

Reflections on the formation of the individual: considerations about the idea of compassion

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Abstract: This study aims to present and discuss some aspects of the concept of compassion in the philosophy of the Critical Theory of Society and in Greek tragedy, in an attempt to understand the meanings and forms attributed to it. The aim is to reach the aspects related to the dominant social formation, inquiring about how human relations are configured, the process of sociability and the idea of experience. The text is divided as follows: a brief introduction of the topic based on some writings by Horkheimer and Adorno; a discussion of the ambiguities and contradictions attributed to the concept of compassion, presenting a few episodes in Greek tragedies in which the feeling of compassion appears. And finally we will discuss the aspects related to the dominant social formation in the context of mass society.

Keywords: compassion, formation of the individual, Greek tragedy, critical theory of society.

Introduction

The aim of this essay is to present and discuss some aspects of contemporary social life, forms of sociability, of experience, the concept of compassion, as well as the way that this is understood while considering philosophy. Accordingly, we will take some elements of the critical theory of society as theoretical framework. We will also address the process of impoverishment of the individual, highlighting the decline and presenting concepts and ideas related to compassion, based on some writings by Horkheimer.

It is noteworthy that the considerations in this essay present no closing remarks or deterministic conclusion regarding the issues discussed. In fact, the purpose would only be to present a set of ideas in order to reflect on the problems of formation of the subject in the context of an administered society¹. Within this reflection the intention is to address the concept of compassion and discuss it while considering the contradictions presented by some authors, in particular those made by Horkheimer.

Horkheimer (1990) turns his attention, especially in his later writings², to the theme of “the other,” that is, of otherness, noting the real possibilities of realization of the individual, as well as the contradictions and trends that hinder or impede this process. Considering the wonders

of scientific, technological and economic progress, the capability of suppressing hunger on the planet and reducing the needs of the individual, the author is surprised with the growing rate of impoverishment, whether on the material or the spiritual plane. According to the philosopher,

Never has man’s poverty been in a more glaring contrast with their possible wealth as it is today, never have all forces been more cruelly bound as they are in these generations in which children starve while their parents’ hands make bombs. (Horkheimer, 1990, p. 77)

Considering the contrast pointed out in this quote, the author exposes the context, the characteristics and the consequences regarding the decline of the individual³ and the respective subjective and objective expropriations, which are based on the perspective of instrumental rationality⁴. In addition, he realizes that, before the procession of misery, pain and suffering imposed on the contemporary man in the context of late capitalism⁵, the theoretical pessimism, which is associated with the practices of compassion and solidarity, should assume the first reaction as a form of resistance.

In contemporary society this is dominated by the principle of trade – whose base has been indifference,

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1 Expression commonly used by some authors from the Frankfurt School. Administered society or administered world refers to the process of economic, political, cultural and technological domination that consists of maintaining the mechanisms that support the capitalist system and reduce the possibilities of liberation of the individual.

2 This is a phase that shows a certain break with the writings of the first critical theory. In this phase, the author would have distanced himself from the interdisciplinary materialism program that marked his thought in the 1930s.

3 The expression is used by the author in the work *Eclipse of Reason* (Horkheimer, 2002), in the chapter titled “The rise and decline of the individual” (p. 133).

4 This concerns the reason for the dominance of the internal and external natures. Thus, “the instrumental reason (evoked to dominate the external nature) subdues the emancipatory reason. The spell turns against the sorcerer. The enlightenment reason, which was introduced to subdue the myth, is transformed, in turn, into myth.” (Freitag, 1986, p. 49).

5 This concerns the third phase of capitalist development, marked, among other things, by the expansion of transactions, global capitals, mass consumption, and intensification of trade.

competition and, in many cases, cruelty, callousness and exclusion –, the feeling of compassion would stand out as a counterpoint to the triumph of the barbaric forms on which this society has fed and which it has cultivated.

On the other hand, according to Horkheimer and Adorno (1985), compassion would also have been the target of harsh criticism from many modern and contemporary thinkers, such as Kant and Nietzsche. For different reasons, the feeling of compassion should be, in the conception of these authors, absolutely outcast and rejected as a social practice devoid of merit, dignity or virtue.

Compassion: ambiguities and contradictions

Regarding its dignity, while virtue is invested with reputation, Comte-Sponville (1999) reminds us that “[the] compassion has a bad reputation; nobody likes to be subjected to it, nor feel it. This distinguishes it, for example, from generosity” (p. 55). The author then considers that “compassion is suffering, and all suffering is bad. How could compassion be good?” (p. 55). From this perspective the author admits that the idea of compassion is a “unique virtue that opens our minds not only to all mankind, but to all living things or, at least, to those who suffer” (p. 55). On the other hand, as we are reminded by Horkheimer and Adorno, quoting Spinoza, “one who is led to help others neither by reason nor by compassion, is rightly called inhuman” (1985, p. 98).

Considered as vice and sin, Nietzsche, in the interpretation of Horkheimer and Adorno (1985), affirms that anyone who adheres to compassion “perverts the universal law: therefore mercy, far from being a virtue, becomes a true vice as soon as it leads us to interfere with an inequality prescribed by the laws of nature” (p. 97).

A sort of “more compulsive prejudice” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1985, p. 97) emerges, another aspect relates to the fact that compassion would encourage attitudes marked by the superiority of the one who pities, making the other one devoid of the possibilities of overcoming one’s real condition of existence. From this perspective, compassion would reinforce such inequality and accentuate superiority, either in healthcare practice or in philanthropy in general, because “[the] narcissistic deformations of compassion, as the sublime sentiments of the philanthropist and the moral arrogance of the social worker, are the internalized confirmation of the difference between the rich and the poor” (p. 99).

Thus, Horkheimer and Adorno (1985) support the thesis that, if on the one hand compassion usurps an individual’s strength, resistance and ability to express firmly a vigorous action on the world, then on the other it establishes an asymmetric relationship between individuals, as it reduces the subject to the condition of object to be pitied, deeming it incapable of autonomy.

In this regard, it is observed that compassion has elicited different conceptions about its dignity, while virtue

is taught, learned, transmitted, and, therefore, practiced. Some advocate this in favor of the refusal to suffer, or feel pain and helplessness, while others reject it in favor of autonomy, the principle of efficiency, and strength.

Among the former, Schopenhauer (2014) recognizes in mercy – therefore in the feeling of compassion – the luminous way through which the border between the I and the other dissolves. Thus, the author considers that “[the] pity is this admirable, mysterious fact, through which we see the line of demarcation – that for the eyes of reason completely separates one being from the other – disappear and the I does not become the I in any manner” (2014, p. 109). It is, indeed, a moral feeling connected to the forms of sociability that comprise unity and solidarity.

On the other hand, Horkheimer & Adorno (1985) point out, among other aspects, the ambiguous and contradictory character of the concept of compassion, emphasizing how, historically, its rejection was formed. In this respect, the authors note that:

The *commiseratio* is humanity in its immediate figure, but at the same time *‘mala inutilis’*, that is, the opposite of the manly value that, from Roman *virtus* through the Medicis to the *efficiency* of the Ford family, has always been the only truly bourgeois virtue. (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1985, p. 98)

As observed, from the “Roman *virtus*” to the “*efficiency* of the Ford family,” compassion tends to be proscribed as a mere common feeling without utility, whose content or practice would be dead and devoid of links with virtue.

Seen as rejection of individual autonomy, according to Kant, compassion results from “a certain sentimentality” and would not have “in itself the dignity of virtue” (apud Horkheimer & Adorno, 1985, p. 98). In another context, Horkheimer (1990) recognizes and tries to justify the fact that Kant did not see compassion as being based on a “moral feeling” because of the historical moment marked by “free competition.” Thus, Kant, according to Horkheimer (1990):

could expect that the uninterrupted progress of free competition was the origin of this increase in overall happiness, because he saw the world on the rise under this principle. Despite this, early for his time, it was not possible to separate compassion from morality. (p. 78)

However, Horkheimer (1990) himself again emphasizes the ethic of compassion, highlighting the dramatic aspects under which the individual suffers:

As long as the individual and the whole do not really merge, as long as the easy death of the individual freed from anguish does not seem something extrinsic to him, because he knows

with certainty that his essential goals are protected with the community; therefore, as long as morality still has a reason to exist, compassion lies in it. (p. 78).

Thus, it is within the perspective of this pessimism, inspired by the work of Schopenhauer, that Horkheimer reappropriates the concepts of solidarity and compassion. Accordingly, it is possible to perceive the ambiguities and contradictions with which the author works and, in this context, to understand the way he discusses the concept of compassion.

In observing the failure of culture, the fall of all “values in trade value,” the failure of the enlightenment promises, the predominance of the “subjective reason” (instrumental) and the appropriation – either by companies or by the State – of the technique devoid of ethical and moral content, the philosopher sustains his criticism based on a theoretical pessimism capable of activating the fields of struggle and of the forces against the domination.

In this regard, Horkheimer points out, in his writings, especially in his later thought, that this is not the praise of conformity before the existing reality, but rather a posture capable of admitting the suffering and pain, consciously appropriating their reality, as well as the possibilities of overcoming.

In this respect, Silva (2011), while interpreting the ethic of compassion based on the conceptions of Horkheimer, considers that it “emerges as an alternative to the cruelty that persists with the triumph of the selfconservation principle, both in the economic and the technical-scientific perspective” (p. 222). Thus, the author admits the idea that, for Horkheimer, compassion interpreted as universal solidarity would be supported in this author’s late philosophy based on two philosophical aspects:

On the one hand, based on the thought from Schopenhauer, it arises from the perception of pain and suffering, from the awareness of our finitude as human beings. On the other hand, it is from the Horkheimerean reinterpretation of Marx. This would have deducted a kind of proletarian solidarity before the existence of a great chasm separating paid workers from the bourgeois class. (Silva, 2011, pp. 222-223)

Indeed, Silva (2011) also points out that, in view of the pessimism and disbelief sustained by Horkheimer since the 1930s, the philosopher would go – as clearly observed in the quote above – from a belief in the solidarity of class (in the case, solidarity between the workers) to a defense of a universal solidarity. Founded on principles that would transcend the differences of class or social groups, universal solidarity, stimulated by the suffering and pain, would reveal our fragile condition.

Not by chance, and being one of the aspects that compose the scenes of Greek tragedies, compassion received harsh criticism from Nietzsche, since,

According to Aristotle the Greeks often suffered from an excess of compassion: hence the need for catharsis through tragedy. Thus we see how this inclination seemed suspect to them. It is dangerous to the State, it detracts from the necessary hardness and severity, it makes heroes behave as women in tears, etc. Zarathustra preached: “I see such goodness, such weakness. Such justice and compassion, such weakness”. (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1985, p. 98)

The tragedy and the feeling of compassion

In this context, it is enriching to observe some episodes of Greek tragedies, in which the feeling of compassion can be perceived. An in-depth analysis of the examples will not be conducted here, due to the very support of this text. Our purpose is to bring some elements forth to understand the ambiguous character of the theme, emphasizing, among other aspects, that its practice, content and meaning transcend the purely religious field.

Accordingly, there are entire verses in epic poetry – as in the Iliad, for example – or in mythical narratives, in which this aspect appears in crystalline form. Concerning the “pedagogic” character of these narratives, Chauí (2002) reminds us that:

tragedy has an educational purpose, forming character and virtues, so it should arouse passions in the spectators that mimic (simulate and emulate) those that they would feel if, in fact, the tragic events took place and must, then, offer remedies to those passions, making the audience leave the theater emotionally released or in the government of their emotions. The audience must learn, by imitation (that is, by the spectacle provided), the good and evil of passions, and what terrible or beneficial deeds can be done to man. (pp. 485-486)

Based on this and on the arguments of other authors, we can extract, from some tragedies, examples in which feelings of pity and compassion are present. In this respect, even on occasions dominated by hatred, discord, enmity, or the more radical form of repudiation, which is indifference, empathy with the other is present.

One example is in the episode the Odyssey, in which Odysseus faces Ajax, his enemy. Brandão (1999), in “Ulisses: o mito do retorno,” presents three versions of Odysseus’ encounter with Ajax. In one of them, Ajax is consumed by madness, by mania⁶, because the Greeks had denied him the arms of Achilles. In this context, Ajax

6 Ajax is a victim of his own pride, as, according to the narrative, he would have rejected, on several occasions, the help of the gods. Palas Athena, “in the condition of highly offended, assumes the role of Nemesis and her revenge is terrible . . ., the supreme wisdom wounds him with madness” (Saint-Victor, 2003, p. 379).

beheads a peaceful herd of sheep, believing to see Greeks themselves in them. Upon realizing the demerit act that he had committed, embarrassed, he plunges a sword into his throat and kills himself. Odysseus, the Greek King, realizing the agony of Ajax and rushed towards him to try to help him; then, Agamemnon, the other King, questions: "How can you help an enemy?" Odysseus answers: "In his death it is mine that I see" (p. 300).

In contrast, as Sophocles shows in his tragedy about Ajax, when the goddess of intelligence, showing the proportion of the misfortune that befell him, as well as the power of the gods, asks Odysseus "If, perchance, he knows a wiser and braver hero, the answer of the son of Laertes is swift":

No, I know no one and, although he is my enemy,
I lament his misfortune. Crushed by terrible fate.
In his doom I see my own doom.
All those who live, we are nothing but
Shreds of illusion and empty shadows.
(Sophocles apud Brandão, 1999, p. 300)

It is observed that that there are entire verses in epic poetry – in the Iliad, Odyssey, and tragedies in general – whose lessons remind us of a question that nowadays tends to be forgotten and eliminated from the social and collective experience, that is, the possibility of identifying with the suffering of the other. With that, apathy tends to spread as an increasingly common practice among man, becoming natural as a defense for them to survive in a world that, as well, leans towards dehumanization.

Thus, Matos (1997) reminds us that mercy is characteristic of the tragic genre. According to the author, "tragedy awakens this feeling in those who know how to see oneself in the enemy, this fragile, mortal other: 'you are not supposed to hate an enemy,' writes Aristotle, 'with the idea that we can love him later'" (p. 61). Thus, the author points to man's strong appeal so as to be recognized as the best and most powerful. Such an attitude obscures, for humanity, the conditions that reduce man to ephemeral and deadly beings:

Experience of the absurd and pride of man,
megalothymia – the desire to be recognized as
the best and most powerful – covers the essential
question for man – being exposed, vulnerable,
mortal. For other reasons, the Renaissance
humanism and the Marxist humanism also had
a particular interpretation of man, society and
happiness based on that which they sought to form
them for the betterment of their talents and abilities
and for harmony in the city. (Matos, 1997, pp. 19-20)

Thus, as a counterpoint to Odysseus' aforementioned attitude, it would be worth addressing – still in the context of Greek tragedy – the famous episode of the "sacrifice of Iphigenia" to the goddess Artemis, conducted by her

own father – Agamemnon. Known as *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Euripides's tragedy tells, among other things, fragile Iphigenia's supplication in an attempt to awaken her father's compassion, so he releases her from the cruel martyrdom. At the end, Iphigenia voluntarily accepts the glorious martyrdom on behalf of Greece, but not without first exerting resistance, pleading for the King's compassion:

I bow down at your knees, as a supplicant. Do not
make me die before due time, it is so grateful to
contemplate the light! Do not force me to descend
to the depths of the Earth. I was the first to call
you father and the first you called daughter; on
your lap, I gave and received tender caresses. . . .
I shall receive you in old age, O dear father, in the
sweet hospitality of my home, to return the care that
sustained my childhood? Father, look at me, grant
me a single look and give me a kiss, which I shall
take with me if my entreaties do not dissuade you!
(Euripides apud Saint-Victor, 2003, p. 515)

The dialogue between father and daughter goes on almost as a continuous monologue; as, while Agamemnon remains silent, Iphigenia calls upon her brother, the fragile and small Orestes, to awaken their father's compassion: "O my brother, such fragile defender you are of your relatives! Yet cry with me and ask father that your sister do not die!" (Euripides apud Saint-Victor, 2003, p. 516).

Then, Iphigenia grabs hold of Orestes and, in a last display of pain, grief and supplication, turns to her father and says: "See, father, he has got a silent prayer for you. Oh, he wants to take part in my fate and take pity on my life! Naught is sweeter for mortals than to contemplate the light" (p. 516). Nevertheless, despite her entreaties and lament, Iphigenia cannot mollify the King's conviction and judgement, nor dissuade him from the decision made, as "Agamemnon, however, remains adamant: the oracle's decree is irrevocable" (p. 516).

In this context, it is worth noting the similarity between the entreaties of Iphigenia and the ultimate lament of Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, before King Creon. This is the only time in which the prisoner, in Sophocles' tragedy, seems to make a concession to her fragility, showing that one of the reasons that prompted her to disobey the King's orders was precisely the feeling of compassion devoted to her brother Polynices: "What divine law have I transgressed? What is the use of gazing at the gods and to which faithful ally could I resort, accused of being unholy in my pity?" (Sophocles apud Almeida & Vieira, 1997, p. 75).

Generally speaking, the aforementioned role played by Odysseus was radically opposite to that played by Agamemnon. If Odysseus was able to overcome his hatred or opposition to rival Ajax, he probably did so while moved by sentiments of justice, compassion or mercy. This is clear from the moment that Odysseus persuades Agamemnon to allow the burial honors, because, as Várzeas (2009) points

out, “[it is] from his persuasive and brave intervention with Agamemnon that results in the rehabilitation of the dead hero, whose valor is finally recognized” (p. 26).

However, Agamemnon “is not able to see more than a ferocious enemy who strove against the leadership of the army in Ajax, forgetting the circumstances under which he did it, and forgetting the valorous deeds erst so often executed” (Várzeas, 2009, p. 26). The posture of Agamemnon in *Iphigenia in Aulis* was no less radical. Although torn by suffering and absolutely consumed by the pain of a father, he did not hesitate to obey the request of the oracle, even though it concerned his own daughter.

Another aspect relates to the question of hospitality, as presented in the *Odyssey*. Matos (2006) explores how the text of Homer values, among other issues, the hosting of strangers and the feeling of cordiality in relation to the guest who arrives without warning. Thus:

when Odysseus is received by Eumaeus, the swineherd, who does not recognize his Lord – as Athena had transformed him into an old man –, he exclaims: ‘come, old man, follow me, let us go into my tent; I wish you sated with food and wine, then you shall tell me from whence you come and the evils that your heart has endured. Who is this man, this beggar whose identity is unknown thus far? He is a poor wretch and, thus, it is important first of all to feed him and sate him and then come the questions: ‘Who are you?’, ‘from whence you come?’. The act of humanity – hospitality – is not subordinate to any identification: ‘Foreigner,’ says Eumaeus, ‘my custom is to honor the guest even if one more pitiable than you should come to me; strangers, beggars, they all come from Zeus’. (Matos, 2006, p. 171)

The author considers the fact that, primarily, in the history of Greek culture, the process of humanization, as well as the values related to the law of hospitality, had their place, as “[acknowledging] knowing the dignity of each individual, regardless of name, ethnic or geographical origin, social status or religion, that is the law of hospitality and humanity” (Matos, 2006, p. 171).

We propose, in this context, to address the Horkheimerean conception of compassion discussed in view of the formative experience. Thus, considering the tragic narrative from the perspective of a “pedagogic” lesson, as believed by Aristotle (Chauí, 2002, p. 485), we can, based on this reflection, give rise to new elements to understand the feeling of compassion in light of our modernity.

Modernity and the feeling of compassion

Modernity, contemporary to “late capitalism”, tends to reduce individuals to mere agents of the laws of economics. Therein lies Horkheimer’s (1999) criticism of

the new mechanisms of domination and exploitation which eventually convert individuals into automatons, devoid of themselves and the relationship with the other. This process would have contributed to the “material and spiritual impoverishment of society” (p. 77).

Thus, Horkheimer (1999) points out, among other aspects, the condition of suffering and helplessness that individuals experience under the laws of bourgeois economy, whose principle consists in governing them through a blind and irrational action. The author considers that:

between the free competence of individuals, as the medium, and the global existence of society, as mediated, there is no rational relationship. The process is not executed under the control of a conscious will, but as a natural process. The lives of all men become blind, casual and wretched as a result of the laboriousness of individuals, industries and States. This irrationality is expressed in the suffering of most men. (Horkheimer, 1999, p. 109, my translation)⁷

Through the mechanisms of domination, enhanced by devices that promote individualism, indifference and, consequently, helplessness sustained by the universe of competition, another aspect worth reflecting upon is formation, in view of the amplitude of the experience. By analyzing Horkheimer’s conceptions about formation focused on experience, Silva (2004) considers – in education by mimesis – paper as unnecessary for “direct recommendations or wake-up calls” (p. 16), since this process is carried out through imitation. “In this case, the mimetic impulses are sublimated and not repressed, and would be conducted to achieve human potential” (p. 16).

Based on this perspective, the author highlights the importance attributed by Horkheimer to the educational process with respect to developing the individual and collective experience, as this is the way “we can oppose an education for the perverse identification with the social whole, which reproduces the insensitivity and the impossibility of identifying with the suffering of the other” (Silva, 2004, p. 16).

In another context, Horkheimer (2002) denounces the mechanisms of domination exercised by mass society, whose tendency is to promote individualism, dissolution of individuality and reduction of the subject to mere manipulable object. In this respect, the author writes:

All mass culture media serve to reinforce the social pressures on individuality, avoiding all possibilities that the individual is preserved somehow before the

⁷ “entre la competencia libre de los individuos, como medio, y la existencia global de la sociedad, como mediado, no hay relación racional. El proceso no se lleva a cabo bajo el control de una voluntad consciente, sino como proceso natural. La vida de la totalidad de los hombres resulta ciega, casual y mala como resultado de la laboriosidad de los individuos, industrias y Estados. Esta irracionalidad se expresa en el sufrimiento de la mayoría de los hombres” (Horkheimer, 1999, p. 109).

pulverizing mechanisms of society. The emphasis on individual heroism and on the self-made man in biographies and novels and pseudo-romantic movies does not invalidate this observation. These mechanical incentives for self-conservation actually accelerate the dissolution of individuality. As the slogans of vigorous individualism are useful politically for large trusts that seek to exempt themselves from social control, so is the rhetoric of individualism in mass culture, by imposing models for collective imitation it contradicts the very principle which it apparently intends to promote. (Horkheimer, 2002, pp. 162-163)

Based on this perspective, another effect that is manifested increasingly more clearly in contemporary societies is the decline of experience. Increasingly deteriorated and devoid of a forming role, it leans towards impoverishment and emptiness. Benjamin (1994) had already observed, in particular among the soldiers who fought in World War II, that, when they returned to their homes, they became silent, indifferent, that is, unable to narrate what happened: “[already] it could be noticed that the soldiers had returned silent from the battlefield. Poorer in communicable experiences, rather than richer” (pp. 114-115).

It is precisely in the context of periodic relapses into barbarism (civil wars, genocide of unarmed populations, carnage and fundamentalism of all sorts) that Horkheimer focuses his attention to reflect on the possibilities of combat and fighting against all forms of oppression and domination.

Horkheimer provides several leads to think about the issue of compassion from another perspective. One of these leads is addressed in two essays: “Materialism and morality” and “Schopenhauer and society”. In the first essay, Horkheimer, a reader of Nietzsche and Kant, observes that “the moral sentiment has something to do with love, because within the purpose is love, adoration, the vision of perfection, the longing” (Nietzsche apud Horkheimer, 1990, p. 76). Then, the author notes: “However, this love does not refer to the person as an economic subject or as a position in the financial situation of the loved one, but as a possible member of a blissful mankind” (Horkheimer, 1990, p. 76).

Nevertheless, if happiness and autonomy are rare items, especially in the context of contemporary social destructiveness; if obliviousness to the other is the rule; and if “we see man not as subject of their fate, but as objects of a blind accident of nature . . . , the response of the moral sentiment to this is compassion” (Horkheimer, 1990, p. 78).

In the second essay, called “Schopenhauer and society”, compassion is also presented as a counterpoint to the process of indifference that also characterizes Western democracies. Far from the idea of friendship and contrary to any form of solidarity, which is typical of a society founded on the logic of performance and competition, the sentiment of compassion would be *antibourgeois par excellence*, since

the logic of profit does not tolerate suspending the laws of economics, deferring the cost-benefit ratio in favor of individual or collective happiness and welfare.

Horkheimer (2000) points to the contradictory dimension inherent in capitalist society, whose expression is manifested both in the social relations of production and appropriation of material goods, and in the forms of sociability between individuals. The author considers that, despite the terror and the atrocious forms of injustice, solidarity can be taken as a form of resistance, since:

The relentless structure of eternity could generate the communion of the forsaken, in the same way that injustice and terror in society are generated as a result the solidarity of those who exert resistance. The young refugees from the East, who in the first few months are happy because freedom reigns, but finally become sad because there is no friendship, have experience of what I say. With terror, which brought them together so as to resist, happiness also disappears. Yet the knowledge of reality would be capable of renewing it. Persecution and starvation permeate the history of society to date. If the youth recognize the contradiction between the state of human forces and the situation of the Earth and do not let their view be obscured by fanatical nationalisms or by theories of transcendent justice, we can expect that identification and solidarity become decisive in their lives. The path to that goal goes through the knowledge both of science and politics and through the works of great literature. (Horkheimer, 2000, p. 57, my translation)⁸

According to this quote, we observe that the theme of identification, justice and solidarity permeates the author's thought, becoming a source of inspiration for many of his writings and reflections. In this regard, Chiarello (2001) adds that “[the] disappearance of romantic relationships (those governed by the desire of union) in the world being technified is a recurring theme in Horkheimer” (p. 101). By interpreting the author's thought, Chiarello (2001) considers, in addition, that the individual focused solely on the self, unable to establish bonds with others and the subject to a hulking selfishness, tends to serve:

8 La estructura inmisericorde de la eternidad podría generar la comunión de los desamparados, del mismo modo que la injusticia y el terror en la sociedad generan como consecuencia la solidaridad de los que oponen resistencia. Los jóvenes huidos del Este, que en los primeros meses son felices porque reina la libertad, pero finalmente se vuelven tristes porque no hay amistad, tienen experiencia de lo que digo. Con el terror, por el que se unieron para oponerle resistencia, desaparece también la felicidad. Pero el conocimiento de la realidad sería capaz de renovarla. Persecución y hambre atraviesan la historia de la sociedad hasta hoy. Si la juventud reconoce la contradicción entre el estado de las fuerzas humanas y la situación de la tierra y no se deja nublar la mirada por nacionalismos fanáticos o por teorías de una justicia trascendente, podemos esperar que la identificación y la solidaridad se hagan decisivas en sus vidas. El camino hacia esa meta pasa por el conocimiento tanto de la ciencia y la política como de las obras de la gran literatura (Horkheimer, 2000, p. 57).

blindly, like an animal misled by the purposes of its species, the willful prerogatives of the fully administered collectivity of which this individual is part – a collectivity that is converted into a highly refined animal species. The loveless society is a collectivist fanaticism, an animal species. (Chiarello, 2001, p. 102)

The sense of this love has, perhaps, its most refined expression in the process, described by Schopenhauer, in which one's selfish condition is conquered and one's differences in relation to others are overcome, enabling one to assume the pain and the anguish that afflict humanity. Thus, the author writes:

When the tip of the veil of Maya (the illusion of individual life) is lifted between a man's eyes – so that he no longer makes selfish distinction between his person and other men, and takes as much interest in the suffering of strangers as in his own, thus becoming charitable to the point of dedication, ready to sacrifice himself for the salvation of his fellow –, this man, having reached the point of recognizing himself in all beings, considers the endless suffering of all living creatures as his own, and, thus, assumes the pain of the world. He is indifferent to no misery. All the torments he sees and so rarely can mitigate, all the anguishes he hears about, even those he can conceive, disrupt his spirit as if he were the victim. (Schopenhauer, 2014, p. 113)

Conclusion

The relevant point of these analyses – included in the reflections developed on compassion – is precisely that which points to a criticism of contemporary forms of sociability, coexistence, and experience. The solidarity and friendship bonds – in particular those that are built through social networks, typical in a mass society – are weakened, they lose their durability, since the very notion of future is devoid of its depth. In this regard, Rouanet (2013) writes:

But the future is blocked by a social system in which the new appears in the form of the same, and the same in the form of the new. It is the time of hell, quoting Benjamin. Everything changes: the 2012 smartphones are different from the 2011 ones, and this is essential so nothing changes. In fact, the future has become a technical term of the stock market. People no longer speculate *about* the future, but *in* the future – in the futures market. . . . The future remains alive, but limited to the short time interval between two generations of tablets. (p. 364)

Thus, the trend that is formed is that of uniformity of habits, thoughts and behaviors, whose purpose is to meet the renewed forms of consumption. Even in the most diffuse relations, that is, those essential for arranging social relationships, the levels of indifference and coldness, permeating their set, tend to become increasingly intense, characterizing that which Adorno called the “illness of contact” or the “end of formative experiences” (Adorno, 2000), in other words, those experiences which, among other aspects, prepare us for social interaction and the acceptance of the other.

Based on this perspective, Matos (2006) will say that the “society that is not founded on the bonds of friendship and brotherhood is, also, without compassion” (p. 64). The author addresses the conceptions defended by Horkheimer about compassion, emphasizing that this is a:

“mimetic sadness” by which we wish the end of the suffering of another ourselves. It is not something found solely in reflection, but rather created with the extension of our identity and sensitivity to the details of pain, as a commonality in man is that they are all susceptible to suffering and disappointment. Compassion is based on our capacity for empathy. By relativizing our customs, we will know that, if no one holds the truth, everyone has the right to be understood. (Matos, 2006, p. 64)

Reflexões sobre a formação do indivíduo: considerações sobre a ideia de compaixão

Resumo: Este ensaio tem como objetivo apresentar e discutir alguns aspectos do conceito de compaixão na filosofia da chamada Teoria Crítica da Sociedade e na tragédia grega na tentativa de compreender os significados e as formas a ele atribuídos. O intuito é chegar aos aspectos relacionados com a formação social dominante, indagando como se configuram as relações humanas, o processo de sociabilidade e a ideia de experiência. Para essa discussão, o texto está dividido da seguinte forma: será feita uma breve introdução do tema com base em alguns escritos de Horkheimer e Adorno; em seguida, serão discutidas as ambiguidades e contradições atribuídas ao conceito de compaixão; serão apresentados alguns episódios presentes nas tragédias gregas nas quais o sentimento de compaixão aparece. E, finalmente, serão discutidos aspectos relacionados com a formação social dominante no contexto da sociedade de massas.

Palavras-chave: compaixão, formação do indivíduo, tragédia grega, teoria crítica.

Réflexions sur la formation de l'individu : remarques sur l'idée de compassion

Résumé: Cet article a comme but présenter et discuter quelques aspects du concept de compassion dans la philosophie connue comme Théorie Critique de la Société et dans la tragédie grecque en essayant de comprendre les significations et les formes qui lui sont attribuées. La recherche veut arriver aux aspects liés à la formation sociale en demandant comment sont configurés les relations humaines, le processus de sociabilité et l'idée d'expérience. Le texte est présenté en trois parties : 1. une brève introduction au sujet par la philosophie de Max Horkheimer et Theodor Adorno ; 2. ensuite, on discutera des ambiguïtés et contradiction du concept de compassion – ils seront présentés quelques épisodes présents dans la tragédie grecque où le sentiment de compassion apparaît ; 3. à la fin, on traitera des aspects de la formation sociale dans le contexte de la société de masses.

Mots-clés: compassion, formation de l'individu, tragédie grecque, théorie critique.

Reflexiones sobre la formación del sujeto: consideraciones acerca de la idea de la compasión

Resumen: Este ensayo tiene como objetivo presentar y discutir algunos aspectos del concepto de compasión en la filosofía de la Teoría Crítica de la Sociedad y en la tragedia griega, en un intento de comprender los significados y formas que se le atribuyen. El objetivo es llegar a los aspectos relacionados con la formación social dominante, preguntando acerca de cómo se establecen las relaciones humanas, el proceso de la sociabilidad y la idea de la experiencia. El texto se divide de la siguiente manera: una breve introducción del tema basándose en algunos escritos de Horkheimer y Adorno; una discusión de las ambiguëdades y contradicciones atribuidas al concepto de compasión y una presentación de algunos episodios en las tragedias griegas en las que se evidencia el sentimiento de la compasión. Finalmente, se discuten los aspectos relacionados con la formación social dominante en el contexto de la sociedad de masas.

Palabras clave: compasión, formación del sujeto, tragedia griega, teoría crítica.

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Received: 03/03/2016

Reviewed: 06/08/2016

Approved: 08/24/2016