

The EXHAUSTED CRITICISM

Keys for a civilization change

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Prologue.

Sisyphus, Social mobilization and socio-political impasse

The joint increase in ecological deterioration, economic precariousness and social polarization shows the decline of the globalized civilization or cultural super-system that we are living in. However, the more the promised progress is shipwrecked and the more catastrophic the horizon towards which the current decline of civilization is pointing, the greater the feeling of powerlessness to straighten the situation towards healthier horizons for the majority. We have seen how for a long time waves of social mobilization aimed at achieving a more just and livable society passed and faded, along with the illusions that kept the militant effort alive, without having achieved its goals. The fact that we have spent so long a time without the strenuous militant effort reaching its purpose or, worse still, that when it seems to be close to achieving it - after having won a revolution or winning an election - that purpose ends up fading and we have to start over reminds me of the Sisyphus myth. This myth is one of the best known in Greek mythology and evokes a king punished by the gods to push a large stone to the top of a mountain so that, once it is up, because it cannot be secured, the stone falls again through the all the way down, and so on over and over again for all eternity.

In this book I will reflect on the repetitive panorama that the most sympathetic and well-intentioned social mobilizations have been facing, a kind of socio-political impasse that prevents their triumph and causes, as a consequence, enthusiasm to run out and goals are cut back. I believe that, as we will see, the causes of this repeated failure are multiple. Among them is the excessiveness of their original goals. In principle, the enormous rock that the revolutionary social movements were trying to push and secure at the top of the mountain was nothing less than universal liberation. On the one hand, the grandiose and exciting character of the endeavor made bearable the efforts that with messianic-religious fervor have been made over and over again to achieve it. On the other, the chimerical aspect of it was fated to reap failures. Above all, when the idea that this great end justified any means led to support the commitment to a warlike conception of politics that values victory more than to convince and to resort to means that are inconsistent with the end pursued. That is why I consider that the myth of Sisyphus provides a more revealing metaphor to describe the object of reflection in this book than the one that would face the waves of protest and more or less revolutionary demands against a citadel of power that is increasingly better defended, since the latter assumes the warlike conception of politics mentioned above, which in my opinion is among the causes of the unsuccessful efforts.

And we will also see that power, far from being in a citadel, extends throughout the social body in the form of networks and relationships, not only of class, but also clientelistic, patriarchal, racial ... and of diverse economic and disciplinary dependence, that overlap each other to maintain the well-known “voluntary servitude” that adapts and rearranges itself to changes, as is the case with elites. This calls for a more mature reflection that invites us to review the goals and means, as we will do later.

In this broad context, the book's reflections will focus more on the ideological impasse that underlies and largely explains the aforementioned socio-political impasse. Ideological impasse that remains anchored to old idolatries and weighed down by a series of fetish terms, ceremonial slogans ... or non-concepts with which political, economic and ecological rhetoric manages to entertain and even excite people, diverting attention and criticism from the main problems and protagonists of the current situation and its possible changes. Sometimes the terms and slogans are invented and disseminated from the nuclei of power, as lures, to distract attention and divert criticism and militant efforts. Others are invented with little luck from the social movements themselves, also avoiding, unintentionally, that the critics hit the mark. In both cases, like Sisyphus, the critical discourse is exhausted from repeating a frustrating and sterile exercise: if he had to climb a huge rock to the top of a mountain to, once crowned, see how it slid down the slope, criticism makes some pseudo-concepts, product of the dominant economic and political ideology, roll uphill so that, even pretending to question everything, in the end nothing changes. "Production", "environment", "sustainable development", "fight against climate change", "neoliberalism", "post-capitalism" or "commercial fundamentalism" are just examples of fashionable fetish terms with which criticism is burdened, diverting attention from the real problems and those responsible for the current situation.

The exhausted criticism not only shows the opacity, ambiguity, and emptiness of these "non-concepts" and where they arise from, but also displays the full power of genuine critical thinking when it transcends these "blind spots." Only with this change of perspective, only thinking outside the margins delimited by common sense dictated by the dominant economic and political ideology, we can build a new paradigm of civilization that emancipates human beings and restores dignity to nature.

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This book deals with the goals and lures that, by way of non-concepts, have been populating the political, economic and ecological discourse, helping to maintain undisputed ideas, social relations and key institutions that sustain the status quo. We will see, in the first two chapters that these pseudo-concepts that build idolatries and populate the political, economic and ecological rhetoric, sometimes are creations of power and function as an instrument and part of the dominant ideology, but other times they are creations of the supposedly critical discourse of the left or of social movements, which contribute, unintentionally, to mislead or deactivate that discourse.

After these first two introductory chapters, the third unravels the kind of non-concepts and idolatries that, by way of squid ink, the system segregates to defend itself and that

arise and are raised from the established powers forming part of a «correct political language» that is imposed and that the critical movements end up assuming to a large extent. Such is the idea of caring for the "environment" that, by monopolizing attention, has been avoiding and deactivating the proposals for reconversion of the political-economic values and institutions that guide the metabolism of the industrial system and the uses of the territory with the support of undisputed social conventions such as theories and forms of property and money. Just as the objective of sustainable development came to sustain the mythology of economic growth, inherent to the usual idea of economic system, which had been shaken by the criticisms of already half a century ago. This chapter also addresses other non-concepts created this time, curiously enough, within the environmental movement itself that have monopolized attention in recent decades, slowing down progress in the demolition of the fabric of key concepts of the dominant ideology that continues to support and guide the institutions and behaviors of the world in which we live.

The fourth and fifth chapters of the book open up the panorama of political rhetoric. The fourth reviews idolatries and sectarianisms anchored in the past that make it difficult to reflect and formulate attractive and inclusive goals for social change. The fifth chapter takes as a central issue the invention by the left of the term neoliberalism to designate the public enemy that causes our evils, from which other concepts and responsibilities are spelled out, such as "tyranny" or "fundamentalism of the markets", which help prevent criticism from targeting the ideological heart and vital organs that have been fueling and globalizing the corporate tyranny that prevails in the world today.

After denouncing the ideological magma that protects the current globalized corporate tyranny, finally, the sixth chapter recapitulates and positively rethinks the traps of language and the idolatries denounced throughout it to overcome the current socio-political impasse. It reflects on the necessary requirements to make plausible the emergence of a new conglomerate of approaches and values capable of reorienting the current crisis of civilization towards more promising social, economic and ecological horizons. And finally, it reviews and insists on the key metaphors and concepts on which the usual ideas of the political and economic systems rest, as well as the institutions that maintain the State, the forms of property, money, exchange, etc. ., that give them life and ensure their imprint in today's society. Ideas and institutions that should be the main objective of criticism, but that continue to enjoy good health imbued with a hypothetical rationality and universality, and a neutral objectivity, which, once assumed, can only be faced with an unattractive vacuum of non-concepts. Only by overcoming this void, these "non-concepts", it will be possible to better envision the future, only from there it will be possible to transcend the socio-political-ideological impasse and thus get the criticism to catch its breath and regain strength, and the militancy, by guiding better their criticisms and achieving better results, stop evoking the myth of Sisyphus with their frustrated efforts.

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