

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT MERLEAU-PONTY, LEVI-STRAUSS, FOUCAULT - SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY

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N'est-ce pas un incroyable malentendu si tous les philosophes ou presque se sont crus obligés d'avoir une politique alors qu'elle relève de l' "usage de la vie" e se dérobe a l'entendement ?
(Merleau-Ponty, Signes).

Abstract

The theoretical and methodologists progress of the social sciences and also the massive presence of social workers in the social life induces me to describe the facts where philosophy and human sciences crossed each other with the goal to emphasize the problems and the challenges that their relationships puts on the contemporary knowledge's configuration. To make that, I writhed some remarks about the books of Merleau-Ponty, Lévi-Strauss and Foucault, like Kant's successors.

Keywords: Contemporary Philosophy; Anthropology; Phenomenology; Structuralism.

Introduction

The impact suffered by Philosophy, due to the "invasion" of the human sciences on their spheres of influence, gives rise to the revision of the social context, political, economic and epistemological where founded Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, History and the knowledge of the sciences of language. Even more so given that the event was troubled the understanding about the role of Philosophy in the social organization of intellectual work. Moreover, as we know, the current crisis of Philosophy result from the conclusions of Kant, in three criticisms. The anxiety generated by the emergence of the human sciences, it seems to meresebles and differs from the situation open by transcendental realism. In fact, empirical investigations have forced the academic knowledge to consider the human drama in the concrete situations where he is going, placing it in its geography and its historicity. In this aspect, they are approaching the humanities to the hopelessness of Kant regarding the possibility of access to knowledge of the objects designated by the ideas of reason. On the other hand, and to a certain extent, by repeating Kant, the research on the man. In actuality, that distinguish it from its predecessor when they bet on faith, this is, in the construction of categories not susceptible to sieve the experience and, in this way, according to Foucault, replace the "dream dogmatic" by "anthropological dream". Undeniable progress has been theoretical and methodological disciplines located in this field, which born, not by chance, since the second half of the 20th century. The progress of neurolinguistics and information sciences amounted to those achievements because it have contributed to the understanding of individual behavior and collective. The contexts social, political, economic, and epistemological in which we find ourselves are quite favorable to the development of these

sciences. For this motive, there are many reasons that require the resumption of a reflection in that we can examine it under each one of these aspects. The problematization of the processes and the social dynamics is fostered by the expansion of urban areas, in all continents, the intensification of the processes of migration and the development of means of communication. Those events are increasingly accessible, fast and interactive. Also involving the language, symbolic systems and the mechanisms of diffusion and information control. The emergence of a new configuration of relations between nations, after the end of the Cold War, requires the completion of an intellectual effort to identify the new protagonists and the new rules of the political game now started. In the same sense, the conflicting theories of state interventionism and neo-liberalism seem to have saturated their capacity for understanding and action. It seems not to understand with the increasing degree of complexity that affects the economic development of emerging countries. No either the crisis that affects the developed countries, which requires the sociological thinking a new commitment to interpret the forms of subjectivity inherent in these processes. From the economic thought, these processes are calling for the criticism of its foundations and assumptions in an attempt to clarify because it failed the plans of spending control and investments, which applied precisely to prevent the events that now afflict all peoples.

The institutionalization of humanities and the development of its theoretical foundations go back to a series of events by which settled political projects whose ideological platform consists of the adoption of science as hegemonic form of organization of social life. For this reason, we do not believe it can deepen the study of the substance without taking into account this factor. The Kantism, latent in the classics of social thought, also meets by names such as Comte, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. The scholars as the epistemological founders of humanities and social sciences relate those thinkers. From them spouting plentiful sources from which we can draw a little know that today covers the knowledge the ways in which it is expressed the human existence in its plurality. The use and the criticism of these authors seems to have fed the attempts of re-signification of Philosophy in the enterprises by which if tried, at the same time, give autonomy to the work of the human sciences also enable the philosophical reflection for the understanding of the contemporary world. This hypothesis supported by some writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Michel Foucault which of the following are some notes, which allowed us to define the contours of this issue.

A rupture and a misunderstanding

The examination of the epistemological aspects of the human sciences becomes timely because of relevant events happened more than 60 years ago. Events where was verified inflections in the development of validation criteria, the procedures of empirical research, data analysis and, mainly, the theoretical foundations of this area of knowledge. Among these events, there are publications of scientists and philosophers where is profoundly altered the bases of the intelligibility and the interpretation of social events. In 1952, Claude Lévi-Strauss, with *Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté*, ended a trajectory in which, since Durkheim, just to Mauss, Sociology fought in search of definition of its object and of the construction of the means of its appropriate expression. Maurice Merleau-Ponty welcomed the discovery of “structure” as key for the interpretation of the logic of social life warmly. That concept also opened the intelligence of the mechanisms of integration of the individual into collective. This French philosopher, himself, the author of *La Structure du Comportement*, 1942, and of *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, 1945, said that the research of Lévi-Strauss was a successful venture to reformulate the guiding principles of the investigations on the human behavior, until then governed by assumptions of Kantian theory of science.

Unlike his illustrious colleague, Sartre never accepted that the dialectic was crash. The resignation of Merleau-Ponty, in 1953, from the famous magazine, *Les Temps Modernes*, it is, today, the heart of a debate. Whose germs, according to its protagonists, had already manifested itself at the end of the 1930s, on anguish and of engagements, the generation of 1945, from *École Normale Supérieure*, was obliged to make in light of the events that preceded the outbreak of the Second World War. That debate took again his breath in the middle of the 1950s, when a new configuration of the international scene calling for the revision of the relationship between philosophy and Politics and in what became a balance sheet the choices of the past and the new challenges of one and of other. Without doubt, those were episodes of a drama French. This does not exempt us from realize that that conflagration and its tragic consequences took all over the world. In such a way that, after the end of conflicts in Europe, settle down a new way of living, thinking and design the relations between the countries. That extinguished the hopes and the charm that did shine the *Belle Époque*. It opened, therefore, a new challenge involving the need to know the sociocultural processes. It was also needed to weigh up the values that now seemed orient the individual behavior and the intersubjective relations. I was wondering: - Can Philosophy to say anything about this new scenario? Is it able to provide the science tools needed to know the man? Is there space for a science and moral humanists? On an events that have marked this drama, *The Letter on Humanism*, 1949, Martin Heidegger contest the Sartre's thesis that the ontological research, carried out in *Sein und Zeit*, 1927, revolved around a conception of human nature. The humanism, born out of the legacy of Kant, stood as well, in puzzle, at the same time in which the critical examination of their scientific expressions renewed suspicion that had fallen on the human sciences since its foundation. This complaint, although point toward a possible path for the renewal of Philosophy as creative activity and consequent, according to Merleau-Ponty, not releasing the Phenomenology of its commitment with the Kantian tradition nor drew one of its greatest exponents from the sentence of aphasia because of their political choices.

Next to Sartre, Merleau-Ponty brought release the philosophy of its dislike at the present. Refugee in research of high principles, the philosophy taught in European universities, at the beginning of the 20th century, abandoning back to the social conflicts. It passed the same about the growth of cities, the changes in the productive processes and, above all, the performance of new social actors. It does not know persons as the workers, migrants, women, youth and all the other agents that made through different political and cultural manifestations. With Existentialism and Phenomenology, the concrete problems of the modern world won right of citizenship in the Republic of Letters. It was also the Merleau-Ponty the merit to receive the research of Cultural Anthropology and Eastern Thought in philosophical area. Thus, prefacing a collective work he had directed, in the 1950s, the author of *La Structure du Comportement* and *Phénoménologie de la Perception* showed the East as the source of a philosophical thought. He said that Chinese literature and Hindu literature, so much older than those from Occident, refuse the idea of dominate nature by the knowledge. His thought was wonder to create a fundamental relationship with the being. That because they have a big lesson to teaching for us. Later, Merleau-Ponty published an article in which attributed to the commitment of the author of *Tristes Tropiques* and *La Pensée Sauvage* the imminent completion of the objective of many social scientists, who, since the end of the 19th century, was looking for dominate the universal structures of relations between the individuals in different societies. For the ethnologist, whose researches carried out in Brazil, in the 1930s, led him to publish *Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté*, the impact of their work has focused, first, in their own way of thinking. It opened her mind the understanding of the high value of indigenous cultures and, thus, became the more able to knowledge of himself.

The Array of Humanities

We find at the work of Michel Foucault, particularly at *Les Mots et les Choses une archéologie des sciences humaines*, 1966, a kind of Analytical Concepts where the author has made a deduction of fundamental categories of human sciences from the examination of discursive relations inherent in the so-called empirical sciences, namely: Biology, Political Economy and sciences of language. At this text famous, Foucault shows us that the human sciences have a common matrix, which is the articulation of three pairs of concepts by identifying the three dimensions of human existence: FUNCTION and STANDARD; CONFLICT and RULE; MEANING and SYSTEM delimit the fields of life sciences, of work and of language. At the same time that his reduplication makes possible the division of Psychology, Sociology and those disciplines which, in the human sciences, deal with the representation that the men make themselves beings as speakers.

A similar picture appears in the article by Claude Imbert entitled *Philosophie, Anthropologie, la fin d'un malentendu*, where the author analyzes the evolution of Ethnology as a theorist concernment that instigate some “philosophical dissidences”, mainly on the breast of the so called “French Sociology. Durkheim, himself, were started this sequence. It happened when he realized that the positivist way of inquiry the human facts was inadequate. The reduction of these facts as “things” prohibited its comprehension like scientific subjects. It was aboard like “facts” and, so, its knowledge required statistics, empirical observations and cases researches. In these conditions of enquiry, the results were anything but simple data. To comprehend its significance was required analyzes, interpretations, explications about process, dynamics and variety of factors. We cannot extract those elements from structures composed of facts and things. The events studied in *Le Suicide, Division du Travail Social* and *Les Formes Élémentaires de la Vie Religieuse* involve problems about inclusion of the individual on social life, the exclusion and the prejudice. In other words, troubles that the intelligibility did not understanding only by naked eyes observation because it is about social organization. That seems, it require the use of mind to give out its system.

At the texts examined here, we give two analyzes on the conditions of possibility of human sciences. In whose, we may consider Ethnology as a privileged field of our reflection. In this sense, it seems that we can take this discipline as exemplar in the study of situation of these sciences. We have an outline of the edges into it put the question by the points in the sequence:

a) From the point of view of the access to the real, surged a trajectory where a limited number of theories, jointed with their methodological tools, were transformed or were replaced for the rectification of their inconsistencies.

b) From the point of view of the formal structure, we identified, in these disciplines, a conceptual matrix on which it rose, modified and opened the way to the born of Ethnology into a new epistemological configuration.

Between these two line of analyzes, some questions appeared about the basis of human sciences. In a hand, the question of the origin: where are the center that liberate the knowledge of man and permit to him became subject of Science? In other hand, the problem of possibility of apprehension of the laws that regulate the ways of representation of Man by himself as a being that live, speak and work also as being of desire, criminal and agent of a Moral.

The Theory of the Subject Revisited

At the structural analyses, Lévi-Strauss support that dialectic, as the existentialism marxist interpreted, made the same wrong that the totemism committed. That is, they judge we can divide humanity in two types of society. One that would capable of to develop forms

of complexes classification, complicates abstractions, fines perceptions and universals values. Other that would not realize these acts because her faculty were be primitives and pre-logics as limiting her spiritual activities and her techniques skills. The last way of existence would focus only for the immediate necessities. The first were adequate with the ideal of autonomy and freedom of human spirit. This division explicate the reason by which ethnologists prefers, before all, dedicate to inquiry the so called “primitives people”. The reason are indigenous were considerate as societies without history. Therefore, we supposed they are closed into structures immutable. There we are the conditions favorable to isolate the elementary form of the social life than those we can found at the complexes societies. That is mean, for those who have this vision structure and history are incompatible concepts. Each one may applied exclusively on the study on the simple groups or on the complexes societies, respectively. *La Pensé Sauvage* was writhed for combat against this way of think. The author wanted show that human condition is only one in all part of the world. It is about ours desires, our feelings, our intellectual capacities and our competences on product values and such cultural goods. It seems diversity is a legacy humankind cannot lose, if we want to get dignity. By the analyze of the Science of Concrete, as Lévi-Strauss called the knowledge of common sense, we are conducted to think on the old Kantian problem of the relationships between thought and reality. At the anthropologist argumentation, this matter is put in through examine of pairs of concepts that work as keys to fit in theory and facts. As some of this pairs, we have contingency and necessity; facts and structures; interiority and exteriority; nature and culture. Both marc, too, the lines that separate History and Anthropology.

Contingence and necessity are the pair that would contain possibility of distinguish Science and Myth. Although, scientific theory and mythic narratives are similar by the possibility of subordinate the events under a consistent logic organization. The long debate about scientific objectivity against the subjective character of “wild thoughts” rest alive. It moves philosophy and human sciences, since the reflection on the relationships between the interiority and the exteriority just the inquiry about the logic of the social organization. We thanks Dilthey for the distinction between sciences of nature and sciences of spirit as twos domains with different laws. Since his work, human sciences go and back between empirical description and the effort to get a transcendental comprehension of events and process. From these occurrences emerges impasses that seems conduct to a pretended opposition between the methods of historiography and those used by ethnography researches. According Lévi-Strauss, these *saporiae* are due to the conception of natural sciences and human sciences work by different mental process. He do not believe that each one require distinct intellectual operations. He think that the same procedures works when we have to nominate, count and classify animals, plants than characteristics of minerals or substances and chemical elements. Therefore, it happens equally when we have to distinguish colors, flavors or when we care about identify civilizations, describe parental relationships and analyze laws under which peoples made their changes and regulate their language.

It seems to us Lévi-Strauss did not broke with so called Copernican Revolution on Philosophy. However, it is correct to say that he made a displacement with the Kantian question on the safe way from metaphysics to the science. That change modified the dealings between the subject and the object of knowledge. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* was the analyze of transcendental structure of reason with the goal of deduct the possibility of synthetics judgments *a priori* on the ground of philosophy. At *La Pensé Sauvage*, it care about to take from the intellectual and material production of different societies diverse possibilities of human expression. At the Kantian work, deduction of the understanding categories and of the ideas of reason is due from both unity of transcendental subjectivity and of syntheses of imagination. It was possible by examination of the procedures of mathematics, physics and metaphysic speculation, where we can apprehend how the multiples perceptions united under

a concept. By her time, Lévi-Strauss's work was back for the study of intellectual operations of many civilizations. These operations was unscripted at the narratives collected by ethnologists, who searches thoroughly the planet to know the "primitive people". Instead of examine the possibility of development of the human spirit through the inquiry of its transcendental structures, Lévi-Strauss jumped to the study of linguistics structures. Like them, cultural organizations can be considerate from its materiality and in its diversity as legitimate although out of the transcendental perspective.

Finally, we can say the unity of the subject, supposed at the Kantian work as fundamental condition for Science got a new signification at Lévi-Strauss's books. It is nor more transcendental and became just structural. The consequences of that are too much serious but we cannot care all of them here.

Well, this exigencies of arrangement is the basis of the thought that we nominate primitive, but only by the fact it constitute the basis of all Thoth, because is under the angle of common proprieties we came more easily at the manners of think that seems to us the more outsider.(LÉVI-STRAUSS, 2002; p. 25)

From the point of view of history, that unity cannot be explicate by admitting a linear sequence of moments. Because discontinuity observed between magic thought, the myth and the modern Science prohibit us to see there an evolution. It is not a sign that exist, at the first, a germen of the second. Technologic revolutions the more decisive for safe the basis of modern civilizations toke place on Neolithic period. It happened when Science was yet so distant from the face of Earth. That is anevidence myth has efficacy as intellectual tool. Indeed, without the goals got by ceramics, agriculture, animal domestication andweaving, modern Science cannot be exist. However, a circumstance knew is enough to remember us chronologic precedence of myth does not authorize to conclude science go beyond them. A long learn was necessary to apprehend these arts of Neolithic. It required infinite essays, notes, memories, comparisons, counts and classifications to create a system so complete and dense than that by which discovery in natural science have made in modernity.

Final Considerations

Foucault publicize, on the end of the 1950s, an article about L. Binswanger, anAustrian psychoanalyst. After almost ten years, he presented *Les Mots et les Choses*. Despite the long time passed by, both are discuss at which the author entered the debate about philosophy and psychoanalysis. Both works have in common one problem for the less. That is to comprehend how being given to itself a singular existence at same time historical and concrete. In other hand, this problem appears as this way: - How to understand Man as point of depart to an ontology? In his oldest article, Foucault felled that, also at Husserl than at Freud, imagination's structures and language's structures seems cannot fit in each other. French thinker took *Logische Untersuchungen* and *Die Traumdeutung* as the more radical efforts of contemporary men to comprehend and dominate the conscience. Getting distance from the concept of truth as adjustment between representations and things, these works wanted tounderstand the being and the thought from some dimensions of human existence, like language and imagination. According Foucault, Husserl wanted to show that language and imagination have origin into lived experiences of such individual. He also sought how it happens. On this question, Husserl seems to contest Cartesian tradition where mathematics is the paradigm of knowledge. Freud, in her turn, introduced the embarrassing question of the unconscious at the philosophical activity. That concept became, at same time, basis of knowledge and rule of conduct for the man in vigil. It is that, in conclusion, it contain the human reality as subject of a self.

Foucault declares that these works are part of a sequence of events by which concrete life of individuals entered at the concerns of the modern understanding. It became a new

dimension of knowledge. There include psychological, political, economic and social aspects of human existence. He says that Binswanger found a solution to the problem of status and value of human significations as it appeared at famous books of Husserl and Freud, in 1900. Binswanger's works did not care about dream and existence. It give attention to existence as it is showed to itself on dream. In this way, dream is a kind of significant anticipation. There, from one of one dimension of human existence the less inserted into the world, surged a way to analyze the real matter of this existence. It became possible to apprehend from dream the forms of human existence without pretend that them came from an *A PRIORI* essence:

The meaningfully privilege given by Binswanger to oneiric has a double importance. He define the concrete demarche of the analyze toward the fundamentals forms of existence: the analyze of dream wont to end at the level of a hermeneutic of symbols, but, from an external interpretation, that belong yet to an order of deciphering, it will can, without escape into a philosophy, arrive to comprehend the fundamentals structures.¹²

Well, this kind of initiative, to philosophe by analyze of fundamentals ways of existence, it is due from Kant. Better, from the inversion of perspectives that him operate at the relationships between finiteness and infinite. Foucault presented, when he submitted her *Doctorat d'Etat*, as a complementary thesis, a study and a translation of *Anthropologie der pragmatischen Perspektive*, which Kant publicize in the end of her life. We should not displeasure that work by which Foucault formulate the concepts and articulate the happenings in *Histoire de la Folie*. It became crucial to the conception of her archeology of human sciences as it surged at *Les Mots et les Choses*. At the Claude Imbert's article, the question of origin refers the arguments between philosophy and human sciences occurred when this new area surged. It was about a new field of investigation that required a soil so strong than it would give guaranty of validation to the new disciplines. It need a valid status, objectivity for its concepts and confidence for its theory. Little by little, misunderstanding given place to deal because it became clear by Ethnology that enter to the concrete is also pass in to the self and to the other. That means admit that Kant's philosophy adopted by the first ethnologists as epistemological rule was not adequate for apprehend the socials occurrences. Foucault's analyzes found the same conclusions. This coincidence is due to the fact of both authors seems to agree with the thesis that questions about origin and about perception – those are inherent from all ethnologist inquiry –conducted human sciences' thinkers to wrack. Because these problems set them through philosophy to give, as ballast, a universal theory of subject for the investigation of the social matter.

Theory of suzerain and universal subject constitute the angular rock of philosophical though at 20th century. It offer the ground to rescue a theory of culture and, at the same time, principles for strategies of politics action and ways of subjectivity. Certainly, reconstituting this theory would be a formidable enterprise. Those that essayed make it with some success, like Nietzsche, Adorno, Horkheimer and Hannah Arendt, opened an inexhaustible vein of research beyond the reasons that moved their own work. Anyway, there is consensus about that: Kant's philosophy is at the begin of our reflection on the Man. Because he made the best synthesis of effort by occidental though to form a concept capable of joint, at an unique representation, the diversity of means on Subject: person, aware, individual, soul, self, interiority, exteriority, I, Me, Ego, civil identity, spirit, mind, though, understanding, reason, sensibility, acquaintance, intelligence, judgment, sense, wisdom and others.

Well, starting from this premise, we can comprehend why thinkers as Merleau-Ponty, Lévi-Strauss and Foucault suited Kant's trail. It was necessary to analyze human sciences at the fields of History of thought and Epistemology. We also can understand why Claude

¹²FOUCAULT, M.:*Introduction*, in *Dits et écrits I*, p. 67.

Imbert could show dissidences and agreements at the evolution of social sciences and philosophy in the last times: it was an effect of different interpretations of Kant's philosophy.

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