

THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS IN THE PERFORMANCE SOCIETY

El papel de las emociones en la sociedad del rendimiento

IVÁN ALFONSO PINEDO CANTILLO*

National Open and Distance University, Bogotá, Colombia

ivan.pinedo@unad.edu.co

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9319-7110>

Abstract

In recent years, the South Korean philosopher living in Germany, Byung-Chul Han, has been setting new paths for philosophical reflection using the theoretical potential that arises from the understanding of the new social, political and economic realities that mark this era of neoliberal evolution and of technological development in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Thus, topics such as the transformation of biopolitics into psycho-politics become a very relevant point for the analysis of current societies and their drifts. Hence, this article aims to delve into Han's arguments, exploring the crucial role that emotions play in societies of performance, fatigue and lack of democracy, resorting to the metaphor of the "hamster wheel" as an image evocative of the dynamics of current societies. In this way, an innovative perspective of the complexity of the 21st Century is presented by delving into certain nuances of Han's thought in connection with the palpable reality of the emotions that act as the fuel that propels each individual in his/her own "existential wheel". This proposition with emotional experiences contributes significantly to contemporary discussions about human nature in contexts of technological innovation.

Keywords

Performance society, emotions, cognition, infocracy, psycho-politic, neoliberalism.

Suggested citation: Pinedo Cantillo, Iván Alfonso. 2024. The Role of Emotions in the Performance Society. *Sophia*, Colección de Filosofía de la Educación, (36), pp. 193-211.

* Doctor in Philosophy, Master in Philosophy, Master in Educational Administration, specialist in Educational Management, graduate in Philosophy. Research professor at the School of Education Sciences of the National Open and Distance University (UNAD) and member of the research group UMBRAL.

Resumen

En los últimos años, el filósofo surcoreano radicado en Alemania, Byung-Chul Han, viene marcando nuevos derroteros para la reflexión filosófica usando el potencial teórico que surge de la comprensión de las nuevas realidades sociales, políticas y económicas, que marcan esta época de evolución neoliberal y de desarrollo tecnológico, en el contexto de la cuarta Revolución Industrial. Así, temas como la transformación de la biopolítica en psicopolítica se convierten en un punto muy relevante para el análisis de las sociedades actuales y sus derivas. Con este trasfondo de pensamiento, el presente artículo tiene por objetivo sumergirse en las argumentaciones de Han, explorando el papel crucial que desempeñan las emociones en las sociedades del rendimiento, del cansancio y de la infocracia, acudiendo a la metáfora de la “rueda del hámster” como imagen evocadora de las dinámicas de las sociedades actuales. De esta forma, se presenta una perspectiva innovadora de la complejidad del siglo XXI, al adentrarnos en determinados matices del pensamiento de Han, en conexión con la realidad palpable de las emociones, que actúan como el combustible que impulsa a cada individuo en su propia “rueda existencial”. Esta articulación con las experiencias emocionales contribuye de manera significativa a las discusiones contemporáneas acerca de la naturaleza humana en contextos de innovación tecnológica.

Palabras clave

Sociedad del rendimiento, emociones, cognición, infocracia, psicopolítica, neoliberalismo.

194



Introduction

Hamsters have an active, restless, genetically inclined nature to move, for this reason humans have designed for these rodents the mechanism of the “hamster wheel”, where they can run for several minutes in an exercise that is often curious, strange, entertaining or simply absurd. We ask ourselves, why does the little animal run and run in an impetuous action of movement? Experts in the field say that they do it so to burn the natural energy that the species has and that, being in captivity, it can not do otherwise.

For the purpose of this article, the hamster wheel image is suitable to examine certain philosophical positions that portray current society and the accumulation of emotional experiences aroused by consumer capitalism. The philosopher Byung-Chul Han, in some of his most emblematic works, has raised the discomfort of this era by showing us a world where the slogans “You can”, “You are a successful being”, “You will achieve it” constitute the common place where thousands of people converge in pursuit of personal optimization and increasing efficiency without limit (Han, 2012). “You can do it at work...” in the gym, in the family, in social relationships, in couple life, in business entrepreneurship, etc. But, in both the hamster and human beings, emotions play a fundamental role as they are constantly motivating actions, attitudes and behaviors. The hamster is moved by basic emotions, typical of the cognitive development of its species, and the human animal is moved by complex emotions in

which judgments, beliefs, and acts of valuation about the world play a pivotal role (Pinedo and Yañez, 2020).

The impact of emotions on what Han has called the “performance society” has not been sufficiently analyzed. The 21st century introduces a unique emotional configuration, intrinsically intertwined with the neo-liberal perspectives that dominate worldwide. The logic of neoliberal economics exercises its dominance over human experience by taking the dynamics of capital to remarkable extremes, powerfully influencing the design of the entrepreneurial subject of itself. Slowly, we are immersed in the illusion that the yearning for a fulfilling life can be quelled by accelerating consumption. Thus, we witness the constant substitution of products, with the mistaken belief that the acquisition of a new commodity can provide a more lasting happiness (Censi, 2022). In reality, however, no commodity has the power to satisfy fully human desires and provide a genuine sense of fulfillment. Capitalism, centered on hyper-consumption, is then driven by a set of emotions and thoughts that lead us to the grueling race that characterizes the hamster wheel. This emotional factor is the one that rightly deserves to be investigated in the current performance society.

Considering Han’s diagnosis of the social, political and economic atmosphere of our time, this article approaches certain theoretical assumptions of the South Korean philosopher, but in the light of certain understandings from the philosophy and psychology of emotions, especially, exploring the reflections of an emblematic author of our time: Martha Nussbaum (1997, 2003, 2008), aspect that opens new drifts to continue discussing the human condition and its fate in the midst of the whirlwind of changes that mark this historical epoch of transition.

In this context, a connection can be established between these perspectives when considering how emotions, according to Nussbaum, could be influencing the self-exploiting behavior that Han (2014a) details in his analysis of the performance society. Specifically, anxiety, fear of failure, and constant dissatisfaction could be propelling emotions that drive people to submit to self-imposed *pressure, seeking to perform better and achieve ever-higher standards in terms of productivity, personal success, or social recognition*. At the same time, we could also point out that Han’s critique of the performance society highlights the risks of social alienation and disconnection, which can arise from the obsession with constant productivity, and these implications could have links to Nussbaum’s ideas about the importance of social relationships and emotional management for a full human life (Silva *et al.*, 2023).

That being so, although Nussbaum and Han come from different philosophical traditions, it is feasible to explore the convergence of their ideas by asking how emotions influence and are influenced by the performance society, and how do these dynamics of the current world affect the ability of people to lead satisfying lives or with purpose?

To clarify the interrelation between emotion and performance society, the reflection is addressed in two sections. In the first part, some relevant cognitive theories about the origins of emotions are examined. These theories conceptualize emotions as valent reactions to events, agents or objects, highlighting the representations, beliefs and evaluations of the world that underlie emotional states. After outlining the cognitive structure of these human experiences, the article focuses on Byung-Chul Han's thought to analyze the influence of emotions on the 21st century individual, characterized by the omnipresence of technologies, virtual environments of social interaction and consumer culture that significantly influences the configuration of both their individual and collective identity.

196



The cognitive structure of emotions that drives the hamster

In the ancient world, Stoics stand out among the first thinkers to perform a detailed analysis of passions from a cognitive approach (*πάθος*, a term related in Antiquity with intense affective states that cause a significant change of mood). Stoic treatises about passions prefigure with authenticity various topics that will be taken up by philosophy and contemporary psychology of emotions, hence their value to understand some current proposals that defend a strong link between emotion and cognition, and a close relationship between the emotional dimension of the human being and moral life (Knuuttila, 2004). Authors such as Nussbaum (2003) refers to stoic thinking as a source of what is today called “intelligence of emotions” or also “cognitive structure of emotions”, in this regard the author says:

Stoics thus offer us a precise vision of passions: emotions are not simply blind eruptions of affection, shaking or sensations that are recognized and distinguished from one another by the quality felt in each of them. Unlike appetites such as thirst and hunger have an important cognitive element. Emotions embody ways of interpreting the world, the feelings that accompany them are linked and supported by beliefs or judgments that constitute their basis or foundation, so that emotions as a whole can be appropriately characterized as true or false, as well as rational or irrational, according to our assessment of the beliefs that underpin them (Nussbaum, 2003, pp. 459-460).

Considering the latter, we can move forwards in the analysis of this “cognitive-evaluative” doctrine about emotions, which will put us in context to understand certain symptoms that arise in the current performance society. An old text *On Passions* is attributed to Crispus, which contains various Stoic teachings on the subject. This is a document recovered doxographically by Diógenes Laercio and other authors such as Galeno, it tells us about a certain ancient conception of emotions understood as beliefs or value judgments (Long, 1996). According to the Stoic doctrine, emotions are related to the way in which objects and situations are valued with a good or bad valence, and in relation to a present or future time. If it is about an object or event of the present, the judgment will involve emotions of pleasure (*hedoné*) or pain (*lupé*), and if it is about the future it will involve an emotion of appetite (*epithumia*) or fear (phobos) (Knuuttila, 2004).

Crisipo, therefore, introduces the idea of passions (emotions) as a type of belief (*doxa*) or evaluative judgment (*krisis*), which determines a good or bad property in objects: this is X, and X is a great good or a great evil, therefore, it reacts to X in a certain emotional way. Fear, for example, implies the thought that bad and important things may happen in the future that we cannot prevent. Anger is stimulated by the thought that someone else has seriously damaged something to which we attach great worth. Grief implies the thought that we have been deprived of something or someone extremely important (Nussbaum, 1997).

As seen, this reflection highlights the idea of valuation or cognitive evaluation that is necessary for an emotion to arise. We pass through life with diverse opinions and belief systems about the way the world works, about the kind of creatures we are on this earth and also about the goals we aspire to at different times in our lives (Graver, 2007). For Crisipo, ordinary people, motivated by particular beliefs, assign an intrinsic value to countless external goods, for example, to friendship and love, goods that by their nature are unstable and beyond our control. In addition, most people see themselves as social beings who wish to be recognized in a certain way in the political community to which they belong; for this reason, the loss of the good social position or privileges to which they are usually accustomed, causes them to develop within themselves the belief that something intrinsically valuable has been lost in their life or that they have moved away from the happiness that others enjoy (Crisipo de Solos, 2006).

Many individuals also believe that the good life cannot be attained without a certain amount of food, money, housing, body health, beauty, honors for success achieved and the wide enjoyment of sexual pleasure,



objects they consider necessary for *eudaimonia* or full and accomplished life. By conceiving of emotions as value judgments, Stoics consider that parents, the people who care for us during childhood, pedagogues and the same ideas present in the society to which we belong, can generate false beliefs that influence the appearance of uncontrolled emotional states (Pinedo, 2021). Crisipo tries to attribute a good part of the origin of passions (or emotions) to external elements: the customs that teach us since childhood, the values that society pursues and the ideas present in the environment that persuade us that all pain is an evil, and that, on the contrary, every pleasure, fame and recognition is good, hence these cognitive valuations begin to take root in our soul from very early generating their respective emotional states (Brennan, 2005; Tieleman, 2003).

In this context of Stoic ideas, the thesis stands out that there are false beliefs that disturb our life, but not all are on the surface of the self, many of them penetrate deeply into the soul, often exerting their silent influence below the level of consciousness, and then become visible through the passions that we express daily. These false beliefs become a disease of the soul when they make us dependent on things, people and situations rather than our own judgment, and when they finally hinder human flourishing (Nussbaum, 2003). False beliefs take root in the neighborhood, in school, among friends, in the family, and over time each develops its own cultivation in the mind, no longer remembering where it acquired the seeds of many emotional states that dominate it.

It is surprising how, more than two thousand years away from the current world, the Stoic doctrines already had a prominent critical stance towards the society of their time, based on the analysis of emotions. Crisipo, Seneca, Marco Aurelio and other highly qualified voices of this current already pointed a sensitive topic in human beings: the cognitive structure of emotions and its consequences in the social world. Crisipo's thesis remains one of the most remarkable in the history of philosophy, stating that passions are forms of false judgment or false belief (Bergua, 1936). The ancient thinker also brought forward a solution to the situation: if passions are modifications of rational faculty, then a suitable therapy that modifies sufficiently the judgments, searching for the right ones and placing in place the false ones would be a good alternative to continue in the complex art of living (Crisipo de Solos, 2006).

In more recent decades there has been a renewal of interest in understanding the cognitive dimension of emotions in formulations such as those proposed by Arnold (1960), Lazarus (1991), Frijda (2007), Solomon (2003) and Nussbaum (2008), which affirm how the physical change that

occurs in some emotional experiences is not enough to explain the diversity and richness of human emotional expression, because deep down what we evidence is that emotions, mainly, are preceded by valuation acts that trigger diverse attitudes and behaviors.

A cognitive theory of emotion, of which there are philosophical and psychological versions, is one that constitutively includes some aspect of thought, usually an evaluation, judgment or belief of a certain type, which is essential to the concept of emotion (Plutchik and Kellerman, 1980). This notion includes the approach according to which emotions have intentionality and therefore have intentional objects. The concept of intentionality, as understood here, is a feature of certain mental states that consist of “being about something” or heading towards something. What an intentional state of mind is or is directed at is recognized as its intentional object. It is a term that refers to the thesis proposed by Brentano in his texts *The Origin of Moral Knowledge* and *Psychology from an empirical point of view*. In this last work, published in 1874, the psychologist raises how consciousness has an intentional structure, i.e., acts of consciousness are intentionally directed at objects, which means that they allude to people, things, or situations: anyone who thinks, thinks about something; and anyone who is afraid, is afraid for something. It is in this context that emotions are claimed to be intentional acts based on intellectual phenomena and directed to values (Brentano, 1935).

Anger, jealousy or guilt is about something, they have an object to which they are directed. If Peter experiences anger because John offended him, that emotion focuses directly on John as an object, because of the perceived insult he believes he has received. In this way, the emotion of the tendency to irrationalism is removed, pointing out its capacity to inform and orient us about a certain part of the world we are related to, while at the same time it is a motivation for our actions (Ortony *et al.*, 1988; Solomon, 2007).

Philosophers and psychologists defending the cognitive-evaluative theory of emotions believe that cognition and emotion are interdependent (there are reciprocal interrelations between emotion and cognition). The background of emotions is basically rational, therefore, it is not possible to establish the traditional border between reason and emotion that is an inheritance of the old philosophical dualism that dominated much of the history of philosophy:

Emotions are the product of reason because they are derived from the way we value what is happening in our lives. Indeed, how we evaluate an



event determines how we react emotionally to it. This is what leads to talk of cognitive emotion (Lazarus, 2000, p. 98).

Emotions are complex responses of an individual to the stimuli of the environment and although they involve physiological reactions, they are characterized primarily by a positive or negative (*appraisal*) of an intentional object (person, thing, event or situation), as well as a tendency to action according to the evaluation carried out: harmful, beneficial or threatening object (Lyons, 1993; Roseman and Smith, 2001).

Cognitive theories thus assume that emotions are based on judgments about situations, people, or states of affairs, and these judgments may be right or wrong, superficial, wrong, or illusory. For most, if not all, people, the emotion that will emerge depends on how they view the object they have seized or believe they have seized (Lyons, 1993; Greenspan, 2004). Likewise, these cognitive theories contemplate illusory objects and a series of beliefs that we would consider irrational. For example, someone may feel appreciation or love for another simply because they discover that they share particular beliefs or tastes. It can also turn their admiration or sympathy into contempt, if the person subject to the emotion assumes a different political orientation that produces in the subject total repulsion.

The cognitive considers both predictable forms under standards of rational adequacy and beliefs, bizarre, incoherent and pathological behaviors. Here the notion of irrational beliefs refers to ideas that are inconsistent with reality, without foundation or illogical, but that individuals consider true in their way of processing the information they receive from the world (Pinedo and Yáñez, 2017).

The human beliefs that provoke emotions are quite complex and constitute a differentiating criterion from the emotions experienced by animals. Human beings have a wide variety of beliefs that interact at different levels with emotional processes, inducing particular forms of behavior or action tendencies: beliefs about the emotions of other people, beliefs about the intentions and motivations of other individuals, beliefs about states of imaginary things and beliefs about future situations, among other thoughts that are part of our cognitive universe (Elster, 2002; Suárez and González, 2021). All these elements configure the causal link that goes from cognition to emotion and emotion to cognition, while making a difference with visceral states such as hunger, thirst and other appetites that indicate bodily needs, but have no cognitive background or intentional objects.

Performance Society and Emotions

Previous inputs allow us to approach Byung-Chul Han's positions, but now equipped with new theoretical assumptions. The South Korean philosopher, in his most emblematic works such as *Psychopolitics* (2014a), *The society of tiredness* (2012) and more recently in *No-things* (2021) and *Infocracy* (2022), makes a type of portrait of the current society and also denounces what we are living. Perceived fatigue results from the frantic pursuit of performance. A performance often self-imposed, but emotionally driven by a society that invites you to believe that you can always give more: work 100 %, you set the goal, success waits for you, there are no limits, limits only exist in your mind...

If we observe -following the Stoic doctrine and the cognitive theories of valuation- the background, what circulates is an overstimulation of beliefs based on hyperpositivity, which alter our emotional state. Han (2014a) attributes this new social outlook to the implementation of neo-liberal psychopolitics as a new framework of domination: to increase productivity, body resistance is not overcome, but mental and psychic processes are optimized. In these areas, which are very well conceived by consumerism and the proliferation of non-tangible objects such as information and programs, the emotional states that characterize today's men and women will grow.

The affirmative plural *Yes, we can* is the expression of the emotional positivity of late-modern society, contrasting sharply with the disciplinary society described by Foucault (2008), where the principles of "should" and "should not" shaped individual and collective behavior. Thus, the condition that it is possible to do everything and the imperative that every day is an opportunity to develop a new and better version of oneself, become the cognitive sources of beliefs that generate a cluster of emotions that function as a sensitive energy foundation of action in contemporary global society (Malaspina, 2022).

Society makes us believe that success, recognition, or fame is most valued, and that underpins the true meaning of life. We often hear about the "successful man or woman", which usually translates as economic success and social recognition: a more luxurious house, travel, cars, eccentricities, etc. Since we were children, we get on the hamster wheel under the idea that "we are what we have". And in adulthood each new day is a hamster wheel that swirls to get the latest cell phone or technological gadget, get the most *likes* on social networks, and be somehow recognized in the new infosphere that governs the fate of our life (Han, 2022).





If a call were made to participate in a conference entitled “The successful man and woman”, surely many would sign up motivated by curiosity and the idea of innovation generated by these typical announcements of *coaching* events. However, if the theme of the meeting was solidarity, compassion, altruism or generosity, the number of people interested decreases drastically and perhaps the event would not be held. Indeed, social media, television, and even the world of series are full of success stories, but success is often understood as reaching the top of the *American way of life*, but these contents do not necessarily represent the lives of those who have globalized solidarity and service to others. The important thing here is to point out the relationship between cognition and emotion, or to be clearer between valuations, beliefs and emotions. Each one takes to the streets in his own hamster wheel driven by the hypercommunication of digital media that exalt success and performance, as portrayed by Han in the *Tiredness Society* (2012).

In neoliberal society, the wheel of every human hamster circulates through information and stimuli that are difficult to structure; in the streets and workplaces, there are loudspeakers who announce: You have to get the right income, you have to concentrate all your energies on personal fulfillment, you have to stay young, you have to appear without being. Even if we are empty inside, we must show ourselves in an interesting way, show the *cool* photo, the super cheerful and even retouched *selfie*, the party with friends, the food in the luxurious restaurant, in the football game, because the important thing is to generate a narrative and a fiction of the successful man and woman that always moves in the atmosphere of well-being:

The neoliberal regime presupposes emotions as resources to increase productivity and performance [...]. Rationality is perceived as coercion, as an obstacle. Suddenly it has stiff, inflexible effects. Instead, emotionality enters the scene, which runs parallel to the feeling of freedom, to the free display of personality. To be free even means to give way to emotions. The capitalism of emotion uses freedom. Emotion is celebrated as an expression of free subjectivity. The neoliberal power technique exploits this free subjectivity (Han, 2014a, p. 71).

After this exhausting journey in everyday life, for a few months, the hamster wheel addresses the only cause that deserves one to mobilize for it: the holidays, to once again show on social networks the life they believe they deserve. This happens because our interpretation or valuation of the world is already tainted by false beliefs—as the old Stoics would say—or misconceptions about the true meaning of life (Han, 2014a).

If so, to the extent that people find themselves full of beliefs about money, fame, or the cult of beauty as fundamental goals to achieve, they will soon be gripped by a mass of emotions of sadness, anger, envy, heart-ache, or shame, seeing that this is not fulfilled in reality. At this point it is crucial to remember, according to Nussbaum's statements, that judgments related to emotions such as sadness are *eudaimonistic*. This implies that they evaluate the external object not from an impartial and impersonal world perspective, but from the point of view of the agent's goals and projects. In that sense, the initial belief that an emotion is based may be unfounded, but this may be intensified as we become unfounded illusions about money or social recognition (Nussbaum, 2008). It is also important to take into account the phenomenon of "emotional contagion", where a person shelters inside and externalizes an emotion towards another person, which is transmitted to a third person through a type of contagion, generating that the behavior of the first person has a disinhibiting effect on the third person by transmitting the signal that it is acceptable to succumb to certain emotions that we would normally keep under control (Elster, 2002).

However, it should be noted that in this continuous exposure to multiple erroneous beliefs the mass media, *influencers*, entrepreneurship gurus, "celebrities" and show business, which have a powerful presence on the Internet play a prominent role. These characters contribute significantly to the formation of culture, both locally and globally, assuming here by "culture" a way of understanding the shared beliefs and values shown by individual members of a society. Thus, so-called "influencers" actually affect the assessments and judgments underlying emotions, and the specific behaviors that result from certain interpretations of reality (Silva *et al.*, 2023). Likewise, these individuals contribute emotionally to define behaviors that can be seen as appropriate objects of scorn, shame, praise or admiration.

It is very revealing that for many people the words and way of life of a recognized athlete, a fashion singer or an influencer (often without education, without judgment or who spreads disinformation) have more impact on their affections than the content of a good book, the statements of a noted intellectual or the ideas contained in a scientific theory (Lazzarato, 2015; Saidel, 2016). It is true that the world of entertainment and the intellectual world are two distinct areas, but the weight given to each in everyday life accounts for the real values and beliefs that motivate our actions:

We let ourselves be overly affected by information that happens quickly. Affections are faster than rationality. In affective communication, it is



not the best arguments that prevail, but the information with the greatest potential for excitement. So *fake news* attracts more attention than the facts. A single *tweet* with a fake news story or a decontextualized piece of information can be more effective than a well-founded argument (Han, 2022, p. 35).

At this point, it is important to say that these reflections are not aimed at abandoning genuine efforts to achieve a better quality of personal or family life, which can be a noble ideal. Nor is it a message against the desire for improvement that many of us harbor within us, the underlying issue is to realize the false beliefs that may be dominating our reason for being in this world or the path we are taking every day to end up in the opaque society of tiredness described by Byung-Chul Han. In the background, the thesis prevails according to which the assessment that a person makes of a situation that induces an emotion is intimately connected with what one thinks it should be and with the goals we pursue, also with the “ideal self” we seek. The point is that in consumer capitalism this ideal self is under question for its burden of fatigue.

For Han, the sovereignty of technology, in conjunction with the “imperative of happiness” of the neoliberal regime, leads life as an existence that takes place in a sum of moments to lose its way, to be immersed in the confusion of the mass and the passing of the superfluous situations in which the individual cannot be authentically himself. Laurent Berlant (2020) had already announced certain ideas along the same lines as Han: this neoliberal society and culture brings a poison within it, aspirations to a good life, social ascent, “success” and comfort become, paradoxically, an obstacle to human development (Berlant, 2020). The race to happiness ends, for many, in the goal of disenchantment with the world and a feeling of rupture with the other, even with their closest relatives: there is no time to listen, people no longer live life as a whole, people no longer want to wait and let it mature, everything must be satisfaction in the act; friendship and love become conceived as occasional fun of the moment. It is not surprising, then, that the technological allies of these experiences are video and chat, because they are the appropriate communication form for the mass, they are the means that quickly transmit what wants to be known and can be forgotten immediately.

For those who live in jail on social media, the issue is even more pressing. Since face-to-face presence is not possible on an ongoing basis, networks are an instrument to call for attention, friendship, affection, and a certain sense of community. However, what we see growing is that in the society of “non-things” (Han, 2021) we are moving from being subjects to



becoming data packages, mere information that is consumed quickly and left aside when the time for novelty or shocking passes. Thus, with the accumulation of information we receive and send (publications, *selfies*, memes, etc.), finally, we do not focus on anything or anyone.

Paradoxically, we demand attention and affection in the digital community, but few really provide that, because, just as we superficially dispatch the information of others, other people quickly consume our information and then follow in their own hamster wheel (Garavito and Bula, 2020). The result is an emotional restlessness or a tiredness, because the belief that I will be valued or recognized as I really want does not occur or occurs incompletely and unsatisfactorily in this swarm of indifference and superficiality (Han, 2014b).

There are contradictions in the acceleration inherent in these experiences: social networks are making the other one in a vanishing trance. They are technologies of expulsion of the other, make us deaf to the voice of the other, stimulate an exacerbated narcissism that does not know the other, although we long to be seen by others (Han, 2022). This contradiction occurs in two ways: because it is impossible to recognize oneself without the gaze of the other and because Internet algorithms -as they detect our tastes- present us with information that is increasingly reduced to our personal worldview, away from opposing ideas or positions, i.e., from the other.

At times, the emotional *burnout* syndrome is the fate that many feel after resting for the fatigue that implies being in the hamster wheel or what is the same: being in this wheel of existence created by *Homo economicus* and *Homo digitalis* according to neoliberal principles. This wheel has a stifling centripetal force, and it is difficult for an individual to escape from its dizzying interior, because the belief that success is around the corner, along with the obligation to be happy, leaves no room for other existential considerations.

In *No-things* (Han, 2021) regarding the emotional world becomes finer and sharper:

The *selfie* announces the disappearance of the person charged with destiny and history. It expresses the way of life that is playfully given to the moment. The *selfies* do not know grieving. Death and fleetingness are completely alien to them (p. 52).

Selfies as mere digital information make the memory, destiny and history disappear, they are linked to today and are not a means for memory; their condition resembles that of a message heard on an answering



machine that is then deleted, that is why they are not instant things that dilute the true links with others. People are struggling to take as many *selfies* as they can, to immediately post them on WhatsApp's "statuses," and then discard them as quickly as they were taken. The *selfie* is not-a-thing, it is a soulless photo, so many are seen on social networks that do not generate a real affection for someone.

Finally, in the informatics society it can be said that the *smartphone* is the privileged instrument to structure our beliefs and, therefore, our emotions. The hamster wheel now comes with an integrated *smartphone* display on which we delegate our perceptions of the world and our cognitions in some form:

We perceive reality through the screen. The digital window dilutes reality into information, which we then record. There is no contact with things. We no longer perceive the material beats of reality. Perception becomes disembodied light. The *smartphone* goes around the world (Han, 2021).

The *smartphone* is the instrument that dominates our emotional repertoire in many areas, but not always to build the human community or to consolidate affective links with the real other that I have in front of me. It would seem that we do not realize that we are not the ones who use the *smartphone*, but the *smartphone* uses us.

The *smartphone* is one of the engines of the hamster wheel, we are subject to the authority of that small digital informomata that dominates us without commandments or prohibitions. Its *smart* function is not to make us docile, but to make us dependent and addicted by breaking our will and emotions (Han, 2013, 2021). The emotional world of the 21st century is shaped in various ways by the "dataism" of the *smartphone* and its package of false beliefs. We have gradually slipped into digital totalitarianism. Now a new ally of the *smartphone* seems to also take the reins of human life, artificial intelligence, with its concrete expressions like the Chat GPT, which has made a successful appearance in the scene of current dataism to reaffirm that subjugation is inexorable. Belief in the measurability and quantifiability of life dominates the entire digital age and in the new temples of information that is the preaching given in the new cult of non-things.

Conclusions

The hamster wheel is a symbol of one of the most vivid problems of the present: the work on the psyche in the neoliberal society of performan-



ce. Human reality, taken both individually and collectively, seems to be driven to run on the hamster wheel. Nevertheless, Han's work allows us to approach the philosophical reflection from a new perspective to face these challenges of the current society of fatigue.

They have opted for a recovery of "nostrity" in the midst of digital dataism, a term that refers to the metaphysical tendency of the human being to the constitution of a "we" and to the authentic attitude of openness to the other. Each person "understands" other human beings and gets to them to form a diverse us. But this nostrity cannot be formed in the "swarm" that has produced the neoliberal society of *Homo digitalis* (Han, 2014b). There is no real otherness in the swarm of digital communication technologies because the personal realization that is emphasized is more focused on selfishness and individuality, rather than on a sense of community, so what prevails is a cult of a dominant self of the other. On the other hand, we emphasize otherness, the tendency to the "other self" under a sense of "comuniversity", a neologism with which we designate the tendency of humanity to form the universal community. A community where the other does, because he is a person, with a face, a soul, a story, with a life full of intensities and sometimes of pain.

Even in the "transparency" that characterizes *Homo digitalis*, there is no real nostrity. People allow others to enter their lives through social networks, images and cameras, erasing the boundaries between the public and the private, but in that intrusion that observes the tastes, desires and projects of the other there is no genuine communion, only curiosity, consumption of rapid information and fleeting attention that is then forgotten in the flow of data offered by the mass (Mallamaci, 2017). In the swarm no one forces others to have a panoptic visibility, each one, without coercion, wants to let himself be seen, wants to be focused to become information of the other. The swarm is not a reciprocal "you" who is spoken to by his own name, nor in the face-to-face of personal affection, where the you appears as a complementary and necessary reflection of the self. In contrast, there is a *like* that is given to many and an emotion that is shared with automatism, just to indicate that I was on the internet and that I effectively consumed the information I found. In the swarm the other is in a vanishing trance, his being is in crisis because we no longer hear or recognize his speech, there is only an effective exchange of information between functional units of the dataist universe. In the digital world, the other is hastily dismissed with a simple "like," an addition to the calculable and optimized life that will again be said in the form of an algorithm when I meet again on the net with your data package.



In this context, the important thing is to recognize how that individual who runs frantically on the hamster wheel is driven by an engine of emotions that are based on a cluster of beliefs about the meaning of life and the value we give to other people. When beliefs are centered on performance, personal success, and hyper-productivity, the result is a series of emotional behaviors that undermine ostracism or attachment to others. Digitization produces beliefs that destroy each other's faces, memories, and contacts.

Following Han's ideas, in this world of non-things, the task of philosophy is to create a space for argumentation and self-examination, so that recognizing the *telos* of the digital order that seems to prevail, we have to be vigilant against this avalanche of desires, beliefs, habits and information that condition our emotions and perceptions. Philosophy reemerges as a medicine of the soul that leads the patient to an exhaustive exploration of his own interiority, to reach what the ancient Stoics already intuited: "You must make yourself better every day". Philosophy shapes the spirit, orders life, shows what should be done and what should be omitted, sits at the helm and through the dangers steers the course.

In this journey through the emotions and their influence on the society of performance, the ideas of Nussbaum and Han open ways to think differently and critically about the human condition of the 21st century. Today's societies face significant challenges, as they must unravel the complex power dynamics that are increasingly being perfected in new ways to subjugate the psyche, beliefs, and their drifts into emotions. Nowadays, human beings are exposed to the possibility of being deceived by their own mind, by their valuations and interpretations of the world, aspects that have become very valuable assets for contemporary capitalism, which invites self-exploitation. So moving away from a logic centered on performance, success, and the narcissistic mindset seems to be a task for every individual, for the philosophy to come, and for education.

In a society obsessed with productivity, information, and consumption, the therapy of emotions is once again a topic of remarkable philosophical relevance. Surely many who are running on the hamster wheel refuse to admit that their desires and beliefs are indeed negative for a flourishing life, therefore they may not be willing to accept the result of therapeutic arguments to improve their condition of submission to neoliberal psychopolitics. But the philosophy of the present and the future will continue to insist on bringing the health of the soul to all those who want to internalize these reflections. The thinking of Han and the old Stoics state that there can be a good and happy life even in the noise of the infosphere.



References

- ARNOLD, Magda
1960 *Emotion and Personality*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- BERGUA, Juan
1936 *Los estoicos: Epicteto, "Máximas"; Marco Aurelio, "Pensamientos"; Boecio: "De la consolación por la filosofía"*. Madrid: Bergua.
- BERLANT, Lauren
2020 *El optimismo cruel*. Madrid: Caja Negra.
- BRENNAN, Thomas
2005 *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties, and Fate*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- BRENTANO, Franz
1935 *Psicología*. Madrid: Revista de Occidente.
- CENSI, Walter
2022 La emoción y la afectividad neoliberal en Byung-Chul Han: una relectura de Jean Baudrillard. *Argumentos, Estudios Críticos de la Sociedad*, (98), 217-237.
<https://doi.org/10.24275/uamxoc-dcsh/argumentos/202298-09>
- CRISIPO DE SOLOS
2006 *Testimonios y fragmentos*. Madrid: Gredos.
- ELSTER, Jon
2002 *Alquimias de la mente: la racionalidad y las emociones*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- FOUCAULT, Michel
2008 *Nacimiento de la biopolítica*. Buenos Aires: FCE.
- FRIJDA, Nico
2007 *The Laws of Emotions*. Londres: Lawrence Erbaum Associates.
- GARAVITO, María Clara & BULA, Germán
2020 *Byung-Chul Han: psicopolítica y educación*. Bogotá: Unisalle.
- GRAVER, Margaret
2007 *Stoicism and Emotion*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- GREENSPAN, Patricia
2004 Practical Reasoning and Emotion. En A. Mele & P. Rawling (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Rationality*. Londres: Oxford University Press.
- HAN, Byung-Chul
2012 *La sociedad del cansancio*. Barcelona: Herder.
2013 *La sociedad de la transparencia*. Barcelona: Herder.
2014a *Psicopolítica: neoliberalismo y nuevas técnicas de poder*. Barcelona: Herder.
2014b *En el enjambre*. Barcelona: Herder.
2021 *No-cosas: quiebras del mundo de hoy*. Madrid: Taurus.
2022 *Infocracia: la digitalización y la crisis de la democracia*. Madrid: Taurus.
- KNUUTTILA, Simo
2004 *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- LAZARUS, Richard
1991 *Emotion and Adaptation*. Nueva York: Oxford University Press.
2000 *Estrés y emoción: manejo e implicaciones en nuestra salud*. Bilbao: Desclee de Brouwer.
- LAZZARATO, Mauricio
2015 *Gobernar a través de la deuda: tecnologías del poder del capitalismo neoliberal*. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu.

- LONG, Antony
1996 *Stoic Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- LYONS, William
1993 *Emoción*. Barcelona: Anthropos.
- MALASPINA, Luis
2022 *La gestión de las emociones en la sociedad del cansancio*. La Plata: Universidad Nacional de La Plata.
- MALLAMACI, Marco
2017 El poder psicopolítico en las sociedades postdisciplinarias del *Homo digitalis*: apuntes sobre el pensamiento de Byung-Chul Han. *Revista Latina de Sociología*, 7(1), 74-94. <https://doi.org/10.17979/relaso.2017.7.1.2135>
- NUSSBAUM, Martha
1997 *Justicia poética: la imaginación literaria y la vida pública*. Barcelona: Andrés Bello.
2003 *La terapia del deseo: teoría y práctica en la época helenística*. Barcelona: Paidós.
2008 *Paisajes del pensamiento: la inteligencia de las emociones*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- ORTONY, Andrew, CLORE, Gerald & COLLINS, Allan
1988 *The Cognitive Structure of the Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- PINEDO, Iván & Yáñez, Jaime
2017 Las emociones y la vida moral: una lectura desde la teoría cognitivo-evaluadora de Martha Nussbaum. *Veritas*, (36), 47-72. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-92732017000100003>
2020 Emociones básicas y emociones morales complejas: claves de comprensión y criterios de clasificación desde una perspectiva cognitiva. *Tesis Psicológica*, 7(2), 198-218. <https://doi.org/10.37511/tesis.v15n2a11>
- PINEDO, Iván
2021 *Martha Nussbaum y la justicia compasiva: un análisis crítico de la teoría de las emociones morales*. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia.
- PLUTCHIK, Robert & KELLERMAN, Henry
1980 *Emotion. Theory, Research, and Experience, Theories of Emotion* (vol. 1). Nueva York: Academic Press.
- ROSEMAN, Ira & SMITH, Craig
2001 Appraisal Theory: Overview, Assumptions, Varieties, Controversies. En K. Scherer, A. Schorr & T. Johnstone (eds.), *Appraisal Processes in Emotion: Theory, Methods, Research* (pp. 3-19). Nueva York: Oxford University Press.
- SAIDEL, Matías
2016 La fábrica de la subjetividad neoliberal: del empresario de sí al hombre endeudado. *Pléyade*, (17), 131-154. <https://bit.ly/47xdbhS>
- SILVA, Wilmer, ZAMORA, Carlos & GUERRERO, Manuel
2023 Elementos de la obra de Byun-Chul Han para la formación ética frente a la sociedad del rendimiento. *Sophia, Colección de Filosofía de la Educación*, (34), 183-205. <https://doi.org/10.17163/soph.n34.2023.06>
- SOLOMON, Robert
2003 *Not Passion's Slave. Emotions and Choice*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
2007 *Ética emocional: una teoría de los sentimientos*. Barcelona: Paidós.



SUÁREZ, Ernesto & GONZÁLEZ, Leonardo

- 2021 Puntos de encuentro entre pensamiento crítico y metacognición para repensar la enseñanza de ética. *Sophia, Colección de Filosofía de la Educación*, (30), 181-202. <https://doi.org/10.17163/soph.n30.2021.06>

TIELEMAN, Teun

- 2003 *Chrysippus on Affections: Reconstructions and Interpretations*. Leiden: Brill.

Document reception date: June 24, 2023

Document review date: August 20, 2023

Document approval date: October 20, 2023

Document publication date: January 15, 2024

