

NEO-HUMANISM AND DIMINUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF THE HUMAN

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Abstract

The argument of this study is that the horizon of the “human” concept in premodern eras underwent a gradual constriction in terms of content and meaning upon the emergence of modern thought; accordingly, such constriction and diminution are examined within the course of history. Therefore, the diminution of concept of the “human” is discussed, first, within the context of “modern secular humanism,” in the sense of the bereavement of the idea of complete being and completion (*kamāl*) in the wake of positioning the knowing (rational) subject into the center of being and thought. Second, the same discussion is offered in more detail with regard to the transformation of the knowing subject into the desiring/willing subject under the influence of the legitimizing effect of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. According to this study, abovementioned diminution or constriction in the concept of the human has occurred over a course that led to the decentralization of the subject; nevertheless, it paved the way for a new human condition with no ground of legitimacy other than unconscious desires. Consequently, man has remained in the middle of a complete experience of nihilism in the sense of total disconnection from truth, in line with the reproduction of being and values arising pursuant to the culture of consumption and the image.

Key Words: Modern secular humanism, Neo-humanism, libidinal, psychoanalysis, culture of consumption, nihilism

Introduction

This study generally concentrates on how the world of life and thought to which modern and contemporary man is exposed determines the human horizon. This period covers approximately four centuries of gradually more rapid change; therefore, it is evidently impossible to render it the object of encircling discourses and to make sharp and exact inferences based on it. Nevertheless, it is possible to make some general inferences about the transformation that human comprehension underwent, in the context of characteristics that are decisive in almost every aspect of life determined by modern and contemporary thought, on the condition of reserving a certain amount of caution.

The thought of being and truth, which emerged together with modern thought, brought with it the loss of the idea of a teleological and qualitative universe. Accordingly, just like being and truth, man was also treated within the context of quantitative terms and suffered reification. Consequently, the concept of the human was fragmented and diminished as a result of the loss of idea of completion (*kamāl*). To analyze the causality in the universe conceived via entirely mechanistic terms, modern representative epistemology points to a practice in which a complex whole, initially, is dissolved into its constructive atomistic elements, before being resynthesized pursuant to the ordered functioning between these elements. As a result, such epistemology reifies and dismantles the human being into elements of consciousness and the body.

According to the classical perspective, however, both the universe and being as a whole had a teleological character, whereupon qualitative distinctions were in question. Thus, the universe and being were subject to a hierarchic structure in which they became ontologically more real, epistemologically truer, and axiologically more valuable during their journey from substance to God. Each being had a telos (purpose, goal), upon the realization of which such being completely attained its respective horizon of existence. There were qualitative distinctions between such a being and the beings within this conception of the universe; in addition, man was not something among other things. Moreover, man was exposed to this world by chance; he was a mature being for whom it was impossible to find in this world that which he lost in the realm of truth. In this

respect, man as a “being towards completion” could only realize himself by means of leading a virtuous and righteous life. In other words, as Socrates indicates, material needs should not be fundamental or essential, even though they might be necessary. Thus, one should proceed to become Human, his *telos*. Any adverse position of existence meant blunting in the face of the gravity of being in this world, as a result of which one would gradually diminish. In fact, the diminution of the concept of man in modern thought was what the classical world-view feared and attempted to avoid.

Certainly, it is impossible to evaluate every aspect of transformation and change because of the influence of modern thought; in addition, such effort would go far beyond the limits of this study. Accordingly, we attempt to examine the constriction of the horizon or the diminution of the concept of the human in modern and contemporary thought through two concepts, namely, modern secular humanism and neo-humanism, on the axis of the modern manner of thinking.

Modern Secular Humanism

Humanism, in the broadest sense, means the relocation of human reason as a reference for knowledge of truth. The origins of humanism date back to Antiquity, to the time of the Sophists, and this approach can be characterized by the well-known words of Protagoras: “Man is the measure of all things: of the things that are, that they are, of the things that are not, that they are not.”¹ Given this background, humanism originally reduces any search for truth to the human perspective and refers to a comprehension in which the idea of the afterlife is abandoned for the sake of this world.

Regarding historical background, the intellectual and social movement of humanism emerged together with the Renaissance and came to dominate art, literature, epistemology, law, and urban life in almost all of Europe, in Italy above all. With the Renaissance, man was rendered the center of thought as a reaction to medieval thinking; consequently, a movement of return to rediscover and capture Greek and Roman philosophies followed, creating a culture exclusively based on man, independent of supernatural or divine

¹ Ahmet Cevizci, *İlk Çağ Felsefesi Tarihi* (Bursa: Asa Yayınları, 2000), 81.

foundations. Broadly speaking, Renaissance humanism means a review of the anthropocentric perspectives of classical civilizations. Nevertheless, unlike modern secular humanism, Renaissance humanism was a movement that was aesthetic in nature, rendering human experience the practical measure of everything; therefore, Renaissance thought was located somewhere between the supernaturalism of medieval thought and the scientific and critical approach of modernity. In this regard, Renaissance humanism concentrated on the salvation of the individual and incorporated the mystical and aesthetic qualities of the prescientific era.

The true transformation of the concept of humanism occurred in the 17th century in parallel with developments in philosophy and science. Modern secular humanism resembles Renaissance humanism in the sense of anthropocentrism; nevertheless, the former differs from the latter by considering human reason and science as the only reference and by insisting on leaving behind any mystical and aesthetic experience. Within this framework, humanism is:

... the philosophical movement that considers reason the only and highest source of value of human existence, that indicates that the creative and moral development of the individual can be realized in a rational and significant manner without referring to the metaphysical, and that, accordingly, brings the naturality, freedom, and activity of man to the forefront in this respect.²

Descartes provides the ground for modern philosophical humanism in his "*cogito*," as noted by Vattimo, it alludes to a perspective that locates man at the center of the universe and renders him the master of being.³ The distinctive feature of the humanistic perspective is its unconditional dependence on human reason, the "thinking subject" and its optimistic vision of modern science. The Age of Enlightenment brings the most competent form of the humanist philosophical perspective, according to which, man is a part of nature and a being who has arisen at the end of a long-lasting process. Therefore, the depiction of the universe by modern science is sufficient without any need for referring to a cosmic or metaphysical source. Accordingly, the source of moral values is

² Cevizci, *Paradigma Felsefe Sözlüğü* (Istanbul: Paradigma, 2010), 801.

³ Gianni Vattimo, *Modernliğin Sonu: Postmodern Kültürde Nihilizm ve Hermenötik*, trans. Şahabettin Yalçın (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 1999), 86.

human experience; ethics are autonomous and do not require any theological or ideological approval. In this regard, modern secular humanism recommends relying on human intellect rather than divine guidance.⁴ Consequently, modern secular humanism is expressed through the rejection of all transcendent authorities above man.⁵

In line with the optimistic progressive notion of the Enlightenment, humanist philosophy adopts the concept of the universe provided by modern science. As a result, the ever-improving human reason inevitably becomes the exclusive reference for human preferences. Therefore, any attempt by man to understand the world depends on sensible data and their comprehension by the mind. Since there is no rational or scientific method for testing transcendent or religious knowledge and truth, such transcendent concepts of knowledge and intuition are completely indefensible. What we define as knowledge must also belong to the space of human understanding.⁶

This humanistic approach claims to have found the answer to all questions. In a sense, it replaces truth with the picture of the world established through the imagination/contemplation of human thought. Man bears the logic of constructing the world as an abstract image; this logic corresponds to the logic of the appearance of the constructed image. Therefore, humanistic thought, in all of its self-confidence, asserts that it has attained truth by means of abstract (rational) thinking. In this context, the safe epistemic position ensured by such an act of thinking, demolishing the idea of transcendent truth above man, can be called the “conformism of truth.” Characterizing modern philosophical humanism via the analytics of limitedness, Foucault indicates that this limitedness points to man as a limited being who presents himself as decisive and fundamental, by means of replacing God, and that modern philosophy, since Kant, is a reflection of this figure.⁷ Although modern philosophy, as a critical way of thinking, displays a heterogeneous view within the context of the limits of human

⁴ Kasım Küçükalp, *Nietzsche ve Postmodernizm* (Istanbul: Kibele, 2010), 93.

⁵ Derda Küçükalp, “Siyaset Felsefesini Yeniden Düşünmek,” *Türkiye Günlüğü* 128 (2016), 90.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁷ David Owen, *Maturity and Modernity: Nietzsche, Weber, Foucault and the Ambivalence of Reason* (London: Routledge, 1994), 165.

knowledge, the central position of man in this philosophical tradition remains evident, albeit in different forms.

In a broader sense, modern secular humanism, which broke the mind off its theoretical aspect pursuant to the meanings of *ratio* and *reason* and which confined it within the limits of modern rationalism, paved the way for the loss of the idea of quality and for the domination of an entirely quantitative worldview, by means of limiting the horizon of being and truth by means of a scientific and rational reality pursuant to the anthropocentric atomistic paradigm. Evidently, the most exact and shortest way to trace the modern interest in the quantitative is the structure of the universe that functions within the scope of the modern mechanistic conception of the world and the laws of nature that are binding even on God. Thereupon, everything in the universe, where man is also, should function under the sovereignty of physical laws that can be theorized via mathematical or geometrical methods or that can be represented by representative human practice.

According to such a conception of being, man, with all his biological and physiological existence, is reduced to a thing among others in the universe. Nevertheless, at this point, man has been carried to a privileged ontological status as an epistemic subject that is capable of representing things as they are owing to his capacity for rational thinking. This privileged status bestows a privileged position on the modern subject in terms of knowledge, truth, and righteousness. As Foucault indicates, the difference between the truth experience of man in the premodern era and the truth experience established pursuant to subjective conceptualization, particularly in the philosophies of Descartes and Kant, is closely related to the status that the subject acquired in line with its construction in modernity. During the classical period, under the Platonic influence, man could not manifest himself in the truth experience without changing his own form of existence through spiritual transformation; however, according to modern thought under the Cartesian influence, in which the scientific practical model plays a significant part, the subject is rendered capable of truth as a subject without any spiritual transformation.⁸

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Öznenin Yorumbilgisi: College de France Dersleri 1981-1982*, trans. Ferda Keskin (Istanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2015), 163.

In light of the foregoing, Foucault indicates that the prerequisite of spiritual transformation for attaining truth is abolished by Descartes and Kant. Indeed, “opening the eyes is sufficient in order to be capable of truth; it is sufficient to put forward ideas in an accurate, rightful manner, adhering to the line of evidence, and never leaving it. Therefore, the subject no longer needs to transform itself. It is sufficient for the subject to be what it is, in order to attain the truth, where it manifests its own structure, within knowledge.”⁹ Certainly, the conception of knowledge underwent a complete change upon the notion of a subject capable of knowing the truth; knowledge no longer meant attaining truth but, rather, became the perception of truth as knowledge of a space of an object; consequently, the notion of knowledge of an object could replace the notion of attaining truth.¹⁰

In parallel with the foregoing, the modern conception of mind was no longer the capacity of knowing and understanding; instead, it underwent a radical change, and *intellect* was abandoned in favor of *ratio* and *reason*. Intellect, which incorporates intuition, was a faculty of thinking that enabled the manifestation of human existence to truth, whereas *ratio* and *reason* render truth an object of calculation, externalizing it within a manner of calculative thinking of a completely epistemic subject. Thereupon, *ratio* and *reason* point to a faculty of thinking that knows truth within its own subjective limits and enables its acquisition as an expendable object.

In classical thought, man refused to make himself a limit with regard to truth by comprehending his own intellectual limits. Thus, the act of reasoning/contriving coincided with the awareness of the ontological connection between the witness and the unknown; moreover, it was an act of contemplation that required a consideration of the manifestation of the unknown in the witness and its aspects hidden from the witness. Accordingly, the eye saw what was visible; nevertheless, this seen part did not consume the possible horizon of the visible/known. Every manifestation pointed to the one who manifested; nevertheless, the being of manifesting was also veiled by manifestation. Thinking, on the other hand, was to half-open the veil, eliminate the epistemic horizon of human ordinariness that was a veil in itself, and to arise towards or to open to the one that

⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

manifested itself via spiritual transformation, as Foucault emphasizes. Therefore, although the act of knowing in the classical world did not have a character determined by the ideal of precision and the horizon of sharpness as in modernity, it was concerned with steering toward divine questions that were impossible to seize and consume. Referring to Thomas Aquinas, Schumacher states that in the classical world, “the weakest knowledge obtained from most sublime things was considered more desirable than the most certain knowledge obtained from the littlest things.” Certainly, the position of weak knowledge in the face of exact knowledge signifies uncertainty; nonetheless, such uncertainty, which comprises a character oriented towards the content of the knowledge of sublime things, expresses how large a loss it would be to restrict knowledge with things that offer undoubtedness and certainty.¹¹

Modern thought with epistemological emphasis is performed from the uncertainty of sublime things to the certainty of little things; such approach abolishes all qualitative distinctions for the sake of the quantitative, whereupon comes along a notable constriction or restriction on the horizon of human existence, providing the concept of the human with content. Both divine and satanic interventions are out of the question in the modern understanding of being; man, under the guidance of “independent secular reason,”¹² is disconnected from the chain of revelation that is captivated by the horizon of his domination in the world. Grades of being, which were considered the possibility of contact with being and truth in classical philosophies and religions, are thus completely lost and located within the order of things and are reduced to an object of modern disciplines. Philosophies that restrict man by the horizon of being of this world include man as analyzed by Hobbes, pursuant to naturalist anthropology, the epistemic subject highlighted by the Cartesian *cogito*, the autonomous moral subject of Kant, the approach of the Enlightenment, in which any transcendent reference other than reason and science is denied and man is rendered a part of the narrative of liberating progress that occurs pursuant to natural grounds, and the Hegelian modern individual, unearthed by a

¹¹ E. F. Schumacher, *Aklı Karışıklar İçin Kılavuz*, trans. Mustafa Özel (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2015), 17.

¹² Leszek Kolakowski, *Modernliğin Sonsuz Duruşması*, trans. Selahattin Ayaz (Istanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 1999), 17.

completely correspondent dialectic between the rational and the real and whose will is capable of reflecting the general will. Thus, modern thought conceals the severity¹³ of the existence of man in the world; it restricts the horizon of existence within a rational horizon of being and truth that precludes any external reference in both the physical and the intellectual sense. In fact, the severity of the existence of man on earth is concealed by means of the epistemic interventions of the human subject, and the resulting blindness has imprisoned modern man in a human horizon in which man contents himself as an ordinary being of common sense who conceals the difference of content between man and the worldliness of the world of things.

In the beginning, man was fascinated by his obtained domination over nature; over the course of time, however, he became the object of the aforementioned domination. The optimistic vision of the Enlightenment, the last stronghold of rationalism, was destroyed by the appearance of a bureaucratic and instrumental rationalism, emerging wars, and the nuclear and ecological threats created by science. In connection with the discovery of the unconscious, it became clear that the definition of man merely as a being of mind led to a perspective that negated differences by means of a deficient and totalizing epistemic discourse. Consequently, the confidence in the master narratives of the Enlightenment, which were grounded in a rational being and truth horizon, the idea of the epistemic subject above all, was lost.

Evidently, one of the main reasons of this process was capitalism, which took science in tow and finally evolved into a culture of consumption. The practice of everyday life under capitalism transformed everything into a commodity, including science and knowledge; humanity, as a whole, came to be destined to lose its final connections with reality at an imaginary plane of being under the influence of globalism. Apparently, the nihilism of the contemporary world is also a symptom of the world of images to which man is exposed because of the culture of consumption.

¹³ For an ontological analysis of the concealment of the severity of the existence of man in the world through being rendered a thing among things and an ordinary being with foresight, see İsmet Özel, *Tabir Vazifeleri VII* (Istanbul: Çıdam Yayınları, 1993), 7-10.

Neo-humanism

In chronological terms, critiques of modern secular humanism and efforts towards the decentralization of the subject began with Vico and Rousseau. Over the course of time, the German Romanticism of the 19th century, the German School of History, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, the philosophies of life and existence, Critical Theory, which came to forefront in the 20th century with its critical approach to instrumental rationalism, the philosophical anthropology established by Max Scheller and Nicolai Hartmann, the philosophies of Heidegger and Nietzsche, and the fundamental ontology nourished by the phenomenological tradition gradually brought more severe critiques of modern secularism. The reactionary tone grew even more radical with poststructuralism and postmodernism.

The scope of this study is evidently too small to detail the critiques of humanism posed by all of the foregoing. Nevertheless, from a general perspective, we can assert that contemporary philosophies and the ensuing world of everyday life under capitalism, which stresses the decentralization of the subject in line with the radical critique of humanism, created a new type of humanism or at least legitimized the emerging neo-humanism. According to Deleuze and Guattari, ideologies such as Marxism and Freudianism nourish capitalism. From this perspective, the practice of everyday life under capitalism, which grew and progressed owing to the assistance of science over the course of time and which, in parallel with globalism, emerged as the absolute decisive power over human desires all around the world, provided the fertile soil and climate needed by the aforementioned neo-humanism.

Deleuze and Guattari consider Marx and Freud to be the dawn of Western culture; according to them, Marxism and Freudianism, if not Marx and Freud themselves, were oriented toward generating new codes for modern society that broke from conventional codes. Marxism re-established the codes of the state in a general manner, whereas Freudian psychoanalysis re-established the codes of the family in a more private aspect; and they functioned as two fundamental bureaucracies that sought the establishment of new codes for the resolving aspects of Western culture.¹⁴ In the eyes of

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, "Göçebe Düşünce," trans. Aslı Kayhan, *Toplumbilim: Gilles Deleuze Özel Sayısı* 5 (1996), 53.

Deleuze and Guattari, Marxism and Freudianism can even be considered forms of ideology that fortify capitalism. Marxism fortifies capitalism by reducing everything to economic practices and convincing humans to admit economic relations as the principal factor, whereas Freudianism fortifies capitalism by legitimizing the nuclear family just as it is foreseen by the practice of everyday life under capitalism within the framework of the trio of the mother, the father, and the ego. In fact, there is a complete overlapping between the appearance of neo-humanism and faith in the economy, Freudian psychoanalysis, in which sexuality and desire (*libido*) under the influence of the unconscious are the principal decisive factors, and the practice of everyday life under capitalism, which flexibly congregates these two principal factors.

At this point, the most fundamental difference between modern secular humanism and contemporary humanism, which we conceptualize as neo-humanism, becomes apparent in the difference regarding the conceptualization of the transition from man as a being of consciousness/reason/ego to man as a being of desire/libido/instinct. In our opinion, modern secular humanism founds epistemic problems such as truth, reality and meaning with reference to conscious human existence or epistemic subject and thus provides man with a central position. On the other hand, neo-humanism, which arises from the decentralization of the subject, also provides man with the same central position by rendering him an unconscious being of desire. With modern secular humanism, man began to lose the possibility of being a spiritual being of arbitrariness that opens to the heavens. Together with the exploration of the unconscious, man became deeper downwards and a being of biopsychic desire and instinct, which becomes clear with his irrational aspects. Therefore, contemporary debates with regard to the decentralization of the subject seem to have shaken the central position of the subject and to have demolished modern secular humanism; however, the exploration of the unconscious and the ensuing philosophies paved the way for a new humanism that is liable for opening man to the expansiveness of the libido and eliminating obstacles before boundless desires under the decisiveness of irrational aspects.

In addition to several poststructuralist and postmodern philosophies as well as discussions within the scope of psychoanalysis after Freud and Lacan, the philosophies of desire of

Lyotard, Deleuze, and Guattari*, who concentrate on the abovementioned opinions and arguments, stress the libidinal.¹⁵ Accordingly, their view insists on the necessity of an absolute code degradation with regard to desires coded as objects of desire within the practice of everyday life under capitalism. Thus, these thinkers legitimize neo-humanism, which is a consequence of downward deepening, in terms of content. In our eyes, the stress laid by Deleuze and Guattari in their *Anti-Oedipus* on the concept of the schizophrenic and its implied conceptualization of productive desire confirms the foregoing finding. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the schizophrenic, who is highlighted via emphasis on the ego/self/subject/consciousness and who is declared abnormal and excluded for pointing to the madness of the modern subject, which decides the standards of normality, “produces himself as a free, lonely, and joyous man; he can say and do whatever he wants, without asking anyone else for permission. Desire lacks nothing; it is a love that has overcome all spectrums of obstacles. Consequently, desire can never be designed as ego. The schizophrenic is the person who has eliminated the fear of becoming mad.”¹⁶

Lyotard proposes a similar approach to the philosophy of desire of Deleuze and Guattari. *Discourse, Figure and Libidinal Economy* by

* Certainly, it is possible to note various philosophies or thinkers who emerged within contemporary philosophy within the context of psychoanalysis in the wake of Freud and Lacan. However, given the limitations of our study, the philosophies of Deleuze, Guattari, and Lyotard are provided as the best examples to reflect how neo-humanism comprehends human.

¹⁵ As Cevizci, in particular, notes, “in terms of postmodern thought, desire defines the libidinal powers and drives that shock the intellectual power of the individual. As a matter of fact, in the eyes of postmodernist thinkers, desire is the driving force which Western culture has tried to oppress over last few centuries since it poses a threat to the social order and institutional structures. This is why, according to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, modern psychoanalysis is a technique of social control that seeks to prevent desire and ensure the adaptation of individuals to a social system. This is also why schizophrenics are the ideal types according to Deleuze and Guattari.” Cevizci, *Paradigma Felsefe Sözlüğü*, 144.

¹⁶ Madan Sarup, *Post-yapısalcılık ve Postmodernizm*, trans. Abdülbaki Güçlü (Ankara: Ark Yayınevi, 1995), 119.

Liotard¹⁷ bear a parallelism with the views of Deleuze and Guattari, and they can be read as a philosophy and politics of desire. Lyotard, who was highly influenced by Marx and Freud but breaks from Marx towards a Nietzschean philosophy of affirmation, asserts that, since Plato, the Western philosophical tradition has served to devalue the senses.¹⁸ In terms of the importance that he attaches to life, the senses, and the instincts, Lyotard has a clear Nietzschean character; his approach also implies the insolvency of the notion of the complete subject, an ever-emphasized aspect of Western philosophy. Indeed, given Lyotard's evaluations of desire, his works, *Libidinal Economy* above all, represent a total break from modern discourse and comprise destructive critiques of the discourses of theory, reason, and modernism. This means adopting a philosophy of life that affirms vitality and the free-flowing energies of life, thus abandoning the notion of a complete, thinking subject. According to Lyotard, desire in modern thought has lost its dynamism since it is exposed to oppression by various social institutions. The thing to do is to free desire from the coagulating effects of theory, fixed categories, values, and manners of thought and behavior and to ensure its free-flowing nature.¹⁹

Lyotard's approach is clearly anti-humanist and excludes the idea of self-representation through which the subject can understand himself. A thought of representation in the sense of the direct penetration of the self into its own consciousness and its representative capability requires presupposing a difference between the representing and the represented. Accordingly, the effort by the subject to express its essence will inevitably bring its distortion. However, for Lyotard, the libidinal essence of the subject will continuously negate the effort of comprehending it through a rationalist perspective, and it will transform such an effort into an act

¹⁷ "The term 'libidinal economy' expresses an attack by postmodernism against Marxism as a philosophy and a cultural project. To push further, it signifies a refusal of the rationalistic heritage of philosophy and defines a post-philosophical or anti-philosophical attitude." See Cevizci, *Paradigma Felsefe Sözlüğü*, 1021.

¹⁸ Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Teori: Eleştirel Soruşturmalar*, trans. Mehmet Küçük (Istanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 1998), 183-184.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 189-190.

of misrepresentation.²⁰ Therefore, desire should be allowed to slide in its free flow through a practice of thought (neo-humanism) that does not restrict the libidinal essence of the subject with rational schemes.

Apparently, critiques of the modern epistemic subject, the idea of the rational being and truth, which began with the philosophies of life, existence, and desire of the 19th century, attained a scientific status owing to the psychoanalytical conceptualization of unconsciousness. Thus, the transition from the definition of man as a being with logos to man as a being of irrational desire and instinct became legitimized. The critiques of the philosophies of identity established by rational thought grew even more radical, and they paved the way for radically libertarian philosophies that sought to save the concept of difference from the hegemony of totalizing rational discourses.²¹ At this point, it is worth noting that the abovementioned philosophies brought some justified and appropriate critiques of humanistic philosophies or manners of thought that stand out with emphasis on the idea of rational being and truth; nevertheless, they correspond to the Western metaphysical tradition in general and to the gradual radicalization of the critical aspect of modern thought in particular. Therefore, although they emphasize the break from conscious epistemic subjects, they do not imply the abandonment of the idea of the centrality of the subject (man). It may be convenient start to associate this fact with European nihilism, which Nietzsche conceptualizes as the end of 2500 years of illusion to expound the problem and to comprehend the new position of man within the practice of everyday life under capitalism.

Nietzsche defines nihilism as follows: “the self-devaluation of the highest values, the loss of purpose, and the lack of response to the question of ‘why’.”²² In this regard, nihilism implies the indifference of the world in the face of value, meaning, and purpose due to the lack of value, meaning, and purpose within becoming.²³ It is even possible to define nihilism as thus: “A human condition in which,

²⁰ Todd May, *Postyapısalcı Anarşizmin Siyaset Felsefesi*, trans. Rahmi G. Ögdül (Istanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2000), 102-103.

²¹ Derda Küçükalp, *Siyaset Felsefesi* (Bursa: Dora Yayınları, 2016), 190.

²² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), 9.

²³ Hüseyin Aydın, *Metafizikçi Olarak Nietzsche* (Bursa: Uludağ Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1984), 39.

looking for a principle of authority on the one hand, humans render impossible such principle and ascent to its consciousness.”²⁴

For Nietzsche, it is wrong to include the social worries, psychological degenerations, errors or temptations of the age within efforts to understand nihilism.²⁵ Similarly, Heidegger considers nihilism to be a historical process and indicates that any attitude to understand its appearances that in itself will render such an attempt negative and defensive.²⁶ Therefore, any effort to understand nihilism should take its origins into account. Nietzsche states that nihilism is a consequence of the faith in the categories of reason; because of the faith in reason, man has devalued this world in favor of categories that refer to a fictional world.²⁷ According to Nietzsche, nihilism originates from the Western tradition of metaphysics and Christian moral doctrines. The Western mind, which is composed of Greek and Christian perspective, has finally destroyed itself and left us alone with nihilism. Thus, any possible belief in truth and faith has been displaced.²⁸ Therefore, the end of the moral interpretation of the world is conceptualized with the metaphor of the death of God, and any discourse of humanistic transcendence has devalued itself and paved the way for nihilism, in which everything has lost its meaning.²⁹

Together with modern secular humanism, the notion of the isolated subject is made an ontological point of departure for truth, value, and meaning to preclude referring to any transcendent reference. Now, all principles and values including the subject of God and the epistemic subject, which were considered in connection with the rational, undergo a complete devaluation process. The loss of belief in the categories of reason made it impossible to establish even an anthropocentric but holistic and comprehensive truth, meaning,

²⁴ David Miller, *Blackwell'in Siyasal Düşünce Ansiklopedisi*, trans. Nevzat Kırac and Bülent Peker (Ankara: Ümit Yayıncılık, 1995), II, 166.

²⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 7.

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, “The Word of Nietzsche: ‘God is Dead’,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1977), 66.

²⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 13.

²⁸ Eric Heller, *The Importance of Nietzsche: Ten Essays* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 6-7.

²⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 7.

and value. At this point stands the modern human, who must found a world for himself by referring to desire, passion, instinct, and the irrational, who comes to the forefront via the emphasis on individual differences, and who has no capacity to appeal to anything other than willing it. The opinions of Nietzsche concerning what man is subject to upon the death of God, which he expresses as a cry of truth ahead of his time, are noteworthy. Nietzsche calls the man subject to nihilism the “last man or last race,” as though describing man in the culture of consumption, even though he was not yet aware of it. According to Nietzsche, the last race is nothing but a herd without a shepherd in which everybody wants the same and thus everybody is the same and anyone with the will to stay out of the masses is declared mad. The last man, who loses the possibility of a sane culture in which he thinks to have found happiness, has minor pleasures for the day and minor pleasures for the night. Moreover, since he has no other concern than willing, he cannot be himself in a sane manner.³⁰

The practice of everyday life under capitalism brought such a being of desire in addition to science and thrived all around the world via the globalism triggered by the mass communication industry. This process corresponds to a complete coincidence or at least a parallelism with its character that evolved into the culture of consumption in the wake of various processes. Within the scope of discussions about identity and difference, modern man is expected to appear with the utmost differences; however, man is taken to a tragic ending in the life world provided by the culture of consumption since he has lost the possibility of principles, values, and meanings that could enable a notion of completion with all his differences. The problem of nihilism emerges in the most profound manner with regard to this tragic end (the postmodern world ruled by neo-humanism) in which man lives a meaningless life without any discomfort.³¹

³⁰ Nietzsche, *Böyle Buyurdu Zerdüş*, trans. A. Turan Oflazoğlu (Bursa: Asa Kitabevi, 1999), 28-29.

³¹ Derda Küçükcalp, “Heidegger ve Nihilizm,” *Kutadgubilig: Heidegger Özel Sayısı* 30 (2016), 491.

In Lieu of Conclusion: The Culture of Consumption and the Image as the Tragic End of Man

The practice of everyday life under capitalism has evolved from times when the concept of the commodity relatively referred to concrete beings to a culture of consumption in which it is almost impossible to determine that to which this concept refers. This evolving character of capitalist practice has brought a time in which human desires are codified as the produced objects of desire at an imaginative level of being. The world of contemporary life is formed within a very complex network of components. The distinctive point of such a world is that the modes of mad consumption and imaginative being have become the only ideals within a practice of everyday life in which the loss of reality, the image and the lack of thought are in charge. Being subject to the decisiveness of the visual, modern man has had to forget to forget, as Heidegger underlines. Similarly, the ever-growing decisive power of advertisement and television separated the public sphere from the private sphere and finally prepared the end of the social in the present age.³² Simulation replaced truth and reality and serves to conceal the absence of truth; the masses, on the other hand, function as a black hole that destroys the social by rendering it anonymous.³³

In this context, the contemporary culture in which we live consists of a play with remnants of devastated modernity. This means man is living within a post-period or, in other words, a meaningless post-history.³⁴ As Baudrillard indicates, this meaninglessness originates from transforming everything into an aesthetic phenomenon. The world is enacted and turned into an image in a cosmopolitan manner, whereupon emerged an abundance of images with nothing worth seeing.³⁵ Thus, the distance between the signifying and the signified has collapsed, and it has become difficult to develop a transcendent or realistic perspective on things. Indeed, the overproduction of signs

³² Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), 150, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203359327>.

³³ Jean Baudrillard, *Sessiz Yığınların Gölgesinde: Toplumsalın Sonu*, trans. Oğuz Adanır (Ankara: Doğu Batı Yayınları, 2013), 12.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

³⁵ Baudrillard, *Kötülüğün Şeffaflığı: Aşırı Fenomenler Üzerine Bir Deneme*, trans. Işık Ergüden, 2nd ed. (Istanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 1998), 22-23.

ultimately caused them to lose the grounds by which they referred to themselves in the sense of the signified.³⁶

Presently, nihilism is experienced almost as a reproduction of being and value. Together with the almost revolutionary emergence of television and cinema, memories are subject to a world of simulation and become a part of the influencing-influenced dialectic. Accordingly, the memories fragment their being and values while simultaneously reproducing them. Man is absorbed into this world of simulation, in which he can simultaneously be everybody and nobody. Positioned at an equal distance from every value, man has become an anonymous entity within the masses and is absorbed into a grey area with his entire being. In this simulation, man has pleasures, pains, loves, worries, and many various emotions that are obtained without paying any price. The ceaseless enjoyment of completely different emotions is possible only by paying their material price. Man has lost his being and values just at a time when he thought that he finally had everything that he wanted, understood everything and attained the truth. Man has been exposed to such effective images and emotions that he lost his belief in his being and values, having become alienated from his emotions and being.

The color grey has penetrated into all layers of the contemporary world, which in turn has created a new humanism that has centralized man not only as a being with reason but also with all his desires, passions, emotions, and irrational aspects. Not only being and values but also God and religion had their share from this neo-humanism. God, dismissed by the Enlightenment, is invited back to earth. Nevertheless, the arrival is not the same as the departure. The new condition was hailed as a return of God; however, new religions, which arose under these circumstances, had to gain a position to satisfy the irrational aspects of human existence via spirituality. The idea of unity was abandoned, and a new paganism, born out of plurality, came into existence.

In this experience of being, almost all possibilities within the world of possibilities became actual and followed a world in which everything is possible. Everybody sees this world, in which everybody is simultaneously good and evil, through the eyes of an

³⁶ David Ashley, *History without a Subject: The Postmodern Condition* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 5.

aesthete; consequently, everything can be simultaneously beautiful and ugly. Imitations, which replace the originals, neither disappoint nor worry man. After all, since ignorance is bliss, nobody puts himself out by striving for truth, which comes at a high price.

In the sphere of imaginative beings, the criterion of existence, once established by Descartes as "I think, therefore I am," is replaced by the motto "I appear, therefore I am." Cafeterias, restaurants, and shopping malls have become firms of the image, which instill a feeling of existence in man. In the world of images, man against the mirror is concerned with seeing himself through the eyes of others, even though he cannot see his own being. As a being at the mercy of glances, man has gained and lost his being with them. The value of man, who has no value originating from his being, is to be established only upon feelings by means of brands and places with the value of the image.

In today's world, desires and objects of desire are produced simultaneously. In all their differences, everybody runs in hurry to the same objects of desire dyed in their own colors. Great capitalists, as though they were a modern Rumi, are humanist merchants of a culture of consumption, calling "come, whatever you are." The same object of desire is served in green to Muslims, in red to communists and in black to hip-hoppers. The differences vanish within the masses in which everyone desires the same things and nobody actually is; consequently, one has lost all possibility of becoming himself.

Presently, man must differ from others with his perfume by inventing perfumes that oppress the human scent. Even the spleen, the only possibility of hearing the sound of being and of opening ourselves to truth, is tagged as depression and stress, whereupon the final door to being is shut in our face. Having forgotten the meaning of being, man has also forgotten what he forgot within fast-flowing time, which renders him late for everything. The loss of meaning in every expressed thing occurs by means of reproduction, the peculiar form of destruction in our times. Knowledge is obtained in the form of information, whereupon truths, which require huge existential prices, became a consumable object that can be rapidly used up by the masses. Wise words can only bring momentary emotions despite their highly influential dosage. These words are snatched from existential planes that create such wisdom, are multiplied and left to

the consumption of the masses within the influencing-influenced dialectic in a world of simulation that is completely disconnected from reality.

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