



Critical review

By

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Han BC. *Sociedade do cansaço*. Petrópolis: Editora Vozes Limitada; 2015.

In the book “*Sociedade do cansaço*”, the South Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han provides an in-depth assessment of the human situation in the current era, characterized by excessive exposure to productivity and performance. In a scenario where the constant search for efficiency has become a social imperative, Han investigates how this pressure leads to collective exhaustion. Using clear and thought-provoking language, the writer questions the neoliberal logic present in everyday life, leading people to self-exploitation that increases physical and mental exhaustion. By analyzing the connection between subjectivity, power, and consumption, Han encourages the reader to consider the restrictions on human capacity and the devastating consequences of a society that privileges doing over being.

The main focus of the book is the shift from the “disciplinary society”, as portrayed by Michel Foucault, to a “society of exhaustion”. In this new structure, exploitation is no longer externally imposed by institutions, such as industries or schools, but rather internalized. Individuals took responsibility for their productivity and success, encouraging a type of self-discovery. In Medicine, this logic may be linked to the increased prevalence of conditions, such as burnout, anxiety disorders, and depression, commonly seen in healthcare professionals and students. Continuous stress and fear of not meeting expectations often result in deteriorating mental health, a phenomenon widely debated in contemporary medical literature.

Han addresses the idea of “performance” as a fundamental element in this new social dynamic, in which the value of an individual is assessed by their ability to generate and achieve. This idea is also evident in high-de-

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mand occupations, such as Medicine, in which efficiency and perfection are incessantly emphasized. In these contexts, the demand for a system that prioritizes “best performance” leads to emotional and mental exhaustion. Self-exploration, mentioned by Han, resonates directly with the fatigue experienced by these professionals, who often leave their health aside during the incessant search to achieve their goals.

Social media and digital culture are also subject to criticism. Han proposes that these platforms constantly intensify comparison and the search for external validation, phenomena that can intensify psychological disorders, such as Festinger’s social comparison syndrome. In Medicine, this constant comparison can manifest as intense competition between colleagues, resulting in isolation and deterioration of psychological well-being, a point that the philosopher discusses in his critique of performance culture.

Another relevant aspect raised by Han is the importance of rescuing the value of contemplation and rest, which are fundamental to a harmonious life. Within medical sciences, this suggestion can be interpreted as a call for a greater appreciation of rest and recovery, essential actions to avoid burnout. Harmony between working and rest hours is crucial for longevity and quality of life.

Although the book provides relevant reflection, “*Sociedade do cansaço*” also has restrictions. The author’s perspective can be seen as overly negative, highlighting fatigue without offering solutions to combat self-exploitation. For medical professionals who debate interventions and treatments for these issues, the reader may miss more tangible suggestions on how to face this situation. Furthermore, his assessment of social media could be more detailed when considering how different social groups experience this pressure. The way people manage performance expectations is strongly influenced by socioeconomic conditions and cultural contexts, an aspect that could be better explored.

In the book “*Sociedade do cansaço*”, Byung-Chul Han proposes a crucial analysis of the obstacles of contemporary times, challenging the logic that privileges productivity over well-being. His criticism of current culture is unequivocal: “We live in a world where doing more is the rule”. However, according to Han, this pace results in widespread exhaustion, affecting the physical and mental health of individuals, particularly in professions that require high performance, such as Medicine.

The book invites readers to rethink their lives, proposing that they should also contemplate and live fully instead of focusing only on production. The book provides professionals and students in fields, such as Medicine, Psychology, and other health sciences, a valuable chance to consider the relevance of balancing productivity and self-care. Despite the lack of practical solutions, the critical importance of the book is indisputable, reinforcing its indispensable reading

for anyone who wants to understand current dilemmas and their consequences on health and well-being, especially for physicians and medical students.