

The sharpness of madness: seeing right through the cage we call progress.

When we study past societies, we often ask the same question: how could people accept, even defend such unfair systems for so long? How could they not see structures that clearly oppressed them? From our classrooms, inequality appears obvious, almost grotesque. We label it bygone madness, as if madness itself had ever gone away. Our certainty might be precisely what should be questioned. The problem is not that people in the past failed to see injustice, but that we assume we no longer suffer from the same blindness. This raises a philosophical question that remains open since the time of the sophists and Socrates: is justice universal, or does it simply adapt itself to what societies normalize?

From a sophistic perspective, justice is not an absolute value but a social construction, since what is considered fair depends on context and its tradition. In this sense, the lack of rebellion in past societies does not necessarily indicate ignorance or submission, but normalization. As Michel Foucault later observed, power does not need to impose itself violently when it is perceived as natural. Aristocratic privilege, for instance, was rarely questioned by those who benefited from it, not because they were consciously cruel, but because their position felt self-evident. The same logic operates today since meritocracy views social hierarchies as deserved results of individual effort, and success as proof of moral worth. What we call progress is oftentimes nothing more than evolution; nothing less than the system changing its form, but not its structure; replacing wording but not meaning as the cage has been rebranded as <<freedom>>.

This is where the Socratic view becomes essential. For Socrates, the fact that a system is widely accepted does not make it fair; custom is not truth. Cervantes' Don Quixote embodies the uncomfortable lucidity of questioning. His so-called madness does not stem from mere derangement, but from an excessive clarity which refuses to adapt and perceives through its <<fractured>> yet sharp and mirroring lenses, a world governed by calculation, productivity, and usefulness, exposing the insanity hidden beneath its appearance of reason.

In my view, the deepest form of madness today is not rebellion, but conformity disguised as reason; perhaps, as Miguel de Unamuno suggests, madness does not lie in resisting injustice, but in the cynical mockery of those who try. We believe ourselves more advanced than past or imaginative societies, yet dystopian fiction makes clear these worlds feel disturbing not because of their novelty, but because of the distance they create from our own assumptions, and that is why Don Quixote and dystopias go hand in hand, distorting our reality just enough to reveal the bars of the cage we inhabit. We live inside systems we no longer question because they have become part of our common sense. As Hannah Arendt stated, the greatest danger lies not in fanaticism, but in thoughtlessness.

To imagine another system therefore appears irrational, since we do not perceive alternatives as possible, but simply as unfamiliar. Yet perhaps accepting the existing one without question is the most irrational act of all. Don Quixote reminds us that keen critical vision is often depicted as madness and becomes intolerable when it threatens power itself. As Simone Weil argued, a world that reduces human beings to mere functions becomes incapable of recognizing fragility or compassion, and in this sense, questioning progress and crafting resolutions to eventually reach it are gestures of humanity. The final question

Cervantes leaves us with remains thorny: is the madman the one who fights imaginary giants, or the one who loudly refuses to see them while they quietly rule the landscape?