

Editorial

John and Mary live on the outskirts of a large city in a landlocked country in the vicinity of the centers of power and decision. The place where they live can be identified as those occupied by emerging middle class, called as class “C” in Brazil, which is a group upgraded to the condition of the consumer through the impulse promoted by social policies of income distribution. In this process of ascension, the area where they live has won a shopping mall in which their children and grandchildren “take a *rolezinho*” and delight themselves (and run up debts) in the market – which stimulates extravagantly their consumption desires.

In almost the whole Latin America, to a greater or lesser degree, goods that were previously restricted to the wealthier ones have become signs of the desire of the most popular classes. Consumption, which was the mark of privileged social situation of the first ones, symbolizes now the upward mobility of class “C”. In the process that links the consumer’s identity to brands, it is more important than the product itself, because it is what offers status and allows identifying belonging.

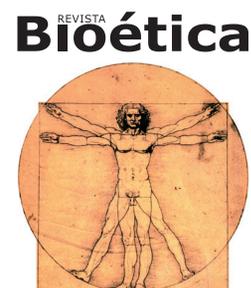
One can no longer doubt that the economic world dominated the traditional logic which established the roles of each one in the hierarchy of social relations. One should not ignore that, currently, people “worth” how much they can afford. How people dress, their suits, shoes, bags, hats; objects they carry (mobile phones, tablets, computers); vehicle in which they move (imported cars or bikes of famous brands) and homemade equipment denote their ability to consume and therefore their place in the social ladder.

At first sight, the proposed standard by the market seems to be emancipatory, because it allows greater social mobility and equality, subverting the traditional mainstream models that are hierarchical and generally based on prejudice. According to these criteria, superiority and inferiority are defined by genetic, phenotypic and social attributes: gender (male x female); color (white x brown and black) and geographical, especially in center-periphery relationship, marked by urban x rural binomial.

Under the impact of the market these archaic forms of classification slowly have been falling into disuse or being reconfigured under the framework of economic relations; the possibility of being an agent in the market. In this context of innocent wickedness, John and Mary live these new times as “the” ability to enjoy the pleasures of modernity that were previously denied to them. And who can say that their demand is not fair?

Those who have always had access to such goods and products may dare to do it; these facilities are translated into convenience and comfort, under a personal aspect, and epidemiological indicators such as life expectancy and infant mortality, under a collective dimension. Despite the resistance of the wealthier classes to assign space in the corridors of the temples of consumption to these newcomers, the individual satisfaction of John and Mary with their new role of customers of branded products seems to be assured. Indicators that measure the biological parameters of their lives also seem to be increasing, although much more slowly than their ability to insert themselves as consumers.

However, as Aristotle weights¹, in this wide range of individual satisfaction and well-being of the population it is always appropriate to focus on the median position, which we could associate to indicators that measure quality of life of people in society, such as running water, sewage collection and treatment of waste, urban planning, transportation, public safety and health services and education. With rare



exceptions, the improvement of these indicators in a large part of Latin America still runs in a truncated way, stumbling over the meager investment of resources, corruption, which makes these features increasingly scarce, and in impunity, which stimulates growth corruption, fueling a continuous cycle of deprivation.

With regard to these aspects, it can be observed, both in Brazil, in a different way, and in other countries of the region, the investment of the states to ensure compliance with their obligations regarding quality of life in society still leaves a lot to be desired. Generally, these aspects are much underinvested and when the destination is larger, it ends up being misused or diverted, resulting in inefficiency and poor quality. In this context of neglect and disrespect to citizens, the national market emerges as a stronghold of pleasures. Guarded by private security, cleaned, perfumed, and tidy to ensure aesthetic, stores and shopping malls emerge as islands in the chaos of the cities in which the sole criterion for citizenship that still subsists, a little in fits and starts, is the consumer's right.

These factors, which in each social reality consort themselves specifically, contribute to the global perspective of moving towards increasing reliance of peripheral consumers to production center, which continuously induces consumption under the encouragement of "novelty". The new standard of identity construction is also marked by the frequency with which John and Mary, in all social classes, exchange each and every one of their consumables. Always presented as a novelty, they promise the remission of all problems experienced by those who, relying on the market, purchased services and products that were not all that vaunted. When market promises the definitive pleasure, it induces the final disposal of the used and a new acquisition, in an almost independent way of the function of the product, thus accelerating the constant degradation of the environment.

Although the planet is not a closed system, performing constant exchanges of mass and energy with the cosmos², the Earth's ability to recover its equilibrium state is limited and it cannot be reset by a simple determination of the will of human beings. We have to face the idea that the growth of the market, both in terms of supply and with regard to the demand, leads to unsustainability³ There is no place to run. You must be aware that after the end there is no return. There is no exit on the next corner through which one can go back in time and change the outcome of our poor choices.

We must now realize the impact of our actions; the result of our consumption decisions. We need to become aware of who and how many we are and what this entails globally speaking. There have never been so many people on earth and, likewise, our ability to change the world is unique, even modifying the atomic structures and that one which frames our corporeal reality, the genome. So, considering the limit of sustainability, how to distribute limited resources that should provide all and keep them for future generations?

Given that human rights ensure the same rights, it is not possible to think of simply limit the access of those who only now reached the minimum goods that characterizes the quality of life. The goods and services that are regarded to the median indicators – education, health and infrastructure – in order to encourage the emancipation of this class and allow the future consumption awareness should be provided to them.

It is also necessary to review the consumption patterns of those who traditionally have the means to use the goods and services provided by market: the more affluent population groups that form almost a single class scattered in different countries and parts of the planet. We need to instill them awareness about the real need of the goods they consume, since this portion of people occupying the centers of power and decision spend more than they need, in a self-indulgent hedonism on

the edge of futility. It is essential to understand what it means to consume before resource scarcity and the social and environmental cost of producing it.

However, this awareness meets the resistance of the people, who do not want to give up their consumption desires, and antagonism of the market that does not want to lose its followers. For that reason, over forty years after Potter denounced the environmental degradation and urged the gestation of a new ethic for sciences and life ⁴ – Bioethics –, we still consume too much and choose poorly, given that our selection criteria are based on reproduction to exhaustion and exaggerated lack of limits induced by the market itself. Perhaps, right now, we are already passing the point from which it cannot return.

In this sense, one might think that the ecological imbalance, earthquakes, melting, freezing, tsunamis and hurricanes are the logical echo of the environment in response to the aggression encouraged by the market and its *ethos* of growing expansion. Because we cannot forget that the planet is made of what we call anthropocentrically as “resources”. The idea that the world is something we can spend up to the limit of the abuse does not hold when contrasted with reality.

But our delirious fever of consumption leads us to ignore this paradox and forget the impasse that installs. Anesthetized by the use of signs that represent our inclusion in the world, we celebrate our “citizenship” sinking deeper and deeper into the sea of equals trying to be different from each other just for that plus they can buy. This is the plot of nowadays class struggle, nurtured within the market and supported by the media that distribute and print brands in consumption.

And it is precisely in the sense to foster the discussion about this situation in which all of us – humanity – are engrossed, we close this first editorial of the year with a simple proposal for reflection. Bioethical guidelines for ethics applied to the social dimension. Since the speech on human action does not seem to produce the expected result, we need to take steps to reduce corruption and control the use of resources, allowing a better social and environmental use. Thus, we suggest that the wealth arising from collective production must be committed to ensuring universal access to the benefits of its application. We believe that, in this way, the trend of the ecological balance and social selection of cultural traits that promote the elimination of dependence and ethics in social life will also be encouraged.

The editors

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