

Against Univocity: Widening horizons through Nihilism

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The article shows a reflection about the ways in which the frames of thought which follow a defined order – and which are believed to be unmovable– affect the individual in his search of an authentic personal development based on Nothingness. It commences with an analysis about the liberation from the divine constructed on the Being, univocal morality, and valuations. It continues with an approach on education as a system of propitiating univocisms and the need to understand educational institutions from a more critical, flexible, and enabling optic. After this, I will undergo a revision of the influence that the family system has on the individual, and the dangers that this implies for him when univocal and absolutist structures are rooted in that system.

Key words: Nothingness, Univocity, Liberation, Absolutism, Morality.

Introduction

By univocity we understand the human supposition of the existence of a single answer for life's issues or one correct manner of solving something specific. The pretension of univocity is very common on many levels of the ordinary in our life.

For example, if we analyze what happens in a psychological consultation, the most common thing we are to expect in a patient is that he asks about whether what he is doing in his life is the right thing. Here, the supposition is that there is only one correct manner of doing things and that if that specific manner isn't utilized, then one is acting mistakenly. In the same manner, there are supposed to be univocal answers when we affirm that the militants of a specific religion are mistaken in their beliefs, probably without realizing that all religions are mistaken, at least in a way. Univocity is to cling to the fact that there is, truly, one only voice, one only way, or an exclusive manner of understanding things. It is true that univocity opens the route towards Manichaeism. In other words, the attitude of understanding things, the world, events, and people from a dichotomic parameter in which one is on one side or the

other; and in which, furthermore, one of those sides is the correct one.

Nothingness and liberation from the divine constructed in the Being

Probably one of the most damaging ideas in the history of humanity is the idea of God. It is due to this concept that, as a human race, we have annihilated in its name, we have destroyed the goods of others, we have conquered and destroyed families; wars, crusades, inquisitions, and many more issues have been developed. Entire families have also been moralized. Guilt and authoritarianism have been generated; dogmas and manipulating proselytisms have been edified; riches and justifications of poverty have been developed; what has been done is - at most - a series of occurrences impossible to not see, unless one wants to keep on being blind. Religion can poison it all for it implies a univocal idea by excellence: that of the Absolute Being. We are not to directly confront that idea here, since it would imply a specific piece of work – which I will develop further along at another opportunity. But suffice to say some specific things against this univocal idea.

The idea of God is always an idea forged by man; and it is due to it that he has man's attributes. At least that occurs in the divine conceptions that are configured from the Being in the West; concretely, Christianity. The aforesaid supposes that this God of anthropological implication also has anthropological behaviours, which is unsustainable in itself. The intervention of said God in human life is actually hardly desirable, for it would suppose in itself not only the loss of liberty but also slavery. Now, the only manner of losing liberty – without becoming a slave by it – is to think about Nothingness more than about God. For, at least, Nothingness is not a creator and, therefore, does not suppose a forceful line to follow; additionally, due to its characteristic of Nothingness, it has no will over man. In any event, we are not free by the denial of God, but at least we are not enslaved to such ideas.

God cannot be intellectualized, cannot be known; if he were so, man would have control over him. Faith is not such if it is sustained on superfluous rationalizations that indicate what God is or, even less, who he is. The faith I can value, in any case, is that which supposes assuming oneself without God, without the possibility of naming him, without the possibility of knowing him, without the possibility of loving him, nor feeling him, or touching him, nor seeing him, or following him. Faith implies that one can only assume that there is Something that is, but that it is not yet for us. Faith, in reality, implies – then – the assertion of Nothingness in our lives; the un-possession of every concept and subjective explanation in order to give way to the simple contemplation of that which is unable to be contemplated.

One cannot make of the Deity a figure that is attentive to our petitions, our needs and precariousness. An axiological God full of justice cannot be assumed when there is precariousness in the world and diversity with opportunities wrongly distributed. A God with will in such categories cannot be assumed for that in itself is an offense to divinity. The only thing which can be said about God is silence; and in silence is where we assume the God's Nothingness, Absolute Nothingness;

Nothingness that redeems upon not explaining or upon being understood; a Nothingness that doesn't beg for repentance. A Nothingness that is and that lets man be in it. A Nothingness that implies the loss of liberty by liberation, the loss of reason by the non-reason, the loss of sense by the no-sense, and in it the lost sense. A Nothingness that is not something relative to divinity, for divinity is only a human explanation to decipher Nothingness.

In the end, all religions are only vain efforts to control the uncontrollable, to respond to the questions that only they make themselves and which, however, must not be responded; at least not univocally. We have failed in attempting to know the Absolute from within our misery for there are no words that may testify to the greatness of that which escapes us. So blind are we that we attempt to possess the Absolute and we call it God; when in reality, this concept of God is not God since, if it were so, it could not be named. In such a manner, the term God is the stage name we have given to Nothingness in our theatre of existence. But such a God cannot be limited by a part with a fictitious, and contradictory in itself, role. God is the main hindrance to understanding it; God is only the human stain, vainly prostrated on the Absolute's perimeter. If only there did exist such a God so that he could liberate us from it.

Not understanding God is the first step towards understanding him. There is no need for interpreters or good wills to take – to the far away and recondite missionary sites or to the busiest pulpits – the explanation of what God must be. Nobody has the right to explain God, or to speak of Him or It. Nobody is called. There are no vocations but, rather, only a barbaric egoism, implicit haughtiness, and an eagerness of possessing what others don't have; an ineffable desire to distinguish oneself, to idolize oneself, to find oneself as nothing less than chosen, when all of this is only vainglory and disdain. In the end, the univocal religion has also been a form of elitism. It has separated the world into good people and sinners, into the chosen and the lost, into dirty dregs and degrading hierarchies, into God and the Anti-God. Likewise, that which is

univocal leads us to concede, in our minds, the idea of contrary people.

Obviously many people will not agree with these affirmations for, in fact, they have constructed sustainment for their own life in them. The human being makes use of fictions in order to be able to find answers. It had better be recognized that the answers are only human fiction. God is the human response to the affliction of a world we understand as chaotic and without sense, which is unpleasant to our yearnings for harmony. If harmony is not found on the earth, it is natural to attempt to find it in another dimension; to create a heaven for us that, very much in the style of Platonic ideas, is exempt from our bodily dirtiness. It is time now to awaken. It is better to dream a little than to spend a whole life dreaming. Certainly it is better to dream than not to, but – I reiterate – dream a little. Life cannot be spent asleep. Everyone's moment of our own Nothingness is to come and maybe we will begin to awaken. Or, it could be that we may lose the opportunity to open our eyes and then we will never have realized it.

It could be argued, with unnecessary eagerness, that since I am confronting absolutist univocisms, then I should begin by confronting the univocism supposed by the Nothingness I propose. Before such an issue I would have to say that to suppose it so is to wrongly suppose it. Nothingness is not a univocal principle; on the contrary, it allows the difference of each being, of everything that is. And, in fact, Nothingness is *something* different than the Being, which allows every being *to be*, and furthermore, *to be as it is*. Nothingness is not obstructive; rather, it allows and facilitates *fructification*. Nothingness is the beginning of the realization of everything that is. It is the silence that takes the sound, the emptiness that is filled, the zero that is begun to be filled with units; Nothingness that contains the Being. There is no possible univocism from this perspective. Even God itself, whichever thing it may be, would be posterior to Nothingness itself or actually be Nothingness; but – in the case of being so – we should call it Nothingness and avoid its suppositions and deformations. Certainly I do not possess more than Nothingness and in it, I have Everything.

I have not confronted nor contradicted, in these lines, the real human possibility of a spiritual life or of cementing a faith in the unmentionable. On the contrary, what I have said is that what mostly hinders in order to be a person who deeply lives out his human being, are the images and representations along with univocal fanaticisms, dogmatisms, and authoritarianisms which are consequently forged.

Neither is this a new or ancient model of atheism. To be atheist supposes to center everything on the denial of God but that is not what I am doing here. Instead, more than a denial of God, what I primarily do is affirm Nothingness. Neither is it an *atheology*.¹ What is proposed here is not a counterpart to theism or Nihilism; instead it is the open, opportune, human, and vivifying valuing of Nothingness. It is true that I have alluded to the illusion that is had of God, but this is not with the intentions of securing science as Richard Dawkins does,² for that itself is another form of univocism – rationalist in this case – which I will refer to further along. Neither is an intermediate position implied, such as atheism with soul,³ for – though I share some of Comte-Sponville's ideas – in reality, the belief in Nothingness is not a way to reaffirm the soul; which, I assume, is not possible. I am more tied to Panikkar's religious atheism,⁴ as long as we accept that the affirmation of Nothingness *is* a relationship with it (or the recognition of that undeniable relationship); and, in that sense, it is re-linking of man with Nothingness and not with the idea of God.

What I propose here can, in effect, be a form of Nihilism with spiritual implications, but not strictly religious ones in the institutional sense. Finally, it is not about saying that "God is not good"⁵ but, rather, that he simply is not; and since he is not, he *is* Nothingness. And if God is Nothingness, then we would have to listen to the

¹ Vid. Onfray, *Tratado de ateología*, 2006.

² Vid. Dawkins, *Destejiendo el arco iris: ciencia, ilusión, y el deseo de asombro*, 2000.

³ Cfr. Comte-Sponville, *El alma del ateísmo*, 2006.

⁴ Cfr. Panikkar, *El Silencio del Buddha: una introducción al ateísmo religioso*, 1997.

⁵ Vid. Hitchens, *Dios no es bueno*, 2008.

Silence of God, perceive his absence, dazzle ourselves with its darkness, fill ourselves with its emptiness. God, as Nothingness, is so close that it feels distant, so distant that it is assumed one's own. The understanding of values as absolute and universal issues are one more hindrance, such as will now be demonstrated.

Nothingness and liberation from univocal morality

Living with Ethics does not imply the blind acceptance of moral rules, forged in the valid norms of the context and with specifically collective characteristics. Ethics, not as a noun but as an exercise, the personal ethical exercise, is presented as a propitious alternative after the recognition of Nothingness. It is because moral values understood in their context of becoming universal, are nothing more than new representations which do not necessarily keep, in their due way, the requirement of relationality that all rules are supposed to have; for oneself, at least.

In order to delve into this problem, we are to refer to the philosopher from Stagira, Aristotle, who clearly defines the impossibility of a Universal Good or of decontextualized moral patterns. That, the context, is a basic element to argue in favour of relational or contextualized ethics, due to Nothingness enabling changes and creating a different structure out of each context from which acts are evaluated.

Since, furthermore, the only timely thing is Nothingness, moral ideas also have their territory of application and specific expiration. Nothingness and change also imply change in he who evaluates moral rules, in the moralizer; which is why such moral rules are not timely and less univocal.

Speaking of Aristotle, though the influences of Socratic-Platonic ideas in his Ethics are clear, he doesn't coincide with Socrates in the idea that virtue is knowledge, nor with Plato in the idea that Good is something which precedes the individual.

Since the first books from his youth, Aristotle mentions that "the happiness of life is more dignified than specific virtues for the

objective is a good and noble life".⁶ It was clear to him that, though one searches for goodness, the valuing of such goodness is not the same in every moment and circumstance for "the value of virtues depends on external circumstances".⁷ Additionally, the Stagirite emphasizes, as a fundamental issue, that the significance of the elective situation, voluntary decision, and correct judgment, be considered.⁸

In *Retórica* [Rhetoric], Aristotle also alludes to Ethics. He mentions that goodness has to generate a particular pleasure in some way, which is why doing good would suppose a relief. Hence, "goodness is what deserves to be chosen by reason of itself, or is what, by being good, provides pleasure because it is good".⁹ That clearly demonstrates his intention that Ethics must be lived out in what is real, in daily occurrences, for goodness must be transformed into acts, under the risk of being diminished to a speech.¹⁰ Therefore, the goal of all men is wellbeing and life happiness. This goodness has to be "a goodness of nature".¹¹

Different to Plato, the peripatus philosopher does not limit himself to consider the reason in itself as virtuous, for it is one thing to know goodness and another to act it out or undergo it. If Socrates had previously affirmed that evil consists in ignorance, it would seem that Aristotle opens the door to the possibility of the existence of non-ignorant evil in the sense that he understands that what must be done can be known and, however, not be done. In that, ignorance wouldn't fit in, though the will to do something contrary to what reason itself dictates, would.

The concept of will seems to be fundamental. For Aristotle, there are voluntary and involuntary acts. With the first ones, he refers to the spontaneous ones, supposing that what surges in a reactive manner is more proper to a person. However, according to Reale, these ideas of voluntary acts "do not coincide with our

⁶ Aristóteles, *Tópicos*, III 2, 117a 121.

⁷ *Ibid.*, III 2, 119a 126.

⁸ *Ibid.*, VI.

⁹ Aristóteles, *Retórica* I, 9, 1366a 33.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, I, 1, 1354a 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1366a 38.

modern ideas of voluntariness”,¹² for immediate spontaneity does not include the act of deliberation and deliberate election that we presuppose, today, as the foundation of will. Aristotle separates these concepts and affirms that will and deliberation are not equivalent, for the will concentrates on the end and deliberation on the means.

However, since I cannot consider the end without the election that led me to see it as an end, then will and deliberation are interrelated in some manner. Furthermore, if the will of the end depends on deliberation, then we would have to recognize that “what is wanted is not wanted by its nature, but according to what it seems to each one; and, since it seems one thing to some and another thing to others, what is wanted referred at the same time to contrary things.”¹³

In that sense, if the virtue depends on the act, on the act of election, then the election of volition and the volition itself depend on deliberation; which, in turn, is dependent on perception –always changing and never univocal. Then, from this perspective, nobody could be either good or evil, for to be it or not would depend more on the circumstances than on the man himself. Now, if kindness or evilness are a circumstantial matter, then they would not be, due to it, a deliberative issue; for even deliberation itself is subject to valuing according to eventualities, experienced or not.

In reality, Aristotle does not actually leave that *aporia*. However, he thinks that our mistakes in the concept of goodness have to do with the fact that, in effect, we are not good. In other words, if I am good, I will observe goodness; I won't if I'm not. But how can I be good and *a priori* elect what is good? Where does such a cycle begin?

Aristotle did not share the Socratic affirmation of evil actions due to ignorance. Rather, he attempts to make man responsible for his decisions; perhaps losing sight of the fact that reasoning is not enough in order to arrive at the same conclusions –a categorical imperative made use of by Kant. Nor is it enough to be rational in

order to opt for goodness since goodness and evil do not respond to a universal and absolute goodness, no matter how much metaphysics is attempted to be forcedly squeezed into a source derived from Ethics. On the contrary, since there is no absolute Goodness, or any Deity whatsoever, all notions about goodness depend on learning; therefore, they are culturally configured, not metaphysically.

Being so, everything responds to apparent chaos and to a very possible causality that escapes our perception and comprehension; to the innumerable connections in our life that lead us to opt –perhaps rationally but, without a doubt, not univocally– for what we do. Aristotle did not respond to what it is that generates will; and, due to that, he leaves the door open on this terrain to the influence of chaotic causality that I propose on this occasion.

The structure of the ethical action supposes, for Aristotle, a process which is generally the following: *a)* the intuitive reason grasps something as goodness.¹⁴ Then *b)* the appetitive faculty goes into action and transforms the prior judgment into an object-desire¹⁵; in other words the grasped goodness is desired and must be conquered. Subsequently *c)* reason orders¹⁶; and if one takes this order into consideration, the will arrives and decides that such a desired object is an end. After that, then *d)* the mediums in order to obtain such an end are searched for, which once again corresponds to the practical reason. In such a manner that, finally, *e)* the validation of such an act is adequate in the circumstances in which one is found:¹⁷ that is the last step.

Concretely: a goodness is grasped, turned into a desire, and becomes a concrete desire for me here. And now, I search for the manner in which to obtain it, and validate if it is good to obtain it under the current circumstances and in relation to the mediums which are in my possession. The question that remains open is: how to know that the initial judgment about what

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, III 7, 1114a 32.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, III 77, 1113a 24.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, VI 11, 1143a 8-10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, II 5, 1106b 21.

¹² Reale, *Introducción a Aristóteles*, 1985, p. 109.

¹³ Aristóteles, *Ética Nicomaquea*, 1113a 20s.

goodness is correct? Today we would know that our comprehension of things is due to a specific Cosmo-vision which is forged through life's lessons; which – naturally – conditions our perspective before reality. Now, the only thing that allows me to become conscious of, or assume, such influences – with the intention of not being subdued to that process – is, without a doubt, what Aristotle proposes: that man must be comprehensive and trained by experience and by philosophical meditation. Concretely, the judgmental man's awoken look to his own conceptions of goodness is the only way he has of being sure that what he elects is correct. He would call this *meta-ethics* and it is characterized by the elaboration of a hermeneutic judgment over my own hermeneutic.

Without a doubt, there is room for the possibility of a dialectic will; which, just the same as dialectic syllogisms,¹⁸ would be the sustainment of all elections based on intertwined possibilities. We would have to refer then to a dialectic liberty, a dialectic will. What to we relate ourselves to and dialogue with in the generation or valuing of the goods through which we suppose happiness is to be obtained? Without a doubt, with everything social, ample, and multifactorial that it supposes. One of contemporary man's greatest problems is that he has forgotten that he can choose. We are tremendously moral and less ethical each time, for we do not discern from within one's own intimacy; we simply cling, cowardly, to the environment's univocal valuations.

Nothingness and liberation from univocal valuations

Only the contingent is cognoscible. The contingent is modifiable. Hence, what we know has a possible modification. With regard to a valuation, in other words a specific connotation about moral hierarchy and the sense of an act, person, or situation, it is impossible to make univocal assertions; which is why the propitious option –prior to making any judgment– would be to say: *for me, at this time and based on the*

associated concepts and information that I have, my opinion is this. Naturally, such a phrase differs greatly from the radical affirmations that are ordinarily heard; and, of course, nobody is exempt from making them.

Since Nothingness is contains the world, everything which occurs there – here – is modifiable. I have already said that the considerations about what is external are always made from a relational perspective. What changes then is the manner in which we are related with things, positioned before life and circumstances. This change is what changes our perspective and the consequent judgment.

We who make valuations, humans ourselves, cannot give a categorization to our own judgments that is greater than the categorization itself. In other words, our judgments are nothing more than finite, relative, contingent, mistaken, chaotic, and partial. No individual can elaborate an entire infinite, incontinent, univocal, completely harmonic, and impartial valuation for, as human beings, we are contrary to all of that. Our judgments do not escape a perception structure; this in itself supposes the impossibility of universalistic affirmations that are attempted to be understood from outside of any structure, or that are not propitious to any structure at the same time.

Being so, since the human being is also something temporary, his affirmations are temporary as well in regard to the future. And, in the same manner, they are relative in regard to the present time; limited, confined to failure, to mistakeness, to the manipulative tendency of our interpreting being. However, the paradox is that we mistakenly suppose that the valuations that others make of us implicitly contain Truth; when we have already said that Truth is simply one more valuation. Promises, vows, and categorical affirmations also have a lot of weight, in spite of them only being and existing in order to enable the faculty of being transgressed. Such a transgression, if it occurs, does not suppose anything extraordinary that hasn't actually previously occurred. Change is the only thing that remains. Even when an affective promise has been made, it could be abided by with the only intention of avoiding guilt; which is why

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

even the perpetual fulfillment of a promise does not suppose equality and mood constancy in its fulfillment.

With regard to valuations, the fact that some of them are maintained for life is hardly important. More than doubt the individual's feebleness in order to change his beliefs, we must precisely doubt his capacity of doubt, of critical analysis, of openness, of detachment. It is true that beliefs and points of view for judgments and valuations can be maintained throughout a lifetime, but this doesn't suppose univocality either; rather, as Watzlawick affirms, it supposes that "in the frame of a generated reality, all behaviour is an ulterior test"¹⁹ in order to maintain it. For example, if right now a person has the idea that his neighbour is a bad person and sees him arriving home in a new car, it is likely that he will assume that the neighbour is doing this with the only intention of showing it off. If that neighbour no longer has the same car later on, the individual could think, "Oh, well he didn't have enough money to pay for it but he tried just to make me feel inferior." This is seen as ridiculous to us, but since that person has that construction which is representative of reality – he has created that fiction for himself, as we all do daily – then it is from there that he judges, in an acritical manner, without sufficient doubt towards his own thinking. He can spend a lot of time like that. Let us think about family problems due to valuations that do not change for years, the never-pardoned offenses that suppose an exaggerated intent in the offender, the apologies not offered under the frame of thought that the other person deserved what he got; and so on and so on, one after another, we could leak out similar situations. In all of these occurrences, the presence of Nothingness is forgotten, the possibility that things are not as we see them, the consciousness of the unconsciousness, fundamental issue with regard to seeing the unseen or, at least, recognizing that not everything has been seen.

All of our valuations respond to suppositions, and those are frames of thought, approaches, or tendentious ways of valuing. It is

not possible to escape said manners of perception, for to deny them would be like simply affirming that no judgment has been made, which is not something sensible. It is then not about avoiding interpretive frames of thought from which we make the valuing judgments. What it is about is affirming that such judgments can be denied. And not only that, but that if we wish to advance a little more, we would also be the first to object our own judgments; to search for the weak point in them and honestly assume that we could, with sufficient evidence, break our own frames of thought. In the end, the final and better achieved frame of thought that would reign in our conceptions is the evidence of Nothingness in them.

I myself recognize here that my own valuation of Nothingness is the interpretative frame of thought from which I affirm everything I have said in the previous pages; but at least upon recognizing the ample possibility of limits in these same lucubrations, I also affirm that the previous vision – the presiding frame of thought in the West, that of the Being – has not always brought kindness. All limited frame of thought is to be exchanged for another limited frame of thought. It is not the limit which we should be confronting, but rather centering in on the manner in which the new frame of thought (and its implied limits) is reinforced or combined with our own limits also. It is obvious that there would not be a perfect basis of interpretation if it has been born from an imperfect mind. Likewise, if that imperfect basis born from an imperfect mind is capable of assuming its imperfection, then it could dissociate itself from more imperfect structures that have not yet assumed themselves so. And when a new supposition succumbs to another one, once again the only demonstration is the correct portion of the previous one which predicted change, along with the imperfection of both. If there were a system that would overthrow my structure of Nothingness, then that would demonstrate in itself the firmness of the position that assumed its possible capacity of being altered. This is to say, my proposal about Nothingness assumes the inevitability of the existence of a person who supposes that Nothingness as a concept and

¹⁹ Watzlawick, *El sentido del sinsentido*, p. 62.

system of world comprehension is insufficient. And I don't have a problem with that, for this is something that is affirmed upon its denial. Valuations then, are always human; and as human, they can never be univocal.

Being so, less guilty is the person who affirms a valuation than he who yet does not personally affirm and discern them. One of our most unquestioned valuations has to do with order and absolutisms.

Nothingness and liberation from education as a doctrine of order

It is frequently supposed that educational effort and its effectiveness as a transforming agent in benefit of society can be called "quality" education. This word, together with the harmful and perfidious idea of "excellence", are the lines I will take care of in order to demonstrate that our traditional ways of understanding the must-be (order) in a unified manner – such as quality or excellence – are fallacies; just the same as the interpretations we have made of those words themselves. It is easy to observe in general educational institutions, for example, a weakening of their sense in pro of quantifiable quality, leaving aside the doubt towards that same system; doubt which – in any case – could be redeeming.

Quality is a word that denotes many conceptions and, hence, there would not be a specific distinction to be universally applied. There would be as many concepts of quality as existing anthropological visions; and, in turn, there are as many anthropological visions as socio-cultural and ideological conditions that are in constant dialectic among each other. To the question, what is quality? We could respond with measured certainty, "It is not something". However, the term is commonly utilized in popular lexicon. Though it is not something tangible in itself, the concept does have a social resonance; which is why it is then inferred that though it may not have a meaning in itself – as all words have – it means something anyhow in the minds of individuals. What does the word quality mean in the minds of individuals? That is a question with a diffused answer which would imply another type of investigation.

But what can be anticipated, in a very general manner, is that quality is conceived as the greatest adjustment possible to validity standards and criteria that are determined by subjects or entities of a high hierarchy; making it explicit that I understand the possibility that said subjects or entities of a high hierarchy may be the customs, manners, theories, or speeches that propel a specific vision of human improvement. Naturally, the problem about the conception of quality increases with this definition, for I am assuming that it refers to socio-cultural constructs or ideologies that are determined by geographical, contextual, and temporary spaces. This implies that the philosophical inquiry has the objective, to a great extent, of examining if the "qualities" that are spoken of are base or form issues. And here we are once again delimited by a variable: the epistemic conduct from which the reflection about quality is made, for it will determine which aspects of the supposed quality will be denominated as base or as form.

Now, when we speak of quality in education, the situation does not change all that much; for we are assuming that upon using the word "quality", we see ourselves once again immersed in the problem of interpreting the concept. There are so many ideas of "quality education", just as there are so many anthropological visions that imply an ideal type of graduate. Education always has intentionality; and based on its achievement, or not, is how evidence is provided of having quality or not. It is clear that quality is found in the processes but it is understood that those processes can imply results. Today there is an ample diversity of visions with regard to quality, depending on the greater or lesser importance given to aspects which are not always measurable, such as the accumulations of knowledge, the development of abilities, or the experience of attitudes that are supposed to be desirable.

Contemporarily, in most countries, there are uniform exams or evaluation methods attempting to measure the quality of schools, colleges, or university centers; not only of once city, but of ample geographical latitudes, and even the entire world. The aforesaid would be

adequate if these results were assumed as a shared reference based on specific and partial established criterion. The problem is that such “measurements” are assumed as absolute truths which have naively quantified everything that an educational center has or offers. And so we enter into a phenomenon that propitiates living based on appearances and searching for appearances; an issue where having quality or not is not important, but *appearing* to be a quality institution is. A pair of truly critical eyes knows how to read this type of issues and diminish its importance. The aforesaid does not suppose that importance is subtracted from these evaluations, but it is clear that such an importance exists in lesser quantity than that attributed.

In what manner can we then recognize improvements in an educational institution? Or with what word could we define this? Quality or Excellence? With neither, it seems to me. One so much as the other is a manner of tranquilization, of avoiding the drug. They are tranquilizing drugs.

Let us imagine that: that quality is a type of drug, that our country is a small town, and that the people in charge of the educational system in our country are dealers of the quality drug – though some people from other countries had previously sold it to them. That the professors and educational institutions are anxious to have that drug (read as quality or excellence) and we do almost anything in order to obtain it; even selling our most intimate ideals, sacrificing spare time or time with children, mercilessly competing amongst ourselves for the recognitions, and mainly leaving aside what mostly makes us human: our capacity to doubt. We bet on the importance of “educating” our students (even if they don’t want it) based on the importance of that drug (quality), for families and the community judge us positively or negatively to the degree that we drug ourselves with excellence. Quality and excellence are friendly concepts that are applied anywhere, which is why we have succeeded in transmitting them to the whole nation in order to then evaluate and compare ourselves amongst each other and the entire world. We drive ourselves based on these suppositions. Furthermore, since

quality is sought out worldwide, we clumsily ask ourselves: how could it be possible quality to not be the best to which we can aspire?

We assume that all people who keep trying to think differently than our quality standards must be obligated to comply by them; we attempt to judge those people as mistaken. How is it possible that there be a person who does not desire to drug himself with quality? The issue is that we want others to adapt to our definition of what quality is, leaving aside the local considerations of what quality is.

René Descartes recognized that the only thing that is not possible to doubt, is doubt itself.²⁰ I doubt that quality (in spite of efforts made to measure it, always partially) is a parameter of an education that promotes doubt. What good is reading if by it we learn concepts that manipulate us? Or do we read only what others say because we have lost the capacity of doubting it? What good is writing if we only copy what we read? Why know numbers, subtraction, and addition if by those concepts or operations we learn to commit fraud or take advantage of one another? Little of what we teach is useful if we don’t teach to doubt. I do not say here that we should be scarcely interested in attempting to have educational institutions. What I say is that the standards by which we measure their supposed quality have been far too centered on appearances or simulations. Beyond the quality, or not, that an educational institution may represent, the fundamental issue is that students possess, acquire, develop, or gestate in themselves the capacity of doubting; which is already in itself a manner of contemplating the possibility of other alternatives, as yet unseen. Obviously, in this sense a contemplation of Nothingness is undergone.

The supported doubt is the most evident demonstration of the existence of personal criteria. If criteria exist, they could define what is desired in life, which generates commitment, propitiates a sense, and implies congruency, if we look into it. Only by reflecting is it possible to teach to reflect; and only by doubting is it possible to teach to doubt. It is necessary to

²⁰ Vid. Descartes, *Discurso del método*, 2005.

enable the doubt about whether education supposes adaptation or social transformation; a doubt that may enable creativity. Are we really willing to doubt that what we do and think as a society is what we must do and think? Do we, professors and educators, generally allow ourselves the question about whether what we believe is something with sense? Or do we cowardly prefer to settle ourselves into the roles of directors and passive critics of humanity?

The philosophical exercise enables the “basis” for the labour of education that can constantly be tormented by issues of form. Pardo mentions that without philosophy, “pedagogy is an arsenal of procedures without content”,²¹ and I agree. The problem is that sometimes those empty contents suppose the so desired quantifiable quality, and more than one would be clumsily at ease. It is already time to take off our academic makeup, to no longer hide in apparent forms of quality. It is time to demonstrate that there is no better and more competitive struggle than that which is made against oneself. It is true that education as a system can contribute towards the improvement of countries, but not any education; rather, only a liberating education, a non-alienating education, sustained in a system of worldly comprehension which, based on Nothingness, firmly assumes the Being.

Nothingness and liberation from the family structure

The family is an overrated structure. If it is true that upon being born an individual requires attention and care from his parents, it is also true that family structures categorically mark valuing structures and manners of conceiving the world. There is no person who is completely attentive to his own families' expectations and who, at the same time, can tend to his own intimate visions. Whoever agrees with his family *in everything* is because he, definitely, has silenced all of his discordant voices, including his own.

Since the family is one of those structures – like religion – that would seem to be untouchable – and, furthermore, frequently

profoundly related in the manner of “the family religion” – few individuals are truly open to recognizing the coercion that the family itself has made of its judging capacities. Within the family, what Erich Fromm called the “authoritarian conscience”,²² is inevitably integrated; which, though it utilizes other moralizing agents like the State, communication media, and society itself, does not reach in them the influence that the family has on the individual by force of routine and affective nexuses.

The authoritarian conscience is the imperative message that has been introjected as a rule or law; and that, internally, directs our perception about the manner in which things must be. It begins with an idea about how we must behave and, little by little, becomes an unquestioned habit in the individual's mind. This moral structure is irrational, generalist in nature, and overwhelming, in the case of having been profoundly inserted in the individual. Punishment, rejection or disapproval, exposed or not, is the consequence of not doing what the family rule demands. It is, therefore, a dogmatized internal order which has not been reviewed, analyzed, or confronted by a healthy and honest individual ethical exercise, for the person is not permitted to doubt the rules imposed by the family in the name of love.

For now, it would be sufficient with the affirmation that love itself supposes expectations that tie us to those from whom we need expressions of affection. There is nothing more painful than a mother's disapproval, for example. There would be millions of stories of men and women who, even in their adult life, keep on searching for that mother's – or father's – approval, unobtained in childhood. Neither are there few cases of people gone mad in order to obtain achievements that are no longer required, due to the message received in the family nucleus with wide open arms that *it is never enough*. They are not less, those people who, attempting to become worthy of their dead mother's love, do not allow themselves to be in disagreement with the systems learnt under her domain. One example of it would be the holy

²¹ Savater & Pardo, *Palabras cruzadas: una invitación a la filosofía*, 2003.

²² Vid. Fromm, *Ética y Psicoanálisis*, pp. 157-172.

mother who affirms that a humble and abnegated man will always be better than to be labeled as revolutionary. Do these people really know what a revolution is? Now, when the learnt guidelines about how things and life should be are blindly believed in, it is because in these cases there has not been the necessary amount of doubt; the formulation of which could be facilitated by Nothingness, if it were taken into consideration a little more.

In other words, if I understand that the family structures simply were or have been properly that, structures, from which I can leave without the risk of being guilty, for they are not univocal, at that point I am considering the Nothingness that prevents the universalism of all these suppositions. Even when I realize that I am more related to Nothingness than with the family itself, it is there where I have arrived at a more laudable point.

And, better yet, if I assume that the members of my family didn't even choose to be with me in reality, that our kinship is one more proof of causality's randomness – as of the inexplicable previous situations that enabled it - and that such people have also been hurt by me, it is there where I understand that the only thing that remains for me, more than love, is the solidarity due to mutual hurt and hopeful comprehension that is offered by the desire that each person finds in his own valuations.

In a family, people persist, they relate to one another, and they help each other; many times due to the extrinsic decree –intrinsicly believed– that the family is the order which must be followed and that it is the destiny of each individual to happily integrate himself to it. The contrary occurs as well: cases in which it would be more beneficial to people to escape from their own family before attempting to contribute to *peace at home*, which only implies the neutralization of some and de-personalization of others. It is because, additionally to the encounter with others in order to see ourselves in them and let them see themselves in us, it is also an opportunity to allow others and ourselves to find the route that the feet themselves wish to tread on. I cannot always see the other person, for that would suppose not to let him walk;

neither can I always go with him, for that would be equivalent to forgetting my own walk. Ruptures are part of life; partial or whole, they are inevitable.

Let it be well understood: I have not proposed here that each individual should immediately leave his family, that family is the worst thing we could have, or even less that family must be destroyed. What this is about is assuming that family, as the social structure that it is, is – among other things – a microorganism that propitiates valuing structures, the structures of which can outline an individual's way of being; and that, therefore, such an individual must be alert in order to keep an appropriate distance, if he so desires, from such family parameters. The love towards one's parents –or anything which we call as such– does not suppose imitation or, even less, equality. To love my mother or my father never implies that the necessary tribute is to walk in their traditions, their structures, and their life-yearnings for me. I must dispose of the idea, the authoritarian conscience, and the absolutist super-ego that imposes such aspects in the name of family respect.

What it is also about, is understanding that each member of the family has the possibility to exercise his own right to make mistakes, to set forth his own valuing schemes, which will not be better or worse than the family ones. The possibility of taking one's own decisions, in spite of their connection or not with the rules of the family in question, allows the responsibility of acting based on parameters that are more one's own, voluntarily defined and accepted by the individual.

Conclusion

Univocity does not allow the contemplation of Nothingness, for the absence of our spontaneous perception is precisely what provokes our univocal suppositions. Contemplating Nothingness opens us up to the perspective that there is no univocity possible outside of Nothingness itself. It is opportune to liberate oneself, for example, from the ideas about divinity constructed by man which invite all believers to suppose themselves as possessors of

the univocal answer about salvation or the sense of living. One must also liberate oneself from the univocal, absolutist, and life-structuring moral systems that oppress and hinder critical thinking and relational analysis. In the same manner, it is necessary to liberate oneself, through the contemplation of Nothingness, from the permanent labels about certain values.

We are to fall very high in order to be able to deny and overcome our ideas of God; sink the divine deformations in order to finally redeem ourselves and enter the world, filthy with ambiguous certainty. It is falling that we can fly; let us say farewell to our figurations of God in order to welcome the Absolute of Nothingness.

That man can choose does not suppose that he self-defines himself in an absolute manner, but only that there is a portion of his actions that can be delimited from the most intimate parameters that he may have. That in itself supposes introspective work that is not very common; for we haughtily believe that we choose with absolute liberty, but we only react to existent valuations that we absorb from the environment, since the mirror has become invisible.

Is inevitable to live from a relational structure from which the individual's valuing structures are forged. The issue is to review if such valuing structures are found –or not– tightly connected with personality and with what one supposes to be the Truth, inexistent anyway.

Gradually, to the extent that the recognition of one's own worth and the capacity to found new rules in oneself to follow is real, will self-acceptance and the capacity to ask about

self-rights be possible. From the consideration of these possibilities, it is that humanism arises; though neither is humanism exempt from univocisms and absolutisms.

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