduces the realities and objective existence of the concepts. The platonic ontology does not provide any kind of objective knowledge: this method is countered by nominalism. But there are a number of thinkers, including Locke, Hume and Kant, who believe in the gnoseological functions of the senses. The man endowed with the power of thought and will, which allows him to have a rational knowledge of the world, turns the laws of nature into norms of his will.

The Kantian thesis, in particular, according to which reason only sees in nature what it produces according to its own project, continues to trouble even today. The subject is the one which establishes the laws of knowledge: it is not oriented by the phenomenal realities, so it is not an expression of them, but it forces the phenomenal world to take the form that is convenient to our spirit: *The phenomena are representations that produce in us things because they wake up our senses. But what things can be in themselves I do not know and I do not need to know, because they can never appear to me any other thing than a phenomenon*^{xi}.

7. Conclusion

The critical examination of the conditions of the possibility of pure reason leads Kant to the ontology of liberty. Unlike causality, which functions in the real world, liberty is the basis of a surreal, a supersensible and moral world, asserting itself autonomously and spontaneously, self-determined by the law it gives itself, with the exclusion of all what is empirical in nature. Positivism, by contrast, in the broad sense of the word, is defined as the philosophy of legitimizing scientific activity and of man's will to decide his fate. The implicit eudemonism of this philosophy, in the version of its founder, Auguste Comte, has generated an unprecedented optimism ever before. The belief that science provides the guarantee of generalized progress and that reason will organize mankind and bring happiness seemed to be unbearable. Postmodern criticism of rationality shows how inconsistent these aspirations were. Although it seems paradoxical, the attraction posed by the positivist conception can be explained by a certain availability of man through that attitude called *cognitive polyphase*. This phrase defines the ability to use different types of thinking and representation, depending on the group of belonging or the context in which they are located. It is hard to believe that the

technological imperative could replace the categorical imperative. It is difficult to imagine that this new myth of sufficient computer reasoning is the one that can ensure the triumph of rationality in the on-coming technological Eden, as our rationalist civilization and its cult for the objective demystification is overwhelmed by the assault on subjectivity and irrationality.

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ⁱⁱⁱ Baumann, Zygmunt, *Etica postmodernă*, traducere în limba română de Doina Lică, Amarcord, Timișoara, 2000, p. 269

^{iv} Cornea, Paul, *Raționalitate și interpretare*, Polirom, 2006, p. 567

^v Idem, p. 581

^{vi} Horkheimer, Max; Adorno, Theodor, W., *Dialectik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*, S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt, 1947, p. 24

^{vii} Idem, p. 130

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^{ix} Idem, p. 237

^x Durand, Gilbert, *Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*, Boombana Publications, Brisbane, 1969, p. 529

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