

Nietzsche: From Decadence at Work to Ascent in Capitalism*

[English Version]

Nietzsche: de la decadencia en el trabajo a la ascendencia en el capitalismo

Nietzsche: do declínio no trabalho à ancestralidade no capitalismo

Received June 7, 2019. Accepted November 21, 2019.

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Abstract

Objective: to demonstrate elements to defend the idea that work in the capitalist context is, from Nietzsche's view, decadent. However, despite being decadent, ascending life is possible within it. To this effect, this article explains what Nietzsche understood by decadence, its causes, some of its consequences and, in particular, the reason why work in the capitalist

* Article derived from the Research entitled "Nietzsche: from decline in work to descent into capitalism". Funding for the project was assumed by the researchers, who declare that there were no conflicts of interest in the execution of the research project.

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› To cite this article:

Rincón-Orozco, Cristian-David;
Londoño-Betancourt, Orlando
(2020). Nietzsche: From
Decadence at Work to Ascent in
Capitalism. *Ánfora*, 27(49), 77-98.
<https://doi.org/10.30854/anfv27.n49.2020.739>
Universidad Autónoma de
Manizales. ISSN 0121-6538 /
e-ISSN 2248-6941.
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context is a further result of the decadence of culture. It also explains how ascending life is possible, despite being immersed in a decadent context. For this purpose, the roles of the business owner and his/her employees are analyzed. **Methodology:** this study proceeds methodologically through the philosophical analysis of concepts. Thus, the genealogical method of Nietzsche is applied, with which the restrictive vision of ethics is confronted, according to which it seems as if it were based on previous, absolute, not demonstrable and dogmatic assumptions. Nietzsche's thought, then, constitutes not only a theoretical reference, but also a methodological model to address this issue. **Results:** Nietzsche's philosophy has implications on capitalism and contemporary business life. **Conclusions:** ascending life within the capitalist context is very difficult to reach and only a few exceptional beings, who tend to the *Übermensch*, achieve it.

Keywords: Nietzsche; Decadence; Ascent; Capitalism; Work.

Resumen

Objetivo: evidenciar elementos para defender la idea de que el trabajo en el contexto capitalista es, desde Nietzsche, decadente, pero que, a pesar de ser decadente, es posible la vida ascendente en él. Para ello, este artículo explica qué entendía Nietzsche por decadencia, cuál fue la causa de esta decadencia, algunas de sus consecuencias y, en especial, por qué el trabajo en el contexto capitalista es una consecuencia más de la decadencia de la cultura. También explica cómo, a pesar de estar inmersos en un contexto decadente, es posible la vida ascendente. Para esto, se analiza el papel del dueño de empresa y de los empleados de ella. **Metodología:** este estudio procede metodológicamente mediante el análisis filosófico de conceptos. Así, se aplica el método genealógico de Nietzsche, con el que se enfrenta la visión restrictiva de la ética, según la cual pareciera como si ésta partiese de supuestos previos, absolutos, no demostrables y dogmáticos. El pensamiento de Nietzsche, entonces, constituye no sólo un referente teórico, sino también metodológico para abordar este tema. **Resultados:** la filosofía de Nietzsche tiene implicaciones sobre el capitalismo y la vida empresarial contemporánea. **Conclusiones:** la vida ascendente dentro del contexto capitalista es muy difícil de alcanzar y solo la logran unos pocos seres excepcionales, que tienden al *Übermensch*.

Palabras-clave: Nietzsche; Decadencia; Ascendencia; Capitalismo; Trabajo.

Resumo

Objetivo: evidencia elementos para defender a idéia de que o trabalho no contexto capitalista é, a partir de Nietzsche, decadente, mas que, apesar de decadente, nele é possível ter uma vida ascendente. Para isso, este artigo explica o que Nietzsche entendeu por decadência, qual foi a causa desse declínio, algumas de suas conseqüências e, principalmente, por que o trabalho no contexto capitalista é mais uma conseqüência do declínio da cultura. Também explica como, apesar de estar imerso em um contexto decadente, a vida ascendente é possível. Para isso, é analisado o papel do proprietário da empresa e de seus funcionários. **Metodologia:** este estudo prossegue metodologicamente através da análise filosófica de conceitos. Assim, aplica-se o método genealógico de Nietzsche, com o qual se confronta a visão restritiva da ética, segundo a qual parece que se baseava em premissas anteriores, absolutas, não demonstráveis e dogmáticas. O pensamento de Nietzsche, portanto, constitui não apenas um referencial teórico, mas também metodológico para abordar essa questão. **Resultados:** a filosofia de Nietzsche tem implicações no capitalismo e na vida empresarial contemporânea. **Conclusões:** a vida ascendente no contexto capitalista é muito difícil de alcançar e apenas alguns seres excepcionais o conseguem, e estes tendem ao *Übermensch*.

Palavras-chave: Nietzsche; Recusar; Anscendencia; Capitalismo; Trabalho.

Introduction

Western culture has had a marked influence of the capitalist economic system that finds its connection with the individual at work¹. After the need for work in this capitalist context, a certain rationality is hidden due to the contents of the bourgeois mentality that, as will be seen, arises in contrast to the Christian-feudal mentality. From Nietzsche's view, this study will try to show how work in the capitalist context is a symptom of the decadence of culture that, for him, has its great cause in Socrates' commitment to reason. Thus, in addition to showing why the decadence of culture begins with Socrates, their main symptoms will be enumerated and explained *grosso modo*. Then, the reasons why work in capitalism is another symptom of such decadence and how ascending life would be possible within this decadent context are shown.

Methodology

This research proceeds methodologically through philosophical analysis of concepts and notions of ethics, business and capitalism. Although it is a conceptual analytical study, it is very oriented by the genealogical method of Nietzsche, with which the restrictive vision of ethics is confronted, according to which it seems as if it were based on previous, absolute, not demonstrable and dogmatic assumptions. Nietzsche's thought, then, constitutes not only a theoretical reference, but also a methodological model to address our subject.

Results

The Great Cause of Decadence: Socrates and his Commitment to Reason

The beginning of the decadence of Greek culture is closely related to the death of the tragedy. Although Socrates is the great culprit of the Greek decadence, the most notable and early consequence of such decline is the death

1. Here work is understood as any activity that subjugates the will in order to obtain an economic remuneration.

of Tragedy at the hands of Euripides, so that it is necessary to understand the death of Tragedy to understand the birth of the decadence. Tragedy, the theatrical genre descended from the Dionysian dithyrambs, was, for Nietzsche, the highest expression of Greek culture, because in it the Apollonian and Dionysian instincts played in perfect harmony. The death of Tragedy begins when Euripides strips it of its Dionysian content and only the Apollonian one remains, while the decadence of culture is due to the great commitment to reason that the West had, beginning with Socrates (Nietzsche, 2004b). This is worth taking a closer look at.

As stated, Tragedy was the highest expression of Greek culture because, although the Apollonian and Dionysian instincts lived in conflict, they coexist in the end. Dionysian instincts take the name of the Greek god Dionysus, god of wine. For Nietzsche, Dionysus represented, in general terms, chaos. It is the instinct of the most basic nature, because it shows the essence of life: it is implacable and cruel. Nature is a titanic force that has no mercy on who is in front of it and, in this sense, life is tragic². However, given such excess and overflow of the force of nature, it is necessary for mankind to put a veil between him and chaos in order to withstand all its magnitude. Otherwise, life itself would devour him. Here lies the importance of the Apollonian instincts, which take their name from the god Apollo, god of beauty, harmony, perfection and reason. Apollonian instincts manage to shape the Dionysian, the chaotic, and allow man to have access to the world, so that it is filled with symbols. The myth is the great expression of the Apollonian instinct, because through it, mankind has filled the world with symbols -gods, stories, figures, divinities, explanations- and has given it a meaning, which allows him to face it (Nietzsche, 2004a).

According to Nietzsche, these two instincts are presented in the plays of Greek Tragedy, whose greatest exponents were Aeschylus and Sophocles. The content and music of Tragedy is pure Dionysian instinct, while dialogues, mainly, express the Apollonian instinct. Consider, for example, the *Oedipus Rex* of Sophocles (1988), the story of the king who, in search of discovering his father's murderer, realizes that he has been himself and that, in addition, he has married and conceived children with his own mother. When he discovers this truth, he takes his eyes out and goes into exile. His mother and wife, meanwhile, commits suicide. This particular tragedy takes up three of the main characteristics of the worldview of Greek culture. The first one is the belief in Fate.

In the Greek Tragedy the influence of fate is clear; When Jocasta and Laius went to the Oracle of Delphi, he told them that his son was going to marry

2. Examples of this are plenty. Think of an avalanche that has no mercy on the family that lives on the mountain uphill, or on the sea that is relentless with sailors.

his mother and was going to kill his father. He told Oedipus the same when he visited him years later. The second fundamental characteristic is that fate is inexpugnable. No matter what mankind does, he cannot get rid of it. It happened to Jocasta and Laius when, upon hearing the design of the gods, they decided to send to kill their son without success; it happened to Oedipus when, after visiting the Oracle, he moved away from his adoptive parents believing they were the biological ones, and on his way he ran into his father and murdered him. The third and final feature is that fate is inexplicable. This was known and accepted by Greek heroes without saying a word. Neither Oedipus, nor his parents ever wonder why the gods had conceived that fate (Sophocles, 1988). They are not seen trying to rationally understand the need for the fulfillment of the prophecy. Explanations, arguments, logic do not interest: destiny is what it is.

These three characteristics silently express the great thesis of the worldview of Greek culture: life is tragic. Let's go back to Oedipus. If fate could be justified, that is, if Oedipus had rationally understood why his tragic end was necessary, it would not have been tragic. The idea of fulfilling a role in a god's plan seems to give meaning to life. Anyway, it didn't happen that way with Oedipus. Greek Tragedy as a theatrical genre and Greek tragedy as a worldview share the most tragic belief of all: there is an inexpugnable, ineffable and tragic fate. What is this fate? Death. Death is the most tragic, inexplicable and inevitable destiny of mankind. Life is tragic because each step takes us closer to fate. At least this would not contradict that myth that says that when Prometheus created human beings from ashes, he enclosed all evils in a box, including death. Zeus sent Pandora to open the box and empty its contents. Human beings, then, became aware that they were mortal and, knowing it, crouched in fear in their caves, until Prometheus promised them oblivion (Ospina, 2018). Human beings know that they will die, but only because they forget most of their lives, they can endure it.

Another Greek myth tells that King Midas pursued Silenus, Dionysus's companion, for his wisdom, to ask him what was the best, most profitable thing for mankind. When he captured and pressured him on his question, Silenus, laughing, replied:

Suffering creature, born for a day, child of accident and toil, why are you forcing me to say what is the most unpleasant thing for you to hear? The very best thing for you is totally unreachable: not to have been born, not to exist, to be nothing. The second best thing for you, however, is this: to die soon (Nietzsche, 2004a, p. 54).

This pessimistic view of the world constitutes the moment of splendor of Greek culture because it is the period in which mankind is closest to nature. In

Classical Greece there was no denial of life as suffering, nor as pleasure. Life was loved in its broadest sense: in its beautiful, kind and pleasant moments, but also in its cruelest ones, in which it caused more suffering and in which circumstances were the worst for human beings.

It was a Greek, however, who began the decadence of Greek culture: Socrates. In Euripides his influence was noted: he stripped of Tragedy all his Dionysian instinct and transformed it into the new Attic comedy. He endowed the heroes with argumentative dialogues and rational capacity, so they began to justify the designs of the gods and modify them in their favor. Gradually, happy endings were incorporated into this new theatrical genre (Nietzsche, 2004a) and two Socratic premises were included: everything has to be intelligible to be beautiful and everything sapient is virtuous. These two theses come from the Socratic equation of reason = virtue = happiness. Socrates believed that the one who acted wrongly was because he did not know what right things were and only by acting properly could become happy. In other words: the rational man is the only one who acts right and is happy. Or in simpler words, reason is the only one that tells us how we should act; so we become happy. Or even simpler: reason is the only and most important. This was the great commitment of Socrates, which gave way to the decadence of Greek culture: reason above all else; life as a subordinate of reason (Nietzsche, 2002, p. 46).

In this way, Socratic optimism gave rise to the decadence of Greek culture thanks to its great commitment to reason that, later, would be idiosyncratic in philosophers. But, why is reason as a *tyrant* the cause of decadence? Let's see what Nietzsche understands by decadence. In his *Antichrist* Nietzsche (1997) says:

I understand rottenness in the sense of *décadence* [decadence]. (...) I call an animal, a species, an individual corrupt, when it loses its instincts, when it chooses, when it prefers, what is injurious to it. (...) Life itself appears to me as an instinct for growth, for survival, for the *accumulation of forces*, for power (pp. 34-35).

Greeks loved life in its broadest sense: both good and pleasant, as well as ugly and painful. To this, a third element must be added: the instincts. For Nietzsche, instincts -as well as reason- are natural in mankind, are part of life and one should not attempt to eliminate them. The Socratic equation states that reason = virtue = happiness, however, this produced the germ of a counter-natural morality that would be present later in Christianity and Kantian ethics. If the reason is the only thing that tells us how we should act, then the instincts cease to be important and we act outside the normal course of nature. In Greek Tragedy, Euripides adopted the Socratic formula where reason = beauty. Reason in

Tragedy stripped Greek culture of its pessimism and made it optimistic; life began to be denied.

Consequences of Decadence

So far it has been shown why for Nietzsche the great commitment to reason, which begins in Socrates, was the great cause of the decadence of culture. This section will enumerate and explain *grosso modo* two of the most notable consequences of this decadence.

1. Reason in Language.

With reason being the highest authority, philosophers embraced the mania of creating permanent and immutable concepts. According to Nietzsche, this constitutes one of the idiosyncrasies of philosophers. They believe to give *value* to a thing when they take away its historical content, that is, when they immobilize it from the perspective of the eternal and turn it into *mummies* of language (Nietzsche, 2002). For him, what philosophers have created under the name of "concept" has no value.

When someone hides something behind a bush and looks for it again in the same place and finds it there as well, there is not much to praise in such seeking and finding. Yet this is how matters stand regarding seeking and finding "truth" within the realm of reason. If I make up the definition of a mammal, and then, after inspecting a camel, declare "look, a mammal! I have indeed brought a truth to light in this way, but it is a truth of limited value. (Nietzsche, 1996, p. 28).

These eternal concepts have been created thanks to idolatry to reason. For reason seems very strange to change, to become, because what *it is*, it does not become and what *it is not*, it becomes. The aging, the decline, the transformation appears to the philosophers as refutations, as symptoms that there is something wrong with them that is deceiving them and when they discover what *deceives* them they shout joyfully: "we have found it!" referring simply to the senses. The senses appear them as an objection to knowledge, because they constantly deceive us and how can we trust in what has deceived us on several occasions? Thanks to this, we have conceived fixed and immovable concepts that, looking at them from the perspective of the senses, appear to intuition as a nonsense. High intellectual work is needed to make us aware of the concepts good, bad, God, being and identity -to give some examples- and a very disciplined work to make us believe that they exist. What needs to be proven, Nietzsche (2002) would say,

has little value. Reason is imposed on us above our intuition: this is the progress of decadence, which explodes with Plato.

2. Explosion of Decadence: Plato and the Beginning of Metaphysics.

Plato came up with an idea that would later influence Christianity: the existence of a true world different from the world of the senses. It seemed very rational to him to think that if all the trees -for example- were physically different, the reason was that they had all been extracted from the same tree idea. He wondered: why do I know that an elm is a tree like a pine being both radically so different? Then he replied: because both are imperfect copies of the idea of a tree, which is a mold from which the rest of the trees come. Thus, Plato concluded that no tree he could see or touch was the real tree, but they were all copies of the perfect tree that, clearly, was not in his world but in a different one: the world of ideas. Plato's argument seems consistent and can easily convince one that he is right -he convinced half the world for two millennia!- But his argument is counterintuitive. There is nothing more contrary to our intuition than to accept that there is another unattainable world for us, accessible only to the wise and virtuous. Everything the senses can tell us seemed to Plato nothing more than a hoax (Plato, 2003).

Much later, the world of Plato's ideas, that is, the true world, becomes Christian and becomes life after death, in paradise. Here, ascetic ideals, which are nothing more than theses drawn from the sleeve of reason, become Truth, and sensitive, intuitive and instinctive knowledge is called sacrilege. Mankind begins to believe in a sick God, who detests the passions and instincts of human beings -the same ones he put into them!- and requires them to act against their nature.

The Christian concept of a god—the god as the patron of the sick, the god as a spinner of cobwebs, the god as a spirit—is one of the most corrupt concepts that has ever been set up in the world: it probably touches low-water mark in the ebbing evolution of the god-type. God degenerated into the *contradiction of life*. Instead of being its transfiguration and eternal Yea! In him war is declared on life, on nature, on the will to live! God becomes the formula for every slander upon the “here and now,” and for every lie about the “beyond”! In him nothingness is deified, and the will to nothingness is made holy! (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 49).

Work in Capitalism as a Result of the Decadence of Culture

In moral terms, the decadence of culture, which went through Plato and Christianity, led to Christian morals and Kantian ethics. A clear example of this is found in Matthew 5 when Jesus says: "If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away from you." Literally or not, his mandate has a fundamental premise: passions and instincts have to be eliminated. For Nietzsche, this Christian moral is an unnatural moral because it is directed against the instincts and shows God as the enemy of life. "Life is at an end where the 'kingdom of God begins'" (Nietzsche, 2002, p. 63).

The same occurs for Kantian ethics which, after all, is the rationalization of Christian morals. Where Kant (2001) puts reason, that is, as the only guideline we have to know how to act, there is an impulse to deny life. For Nietzsche, the Kantian Categorical Imperative is but a failed attempt to homogenize people and deny their differences, as well as their instincts.

That which does not belong to our life menaces it; a virtue which has its roots in mere respect for the concept of "virtue," as Kant would have it, is pernicious. "Virtue," "duty," "good for its own sake," goodness grounded upon impersonality or a notion of universal validity—these are all chimeras, and in them one finds only an expression of the decay, the last collapse of life, the Chinese spirit of Königsberg. (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 40).

Thanks to the triumph of Christian optimism and Kantian philosophy, we were led to believe in human dignity. On the one hand, Christianity told us that all human life is sacred as long as we are all sons of God and, furthermore, because he created us in its image and likeness. On the other hand, Kant (2001) convinced us of human dignity by telling us that we were special, since we were rational. This idea, in contrast, made no sense in Ancient Greece. When Silenus responds to King Midas that the best thing for mankind is not to have been born, never to have existed, he underlies in his words a fundamental idea: human life has no value or, at least, does not have it *per se*. The phrase "all human life is sacred" would have caused laughter among the Greeks.

This Christian-Kantian rationality convinced us, not only that our life was valuable, but of three other ideas, which are worth addressing in more detail: we are equal, we are free and progress exists. As with the idea of human dignity, Christianity convinced us of our equality by telling us that we were equal as long as we were all sons of God. Kant (2001), on the other hand, proposed us as equals because we were all rational beings. However, the other two fundamental ideas of Christian-Kantian rationality (our freedom and the idea of progress)

have their origin in what Romero (1987) calls the bourgeois mentality, born as a response to the Christian-feudal mentality³. The big difference between both mentalities is the overcoming of Aristotelian determinism.

Feudal Christianity believed, with a strong influence from Aristotle, that the world and everything that happened in it -including the fate of mankind- was given by the will of God. Just as Aristotle (2014) believed that the slave was born destined to be a slave, in the Middle Ages, it was believed that the feudal king was born destined to be a king and the vassal to be a vassal by divine design. With the birth of the bourgeois class, and a new mentality, this idea was put aside and began to believe in a demiurgic God, who created, but did not intervene in the development of the world. Thus, as the will of God was no longer what governs everything, mankind becomes free and responsible for his life. The poor is no longer destined to be poor forever, but can change to stop being poor. Since God's will is no longer conceived as the engine of movement of the world and of history, the bourgeois mentality based its social order on the *factum*, on history itself, and, from there, it believed it found a truth: history is crossed by Progress; history itself is progressive, each stage is superior to the previous one.

These four fundamental premises of the bourgeois mentality - human dignity, equality, freedom and progress - led to one conclusion: everyone is free to become what they want to be. Since no one is destined to be a slave anymore, anyone is free to ascend the social pyramid, which is achieved to the extent that more property is obtained (Romero, 1987). The properties are obtained, of course, with work, so that work becomes a means to obtain wealth. It is not seen as something shameful, but as something valuable, necessary, that helps to progress. Expressed in a different way, in words of Marx (2005), “work dignifies”. However, Nietzsche says:

We in the modern age have an advantage over the Greeks in two ideas, which are given as it were, as a compensation to a world behaving thoroughly slavishly and yet at the same time anxiously eschewing the word “slave”: we talk of the *dignity of man* and of the *dignity of labour*. (Nietzsche, 2010, pp. 11-12).

For him, work, more than being a means of liberation or dignification, is a new form of slavery. We in the modern age were born slaves, but we do not accept it, and we call our slavery *work*. We are born slaves of work. We have *dignified* our slavery in a disconsolate attempt to see it as something good and

3. This contrast between the bourgeois mentality and the Christian-feudal mentality should not be understood as a contrast between atheists and believers. The bourgeois were also Christians, but with some ideas other than Christianity that prevailed in the feudal era.

healthy. We consider it normal to wake up every day very early to go to work at something we don't like, which bores us, for eight hours, and then the next day to do it again, and again, and again, until we are old enough to work, and we think: now I will enjoy this old age, I will enjoy my life! We have been so convinced of the naturalness of work that, when we are unemployed, we do nothing but arouse the lamentation of others. This is one of the basic ideologies of capitalism. "Reason in language - oh, what an deceiving old hag she is!" (Nietzsche, 2002, p. 55), it has taken really little to convince us that the work is worthwhile! This should not seem strange to us: the medieval people would have torn their garments too if we had told them that Plato deceived us when he told us that there was another world, the true world. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche (1974) says:

There is something of the American Indian, something of the savagery peculiar to the Indian blood, in the way the Americans strive for [money] (...). One thinks with a watch in hand, as one eats lunch with an eye on the financial pages - one lives like someone who might always 'miss out on something'. 'Rather do anything than nothing' - even this principle is a cord to strangle all culture and all higher taste. (...) Work gets all good conscience on its side; the desire for joy already calls itself a 'need to recuperate' and is starting to be ashamed of itself. 'One owes it to one's health' - that is what one says when caught on an excursion in the countryside (...) Well, formerly it was the other way around: work was afflicted with a bad conscience. A person of good family concealed the fact that he worked if need compelled him to work. The slave worked under the pressure of the feeling that he was doing something contemptible: '*doing*' was itself contemptible (pp. 144-145).

The main problem that Nietzsche finds with work in capitalism is that it obsesses man to the point of not letting him live, and in that sense it is decadent. Let's remember what was mentioned earlier: in capitalist society, work is a means of obtaining wealth. The problem with making it a means is that, as long as it is well paid, man does not usually choose it carefully, so he ends up working at something that does not satisfy him, even that bores him, thus wasting his life. To this one can add that work constitutes a large percentage of a person's life -some people work all of it, because they have no leisure time at all. For Nietzsche, on the other hand, the contemplative life, leisure, time in which *nothing is done*, is fundamental. It is only in these moments that man has an intimate encounter with himself, when he knows himself and discovers his *will*. Modern man, on the other hand, is ashamed when he is found doing nothing, because he

considers it to be a waste of time. This attitude is unnatural, for his willingness to work is a product of modern indoctrination.

If for Nietzsche decadence is everything that goes against life itself, then work in capitalism is decadent, it is a symptom of decadence itself. Otherwise, the slogan in Auschwitz would not have been "*Arbeit macht frei*" (Work will set you free). There is nothing more counter-instinctive, more counter-natural than hard, organized work for the purpose of accumulating wealth. Dissipation of the senses and unproductiveness appear closer to man's nature than continuous, restless and boring work. But a little rationality has been enough to make us believe the opposite! Work appears to us as the natural and correct thing to do, while we are ashamed of leisure!

Ascending Life in Capitalism

Contrary to the decadent life, is the ascending life. Work in capitalism is decadent, because in it there is a denial of life. In view of this, the easiest way out would be to reject capitalism and affirm that it is impossible for ascending life to emerge in it. However, such a conclusion would not be fair to Nietzsche. Although work in capitalism is decadent, we live immersed in this context from which it is almost impossible to free ourselves. It cannot simply be rejected, so what remains is to think how life can be ascendant within a *decadent* context. On this point, Nietzsche has much to say.

The ascending life, as opposed to the decadent life, is one in which the individual does not deny life, but divinizes it. That is to say, his instincts, his fears, his passions, his pains and problems are not something to be denied, but accepted with the greatest joy, for every difficulty is, for him, a source of strength. One cannot become a great man if one has not first gone through great adversity. Nietzsche (1974) states:

Examine the lives of the best and the most fruitful people and peoples and ask yourselves whether a tree which is supposed to grow to a proud height could do without bad weather and storms: whether misfortune and external resistance, whether any kinds of hatred, jealousy, stubbornness, mistrust, hardness, greed, and violence do not belong to the favourable conditions without which any great growth even of virtue is scarcely possible? The poison from which the weaker nature perishes strengthens the strong man - and he does not call it poison (p. 42).

Depending on who is poisoned, the poison can either make them stronger or kill them. If the individual is weak, he will not be able to bear it and will faint; if, on the other hand, he is a strong man, he will take it, drink it with joy

and become strong because of it. Then he will say: "What does not kill me makes me stronger" (Nietzsche, 2002, p. 34). Here, "poison" means nothing but the problematic, the dark, the dirty, the chaotic, the instinctive; "poison" is everything that Kantian Christian optimism has called "bad". Here is the great difference between a decadent life and an ascendant one: the former avoids at all costs the poison of life and clings blindly to its ascetic ideals⁴; the latter takes the poison, enjoys it, loves it and constantly asks for more of it because it thus becomes stronger. The "good" in Kantian Christian optimism, that is, the ascetic ideals, becomes debilitating, while the "bad" becomes strengthening. From Nietzsche (1997), in a *moralistic* language, "What is good? - All that heightens the feelings of power, the will to power, power itself in man. What is bad? - All that proceeds from *weakness*" (p. 32).

However, as Nicolaidis (2014) states, this Nietzschean *ethic* is only for the most spiritual individuals, who are very few in number. The most popular name by which these people are known is *Supermen* (Übermensch from now on), but Nietzsche also calls them noblemen, children, Olympic men, among others. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche (2003) shows how one can become an Übermensch (or child). First, Zarathustra says, the spirit of man becomes a *camel*. Like the camel, the camel-men bow down with reverence, waiting to be burdened with the heaviest of burdens, and these burdens are but cultural impositions. The camel man acts out of duty, because that is what the orders, commandments and imperatives tell him to do. He acts because this is how he *must* act, not because this is what he really wants, even if he has been convinced that what he should do is what he wants. The camel-man is, in other words, the individual who blindly follows authority, whether he calls it culture, whether he calls it morality, whether he calls it religion or God.

There are a few camel-men who immerse themselves in the solitude of their reflection, or in the loneliness of the wilderness, and there they rebel against their great god-the dragon of the "thou shalt". There they discover that their will is different from their *duty* and they begin to do what they want, not what they owe. It is at this moment that the spirit is transformed into a lion and a new type of individual is created: the lion-man. His actions are not motivated by *duty* but by *will*. He does not say "I must," but "I want". He shakes his back to drop all his cultural burdens and continues on his way, lighter and freer. Gone are the ascetic ideals that used to serve him as support, guide and God; little by little the desert sand buries them. The death of God occurs and all his values are buried in the loneliest of deserts. That is why the madman (Nietzsche, 1974), when he discovers that God has died, goes out into the public square and claims

4. Ascetic ideals seek a lifestyle in which pleasures are reduced to a minimum.

that not only did he die, but that we have all killed him, we are all responsible for his death.

The death of God is not a minor event. When the lion-man murders him, that is, when he abandons all his cultural burdens, he is left floating in an infinite nothingness with nowhere to lean. The horizon has been erased, there is no longer an up or a down, a good or an evil. The lion man wanders aimlessly, uncluttered. Although his action is based on his *will*, it is necessary that he himself takes the place of the god he has killed and becomes a god, who creates his own values. That is why it is necessary for his spirit to be transformed into a child. The child is innocence and oblivion. He needs to create new values to sustain him and "For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred 'Yes' is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world" (Nietzsche, 2003, p. 55). The lion cannot create new values because he has not forgotten his old values, he cannot play with them; he would feel sacrilegious. To the child, on the other hand, the world appears without prejudice, so that he can play with it. He doesn't take anything really seriously, he makes fun of the sacred and does his own will.

Although Nietzsche was thinking especially of Christianity when he spoke of the cultural burdens of the camel, these do not fall within his remit alone. The death of God does not only imply the death of Christian values, but, in general, the twilight of all idols: God, reason, the Enlightenment, civilization, among others. One of them is the idol of money (capital) in capitalism. The camel man bows down with veneration before him and expects him to carry the heaviest burden: work. He feels that his duty is to work to give himself and his family a good life, to be someone important, a good man. He feels vigorous because he has a job that, although it does not satisfy him, is stable and well paid; but he does not know that it is a symptom of his decadent life.

The death of God here implies the death of the god of money. Money is dead to the individual whose life is ascendant. The *Übermensch* (child) no longer takes it seriously, mocks it, is able to play with it. He finds stock quotes a bad joke and laughs when the dollar goes up in price. He has already buried his old god and taken his place. He no longer works for money, but works for himself. Work does not appear to him as a means of accumulating wealth; work appears to him as an end in itself, for his self-realization. He calls it "work," but he does not consider it as such. More than accumulating wealth, he is interested in living⁵.

5. This thesis has references in Idarraga and Carvajal (2018).

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche states that “To this rare breed belong artists and contemplative men of all kinds, but also men of leisure who spend their lives hunting, travelling, in love affairs, or on adventures” (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 43). According to this, individuals involved in business activity could not have an ascending life, and yet one finds people who enjoy their work and see it as an end in itself. Here we must distance ourselves a little from Nietzsche. He saw the business world as a decadent place, where the ascending life had no place. He was a great enemy of business; industrialization had made modern life restless and spiritually empty (Meerhaeghe, 2006). Zarathustra says: “Where solitude ends, there begins the market place; and where the market place begins, there begins too the noise of the great actors and the buzzing of poisonous flies” (Nietzsche, 2003, p. 90). On this, Nicolaides asserts that:

“Nietzsche was also somewhat opposed to business *per se*. This was because he viewed capitalism as a destructive force which promoted greed and exploitation and which reduced the depth of spirituality in people. However as business is part of life, ethics must be driven by business and this is what Nietzsche proposes” (Nicolaides, 2014, p. 192).

The thesis that is defended here, following Nicolaides, is that although life in capitalism is, according to Nietzsche, decadent, from there ascending life can arise. It will be shown, then, how this is possible and what characteristics both the manager and the employee must have in order to achieve this type of life, very close to that of the *Übermensch*.

The Ascending Life of the Manager Who Owns the Company

Companies, understood as private for-profit organizations, find their motor in selfishness, represented by the obtaining of profits (Rincón, 2018; Rincón, 2017). Contrary to other ethical theories (Kant, utilitarianism), Nietzsche, before criticizing egoism, accepts it as something natural, and even healthy, in man. Selfishness, in the sense of preserving one's own, is healthy and sacred; it is the engine of life, of the will to power, which drives the self-preservation and self-realization of the individual. Instead of rejecting it, it is necessary to accept it and celebrate its existence (Nietzsche, 2003). We will call this selfishness, for effects of conceptual clarity, “good selfishness”.

However, says Nietzsche, there is another kind of (bad) selfishness that is sickly, typical of a decadent life.

Another selfishness is there, an all-too-poor and hungry kind, which would always steal –the selfishness of the sick, the sickly selfishness. (...) With the eye of the thief it looketh upon all that is lustrous; with the craving of hunger it measureth him who hath abundance; and ever doth it prowl round the tables of bestowers (...) Sickness speaketh in such craving; and invisible degeneration; of a sickly body, speaketh the larcenous craving of this selfishness (...). A horror to us is the degenerating sense, which saith: "All for myself." (Nietzsche, 2003, p. 123).

While Nietzsche claims that good selfishness is natural and desirable, bad selfishness is considered sickly, a product of the decadence of culture. Here he argues that this bad selfishness is the engine of action of the most ardent business owners in the capitalist context. Their desire for wealth, for capital accumulation, for the national and international market, for monopolizing and eliminating the smallest competing companies (Parada, 2016) are but the most visible sign of their illness. There is no substantial difference between the one who wants to increase the company's profits at the expense of its employees, either by cutting their salary or by exploiting them, and the one who says: "All for myself ". Their greed is the selfishness of the sick, for they themselves are sick. These die-hard businessmen have allowed themselves to be diverted from their lives and have become slaves to their capital; they are more slaves than those who work in their company. Even their condition is worse than that of people of African descent in colonial times who were condemned to slavery: they are slaves, but they think they are free and live proudly in their slavery!

Here is the first condition of a manager who owns a company and whose life is ascendant: his selfishness is healthy, his egoism is good. Contrary to the staunch businessman, he finds in the company he runs a stable source of resources that allow him to live comfortably and enjoy his life. He is not obsessed, like the manager with bad selfishness, with increasing his company's profits, nor with his eyes always on stock prices. His interests are far from money; in it he finds only a means to do what he wants to do. Thus, his action is guided by his will to power and does not follow the imperatives of capitalism. As a lion-man, he has freed himself from the maxim "you must get money"; he has buried it in the loneliest part of the desert. Then, as a child-man, he has confronted the world with an innocent and playful look, so that he creates his own table of values, of maxims and imperatives, the product of his will, of his desire; he is a *happy* person.

Contrary to the Kantian-Christian morality, which tells us "do this, do that and you will be happy", for Nietzsche (2002):

A *well-constituted* man, a man who is one of "Nature's lucky strokes," must perform certain actions and instinctively fear other actions; he introduces the element of order, of which he is the physiological manifestation, into his relations with men and things. In a formula: his *virtue* is the consequence of his good constitution. (p. 68).

The manager of ascending life necessarily maintains a healthy relationship with his employees, other members of the company, his stakeholders and even with the environment; for example, labour exploitation, which is defended by Worden (2009) from a Nietzschean position, as a manifestation of the power of the strong. Contrary to Worden (2009), labour exploitation seems, from Nietzsche's point of view, closer to a decadent life than to an ascending one. First, it could be asked whether those who manage their companies are *happy* with their work, in the sense of feeling good about themselves, and, furthermore, for those whose engine is not money, what reason would they have to exploit their employees? On the contrary, he would be inclined to have them in good working conditions, to treat them well and to try to make them happy at work; his relationship with the employees represents his happiness. A happy man tends to treat others with kindness, not because *duty* dictates it, but because it is instinctive in him.

Ascending Life in Employees

With the company's employees, including managers who do not own the company but are its employees, the issue is more complicated. In many cases, employees do not have enough financial freedom to do what they want and, in addition, they work for their own or their family's subsistence. They are decadent; they are victims of the capitalist system. However, there was no right to judge them for that. That they were born in difficult conditions, from which it is difficult to escape, is not their fault; it is nobody's fault. That they make certain decisions like dedicating themselves to work in something they are not passionate about is not their *decision*. For Nietzsche (2002), this kind of person cannot be held morally responsible or judged for their decisions, since their actions do not depend only on themselves, but -and in greater proportion- on the external conditions in which they were born and raised. It is a mistake, he says, to believe that the decisions we make are the product of *free will* (Nietzsche, 2002).

Managers who do not own the company are not spared these difficulties either. Although they may be thought to be more likely to have greater financial freedom, better education and better conditions to develop their will to power, they have a responsibility within the company, explicit in a contract, which is

to achieve the greatest efficiency in their area of work. The restructuring of the company that would be expected in a manager who owns a company with an ascending life, could not be expected in the manager who is not an owner; even if he wants it, it is not within his power to do so. Here too, they cannot be blamed: they have been brought up this way and, although they are passionate about their work, they are the product of a decadent culture; camels are also passionate when they bow down with reverence to be saddled with the heaviest burdens⁶.

Conclusions

For employees and management-employees to be able to have an ascending life, there are two options, both of which are very difficult to achieve, - but that is why the Nietzschean *ethic* is meant for very few individuals. The first is that they cease to be. The employee would have to stop being an employee and the manager would have to stop being a manager. The work to which they are subjected keeps them in a decadent life; their freedom is strongly conditioned and they continue to act out of duty. If they leave their jobs and devote themselves to unfolding their will to power, they will come closer to an ascending life.

The second option, less drastic but also difficult, is that they find an activity to which they subscribe, not because of the remuneration, but because they find in it an end in itself. There, their will is not subjugated to obtaining some economic remuneration. This is the case of those who, in their work, say: "I would do this even if I were not paid". So the picture is not at all optimistic and it seems that the vast majority are condemned to a decadent life. But *C'est la vie*⁷; so you have to accept it and love it, like the tragedy that it is. Nietzsche already said it: "Now there are rare individuals who would rather perish than work without taking pleasure in their work: they are choosy, hard to please, and have no use for ample rewards if the work is not itself the reward of rewards." (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 43). The vast majority, on the other hand, prefer to work at anything, as long as their pay is good. These are the modern *slaves* who must work so that the manager, owner of the company who lives an ascending life, can live.

Even if the conditions are in place in a company to develop the will to power of the employees, this does not mean that everyone develops it. On the contrary, only some succeed in taking advantage of these conditions so that

6. The fact that work is what the individual is passionate about does not imply that he moves away from his condition as a camel, contrary to what Idarraga and Carvajal (2018) state.

7. "That's life".

their spirit can be transformed into a lion and then a child. On the way to the Übermensch, many are called and few are really *chosen*, so that in the company there are camel-men everywhere.

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