Religion and Critical Theory in Max Horkheimer

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Introduction

In the continued truth of western thought, the discipline “History of Philosophy” that which is the summary of present academics, followed by the determinate plan of temporal interpretation, the self-conscience of philosophic thought and its relations to different undertones; despite past inspections, there’s also the possibility the speculative exercise about the opinion critical-reflex and the explanation of the subject completely, natural and social, experienced by man. Nevertheless in whole the historical and philosophical works of the philosopher Max Horkheimer is much remembered, almost negligently, by that reason the intellectual founder of the School of Frankfurt and in modification theories about its importance to the knowledge of philosophy, for the diverse areas of knowledge are rare as is its large quantity of documentation – to a smaller degree they guarantee to life’s end intellectual appeasement of the greatness of his friend Theodor-Weisegund Adorno, even the criticism of supporters of Kant, also from Frankfurt Jürgen Habermas. The philosophy of Horkheimer is the intellectual expression that didn’t suddenly just adapt like the experiments of hegelism, marxism, kantism etc., but the effort of lifting up the philosophy of the traditional philosophical movement with truth and reason. This article accompanied with a religious theme emerges in irregular and inopportune stages of his life and that Horkheimer reverses his new reflective stage, the motivational experiences in relation to the reasons for life, that before now solidified and illuminated principles that proclaimed the reason for autonomy and the same freedom itself.
I. Critical theory: from the positive optimism to the radical criticism

The post Hegelism philosophy from the end of the 19th century, already metaphysically living a dying existence yielded to the question that relates between philosophy and the dimension of social culture, or simply unidimensional imperatives of the techno-scientific reason. In the course of the arrival of the new century, the contemporaneous world saw the arise of outburst of two big world wars, the catastrophic transition of economic models, the ascension of totalitarian politics and so many other social phenomenons that began to emerge in the interior of academic performance, the question about the possibility of a critical reflection to the western capitalist governmental process and about their respective models of rationality.

Max Horkheimer is the thinker in the fight against the cruel dilacerations of life. His work expresses an intellectual militancy against the self-regulation of science, politics, economy and the positive philosophies that hoist the imperative of the economic-capitalist order and progress, becoming, this way, indifferent to the affirmation of the existential singularities. The philosophy of this German thinker emerges not as a systemic and perennial science, but how to know that trying to raise the “critical epistemology” above its simple techno-formal use by sciences, transposing intuitions of thinkers as Shopenhauer, Kant, Hegel, Freud, Benjamin, Marx and Weber, among others, to the reflection about the connection between theory and praxis that, all at once, elects the human emancipation as the main theme, but now under the way this question of the temporal condition, fragile and chilled existence of the human being. However, with understanding of Kant, Marx and Schopenhauer, Horkheimer understands that the critical thinking should favor the emancipation process in relation to the historical-social that divide the process of lives of the social body, in which people or a group of individuals exploit people, to subjugate to the private interests.

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The affinity with the philosophy of history native of the Marxist tradition made that, in his first phase, the critical theory understood the fundamental progress of the society as a direct result of the technological enlargement of social work. The optimism was held completely, whereas the historical development occurs before everything as a process that consists precisely to unfold this potential for the rationality, that is established in the instrumental domain of man upon natural objects. However, since the 1940’s, the comprehension of the consequences of historical-social development under the support of reason passes to win an unwelcomed appreciation: Instead of looking at the harvesting of the possibilities of Freedom in the process of society domination of nature, Horkheimer now directed his looks towards the devastating effects that cognitive realization presupposed in the practice caused by human work.

This change reflects a detachment concerning to the theoretic model of analysis restricted to the sphere of the capitalism, assuming a now wider worry in relation to the universal world process, because, as Axel Honneth observes the totalitarian conditions in which the world had fallen, with the rising of fascism, that couldn’t be already explained by the conflict between the productive forces and the relation of production, but by the internal dynamic of the formation of the human conscience.

The pretension, now, is to make explicit the mechanisms that took the humanity to a continuous process of disintegration in which the capitalist society would appear as a final disintegrated moment. Now, the negative philosophy of history dislocate the meaning of “social work” – that, before, was a categorical mark fundamental of the civilizing process – to a concept that, as being instrumentally mediated, passes to be understood as germ of its own rectified process of humanity.

The second theoretical phase of the School of Frankfurt is marked by the perception that the barbarisms are, in reality, inevitable events caused by the rationality model initiated. “Ever since, according to Luc Ferry, totalitarianism seemed to be situated in the same way of the rationalizing process. (...) And the totalitarians more obvious (Hitler and Stalin) seemed to Horkheimer, ever since, simple excesses in the process of the total rationalization.”

Here, it's clear the influence of the weberism and lucacism diagnosis. To the Frankfurt philosophers, the process of elucidation brought with itself a veiled logic of control and repression that happens during the hu-

7 SCHOPENHAUER, A. O mundo como vontade e representação. Opus cit., p. 517.
8 Idem, ibidem, p. 519
9 Ibidem, p. 520.
man history and not restricted to the historical opportunity of the capitalist societies. The traumatic events of the 20th century could be understood as a consequence of the historical deployment of this project of reason. With this, the marks of modernization would be a social non-humanist state – the opposite effect to the expected social emancipation – and the collapse of the bourgeoisie civilization.

The thesis exposed in the Dialectic of the Elucidation articulates a comprehension of the civilizing process based on a culture theory that, on the other hand, is reconstructed based on the myth of Ulysses. This culture theory in the dialectics of explanation, shows a dynamic of socialization based on paradigm progressively autonomous and structured in the imaginary phylogenetic not only from the euro-american world, but from the proper humanity. Well, when Adorno and Horkheimer wrote this, they tried to anticipate the nefarious of a project of reason to repress in teleology of unanimous and absolute truth with motives of domination and repression, pointing the catastrophic dimensions that this society could provide according to its logic of socialization. So, after the conclusion of this work in four hands, Horkheimer creates a new critical theory that, motivated by one pessimist of metaphysics in Schopenhauer, of the romantic and Marxist messiah in Benjamin, and for theology, the final adorner, Paul Tillich, rediscovers the dimension of the singularities and the vital contingencies, understanding that they reveal alternatives to the socio-systemic determinations expressed in the dimensions of economy, of politics, of public justice, of formal science and of technology, impregnated of the ideal of an administrated society.

II. From the enlightenment to the theology of faith

Horkheimer understands that the images “of the absolute creator” non-explicit in the systems of identity are able to unmask the omnipotent speeches of the unanimous and narcissistic figures of active authorities in the coordination of the western societies. It is in this sense that, for Horkheimer, the symbols, the experiences and the religious language spontaneously express the rejection of the abysmal condition of the existence created by the contradictions of life, and, this way, proclaim the non-historical redemption of an absolute harmony in the reality.

The objective of the radical critic of his works is not, in any hypothesis, deny the modernity and its reason, but to promote a self criticism and self-reflexive illustration, that is able to break this logic from all the reasons it imposed on its descendants, and through the undeniable progress in freedom and in catastrophe. Only “breaking” this logic – that’s how Horkheimer thinks now together with Benjamin and Adorno – breaking, this way, the linear progress dominated by it, the history can achieve “the
principles of humanity”, the emancipate ideals that the modern reason proposes itself as an horizon\textsuperscript{11}.

Horkheimer does not consider any hypothesis of dogmatic return to the old religious views. However maintaining a distance between from criticism of the illuminist autonomy beseeched by Kant, Horkheimer understands that the expressions of the sacred can seem as a convincing affirmation of a faith that rejects the disease of an unfair life. It is important to observe that, for the Frankfurt thinker, behind all the confessional formulas of religion there’s an experience of the human authenticity that enjoys life and its experience constitutes of solidarity and of affirmation of a necessary subjective, social and natural reconciliation. The symbols of faith causes more on aesthetics fight for the affirmation of lives properly dogmatic truths, because they express hope in the advent of a period not anymore marked by the triumphant of fatalities.

Here in no way, there’s a relation between Theology and Science of the Divine. Theology means the conscience that this world is a phenomenon that it´s not the absolute truth, that it’s not the last reality. Theology is – I consciously express myself with great care – the hope that the injustice in which this world is going through will not be the last dimension and does not have the last word … (theology) is the expression on a faith, of the hope that the executioner does not triumph over the innocent victim\textsuperscript{12}.

The positive reception in Max Horkheimer of the religious already profess by the young Walter Benjamin, can be seem not as a mere nostalgia from the sacred, but as a recognition of the utopian ideals incarnate in the language, in the symbology and in the experience of the sacred. Horkheimer recognizes that religion is a source of solidarity and emancipator ideals that were progressively swallowed by the social modernization. Its reunion with religion breaks with the positivist tradition of a singular logical reason that only conceives one narcissistic reference of interpretation of the world. To him, religion represents a rediscovery of an obfuscated symbolic emancipative power that claims a world truly human.

The confessions must go on existing, however not as dogmas but as expressions of a desire. Because all of us should be together by the faith that what happens in this world, the injustice and the horror, won’t be the last word, the hope that there is one Creator, and that from him we assure in what we denominate as religion\textsuperscript{13}.


\textsuperscript{12} Cf. HORKHEIMER, Max, Anhelo de justicia. Teoría crítica e religión,op.cit, p.169.

\textsuperscript{13} HORKHEIMER, Max, Anhelo de justicia. Teoría crítica e religión,op.cit, p. 119.
However, as we wish to interpret the text, the meaning in and for the symbol, the undescrivable, whom in an absolutely serious way and assuming it own risk, with no safe guarantees, realizes it as news of the implicit strain itself for living in a way that its desire does not weary, in the given ends in each moment, only worries with the other, however only through a desperate denial, this gives testimony of the truth and is a Christian in the meaning of Tillich.  

Leading itself by the imperative of the singularities, Horkheimer seeks to rethink the anthropological idea for there is a reduction in logical-formal interpretation by cognitive science of Cartesian and Kantism. Thus, Horkheimer aligned himself to the first perception of the philosophy of life (Bergson’s philosophy of vitality, for example). On the average in understanding what the therapeutic process that the thinking should lead itself is of the conduct in the direction infinite changing of experience inherent of reality. Although the metaphysics of life’s work for H.Bergson over estimated the intuition and the sensation, deflating the document of thought and hoisting irrational ideas, or simply unethically the approaches of traditional philosophies. It is that Max Horkheimer encountered in theology and in philosophy of Religion by Paul Tillich the symbolic possibility of the manifestation of the Absolute not ontological or not of substantial Totally the Same, which creative horizons that extrapolate the perspective logical configurations of traditional philosophy and of irrationalism from the nihilist philosophy and for that reason, capable to welcome a dimension infinite and open to the subject. In this instant, Tillich appeared as an interlocutor not only for the cause of academic alliance and of friendship that henceforth joined the twentieth century where as the influences themselves diminished at the University of Frankfurt, but met up with some more capable to formulate in a liberating manner that already much time was evident, but until then no one amongst the theologians dared to express, the historical scriptures, and all the references to God, the saints and everything concerned. It shouldn’t be overcome by the literal form but should be understood for its symbolic form. The literal reading is necessary joined by the one whom speaks designated by “integrity”.

For the theologian Paul Tillich the dynamic social renewal today is lamented by economic imperatives and capitalist political orientation. In this manner, that society recreates a system of value, in any mode, perceiving the existence of human life. The future requirements in the industrial sector or in commerce, each time more restricted by the ideas of liberty and the direction of independence within

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the place of economic culture effectual. Yet, following the German theologists the grand mechanism in the production of values increased greatly, transforming itself in wealth capable of shock and to objectify the truths of mankind under the finality of commerce in consumption. Even so, religion and other cultural expression with the skill of philosophy, the expression of destiny in the form of resistance, become a form of heroism. In those cultural spheres, the man and the woman elaborated on questions about the reasons of existence and the profound significance of their lives and respective durations of existence. They perceived that nobody had the answer to existence and so therefore to remain with deficient sciences is an excuse for continued movement to a life of capitalism – that for a time resignified life under the models of success, without ever to affirm for the ultimate dimension in life. Without knowledge whatever may happen with themselves, these individuals placed the loss of significance in their respective lives, the dimension of abyss. Yet, on the other side from this pessimistic immanence, they could discover those religious symbols and the possibility of redemption and freedom until they are lost in the routine of modern society.

Once faith is being possessed by something that touches us unconditionally, all the provisory worries are subordinated to it. The unconditional worry lends to all the other interests to their deepness, direction and unity, based, this way, on man as a person. One life of a character really personal is integral and united in itself; the power that creates this integrity of a person is the faith. Such affirmation would be absurd, if faith would be given credit to things that can not be demonstrated. But this affirmation is not absurd, and obviously true, if faith is being disregarded, it would still touch us unconditionally.\textsuperscript{17}

According to Tillich’s thesis, Horkheimer understands that the heteronomous power of the religious symbolism points to a “kairotic” action that propitiate alternatives to the conduction of the life which was oppressed and with no alternatives, towards a world with more freedom. So, the world that can be manifested in religion harbor an orientation of deep feeling that belongs to the subjective, social and natural changing, refuged for a relation of compassion that are the experiences of manifestation of the images of good. Such, the theology and the religion as such announced by Tillich, engage in favor of the extraordinary reconciliations to the immanency of the oppressions, doing justice to the appeal of the majority of the oppressed and of the wronged ones.

In the capitalist societies, the importance of the economic growth, of the political order, of the payment of the public debt, etc made that the man, woman and child were put in a second tier of importance. If before, the ideals were anthropocentric, now they are “capitalcentrics”. Neither the

philosophy nor the sciences understood the importance of the ideal of life. And, versus this feeling of impotence that nurtures all the desires of rejection of the actual political and economic condition: wise is the one that conforms in contemplating the misery of the world.

I suggest that we call “deepness” that religious dimension presents in the human nature. From this religious dimension we can understand the formulation of passionate questions by the meaning of our existence, and more, the disposition of receiving the varied answers even if not unpleasant. Such idea of religion expresses “an ample concept” (universal) of “human religion”, however it surely defers from everything that is generally shared. Religion can be described as the conviction in the existence of gods or in any God, or also as a set of activities and institutions, or even as the cause of everything surmised in thinking, devotion and obedience. Nobody can deny that the religions intervened in human history are organized in this sense. There, lives the difference between the particular religion and the universal religion.

For Horkheimer as for Tillich\textsuperscript{18}, the modern society is the one that removed the concerns about life, death and its meaning for questions of doing, of constructing and of improving. But to have conscience of the death is also to have conscience of life and vice versa. Only this way, in this symbolic dialogue presents in the living experience, the human being understands the importance of life. In radicalizing these instructions, awake the interest in the experiences fundamentally interconnected to life: “deal with the fundamental experiences that we do with vital interest that we call love, the affirmation of life that we receive and that we can give. A paving, loving and welcoming life is really a human life”\textsuperscript{19}. A theological statement of hope in the critical theory of Horkheimer, is a hermeneutics onset of life in the appreciation of the oppressed. His perception of religion as a cultural sphere in which the individuals articulate liturgical symbols in favor of the total Creator which postulates the possibility of alternatives to the austere economic and fiscal politics of the contemporary State values the dynamics of economical growth in depreciation to the imperatives of life.

**Conclusion**

Herewith, the question opened by Horkheimer and Tillich creates a problem with the fact that very important human expressions, including philosophy, repressed the meaning of existence and of death, causing us to for-


\textsuperscript{19} HORKHEIMER, Max. Anhelo de Justicia. Teoria Crítica e Religião, op. cit. p. 71.
get the existential limits, and, because of this, superficializing the importance of life as a singular and temporal experience. A theology that considers important the theme of existence and death is that one that stimulates the value of life and, because of this, goes down to the deepest roots of the critical conscience in the process of religious exclamation and interrogation. Horkheimer meets again in the religion expressions of the experiences more authentic of men, although they were native of a scatological hope of universal redemption (man, society and nature) and not of dogmatic formulations.

References