

**THE HEDGEHOG DILEMMA: HOW TO FACE LONELINESS**

***O DILEMA DO PORCO-ESPINHO: COMO ENCARAR A SOLIDÃO***

***EL DILEMA DEL ERIZO: CÓMO ENFRENTAR LÁ SOLEDAD***

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*The hedgehog dilemma: How to face loneliness* is a 192-page work, launched in 2018 by Editora Planeta. Written by Leandro Karnal, historian graduated from the University of Vale do Rio dos Sinos and doctor in Social History from the University of São Paulo, professor in the History department at the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences at the State University of Campinas, the manuscript leads the reader to reflection on the theme that is still a dilemma for the human being: to live alone or collectively? Living in the heat of groups and taking the risk of being hurt by the thorns of the other or living alone in the cold of solitude, taking the risk of destroying “human stability”? (KARNAL, 2018, p. 12).

The work consists of six chapters, including the introduction, conclusion and thanks.

It is a personal production aimed at any audience interested in the theme, especially all those who seek to understand human relations between *me-other*, *other-me* (BAKHTIN, 2011; BAKHTIN; VOLÓCHINOV, 2017) and the tension generated in these interactions, here signified in the introduction based on the metaphorical hedgehog figure, by Arthur Schopenhauer. Thus, Karnal weaves his impressions about the immersion of the collective and solitary experience of the human being, based on philosophical and historical anchors, in excerpts extracted from the Bible, novels, works of art, among other research sources, that the human being, in the hedgehog update, it is gregarious, it is social. In this way, “[...] our

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problems also stem from this. Everything good and bad comes from the game of contrasts between company and solitude” (KARNAL, 2018, p. 15, our translation). This excerpt implies the consideration that the man survived/survives with his peers because he learned to constitute himself/herself in the other, in a mutual relationship, the result of a cooperative and collaborative teamwork.

In chapter 1, entitled “*Não é bom que o homem esteja só*” (It is not good that the man is alone), Karnal talks about the loneliness that can affect the human being when he is alone or when he is living with his peer, in a group. Such sensation and/or feeling of feeling is only effective in/by the conscience of the human being in relation to the other, of this being similar to himself. Karnal (2018) narrates about the biblical world from the figure of Adam who lived solitary in paradise, a man created in the image and likeness of God. Adam was not aware of this, as he had never before experienced collective coexistence with the other. This absence of coexistence with the other is only constituted from the interaction relationship, when there is indeed social experience, because it is understood that human beings are gregarious. In the words of Cortella (2014, p. 24, our translation), we need to live together, since “[we] are a fragile animal, and our fragility is so great that we have to live together all the time to have strength”.

However, problematizes Karnal (2018) regarding accompanied loneliness, or loneliness without the presence of another person, encouraging the reader to reflect on what would be crueler: to live alone together or collectively lonely? As human beings, we only in groups see ourselves and we understand each other? This dilemma reinforces the importance of dialogue, be it for oneself in more solitary moments or in dialogue with our peers. In other words, even if being or living in solitude, there is dialogue, which is this movement of interaction that only exists in and through language, based on the social, history, and culture (BAKHTIN, 2011; BAKHTIN; VOLÓCHINOV, 2017).

Chapter 2, entitled “*A solidão entre milhões: redes e mundo virtual*” (Solitude among millions: networks and the virtual world), presents a tessitura of reflections about the changes in the media since previous generations, known as *baby boomers* (comprising those born after World War II until the mid-1960s) that had television as an expressive behavior-promoting technology. Generation X (that of those born from the mid-1960s to 1970), who saw the Internet emerge, however, did not use it in their daily lives. Generation Y (those born in the 1980s and 1990s), “was born without the internet, but incorporated it into their daily lives at a very young age or in early adulthood, whether at home or at work” (KARNAL, 2018, p. 35). From the period comprising the 1990s and the 2000s, generation Z emerges, also known as

*digital natives* (PRENSKY, 2001), a generation that was born and grew up in the digital and connected era, which comprises a life with internet. In the same direction and envisioning a relationship much closer to the use of different semiotic, multimodal resources, the Alpha generation emerges (made up of children born from the years 2010 to the present). They differ, therefore, from the *baby boomer*, X and Y generations, with people inserted in these generations, known as *digital immigrants* (PRENSKY, 2001). These behavioral changes now caused by social media, which have crossed and still cross the generations, imply thinking, as pointed out by Karnal (2018), of the loneliness, isolation and happiness that reflect and instill such human actions in/through the relationship and mediation with each other. Karnal (2018) also discusses how these behaviors, to what extent and in what way, transformed the human being in the 21st century, who can feel lonely, isolated or (un)happy from the digital configuration now present in daily life, be it directed to any spheres of human activity: family, religious, labor, among others. The author points out that the internet brought more autonomy for people, however, it also served to “reaffirm the self”, that is, it created “the illusion of the company, the addiction to the like” (KARNAL, 2018, p. 46, author' highlights, our translation).

Based on the sociologist David Riesman, author of the work “The lonely crowd”, Karnal (2018) points out that in the *baby boomer* generation (the war generation), children were influenced by the family, by the figure of the father or mother, or even by older/experienced authorities and ended up, in this way, reproducing behaviors, living standards. At that time, people “depended” on the approval of their parents/authorities regarding their behavior, attitudes, ways of being, acting, thinking. Thus, with a “new behavioral pattern, individuals started to depend more and more on the approval of their peers, in social media, to live: “People lose social freedom and individual autonomy trying to be like the others”” (KARNAL, 2018, p. 47).

These attempts to follow a pattern, a model, to become equal to the other, end up reflecting on the social relationships that are built from the interaction with the other, a relationship that often relies more on the virtual/digital than on the real. This, therefore, the virtual/digital world brings a certain control of the subject of this/that "bubble filter" that prevents the human being from feeling pain, insecurity, from feeling unhappy. Pain makes us mature, grow, it teaches us to live together and to heal the thorns that hurt and which we also hurt the other. “In pain I find something new, a limit, an extra knowledge, the grain of sand that the oyster can transform into a pearl” (KARNAL, 2018, p. 50).

Unlike what happens when people launch themselves into the virtual/digital abyss, by projecting themselves into what they seek and wish to be and have, from a universe that is possible to obtain and that pain can also be avoided, there is the creation of a new identity formed/constituted from an avatar (a cyberbody), inscribed in different cyberspaces, such as social networks, virtual/digital games, social networking sites (KARNAL, 2018). Thus, more and more there is an isolation that restricts touch, smell, among so many other senses and feelings, in which one does not experience what is different, what is external to us, the other. In addition, it is possible to allow reflection on the current context, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which intensified isolation due to health control measures, but also caused a restriction on the other and on ourselves.

Thus, living with the other amid the heterogeneity of profiles, identities, is to become aware of oneself and the other, to dialogue, to exchange, to negotiate, to constitute oneself as a human being through these dialogical relationships (BAKHTIN, 2011). For Karnal (2018, p. 54, our translation), “loneliness can be good and productive, reassuring and even essential” while I manage to take advantage of it, reflecting about me/myself, “feeling accompanied without being with anyone”.

Chapter 3, entitled “*Solidão, solitude e livros*” (Loneliness, solitude and books), involves the reader from the interlocutions undertaken by Karnal (2018, p. 88, our additions) when the author brings up the “dozens and dozens of lonely lives [that] are on the pages of literature”. Stories that reflect and refract different contexts of experience and the production conditions of authors regarding loneliness and isolation. “Conscious, imposed, vindictive, reflective, productive, maddening, challenging isolations and all the possibilities you can imagine” (KARNAL, 2018, p. 88, our translation). Narratives that are intertwined in/amidst different places of isolation and loneliness, ranging from the exposure of the isolation of the British Andrew Wiles in order to find the error in Fermat's theorem, going through the characters of Macbeth and Hamlet of Shakespeare; by Don Quixote de Cervantes; to Defoe's novel “Robinson Crusoe”, expressiveness in literature by writers such as Heloísa Argenteuil, Hypatia de Alexandria, Kate Chopin, Charlotte Anna Perkins, Virginia Woolf, which are described by Karnal (2018).

On, through and with the different life histories of these and other characters, we agree with Karnal (2018, p. 60) when he states that: “Literature enables the so-called vicarious experience, because, when we get in touch with the experiences of the characters, we cross boundaries unknown to ourselves”, and we are constituted by this exteriority. Which implies to think about what Bakhtin (2011, p. 26) names for excess of vision, as well as the

boundaries that permeate us and also constitute us from that other that seems strange and external to us, in certain social and historical contexts: “so, real perception happens; in an external-unique world that I can see, hear and feel, I do not find my external expressiveness as a unique and equally external object, alongside other objects; I find myself in a kind of frontier of the world that I see [...]” (our translation).

In chapter 4, entitled “*O Deus da solidão*” (The God of Solitude), Karnal (2018, p. 126) urges the reader to reflect on the way in which loneliness influenced/influences the “greatest religions and religious practices”, illustrating how Buddha, Jesus, Moses, Muhammad, Abraham and Joseph, among other religious/biblical characters, sought and found in isolation God and themselves. According to Karnal (2018, p. 93, our translation) “[...] being close to God brings virtue and abundance. On the other hand, moving away from it brings drought and deprivation”. The moments spent under the fig tree, as it happened with Buddha, or the lonely walk in the desert made by Jesus, imply, in these cases, in the faith of each one, in what each one believes and brings to himself other reasons to move forward. These reasons for self(knowing), being touched and (trans)formed in/by and with isolation, being and experiencing solitude in dialogue with God. In this way, as stated by Karnal (2018, p. 94, our translation) “[a] loneliness without God is something that is not desired in tradition”. This, therefore, the loneliness lived, experienced from some biblical passages inscribed in the Old Testament and discursivized by the author, is necessary for the development and serves as food for the spirit, “Jesus finds his essence”. Thus, man finds balance and acceptance in/by the word of “salvation”.

In chapter 5, entitled “*A imagem do solitário: arte e cinema em busca do isolamento imagético*” (The image of the loner: art and cinema in search of imaginary isolation), the author takes an initial look at the connection between art and solitude with a metatext. Or even, “with a metatext over a metatext” (KARNAL, 2018, p. 127, our translation). As an example, he cites the work “The flame of a candle”, by French philosopher and poet Gaston Bachelard. The reflections engendered by Bachelard proposed to think, as Karnal (2018, p. 127) develops, of the relationship between the solitude of a candle and another candle in a given time and space, being that “[...] even if two candles are joined, the flame of one does not merge with the other” (our translation). This, because each in its own way, by their own experiences, private or public, individual or collective, are also constituted by loneliness. The candle, like the poet described by Bachelard, begins its trajectory alone, “gains a life of its own, its own light [...], a simple candle” (KARNAL, 2018, p. 128, our translation). Karnal (2018) invites the reader to make this reflection, considering art as a candle. The candle takes

on an important position in the face of the loneliness experienced by each one of us. A candle that brings light to this loneliness, just as art also begins to illuminate our existence. “How many times has a film, book, music, or work illuminated hidden intricacies of all of us, places that we never even imagined existed. It can illuminate and transform us through this light” (KARNAL, 2018, p. 128, our translation).

Thus, watching a movie, reading a book, listening to a song is never something done, finished, repeatable. On the contrary, these actions are practiced by people in different times and spaces, because “each person, individually, reads and rereads the work, and with each re-reading, discovers something new” (KARNAL, 2018, p. 130, our translation) , one discovers, transforms itself and transforms the other in/through the different meanings attributed to this (these) reading(s). To enrich the discussion, Bakhtin (2011, p. 14, our translation) can be quoted, stating that: “when we look at ourselves with the eyes of the other, in life we always return to ourselves, and the last event, a kind of summary, takes place in us in the categories of our own life”. This author conceives that the subject is, in this dialogical perspective, unfinished, in movement, as well as the readings he performs in different spheres of human activity (family, media, religious, among others) situated historically and socially. And, as Karnal (2018, p. 130, our translation) points out, “[the] work recreates us with each reading. [...] we change, the work and me, at each meeting”

In any case, we are never alone, even if man seeks to, aim for this imagery isolation in large urban centers or in/by media/digital interactions. In other words, to desire this “liberating loneliness” that crosses the 19th century, from its representation in films and works of art, is a “condition to be free” (KARNAL, 2018, p. 143). As the author points out, it is the power of candlelight that brings to a certain extent a cure and causes people to feel less lonely, to become less ill. Thus, art has this “capacity to soften loneliness, to make us think, to make us feel closer and feel” (KARNAL, 2018, p. 150, our translation).

Chapter 6, entitled “*As solitárias*” (The Solitaries), is woven by the author bringing up the term social loneliness, which emerges from social, historical, cultural, ideological processes, very well punctuated in the following excerpt: “[...] when the imposition of loneliness becomes something normative, legal. We punish with the solitary” (KARNAL, 2018, p. 166, our translation). As a punishment, it can be used in the prison system with the control of the body, thus choosing a disciplinary power “the model in which all coercive technologies of behavior are concentrated” (FOUCAULT, 2014, p. 289, our translation). Or even, the loneliness described by and in old age, when many elderly people end up being allocated by the family or the State in hospitals, nursing homes. Or, yet, the loneliness lived in

the marriage, in a pair, in which “Solitude is cruel”, says Karnal (2018, p. 151). So it is, because it can wreak havoc on a human being when physically isolated from another being. It weakens, undermines, dampens the feelings and even the essence of those who experience this isolation, that of the solitary. Thus, agreeing with the author and, from a Bakhtinian perspective, one can understand that we are social beings, we live in dialogue with the other, we are gregarious or congregated beings who are weakened from isolation, we lack this affection, this care of the other.

In addition, Karnal (2018, p. 156, our translation) reinforces that “being alone and well requires maturity and balance. Imbalanced, insecure and those with impenetrable voids in the soul tremble at the possibility of being without someone on the side”. When referring to the conjugal relationship, the author points out that hardship is not based on being alone or being silent, but in the absence of dialogue, the lack of this meeting of souls. This loneliness that perhaps would have a resolution or “cure” in dialog with the other. However, it is not, because even in company, as explained by Karnal (2018), there are couples who live alone during years of marriage. Therefore, it is not the company, but the relationships of affection, care, interaction, dialogue with the other and the other towards yourself that makes solitude not so intense or does not exist in some social contexts. Especially because “loneliness is a problem created by society” (KARNAL, 2018, p. 158, our translation).

Finally, the conclusion entitled by the author of “*Solitários do mundo, afastai-vos*” (Loners of the World, move away), based on the thought of the French poet Jean-Nicolas Arthur Rimbaud, has as an assumption that the “I is an other” (KARNAL, 2018, p. 181) and in this reflection he carries out with the reader, Karnal (2018) takes up the different chronotopes<sup>5</sup> in the course of his work in which loneliness is configured: loneliness-solitude, loneliness-experience, loneliness-productive, loneliness-connected, loneliness of conscience, idealistic-loneliness, liberating-loneliness, selfish-loneliness, voluntary and/or forced loneliness, as well as the strangeness, encounters, mismatches, discoveries, challenges, finding oneself, losing oneself, which encompass different dimensions of our existence.

From the most varied roles that we as a social and gregarious subject occupy and place ourselves in the world, in the most varied social spheres of human activity, in and through the

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<sup>5</sup> This relation between time and space that constitutes the statement, Bakhtin (1998) in “Issues of literature and aesthetics”, will call chronotope. “The chronotope is linked to what Bakhtin calls “great temporality” and can therefore be conceptualized as “the expression of a great time” (GEGe, 2009, p. 25, group highlights, our translation). “While space is social, time is historical, as it is the dimension of movement in the field of transformations and *events*” (GEGe, 2009, p. 25, group highlights, our translation). Amorin (2018, p. 105, our translation) adds that “[the] chronotope concept deals with a production of history. It designates a collective place, a kind of space-time matrix from which the various stories are told or written. It is linked to genres and their trajectory”.

dialogical interactions we carry out with this other, we constitute ourselves and also constitute this other (BAKHTIN, 2011 [1979]). In the voice of Geraldi (2013 [1991], p. 6, our translation) “the subjects are constituted as such as they interact with others, their conscience and their knowledge of the world result as a “product” of this same process”. This process from which we act, move and exist in groups, gathered in/through the relationship with another.

Thus, "loneliness is a privileged place to distinguish voices from the world, including those that defined me and I incorporated" (KARNAL, 2018, p. 186, our translation) in/through the ties of otherness, that is, in/through our dialogical connection with the another, that is, “[the] interaction with the other is the condition of the possibility of existence and constitution of the subject as a social being”, historical and pervaded by ideologies (SILVEIRA; ROHLING, RODRIGUES, 2012, p. 19, our translation). Therefore, what identifies us, constitutes us to be who we are is the “historical result of the relationships with other subjects” (SILVEIRA; ROHLING, RODRIGUES, 2012, p. 19, our translation). People complement and complete each other in a process that happens continuously with/in and through the other. It is necessary to let oneself go, to allow oneself to listen to let “the other emerge” (KARNAL, 2018, p. 186), an “other in itself” (KARNAL, 2018, p. 187, our translation).

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