

## Postmodernity and education in Spain

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### ABSTRACT

It seems that Spanish society has made up for time lost during the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975) and now postmodern values have a high prevalence especially among the young. This change in values which began in the rich European countries in the sixties was delayed in Spain until the installation of the constitution in 1978. This led to a more libertarian regime which has allowed the possibility of postmodernity. The arrival of postmodernity in Spain has given rise to relativism, pluralism, disenchantment with enlightened reason and has brought with it pacifism, feminism, ecology etc. With increased democratic freedom came drugs, pornography, student rebellion, sexual liberation and many other changes which appeared in a number of European countries several years before.

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### 1. Spanish Intellectuals

Faced with this new situation, a large proportion of Spanish intellectuals have opted for agnosticism, which has become fashionable and is now the common denominator in intellectual values. In the opinion of Carlos Diaz, the majority of Spanish philosophy which considers itself postmodern belongs to this school of thought. "Many called themselves postmodernist scarcely had the term been put into circulation" (Diaz, 1985). It is an agnosticism which has a certain cautiousness and insecurity with regard to metaphysical and religious questions and is convinced that nothing can be known about these subjects. At the same time, it proposes a humanism which escaping from the polemics of faith versus atheism favours tolerance, understanding and social collaboration (Jimenez, 1990).

Such an attitude, comments Javier Sadaba, is so universal that it does not even arouse interest. Nowadays, it is considered normal and widespread that an educated reasonable adult will neither be a believer nor an unbeliever and would in fact be unconcerned about such issues (Sadaba, 1984). Only the finite can explain the limits and possibilities of reality affirms Tierno Galvan, teacher and Mayor of Madrid:

There is nothing more tedious than the attitude of the skeptic. There is nothing more vibrant than the attitude of the agnostic who accepts the finite without trying to explain it, understanding that the boundaries of the finite are the limits of "what is". To put it in the language of the poem by Parmenides (Tierno Galvan, 1982).

Along with this intellectual agnosticism there is another agnosticism called "popular induced" derived from a positivist mentality and an empirical view of life which is increasing in prevalence in Spanish society. It is more or less true to say that this is the "forma mentis" of man today and its influence can be found in any widely held opinion.

The disenchantment with reason and weak thinking has generated an "indifference" which is visible above all in the culture and vocabulary of the young. The ("yo paso tío") "Couldn't give a damn attitude" is an affirmation of complete withdrawal and non-participation. It is a transitory attitude similar to the life of the airports where nothing is stable and everything is in constant change. The ("pasota") "indifferent person" doesn't get involved because he is not interested, he doesn't fancy it or he has no incentive. Religion, unions or politics fail to convince or enthuse him.

Postmodern man has taken easily to weak thinking. What is thought and felt today will not necessarily be maintained tomorrow. It is a supermarket mentality in which each person can choose at any given moment what he fancies without fear of incoherence, without having to refute anything. Disenchanted reason is now so feeble that it has lost the power of reason and it has broken into a thousand reasons. -

The dashed hopes of the person in a well known folk tale are analogous to this situation. A peasant who started out with three grains of wheat had by investment and step by step improvement got to the point where she owned a ceramic churn of milk which represented the next step to economic prosperity. As she was thinking about the future, the churn fell from her head and everything was lost. From that day on her hopes were replaced by disenchantment, skepticism and indifference; Just as postmodern man, who with no feeling of nostalgia or sadness holds no great expectation for the future, from now on will only live for the present.

## 2. Now Everything is Possible

In the face of the disenchantment with reason and of fragmentation of reality everything is possible. Before, reality was talked about in many ways, now it is talked about as many things; now there is not one reality but multiple realities. The loss of foundations has caused the fragmentation and the birth of multiple foundations. The principles of the modernity are over and now there is only plurality in ways of justification.

All ways of being can co-exist without exception, in this lacklustre time which is without stable reference or coordination everyone can choose his pleasure, whether it be mundane or exotic, new or old, a simple ecological existence or a hyper-sophisticated lifestyle (Lipovetsky, 1990).

Our postmodern society as such, is in an overall sense "irrational" as a result of there being so many rationalities. We have changed from absolute truths to relative truths in all areas of life, from the basic foundations to the large institutions and the absolute truths which still exist are only absolute for each individual. This dissolution creates a state of temporariness in our social structure, a disorientated vision of the future and a devaluation of the principle values of the modernity. We do not live in a society without values, as is often stated, we live in a society whose values negate those of previous generations. Or one could say that this coexistence makes it difficult or impossible to

distinguish with clarity the value of the antivalues. Fundamental principles don't exist because there is no foundation to justify the foundation.

Various images have been used to illustrate this destruction: the broken vase (C.Dfaz) open sea without fixed horizon nor foundation (Mardones) the substitution of the compass by the radar (J.M Lozano), lost paths (Heidegger), islands in an archipelago (Lyotard), road with no signposts, boat with no anchor, broken mirror ..... In this plural and deficient situation perhaps reason itself will work out its own itinerary, find its bearings and construct a foundation or maybe it will piece together those fragments of the broken mirror or smashed vase as it sees fit.

The postmodernity therefore, says goodbye to all foundation and fixed principles and opens a new "episteme" of indetermination, discontinuity and pluralism. Its social consequences according to Mardones are:

- a. The decline of religious predominance: salvation, the destiny of man, sin, grace, etc. In its place are economic problems: What and how to produce, what benefits to obtain. In consequence a substitution of religious values for economic values.
- b. A world of fragmented principles on the disappearance of christian principles in the west. Weber calls this loss of the sacred "disenchantment of the world"
- c. Growing bureaucracy as a result of economic and industrial growth. It is necessary to introduce order to classify and subclassify organisms which are increasingly more complex in the social and political world (Mardones, 1989).

An Indian folktale narrated by Professor Maurice Duverger can illustrate the fragmentation which goes with the loss of foundation. It is about five blind people who describe an elephant. The first one touches the trunk and says "It's a tube", The second one grabs the foot:"It's a tree trunk" The third takes the tail: "It's a rope" The fourth felt the tusk "It's some kind of stake", The last one bumped into the body and declared skeptically, "Baa it's only a wall" (Cebrián, 1987).

The postmodernist is not concerned with what total reality is, he is content with the partiality of momentary perception. Therefore his life is the domain of autonomous subjectivity, without north or any predetermined orientation. Lipovetsky affirms this "God has died, his great designs are extinguished, nobody cares at all. This is the happy new situation" (Lipovetsky, 1990). Or as Heidegger holds: We have lost the path and we can only find fragmented weak thinking.

### 3. Moral fragmentation

Loss of all foundation- of the self, of reason, of history - There is nothing left except an existential fragmentation and "a changing horizon where reason can vary, which is not now an objective instrument but a pleasure seeking instrument. Morality, in consequence also remains fragmented not supported by fixed principles. The centre of the action is the self. The feelings and preferences of each individual determine the action which is always judged according to personal criteria. With the disappearance of a rule based orientation and all criteria of values, there will only be as many moral rules as each person has need for. The ethics of modern thought has arrived at its conclusion.

Logical plurality and movements which advocate rejection of all ontological foundation give rise to the proliferation of "microethics" which afford no possibility of unanimous consensus. In the words of professor Victoria Camps, "We would say that today the only possible result of skepticism and disorientation is "microethics" (Camps, 1983). Or as Vatimo declares "as opposed to an ethic of imperatives we find ourselves with a material ethic" No less radical is Juan Luis Cebrian who affirms that "any aesthetic requires an ethic and not the other way around" (Cebrian, 1987). In other words, how we, appear is more important than what we are.

Postmodernity, therefore, postulates relativism, the eminence of aesthetics, the dissolution of rule-based orientation; it is against science and the predominance of judicial law. It is a polytheistic

society which, lacking any ethical criteria, has adopted an "anything goes" attitude. Absolute values do not exist nor is there any stable hierarchy of values. The only categorical imperatives are "Do what you want", "Be happy" (Sadaba, 1985). Or as F. Umbral recently declared "What your body asks of you is true, never betray it"(Umbral, 1991). As Dostoyevsky says in a novel *"If God doesn't exist, everything is permitted"*; anything is morally valid with the exception of absolute values or virtues. Rubert de Ventós also understood it in this way:

It is possible to be morally correct doing anything as long as we do not start wanting to colonize the whole world with our own values and virtues. As opposed to this tendency to make society conform to suit one person, morality will consist, rather, in conforming to the world: not in moralizing about the world but by making ourselves part of the world (Rubert de Ventós, 1971)

We can find the same affirmation in another of his works:

To be moral, we often hear, means to be responsible, to be part of a whole, to have a clear and firm hierarchy of principles. Well I believe that it can be said and up to a certain point it must be said, that it is totally the opposite" (Rubert de Ventós, 1984)

Narcissus who was in love with himself, is the symbol of Postmodernity. Modern man identified himself with Prometheus, the hero, who distrusting Zeus, brought the fire of the gods to Earth and in doing so advanced humanity.<sup>1</sup> Camus in 1942 believed that the most suitable symbol was Sisyphus who was condemned to perpetually drag a rock to the top of a mountain. No sooner had he reached the top, the rock fell to the bottom. (successive reconstructions of Europe after the first and second world wars). Now it is **Narcissus** who died a victim of his passion for his own reflection in a pool of water.(narcissism) and **Dionysus**, the god of wine, known for his orgiastic parties.

With a subjective, narcissist-hedonist morality in which anything is valid it is impossible to distinguish between good and evil because everything is relative to the individual in any given moment. In consequence there is no place for guilt, if by guilt we mean the transgression of a moral law or not doing as one ought. The notion of accepting "what is" without the compunction to include "what ought to be" is dealt with by Fernando Pessoa in his poetry.

The existence of injustice is like the existence of death. I would never lift a finger to alter that which they call the injustice of the world. I accept injustice in the same way as I accept that a stone is not round or a cork tree was not born a pine or an oak" (Pessoa, 1981).

Raul del Pozo goes even further because he considers that some architectural works have been inspired by a sense of guilt. "Medieval kings tormented by guilty feelings due to fratricide and adultery ordered great needles of stone to be built in an attempt to beg heaven for mercy". The Porch of Glory in Santiago would not have been built if an adulterous king had not lain with concubines. On examining his conscience with the cardinals of the regime, Franco, instigator of the civil war, ordered a cross of forgiveness to be erected which would be seen by the eyes of God. Those who repent for their licentious lives or reflect upon their crimes, are absolved of their guilt forever, and it is written in marble ( ... ) If Felipe Gonzalez and Alfonso Guerra had not received the wholehearted approval of their own executive committee on issues so liable to inspire guilt as the NATO referendum, or the policy of economic compromise against the workers perhaps they would have already decided to build a mosque in the working class district of Bella Vista or a marble hermitage for an Andalusian virgin. As they lack a sense of guilt, not enough hospitals roads and monuments are built."(Del Pozo, 1989).

The feeling of guilt stemming from the absence of good deeds or the presence of evil deeds must be rejected. In this light, postmodern man has neither past nor future; he has no alternative to the present morality and the precariousness of daily life. As Javier Sadaba affirms: "The current morality has no option but be a morality of the precarious or to be more exact, of day to day existence. This is not, of course, in order to convert necessity into virtue but because our shadows are shadows of something provisional: Man himself"(Sadaba, 1984). In daily life, one must rebel in order to make up for the pleasures that have been replaced by an impoverished and dry God. There

is no other life than the day to day one and all extraordinary things either come from it or lead to it. In order to cope with it, the first step is to live it because there is no other (Sadaba, 1984).

Consequently, post-modernity leads to a hedonist and narcissistic individualism. More than an ethic, it is an aesthetic. It is a democratization of hedonism, the triumph of anti-morality and of anti-establishmentarianism, which results in a life devoted to the seduction of the multiple or momentary, to the pleasure of the new and of the self (Mardones, 1988).

J. Kerkofs expresses the following opinion about European hedonistic and narcissistic individualism: "This individualistic narcissism manifests itself in a tendency towards more security and less commitment (...) Young people are fully aware of the negative aspects of our contemporary society: the arms race, unemployment, the increase of divorce, the universal spiritual void and questions about the meaning of life. Precisely for this reason, a large percentage shelter in individualism and in immediate experiences (sexuality, dance, sports, drugs). Many consider this individualism to be a self-defence against complex and uncontrollable structures and systems about which more is known each day but less is understood" (Kerkofs, 1987).

The popular folk tale of the grasshopper and the ant illustrates the antagonism between the modern and the post-modern conduct and way of life. Whilst the grasshopper lives only for the present enjoying himself with song and dance, the ant works hard from sunrise to sunset, planning for the next winter. Today, the grasshopper wearing his post-modern suit may even sing the following Spanish song by the "Rebeldes":

"They say I'm going backwards ...  
But my head's OK where it is.  
And I follow my own morals.  
I say I'm mad but in reality  
I'm beyond good and evil."

(Rebeldes)

#### 4. Pluralism of Values. "Anything Goes".

The previously expressed philosophical vision - in which there is loss of confidence in reason and ontological foundation is denied - leads us to a relativism and a subjectivity which affect all aspects of human knowledge and life, and consequently to a pluralism and polytheism of values. Nothing is absolute. Anything is valid or could be valid since values are now always circumstantial: "it depends".

From these foundations we can make a list of values, albeit unfinished because "anything Goes". A synthesis of the most representative foundations is expressed in the following table which shows the conflicting relationship between modernity and post-modernity:

## VALUES

<b>Post-Modernity</b>	<b>as opposed to</b>	<b>Modernity</b>
the relative	"	the absolute
diversity	"	unity
subjectivity	"	objectivity
pleasure	"	effort
fragility	"	strength
the present	"	the past/future
secularization	"	sacralization
feeling	"	reason
aesthetics	"	ethics
humour	"	seriousness
agnosticism	"	certainty
frivolity	"	security
Etc., etc.	"	etc.,etc.

Without doubt, this list only shows the most important comparisons. However this enunciation could be unlimited, just as the possible experiences and circumstances of humans, not only on a personal but also a group level, are also unlimited.

## 5. Axiomatic Foundation of all Education

Nowadays, no doubt remains about the axiomatic foundation of any educative action, since it is impossible to carry out any educative action without referring to its value. The problem does not stem so much from the axiomatic foundation but from **which** axiomatic foundation; that is to say, whether Modern or Post-Modern values act as the foundation. The subject becomes all the more complicated and even more conflicting when one considers the doublesided nature of value: its ideal existence (beyond experience) and its real existence (here I am now), or rather reality tinted with reason and affection. Consequently, agreement will easily lead to the ideal plan (truth, justice, friendship ... ), but such agreement will disappear in the face of concrete reality. Perfection and optimization have always been sought in education: and divergences will arise if the concrete content of that perfection or optimization is limited: what values, what meaning and what hierarchical order lay the foundations for education, or rather, better education.

The educational problem is, however, an axiomatic one: whether value is derived from within man or from outside of him, whether man creates value or discovers it. This leads us to a subjectivity or an axiomatic objectivity, and on this basis, to a pedagogical subjectivity or objectivity.<sup>2</sup> If the values are subjective, education will be "**educere**", or rather to draw out, to extract, to give birth to; a model for development: to encourage what the subject already possesses. On the contrary, if the values are objective, education will be "**educare**", to lead, to guide, to orientate; a directive model: taking the subject towards a previously determined important goal. And if the values include a subjective as well as an objective dimension, education will follow the same steps: a model of integration.

In order to make such qualifications, there needs to be an explicit or implicit link or reference with value and with each and every dimension of education:

- *The who* of education with **man** as a subject of his own perfection or formative process: Although education never creates the individual, if it gives a new and better way of being, it is one more value in a person's individual and social dimension, a second nature.
- The **content** or *what* of education in any of its aspects: physical, intellectual, affective, moral or religious. In all cases, the content will always be linked to whatever is desirable or worthwhile, or it will cease to be educational. Nobody would class drugs, robbery or murder as educational.
- The **method** or *how* education is carried out. A positive content conveyed by means of manipulation, violence, deception or indoctrination, is no longer worthwhile because of the manner or way in which it is executed and for the same reason, it is far from what we understand by education. Peters said that "educating implies committing oneself to the use of procedures legitimized by morality" (Peters, 1969).
- With the **goal** or *why* of the educational process. The ends, goals or objectives are desired because they are worthwhile. This justifies any of its aspects. At the end of the process, the hope of the educator and of the person being educated is to attain, or at least to get near to, the desired goal, which will always be a more valuable way of being according to the selected model or pattern.

From this axiomatic vision of the educational process, there is today more than ever before the dilemma of acceptance or rejection of that which already exists. Whether to accept the current values (conserving and increasing them), or rather to change a worthless situation has always been the problem and the task as regards education. Adaptation or rejection, affirmation or negation is perhaps, more than ever, a permanent task with regard to the analysis and assessment of what we inherit.

Post-modern man accepts a collection of values gleaned from personal experience in his anxious search for happiness and perfection.<sup>3</sup> Such values today form a profile or silhouette, a sketch, not an exact photograph of our present society and experiences, and are most noticeable amongst certain groups of young people. It is not a systemized or coherent image, or a clear, anthropological model which is clearly defined. The post-modernist sensitivity - fragmented, nihilistic and empty - is too ambiguous and baroque, too polymorphic to allow such an image. In whatever case, the crisis is always present.

## 6. Post-modernity as an educational crisis

In pedagogical literature, the word "crisis" is not a new one when used in its original sense~ being a situation of change where one must decide. (The Greek word *krisis* means the act of deciding, of distinction or choice). However, what is new is the acceleration of such changes both in number and depth. This distancing has reached such a level today that, children are only their parents' children biologically: axiomatically they are at most, their grandchildren. Post-modernity has accentuated these changes, making the crisis more of a crisis.

Without entering into the axiomatic subjectivity-objectivity polemic, it can be seen that the changes in current education are nothing more than a consequence of the crisis of values or evaluations of man, society and culture. Only a few decades ago, this new culture was nonexistent in Spain as post-modernity had not yet been born (Gervilla, 1990). Today, in only a short space of time, it has invaded everything: the family, school, religion, politics, art, literature, the media, etc. Post-modernity has arisen at such a fast rate that it is apparent in many families, schools and churches ... in general, parents, teachers and clergymen tend to be modem-minded; whilst sons or

daughters, pupils and parishioners have a post-modern frame of mind. This often causes a *confrontation between generations* which makes dialogue and understanding between parents and offspring, teachers and pupils, priests and parishioners, old and young difficult if not impossible, causing a certain flight from the family, school and church environment.

The key, to understanding the young and how they live is not so much based on ideas but on understanding their experiences and environment. Young people today possess their own vocabulary and appearance which differ greatly from those used by their parents or teachers, and for this reason it may make them feel as though they are living among strangers who were born and who live in the same house or school (Lozano, 1991). Often the differences are so great that dialogue is partially or totally unintelligible. This is the high price that institutional education (family, school, church) must pay when it does not adapt to the rhythm and life-style of the young, and instead of acting as an impulse in accordance with youth dynamics, it acts more as a brake or hindrance. Frequently, the only thing which is shared are the buildings themselves: the intimate and personal remain remote from these places and the people who direct them.

These ideas are mirrored in the following important figures: only 21 % of young Spaniards said that they shared the same basic ideas and attitudes about sex with their parents, 24% said that they shared the same political opinions, 40% shared the same religious opinions, 44% shared the same moral conduct, and 47% shared the same social attitudes. Parents and children exist together rather than live together happily in unity and depth. Today "there is a deep ideological pit separating the generations. Furthermore, one in five young people have nothing in common with their parents, not forgetting that young people receive their basic ideas about life from the television" (Azcona, 1990).

Abroad, the change is similar to that which can be seen in Spain although it happened quite a few years earlier. Professor W. Brezinka, from the University of Constance, following a study carried out in the Federal Republic of Germany concluded that: until the sixties various axiomatic individual orientations predominated which can be called self-effort or self-control, or rather *values concerning duty and acceptance of coercion*. Values of this type are: discipline, obedience, devotion, order, fulfilment of duty, fidelity, subordination, application, moderation, self-control, punctuality, adaptive attitudes, obedience and, moderation.

Between 1965 and 1975, there was a decrease in these values and, at the same time, an increase in those known as *personal self-development values*. These include the following three groups of values:

1. Values of social criticism, such as the emancipation of authority, equality, democracy, participation and the independence of the individual.
2. Hedonistic values in the style of pleasure, adventure, suspense, variety and the experience of emotional needs.
3. Individual values such as creativity, spontaneity, self-fulfilment, independence, personality (Brezinka, 1990).

In whichever country or situation, this permanent change makes dialogue and communication between the old and the young difficult; it also encourages isolation and at times, contempt and a reduction in the authority of the family, school and the church. The educational relationship is therefore made tense and difficult, and is more legal and material instead of intimate and personal. This is a difficult problem to solve and has serious educational consequences.

## 7. Post-Modern Education

What should be done in the face of post-modern values and culture? This is a question often raised by teachers today when post-modernity defies education. The answer is not easy since in the face



of the values - which are the basis of education as we have previously explained - we find ourselves "devoid of reason" and this is why, we can find as many reasons and objections to justify or reject modernity as post-modernity. From a certain viewpoint, it is therefore fairly easy to argue or reject the opposing view. However, we do not believe that confrontation or axiomatic ideological struggle is the best way to clarify the educational model. Conversely, we prefer to search concurrently for the truth and goodness, without there being victors or losers, good or bad people, clever or stupid people ... which will guide us towards a specific choice. This is essential in view of the plurality of educational models, in as much as it is impossible to educate without values or model, but we recognize that only in theory does a perfect model for practical realization exist; instead we find ourselves with a confluence of various models. Not all of those who regard themselves as modern can be said to be totally modern, nor all of those who regard themselves as post-modern can be said to be totally post-modern and the same is true of conservatives, liberals etc; In fact nobody can be said to be completely of one persuasion.

It appears more constructive, and certainly more educational, to accept the existing reality critically, submitting the values offered by the different options to analysis.

Our opinion, therefore can be encapsulated in the following sentence: ***Education must always humanize, making the individual more worthy in his or her individual or social dimension.*** The problem stems from the concept of humanization, or which values humanize best and predominate in man's individual or social dimension.

Only an attitude of dialogue, flexibility and tolerance in view of the plurality of values which are today present in our society enables us to live together without confrontation. Neither Hegel (absolute state) nor Nietzsche (personal anarchy) seem to be good models for education.

## Notes

1. Fichte chose him as a symbol of his ideology. Goethe dedicated an ode to him. For Marx he was the most distinguished of the martyrs and saints.
2. The representatives of subjectivity or relativism in education and culture are: G. Dilthey (Fundamentos de un sistema de Pedagogía, Losada, Buenos Aires, 1954); R. Benedict (El hombre y la cultura, EDHSA, Barcelona, 1971); A.L. Kroeber (The nature of Culture, University of Chicago Press, 1952); J. Dewey (Democracia y Educación, Losada, Buenos Aires, 1978). La búsqueda de la certeza, F.C.E., Mexico, 1952. Naturaleza humana y conducta, F.C.E., Mexico, 1964).  
  
Proponents of objectivity and absolutism (universalism) in education and culture are: M. Huchins (Education of Freedom, Louisiana State University Press, 1943); J.M. Adler, de la University of Columbia; H.H. Horny y W.T. Harris (idealists); C. Kluchhohn (Antropología, F.C.E., Mexico, 1965); R. Linton (Cultura y personalidad, F.C.E., Mexico, 1945).
3. We take value to mean "the desire to possess, conserve and increase goodness, real or ideal, for oneself or for others". Someone or something which we care about (Gervilla, E., El animador: perfil y opciones, C.C.S., Madrid, 1991, p. 68).

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