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Metaverse, Virtuality and Self-Image: Ethical Reflections on the Individual in the Virtual Society

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Abstract

A reflection on the projections of individuals on their virtual platforms, considering virtual reality, artificial intelligence, social networks, virtual worlds and the metaverse. Pondering the distortions of being and its multiple representations and personifications in the face of these, as well as a reflection on the truth value of these projections of people. Assessing their correlations with the person's being itself, its distortions and how much these distortions affect the individual's conception of themselves. In an ethical questioning of these environments and their implications for real life, in order to enter into a philosophical dilemma already observed since Plato's cave, but reissued and updated today in the concept of the metaverse and its effective actions in people's lives. Evaluating liquid modernity, which ironically solidifies itself as an even stronger reality every day, where people live more virtual lives than their real existences, creating an update of the paradigm of existence, of being in its concept and its representation virtual.

Keywords: Metaverse, Self-image, Ethics.

1. Introduction

Although philosophy has long been concerned with the fundamental questions of humanity, seeking to answer and re-ask questions, questions related to being and existing have always been the subject of intense research. Plato's conception of the world of ideas and its correlation with the sensitive world, he presents us with a higher definition for this world of intellect, considered by the philosopher as excellence, the supreme, the sublime, compared to our so-called world. real'. Having a more pejorative connotation, this sensitive world, perceived by our senses, as a draft of that supreme world, as we are unable to bring the excellence of that idea to it.

In a fundamental counterpoint, the philosopher presents us with an interesting perception in the famous Allegory of the Cave, described in Book VI of the Republic. Considering the distance between what is believed to be real and what really is. Therefore, an interesting picture is formed when combining these approaches into different perceptions. From this Platonic dialectic we can see a framework in which we seek to support this reflective proposal on the projection of individual self-image and the social perspectives that lead to its distortions. Although not only in the Platonic conjecture, but also other thinkers present us with correlations between reality and virtuality, such as Putnam[1], who suggests that it is impossible to be certain of what is real.

Constructing this in a way that considers its intrinsic aspects and its reflective nuances. Just like the inhabitants of the cave, most of the time we do not distinguish reality from what we are seeing, our perception oscillates between what we believe we see or perceive, what we are seeing or feeling and what it actually is. This oscillation is one of the aspects of this project. Following this, the

[1]Hilary W. Putnam and his theory of brains in vats.

other aspect is the inversion of the Platonic concept of the world of ideas, where we perceive an action inverse to the liberating attitude of the cave dweller who leaves, freeing himself, to an antagonistic attitude to this, where we perceive more people every day imprisoning themselves in modern caves, be they cell phone screens, virtual media, social networks or even, or why not say, as a consequence of these, the rooms of depression and unreality. In this last aspect, where people, having a 'real' world unacceptable to their expectations, create a virtual world where they transport their existential expectations, to their social networks, then creating their acceptable version of the life they would like to have.

Faced with a growing debate that not only raises the issues of false news, or deliberately falsified, in order to effectively influence even the results of electoral elections, devastation of lives at very high levels, but also in individuality, in the destruction of reputations and curtailment of freedom, arising from these issues. This reflection is necessary in a deep and rational way, on the ethical limits and their regulations in the metaverse, understanding this as the virtual and 'virtualized' whole, from social networks to the most obscure intricacies of this 'other' universe.

To build a philosophical argument in this aspect, it is essential to look for authors who approach the subject, but as we know, there is still a lack of deep reflections on the topic, which is why we need to review the fundamental questions, so, as Kant points out, in the Foundation of Metaphysics of Customs:

> In this world and even outside of it, it is possible to think of nothing that can be considered good without limitation other than one thing: a good will. Discernment, keenness of mind, ability to judge and whatever the other talents of the spirit may be called, or even courage, decision, constancy of purpose, as qualities of temperament, are undoubtedly good and desirable things in many respects; but they can also become extremely bad and harmful if the will, which has to make use of these natural gifts and whose particular constitution is therefore called character, is not good. (KANT, 2003)

It is clear from this section that one must understand limits, consider something good, without measuring it, without building these ethical delimitations, is leaving it adrift, without a law or parameter to which it can be verified. The 'metaverse' is an increasingly 'real' environment and needs to be understood as such.

Therefore, it needs to be investigated as an object of study:

> It is evident to anyone who investigates the object of human knowledge that there are ideas (1) currently impressed on the senses, or (2) perceived considering passions and operations of the spirit, or finally (3) formed by the aid of memory and imagination, composing, dividing or simply representing those originally apprehended by the aforementioned method. By sight I have ideas of lights and colors, and their respective tones and variants. For the touch, I perceive rough and soft, hot and cold, movement and resistance and all these to greater or lesser quantity or degree. The sense of smell provides aromas, the palate tastes, and the ear brings to the mind sounds in variety of tone and composition. And, as several of them are observed together, they are indicated by a name and consider themselves to be one thing. (BERKELEY, 1973, p. 19)

Evidently the object of this study is also perceived, imagined and composed in such a way as to be an effective representation of a growing aspect of our world, said to be real or material. The metaverse grows in several aspects and, added to the technological advances of Artificial Intelligence, they become unlimited, something that, as seen in Kant's quote, is only good if applied to our good will.

David Hume states that the objects of human reason can be divided into two classes: relations of ideas and questions of fact. For him, the relationships between ideas belong to specific sciences: All objects of reason or investigation human nature can be naturally divided into two species, namely, ideas and fact. The first species are the sciences of Geometry, Algebra and Arithmetic and, in general, any statement that is intuitively or demonstratively right (HUME, 2009, p. 71). Hume understands that "The second kind of objects of human reason, questions of fact are not determined in the same way, and nor is the evidence of its truth, however strong, of a natural nature. similar to the previous one." (HUME, 2009, p. 71).

However, I believe that this object of study, which we seek to resolve, somehow merges into the two species mentioned by Hume, challenging us to reflect even more and more deeply. Therefore, for this we need to build a deep analysis of what has been said about, in the aspects of law, data protection and what theorists and thinkers have already said, drawing a close and

comparative parallel between the proposed realities and their implications. The liquid life described by Bauman takes us to this fleeting, ephemeral, but increasingly influential environment of our existence, so much so that today there is the occupation of 'digital influencer'[2], something that is based only on personal opinions, without any commitment to the truth or something else.

Current society proposes standardization that has been disseminated through social networks, influencing behavior of intensity, speed and massification of these standards. Where the ideal of thinness, a sculptural body, defined lips, among other things, is advocated, in addition to standards of ostentatious 'virtues' falsified through the most diverse ways. These standards become a dilemma for a large part of the population, which leads to a distortion of their own image and making personal dissatisfaction much more intense (LUDEWING, 2017).

According to Meier & Schafer (2018), teenagers use social media (WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram) very frequently, with 24.3 million teenagers having access to these social media, that is, the equivalent of 78% of the population. of Brazilian teenagers, with a minimum time of 6 hours and 54 minutes per day and with constant growth in this frequency of use. Furthermore, this use generates through these channels a propagation of these patterns, thus influencing the formation of this self-image and this distorted perception of oneself in conflict with the presented pattern, generating a conflict with the reality of the patterns provided by the virtual environment (KELLY ET AL. , 2018).

> These unrealistic beauty standards can be easily internalized by adolescents, guiding their behavior and increasing dissatisfaction with self-image, through social comparison behaviors, which are related to decreased self-esteem, mental health and increased body shame, which can lead to unhealthy behaviors that aim to achieve "ideal beauty" (LIRA,2017).

Therefore, there is a correlation with these patterns and the distortions they cause in individuals in general. In Plato's philosophical approach, there is a metaphorical reflection of a metaphysical reality, where the philosopher presents his concept of the world of ideas[3] and the sensible world, making this dichotomy between these two aspects, showing that in the world of ideas there is excellence, the sublime , the idealized perfect, with this sensitive world being a sketch, an inferior imitation of what was idealized. This approach finds its symbolism, most vividly, in the allegory of the cave[4] where the proposed question can be measured in the sense of the deception of the sensitive world and what we believe to be reality, in comparison with the supreme reality of what really is.

In this way Plato introduces an idea of a better place and a perspective on the world and understanding of this conceptual and idealized world. But today we can see an ironic distortion of this concept, which is also mirrored in parallel, albeit with a more glaring break with reality. On social media, there is a strange tendency to create a sketch of the sketch, if we can say so, where people create another reality of their existence. However, starting from this outline they want to base their existence and build it in some way, as if they created an avatar[5] and decided that they wanted to become the avatar, sometimes searching for this realization, using the most varied means.

Thus building an 'other self', an alter ego[6], with whom they sympathize more, they are more interesting characters, built from desires, expectations and dreams, not to say individual delusions. This fragmentation of the personality is defragmented and unified in this avatar, making up individual reality. A social media profile photo reveals a lot about each individual's desire for personification. But, more than this, it also presents us with this idealized but unreal self, which that individual believes he or she is. When I talk about superiority, I'm referring to this feeling of power created by the tools linked to social networks, such as filters and editing applications, which literally

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[3]Plato conceived of reality in a dualistic way. A dualist is one who believes there is something more than one material reality. He believes that, in addition to the world we observe through our five senses, there is a world made up of unobservable things. For example, there are people who believe that in addition to a body we have a soul. The body is material, the soul is not. This would be a dualistic conception of the human being.

[4]In the book The Republic, Plato tells an allegory to illustrate various aspects of his thought. He invites his reader to imagine a cave in which several people have been tied since childhood in such a way that they are unable to see anything other than the bottom of that cave. They are unable to turn around and look toward the exit and see the daylight and things outside.

[5]Avatar is a virtual body, a graphic figure of varying complexity that lends its simulated life to transport Internet users into the parallel worlds of the Internet.

[6] a second self; perfect substitute."the partner was his perfect alter ego"

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[2]In essence, the digital influencer is an opinion former. Through his posts on social media, he is able to awaken different sensations, behaviors and thoughts in his audience.

transform not only the appearance, but also make up the character of these individuals, because there everyone seems happy, wise, beautiful and healthy, as well as successful and kind.

The metaverse is a virtual and hyper realistic environment created for the immersion of human beings, where they can make decisions, build or do things (Castro, 2022). Where through 'avatars' there is interaction with other people in different places, something that in a way migrates more and more every day to all virtual demands, such as social networks, school and academic environments, stores and all types of business environments, games and other online activities. This growing expansion of this universe signals not only a trend, but the imminent future that presents itself, and which needs to be thought about, reflected on and even measured in ethical terms.

The ethical reflection of this very present universe must be grounded in order to have a favorable perspective of what is presented to us and how it explains it to us:

> On the other hand, we have Law as a set of rules that regulate people's behavior. Once individuals interact, react, construct, and ultimately experience the virtual space of the Metaverse, it is speculated: what is the limit of the laws that regulate the real lives of citizens over the virtual lives of these same citizens? What are the impacts of virtual life on real life and people's rights? There is growing concern in the legal community regarding the consequences of what has been experienced in the Metaverse on fundamental rights and freedoms. Would the full effectiveness of fundamental rights be guaranteed in terms of attentive care, whether legal or extralegal, to prevent these rights from being violated? (PALHARES, 2022)

George Berkeley, following the line of empiricism, uses induction as a method of knowledge formation, through which knowledge about universalities also comes from particular situations. For him, it is from the relationship between particular objects that universal ideas are established. In this sense, the author asserts that:

> [...] it is insisted that all knowledge and demonstration are based on universal notions, and I agree, but it does not seem to me that

such notions are formed by abstraction of the aforementioned way. Universality, as I understand it, does not consist in the absolute, positive nature or conception of anything, but in the relation it signifies between particulars; Therefore, things, names and notions, by nature particular, become universal. (BERKELEY, 1973, p. 15).

It is also worth highlighting the liquid life expressed by Bauman, which presents us with this utopia, due to the lack of a great social narrative, in this post-modernity and the loss of these references:

> Postmodernity is defined as the phase of history in which the world, lacking a "grand narrative" (or "metanarrative"), is understood as a "grand vision of history" as a guide, inspiration and utopia; the achievements of social progress no longer exist (BAUMAN, 1998).

> By definition, technology consumption, despite being an individual activity, generally determined by social processes beyond the individual's control, can be considered a collective phenomenon, as many individuals can have the same consumption pattern, which constitutes a social phenomenon. . Technology has an irreducible personal aspect: it is individuals who determine which good, substance, ideal, social network and media to bring into existence and use it for biological or social reproduction (MIRANDA, 2012).

In this way justifying this perspective in the reflexive need for this process as a whole and its philosophical implications and mainly ethics and why not say metaethics of the metaverse. As a teacher, father and citizen, as well as from a philosophical perspective I am interested in the proposed topic, since my son, now thirty-eight years old, a mathematics teacher, even as a child and teenager spent hours and hours 'playing' video games in his room, in the first versions and today I see nephews, stepson and friends practically living in rooms in open world games and browsing the networks and online games. I have always reflected on this trend towards virtualization and social isolation.

In view of this, we need to consider this subject in a lucid, rational and above all philosophical way, checking trends and analyzing concepts, but also creating new ones, since this subject is relatively new in the technological aspect, but old in the imaginative sense and self-deception of humanity. Ethical

perceptions are today even more distorted and always applied to others and not to the individual himself.

We are quickly moving towards an increasingly virtual world devoid of reality, where people have a wonderful life on social media and a lonely life with no perspective in the 'real world'. Furthermore, questions arise again from the reflections on Plato's allegory of the cave[7], about what reality itself is. Just like Putnam's reflections on 'the brain in vats'. Today we present caves in our cell phones and computers, just as they represent Putnam's vat very well, but instead of being fostered by an evil genius, they are enslaved by algorithms and commercial tendencies to manipulate opinions and 'suggestions' based on research. virtual.

2. Final Considerations

As I presented in my previous article[8], my reflection is made in this field, since there is a need for understanding on the part of humanity, about what is real, what it means to be real and what the virtual being is in its conceptions and nuances. more complex. Balancing virtuality with reality, being ethical in both is a fundamental challenge. But the necessary considerations are beyond a virtuality that swallows us, but rather towards a reality that is hidden and an ethics that does not exist. Fostering reflections on the topic is just a small part of this complex and growing 'new world', but not different in some aspects from the mythological and religious controls of the past, which led many along very difficult paths on unreal journeys.

The reflective construction that needs to be erected is towards a perception of individual and social self-knowledge, based on reality as it is. Furthermore, a deep legal reflection is necessary, to build applicable parameters for virtual crimes of all kinds, as well as an education designed to prepare the social citizen, both in the 'real world' and in the virtual one, understanding where these merge and also where they get confused.

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