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## El concepto de culpa desde los principales referentes de la filosofía contemporánea

### *The concept of guilt from the main references of contemporary philosophy*

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### Resumen

El manuscrito discute sobre el concepto de culpa desde Nietzsche, Heidegger, Jaspers y Ricoeur como principales referentes de la filosofía contemporánea que han abordado este tema. En el artículo se reflexiona acerca de las distintas concepciones de culpa y su relación con el sujeto moderno, su existencia, la trascendencia y la responsabilidad. En una época tecnificada, dominada por la tendencia utilitarista y consumista, la producción en serie y la enajenación que vive el ser humano respecto a sí mismo, se hace indispensable repensar en torno a la autenticidad, a la individualidad y a la subjetividad en contextos singulares como el nuestro. La metodología utilizada para la estructuración de este documento se respalda en las principales directrices de la investigación cualitativa, se apoya en la revisión bibliográfica, el análisis de textos, y consecuentemente, el método hermenéutico para la interpretación de las teorías, categorías, principios, doctrinas y concepciones. El artículo se encuentra estructurado en cuatro apartados: El primer apartado presenta una discusión sobre el concepto de culpa y el nacimiento de la conciencia desde la perspectiva nietzscheana. El segundo apartado se refiere al concepto de culpa en la filosofía de Martín Heidegger, explica la función que cumple la culpa en el esclarecimiento del sentido del ser.



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El tercer apartado realiza una exposición sobre la relación entre el concepto de culpa y trascendencia según Karl Jaspers. Finalmente, el cuarto apartado, indaga sobre la relación planteada por Ricouer acerca del concepto de culpa y la responsabilidad.

## Palabras clave

Autenticidad, culpa, existencialismo, filosofía contemporánea, responsabilidad, trascendencia.

## Abstract

The manuscript discusses the concept of guilt from Nietzsche, Heidegger, Jaspers and Ricouer as the main referents of contemporary philosophy that have addressed this issue. The article reflects on the different conceptions of guilt and its relation to the modern subject, its existence, transcendence and responsibility. In a technified era, dominated by the utilitarian and consumerist tendency, mass production and the alienation that the human being lives with respect to himself, it becomes indispensable to rethink about authenticity, individuality and subjectivity in singular contexts such as ours. The methodology used for the structuring of this document is based on the main guidelines of qualitative research, it is supported by the bibliographic review, the analysis of texts, and consequently, the hermeneutic method for the interpretation of theories, categories, principles, doctrines and conceptions. The article is structured in four sections: The first section presents a discussion on the concept of guilt and the birth of conscience from the Nietzschean perspective. The second section refers to the concept of guilt in Martin Heidegger's philosophy, explaining the function of guilt in the clarification of the meaning of being. The third section makes an exposition on the relationship between the concept of guilt and transcendence according to Karl Jaspers. Finally, the fourth section explores the relationship raised by Ricouer on the concept of guilt and responsibility.

## Keywords

Guilt, contemporary philosophy, existentialism, transcendence, responsibility, authenticity.

## 1. Introduction

The manuscript discusses the concept of guilt from Nietzsche, Heidegger, Jaspers and Ricouer as the main referents of contemporary philosophy that have addressed this issue. The article reflects on the different conceptions of guilt and its relation to the modern subject, its existence, transcendence and responsibility. In a technified era, dominated by the utilitarian and consumerist tendency, mass production and the alienation that the human being lives with respect to himself, it is essential to rethink about authenticity, individuality and subjectivity in unique contexts such as ours.

The concept of guilt is a polysemic term, it has several meanings that come from different fields such as ethics, law, morality and existential itself; likewise, there are some connotations, differences and similarities regarding its sense and meaning, the most outstanding conception is related to the term debt. In existentialist thought, guilt is the core of existence, since it fulfills the function of claiming the authenticity of being. The aim of this article is to reflect on the concept of guilt from the existentialist point of view in relation to the subject, transcendence and responsibility.



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## 2. The Concept of Guilt and the Birth of Conscience in Nietzsche

Nietzsche, in his research on moral sentiments, made a tour on the origin of such sentiments, as well as their evolution throughout time. At the beginning, this thinker, based on the works of those whom he calls "English psychologists" and especially supported by Paul Ree, came to the conclusion that all moral concepts do not have a divine origin, but rather are the result of the different evolutions of civilization, they are the product of the social life of the human being. For Nietzsche (2011), the analysis on moral sentiments of these English psychologists possesses "a perverse taste for the strange, the painfully paradoxical, the problematic and absurd of existence" (p. 50), since they show that, behind all concepts, the human being has clothed them with a divine or holy aura, where rather biological, instinctive and animal issues are to be found.

Likewise, for Nietzsche (2011), "those researchers who look at the soul with a microscope" (p. 50) have approached a truth different from what has already been taught by religious tradition, for this truth expresses the most human of moral feelings is a "simple, rough, ugly, nauseating, unchristian, amoral" truth (p. 50). This view of Nietzsche's is based on the fact that these researchers argued that altruistic acts have remained within the various civilizations for utilitarian reasons, i.e., generous actions, selfless actions contributed to the survival of human groups and remained in the memory of peoples because they were functional to gregarious instincts (to groups of people), so that they are not actions that have some value in themselves or some transcendental meaning, but are actions that through habit and their utility have been reproduced throughout history.

On the other hand, while Nietzsche praises the work of these "English psychologists," he argues that their research on the origin of moral sentiments has been sought in the wrong place, since for Nietzsche (2011) the concept of goodness did not arise from some social consensus and neither from any utilitarian sense, but rather "it was the 'good' themselves, that is, the noble, the powerful, the individuals of position and high feeling who saw and valued themselves and their actions as good" (p. 51). In such a way that Nietzsche, in opposition to the common opinion, defended the idea that the concepts of good and bad were employed in the beginning to mark a hierarchical division between the noble, superior individuals and the servile, mediocre, vulgar and weak individuals.

According to Nietzsche (2011) the noble classes are characterized by "their indifferent and contemptuous attitude towards security, the body, life, well-being" (p. 68), and also present certain characteristics that in modernity would be observed as perverse, among which are a tendency towards intense pleasure in conquest and war, a tendency towards cruelty and enjoyment in destruction, and most importantly, a tendency towards the creation of authentic and original values, going so far as to argue that these types of individuals are destined to represent the best of humanity, i.e. authentic humanity; They are individuals who are beyond good and evil, and close to the ideal of the "superman", that is, of that human being who has overcome all kinds of schemes, who has overcome the lowest of humanity, who responds only to his "will" and whose goal is the exceptional, that is, the creation of higher values than those that characterize the Christian life marked by conformism, mediocrity and submission.

Moreover, for this type of people the usefulness of actions is of little importance, since they are individuals who do not focus, as Nietzsche says, on "prudential and utilitarian calculation" (p. 51); they are those who by their very nature and physical constitution tend to squander strength, concentrate on action, and overflow with life and powerful instincts. On the contrary, inferior, servile and mediocre human beings historically constituted the opposite of the superior subjects who called themselves "good". In such a way that, at the



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origin of moral sentiments, it was the mediocre who by their very nature tended towards thrift, prudence and utility, and who in the eyes of the superior beings represented all that was low and "bad" in society.

The above is evident in the explanation of Nietzsche who maintains that the origin of moral sentiments should not be found in some kind of social consensus that was reproduced throughout history for its utilitarian value, but rather should be sought in the historical struggle that took place between the class of lords and the class of slaves, between the class of warriors and the class of priests; since it was a historical struggle that to this day remains and is expressed in new forms of domination and submission. Among these new forms of domination and submission, Nietzsche looks at the continuous struggles for social egalitarianism, which in his opinion is a disguise that the weak classes employ in their attempt to domesticate the dominant classes (Nietzsche, 2011).

Nietzsche realized that over the centuries the winner of this struggle was the class of priests, a class characterized by a weak physical constitution, but whose deficiencies are subtly hidden in the kind of contemplative, ascetic and spiritual life they live. The priests, under this subhuman appearance that they try to provide, generate in the people a certain fear, since they are individuals who present themselves as the receivers and transmitters of divine messages, who are distinguished by habits that frighten others such as self-flagellation and other types of self-harm. In addition, the ascetic life led by this class of individuals generates within the public sensations of mystery and depth, being this artifice one of the main resources to triumph over the warrior classes.

It is important to emphasize that both the warrior class and the priests seek, according to Nietzsche, domination by different means; the warriors do it through conquest and force, the priests by means of different artifices, and to which others would be added such as the remorse they expose on the people through their vision of sin, and the most important: the love and crucifixion of their martyrs. Likewise, the type of means employed by the class of priests responds to a vengeance against the dominant classes; addressing to that rebellion of the slaves that Nietzsche observes in the triumph of Christianity.

According to Nietzsche (2011) "the rebellion of the slaves in morality begins when resentment itself becomes creative and produces values: the resentment of those individuals who are prevented from true reaction" (p. 63). This rebellion represents an explosion of all the resentments accumulated by the servile classes, since this class, not possessing the strength to fight directly against the ruling classes, planned in the depths of their being different spiritual forms to take revenge against those who subjected them by force.

In fact, for Nietzsche, that which the peoples call spirit or conscience is synonymous with the triumph of the priestly classes, because these classes in their search for artifices to triumph and dominate, used spiritual concepts to alter the forces of the dominant classes. In such a way, the triumph of the slaves was based on moving the real struggle to a spiritual plane, to the interior of the individuals, being born under this new form of struggle: the concepts of conscience, guilt and remorse. Henceforth, the struggle between masters and slaves became deeper, more spiritual and more subtle.

It should be emphasized that this battle, once it acquired a deeper and more spiritual tone, also brought about an inversion in the hierarchy and division of moral concepts; an inversion whereby the concept of good used by the superior and strong individuals to characterize themselves, was assumed and re-invented in a totally different sense by the class of inferior individuals. The inversion of the scale of values employed by the slave



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classes was based on a new division between the good and a concept that they themselves introduced, the concept of "evil", a concept that according to Nietzsche was born out of the resentment and hatred of the servile classes.

Thus, Nietzsche (2011) analyzes that between the concept of good originally employed by the upper classes and the concept of the servile classes, there is a great difference: "the first is a later creation, something additional, a complementary color; the second instead, is the original, the beginning, the real action in the conception of a slave morality" (p. 67), and further on he points out that the radical antithesis of the concept of good employed by the servile classes, is a concept that designates everything that has the appearance of perversity, leisure, pleasure in destruction and cruelty, that is: the evil, and which is a designation used by the slave class to take revenge and discredit the properties of the noble classes.

Once Nietzsche reaches this conclusion, he is not only authorized to point out that the hierarchy of values of modernity is based on an inversion that began with the rebellion of the slaves and is perfectly identifiable in Platonism and the ethical philosophy of Kant, but to affirm that culture as it is understood today is the materialization of the same rebellion and the result of a falsification of human nature. Culture has become in the hands of the slave classes an instrument for domesticating the forces of those select individuals who present overflowing health and instincts of domination and conquest. Likewise, culture under the rebellion of the slaves has become contrary to life, to their innocence and in general contrary to their natural inclination towards the creation of new and original values, while values such as equality, mercy or self-sacrifice that characterize culture, are signs of weakened instincts, of a will to nothingness that in turn is present in Christian values.

Then, taking into account these aspects on the rebellion of the slaves and the origin, as well as the evolution of moral sentiments, it can be indicated that the concept of guilt in general terms expresses a debt that a subject contracts with a creditor. This concept evolved as culture did; in its origins it was only a physical punishment deserved by a subject who had committed an injury against another person and only after the battles between priestly classes and war classes were internalized in the subject, did the concept of guilt acquire its current meaning.

According to Mejía (2002), in the dynamics between the punished and the punisher there was a logic of pleasure and displeasure; the enjoyment provoked by punishing was a form of reward on the part of the injured party, since according to Nietzsche (2011) "making suffer produces well-being, since the injured party exchanged the harm, as well as the displeasure it produced, for an extraordinary counter-joy: making suffer" (p. 75). These punishments, which at first were only physical, slowly became internalized in the form of a spiritual battle, thus giving birth to a series of moral remorse along with conscience. In this way, the debt of the first human societies was internalized in the conscience, giving birth to the concept of guilt.

The rebellion of the slaves introduced the concept of guilt to triumph over the master class; they used this concept to establish an insurmountable debt between the human being and a superior entity, and in this way ensure total domination over culture and universal history. The Christian religion, as an expression of the priestly classes, was used to ensure the triumph of these servile classes; a religion built on the myth of original sin, on a myth that established an insurmountable debt between man and God, a myth on which all forms of remorse and guilt are based. This is pointed out by some scholars such as Rojo (2017) "all religion is founded primarily on the idea of sin, that is, the feeling of guilt experienced for not being able to comply with the prescribed norms. Without this conception, religion loses all meaning" (p. 121).



Moreover, from the perspective of Christianity, guilt translates the ontological debt that the human being has with God, since the human being has not created the universe, nor himself, but God is the creator of all things. In the personalist philosophical literature one can find arguments such as those of Mounier, for whom the human being, unlike animals, experiences uncertainty not only about the origin of all things, but also about the permanence of the world he inhabits. And in this need for the search for certainties, the idea of God is presented as one of the most accepted. Consequently, the human being has a relationship of dependence with God, that is, with his creator, so that, if man commits moral faults, he fails God, and this is what guilt consists of, in this sense, man has an ontological debt with God, since it is he who has given 'being', the possibility of existing and the possibility of transcending (Mounier, 2000).

According to Elders (1983) the concept of guilt, referring in a theological way, accounts for "a voluntary disturbance of man's ordination towards God" (p. 173) and which is expressed in the lack of moral responsibility. Thus, that rebellion of the slaves which began against the seigniorial classes and which gradually acquired a spiritual subtlety, until it ended in an inner struggle, was from the beginning a planned rebellion, which used means such as culture and religion to tame the impulses and instincts of the strong individuals. Conscience together with guilt is born under the form of a spiritual battle used by slaves, and it was precisely this feeling that Nietzsche fought throughout his life, since his purpose was to recover the innocence of the human being; it is not a novelty that the last figure of the three transformations that Nietzsche exposed in his work *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, is precisely a child (after the camel and the lion).

In the following section the concept of guilt from the existentialism of Jaspers and Martin Heidegger is presented. The difference between the ways of approaching the concept of guilt in these authors consists in the fact that for Jaspers guilt has a psychological and moral aspect that must be discovered; while for Heidegger, guilt fulfills a function of clarifying the meaning of being.

### 3. Guilt and the clarification of the meaning of being according to Heidegger

Before beginning with the development of this section, it is important to indicate that Heidegger's existentialist philosophy arises as a response to the tragic events of the two world wars of the twentieth century. The central theme of Heidegger's philosophy is existence; one of the reasons why this became the main concern of this author was the alienation experienced by man in the twentieth century. According to Prini (1957), the alienation of man was denounced by existentialism under:

[...] the twofold aspect of a loss of the personal character of existence, within the suggestions and impositions always more linked to an anonymous community and in the automatism of a life and a world always more rigorously organized by technical progress. (p. 10).

In this new world, the masses or crowds emerged, which according to Heidegger (2003) constituted the impersonal domain of collectivism, while for Marcel (1964) this event reflected "the suffocating sadness of a world organized according to the idea of function" (p. 74). In this context, Heideggerian existentialism arises under a feeling of deep discontent for a man who did not find himself in the world he himself built. Then the task was to find out the meaning of existence and vindicate the authenticity of the individual. To this end, Heidegger gave a special role to the concept of guilt.



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Heidegger in his analysis of that which is above the ontic, that is to say of everything that is outside the daily, political and ethical questions, concentrated on the structure of the Dasein, the structure of that which is more proper and immediate to the human being: his existence. To this end, he will develop, as Redondo (2001) indicates:

[...] a type of conceptualization that in the history of thought had only appeared on the occasion of the expression of a certain type of experience. It is the conceptualization with which the tradition had tried to give an account and expression of the search for the self by a subject who feels fallen, estranged, lost and dispersed and who tries to collect himself in order to focus on what is most proper and genuine in himself, to be truly with himself, and who therefore has to begin by searching for himself. (p. 27).

Heidegger's search for the structure of existence begins with a problematization of the meaning and authenticity of Being-there (Dasein), giving the form of a conceptualization articulated to the experience of what Heidegger calls the "confessional" structure of the subject or the structure of the subjectivity of the one who searches for himself, also indicates that the human being is an entity who is interested in his being, a being who can know and experience himself in authenticity or in inauthenticity, between the possibility of knowing himself or losing himself (Heidegger, 2003).

On the other hand, as Redondo (2001) indicates, the structure of Dasein has "a world articulated as a space of relevance, remissions and significations, in which the entity shows itself to us in what it is, this world being nothing but a determination of existence itself" (p. 28). This means that the world is one more modality of the being of Dasein, since the world is a space that founds the human being himself through his existence; it is the space where existence relates to itself, to others and to objects. In Heidegger's terms, existential analysis reveals that Dasein appears in the form of being-in-the-world. The world is a space constructed by Dasein, where things appear in a network of meanings and relevance.

The human being is projected in a world that exists without previous meanings and that only finds meaning from existence. From this point of view, the human being is thrown into existence; he is the only one who has the duty to take charge of himself. Faced with a world that has no previous meanings, existence, as Redondo (2001) points out, "is apprehended based on the possibility of the absolute impossibility of itself, that of death, and that is the unassailable possibility and the one in which each one cannot be substituted by anyone" (p. 29).

Therefore, the human being faces anguish and two constituents of the structure of Dasein appear: care and guilt. On the one hand, care is defined by Heidegger as the moment of projection and facticity in which existence opens itself to the world. The human being in his condition with the world has to relate to objects; he is concerned with things, shows attachment and addiction to them (Heidegger, 2003). However, existence once it is thrown into the world of things ceases to be authentic. In the care and preoccupation with things, Dasein is far from itself, it is occupied with the activities that custom dictates and that all human beings do, such as thinking, reading or choosing.

Faced with anguish, the human being can freely opt for the preoccupation of everyday things, thus fleeing from anguish, or for the existential abyss that opens up with the question "what for? The human being has the capacity to choose; he can choose between worrying about the everyday and thus living in the oppression of the near, or he can choose the possibility of being able to be according to Heidegger, and thus heed the call of conscience



that deep down tells the human being that existence is heading towards death. This is also explained by Ballbé (1964):

Our freedom consists in choosing between being in the oppression of proximity, that is, in impersonal individuality, or taking the risk of pilgrimage, recognizing our finitude, as witnesses of a transcendence that is continually hidden, but which offers the unrealizable possibility of authentic existence. (p. 1).

To live in everyday life and in the preoccupation with things is to opt for an inauthentic existence, while the recognition of human finitude is a possibility for authentic existence and for transcending. In this free decision, guilt arises, and for this reason it is considered, according to Ballbé (1964), as "the core of existence" (p. 1). Existential guilt must be distinguished from qualitative guilt. The first refers to the flight from the possibilities of being able to be, that is to say, from authenticity. The second refers to the guilt that the human being experiences in everyday life, when he commits some mistake regarding the value of coexistence and which have been conventionally agreed upon.

The human being escapes from questions about the meaning of being, since they provoke anguish and lead to some kind of existential crisis. Society offers multiple ways to avoid this encounter with anguish, which are presented as incentives shared by human beings as a whole. In addition, the human being, when facing the existential crisis, feels the burden of his freedom, of being someone singular and different from others. To escape the anguish of freedom and individuality, he wishes to be integrated into society once again, as if he were a lamb that has lost its flock.

Society continually creates mechanisms to avoid anguish: amusement centers, shows, serials. The important thing is to be part of the masses. The human being, instead of choosing for himself, prefers to submerge and get lost among the masses. In other words, the emergence of the masses is a form of collective discharge in the face of anguish, in the face of the possibility of being. For Ballbé (1964) of "the multiple forms of unloading of the self-individual and collective- the simplest consists in the concealment or repression of the experience of guilt, with which it is possible to eliminate from the field of consciousness the fault committed" (p. 5).

When the human being adopts this way of existing, he loses his individuality, becoming an anonymous subject who lives in inauthenticity. Existential guilt arises precisely in this decision that the human being has taken, since it reminds him of the renunciation of his possibility of being able to be and the responsibility that he should have had with himself. As Acevedo (2013) indicates, guilt "has a fundamental ontological purpose; that is, its goal is to clarify a dimension of being-there in order to prepare the ground to sufficiently pose the question that asks about being and its meaning" (p. 56).

For Heidegger (2003), guilt is found in the depths of being itself, being the voice of conscience, which points out to man his guilt. This thinker by means of transcendental analytics, which is a phenomenological study, found that guilt constitutes a fundamental structure of human existence and that consciousness discovers it. According to Acevedo (2013), this call of conscience shows the "being-there immersed in the everydayness of middle or medium term dominated by the self or one thrown into the world and fallen into the gossip, the greed for novelties, ambiguity and fear" (p. 58) and demands from him, to abandon the impropriety to assume himself as himself.



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It is necessary to emphasize that this call is not made by conscience from discourses, since according to Heidegger (2003) "conscience speaks only and constantly in the mode of silence" (p. 321). The conscience reminds man that he is guilty for losing himself in everyday life, for making of existence a business occupied with worldly affairs, instead of assuming his finitude, since the acceptance of this fundamental dimension of the human being implies taking charge of his possibilities as an authentic existence. Once the human being accepts his finitude, he heeds the call of conscience and prepares himself for resolution. In the words of Heidegger (2003):

The state-of-openness of the being-there implicit in the will to be conscious is constituted [...] by the encounter of anguish, by understanding as projecting itself upon its own most guilty being and by speech as silence. We call this marked self-opening, attested in Dasein itself by its consciousness - the silence of projecting itself, disposed to anguish, on its own most guilty being - the resolution. The resolution is a marked mode of the opening. (p. 154).

However, according to Acevedo, resolution does not imply the disappearance of guilt, because despite opting for authenticity, guilt survives (Acevedo, 2013). Although the positive aspect of resolution consists in the acceptance of the limitations of existence, in its finite nature and in the rejection of the illusions offered by society, guilt remains, because the human being, faced with the anguish of existence, tends to forget himself again.

#### 4. Guilt as a limit situation according to Jaspers

One of the central concepts of Jaspers' philosophy pertains to 'limit situations', which according to this author have the function of awakening consciousness, similar to the function that Heidegger attributed to the concept of guilt. According to Jaspers, guilt is one of these 'limit situations' which, like suicide, struggle or illness, are accompanied by some kind of existential crisis. The importance that Jaspers attributes to these 'limit situations' consists in the fact that they have a positive function for the constitution of individuality, since they bring the subject face to face with himself. In these 'limit situations' the subject experiences the fragility of his finite condition, and for this reason they are situations that awaken the subject from everyday life, pointing out to him his possibilities as an existence and the need to be himself, to be what he is. At this point it is important to take into account what Nietzsche (1951) said about his illness, since illness and guilt are two limit situations that reveal human finiteness:

[...] The whole meaning of the terrible physical pains to which I have been subjected lies in the fact that, thanks to them, I was torn away from an erroneous - that is to say, a hundred times too low - conception of my life's mission. And as I count by nature among modest men, the most violent means are necessary to bring me back to myself. (p. 265).

As can be seen, the man who wishes to resolve with himself, finds in the disease an opportunity, he feels the call of his conscience, who demands him to be himself. Nietzsche's illness was a limit situation of the tragic theater of life as considered by Unamuno (1983) who presents to the human being the opportunity to think of himself as a project, as a possibility, as the only owner of his destiny. The disease, if accepted and attended to, provokes in the subject an existential crisis that awakens him from his inert state, from that state in which he was outside himself, occupied with things that kept him away from anguish and turned him into an anonymous subject who was lost in the mass. He who rejects



limit situations is condemned to reject his authentic existence. This flight, according to Ballbé (1964):

[...] lead to the failure of the possibility of being oneself. The appearance of guilt, which manifests itself as an existential crisis, accuses us of the desertion committed. The temporal irreversibility and the horizon of death give sense to the anguish before the condemnation that demands, peremptorily, repentance and conversion to authenticity. The sense of this crisis defines what we call existential guilt (p. 4)

This means that the human being finds himself on the horizon of death, because in front of it he has to declare what is the meaning of his existence, that is to say, why and for what? These are the questions that determine the lifestyle of every man who has decided to be himself. On the other hand, guilt, unlike social punishment, is individual, subjective and represents the remorse generated by the damage caused to a value that the human being considers as unique and intrinsic to himself. And this value is the subject himself and his existence.

Existential guilt demands the transformation of the subject into existence, authenticity, and the call of conscience is made through signs instead of words. Basically, what the conscience expresses through guilt is a continuous search for the why, which may never find meaning unless the authentic, free and individual human being defines it. That is to say, in the background is nothingness, which incites the individual to invent a meaning and to create a project for himself. For this reason, it is correct what Ballbé (1964) indicates, who considers that "guilt is the revealer of our original debt and moves man to make an incessant pilgrimage in search of a truth that is always hidden and appears after each denial" (p. 10). This means that the human being has an unbreakable debt with himself, which is presented to him when he forgets himself. This is what existential guilt consists of.

Guilt as a limit situation indicates that human action brings inevitable consequences. Since human beings do not have the ability to predict with certainty the consequences of their actions in the future, they can feel guilt. Thus, guilt is inseparable from life and is closely related to its finite character. Decisions that are part of existence may end up hurting or wounding someone. It is important to point out that the omission of action is also a decision that can have inevitable consequences. Thus, the human being is condemned to experience guilt.

Jaspers' idea of guilt can be connected with Sartre's (1992) perception of human freedom, since the human being is condemned to be free, condemned to face his responsibilities; thus he points out in his words "when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that man is responsible for his strict individuality, but that he is responsible for all men" (p. 33). Likewise, it should be noted that guilt, in addition to belonging to human beings, corresponds to the epoch that they themselves have created. Jaspers (1992), speaking about the guilt and responsibility of Germany in the Second World War, indicates that:

[...] in my situation I bear the responsibility for what happens because I did not intervene; if I can do something and I do not do it, I am guilty of the consequences of my abstention: Thus, whether I act or not, both behaviors have consequences; in all cases I irremediably incur in the guilt. (p. 120).

Although guilt is a limit situation from which the human being cannot escape, there is a possibility of transcending it, which Jaspers found in philosophy and communication.



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Philosophy according to this author is continuous communication, an activity by which the other is called; whose main objective is to investigate and clarify the meaning of existence. This consists in the fact that among people who philosophize about matters that concern them, there is no authority. In this way, communication among equals allows us to understand the other as a free subject, whose duty is to fulfill himself.

The human being aims to be what he is; he is the only being who is a possibility, in his freedom he realizes himself and in communication he transcends himself together with other free subjects. Thus, if guilt is a limit situation that forces the human being to choose for his authenticity, it can be affirmed that communication allows this possibility. This aspect was not unknown to Sartre, since he was concerned about the importance of dialogue with the other.

Then, it can be summarized that guilt is a way of awakening the consciousness from its numbness, which is expressed through an existential crisis that puts the subject in front of himself. This approach brings a problem related to responsibility and the life of others, since guilt from this perspective would seem to be an individual and selfish situation, which bears no relationship with the other, an aspect that leads to the next section in which the relationship between guilt and responsibility from Ricoeur's perspective is reviewed.

Ricoeur in his book "Finitude and Guilt" (2004) deals with the lability of the human being towards evil, from the research on the structure of human reality that is generally divided between voluntary actions and involuntary actions. It should be noted that his research on the lability of the human being is done through the study of symbols that are at the basis of Western thought. In this way Ricoeur (2004), starting from the 'language of confession', tries to understand the content of symbolic words that come from the religious tradition such as stain, sin, guilt. Thus, to find the meaning of guilt it is important according to this author "an exegesis of the symbol, which requires certain rules to decipher, i.e. a hermeneutic" (p. 14).

Ricoeur (2004) through this procedure concludes that lability towards evil is expressed in the act of confession of a religious conscience. Segovia (2015) explains, confession "is the tone with which the human being goes about confessing to himself the learning of being, which is both pleasurable and painful" (p. 137). Although pain and fear are distinct, they develop in parallel, since both are related to the guilty conscience. The former because it is related to an action considered forbidden, and the latter because it is determined by some taboo of the sacred.

From this hermeneutic analysis, two important aspects can be gathered. The first consists in the fact that lability towards evil is a possibility that reflects the tragic experience of existence itself, because in it is recognized the possibility of failure. The second refers to the fact that freedom is possible when one takes responsibility for one's own guilt. In assimilation and repentance lies the possibility of rebuilding oneself. This practice of religious character is ancient and still determines the human conscience.

Aunque la culpa es una situación límite de la que el ser humano no puede escapar, existe una posibilidad de trascenderla, que Jaspers encontró en la filosofía y la comunicación. La filosofía según este autor es una comunicación continua, una actividad por la que se llama al otro; cuyo objetivo principal es investigar y aclarar el sentido de la existencia. Esto consiste en que entre las personas que filosofan sobre los asuntos que les conciernen, no hay autoridad. Así, la comunicación entre iguales permite entender al otro como un sujeto libre, cuyo deber es realizarse.



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El ser humano aspira a ser lo que es; es el único ser que es una posibilidad, en su libertad se realiza y en la comunicación se trasciende junto a otros sujetos libres. Así, si la culpa es una situación límite que obliga al ser humano a elegir por su autenticidad, se puede afirmar que la comunicación permite esta posibilidad. Este aspecto no era desconocido por Sartre, ya que se preocupaba por la importancia del diálogo con el otro.

Entonces, se puede resumir que la culpa es una forma de despertar la conciencia de su adormecimiento, que se expresa a través de una crisis existencial que pone al sujeto frente a sí mismo. Este planteamiento trae consigo un problema relacionado con la responsabilidad y la vida de los demás, ya que la culpa desde esta perspectiva parecería ser una situación individual y egoísta, que no guarda relación con el otro, aspecto que nos lleva al siguiente apartado en el que se revisa la relación entre culpa y responsabilidad desde la perspectiva de Ricoeur.

Ricoeur en su libro "Finitud y Culpabilidad" (2004) aborda la labilidad del ser humano hacia el mal, a partir de la investigación sobre la estructura de la realidad humana que generalmente se divide entre acciones voluntarias y acciones involuntarias. Cabe destacar que su investigación sobre la labilidad del ser humano se realiza a través del estudio de los símbolos que están en la base del pensamiento occidental. De este modo, Ricoeur (2004), partiendo del "lenguaje de la confesión", intenta comprender el contenido de palabras simbólicas que provienen de la tradición religiosa como mancha, pecado, culpa. Así, para encontrar el significado de la culpa es importante según este autor "una exégesis del símbolo, que requiere ciertas reglas para descifrarlo, es decir, una hermenéutica" (p. 14).

Ricoeur (2004) a través de este procedimiento concluye que la labilidad hacia el mal se expresa en el acto de confesión de una conciencia religiosa. Según explica Segovia (2015), la confesión "es el tono con el que el ser humano va confesando a sí mismo el aprendizaje del ser, que es a la vez placentero y doloroso" (p. 137). Aunque el dolor y el miedo son distintos, se desarrollan en paralelo, ya que ambos están relacionados con la conciencia culpable. El primero porque está relacionado con una acción considerada prohibida, y el segundo porque está determinado por algún tabú de lo sagrado.

De este análisis hermenéutico se desprenden dos aspectos importantes. El primero consiste en que la labilidad hacia el mal es una posibilidad que refleja la experiencia trágica de la propia existencia, porque en ella se reconoce la posibilidad del fracaso. El segundo se refiere a que la libertad es posible cuando se asume la responsabilidad de la propia culpa. En la asimilación y el arrepentimiento está la posibilidad de reconstruirse. Esta práctica de carácter religioso es antigua y sigue determinando la conciencia humana:

[...] the affective force of reproach, of self-reproach, becomes fundamental in this feeling, knowing and saying guilty. The imputation remains in the dimension of exteriority if the self does not ascribe to itself the responsibility for actions whose consequences have caused harm (p. 75).

If the accused does not feel guilty, it is impossible for him to value a possible ethical re-signification and even less for him to assume a sense of responsibility. To be responsible and to be guilty are two different things, for as Ricoeur expresses "the consciousness of responsibility is nothing more than an appendix of the consciousness of being overwhelmed in advance by the weight of punishment" (p. 261). On the other hand, responsibility, according to Ricoeur, develops through three temporal dimensions, since it is related to the future (anticipation of the consequences of the action), the past (as a debt) and the present



(accepting oneself today as responsible). This means that the human being is a being reflective enough to consider the implications of his actions.

## 5. Conclusions

This article discusses in principle the concept of guilt from Nietzsche's thought, finding that this concept in its most original meaning refers to a debt that in the first human societies was based on a dynamic between pleasure and displeasure, between enjoyment and pain, since he who committed some harm had to pay with his own physical pain, and which represented an enjoyment for the creditor. Furthermore, the concept of guilt, as Nietzsche could identify, is related to the birth of culture and the triumph of the slaves' rebellion, since guilt arises as a form used by these classes to tame the instincts of conquest and domination of the strong classes, that is, of those warrior classes that were overflowing with strength.

After this analysis, the concept of guilt was discussed under the concept of Heideggerian existentialism. For Heidegger guilt is part of the structure of Dasein, it arises in the face of the anguish of existence and expresses the possibility of being authentic. Specifically, guilt according to Heidegger is presented as a call of conscience that claims the individual to be itself. In turn, this call of consciousness expressed in guilt was compared with Jaspers' limit situations, finding that both concepts have in common the function of awakening consciousness from its lethargy.

In Jaspers' thought it was possible to identify that guilt involves all individuals, in such a way that action or omission has consequences on others. Therefore, guilt is irremediable and had to be thought in its relationship with responsibility. Under this objective, the concept of guilt is reflected upon in terms of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, reaching the conclusion that the subject who commits some harm and who assumes the guilt of his action, has the capacity to take responsibility and to ethically re-build himself.



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