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Sociology and Symbolism of Psychopathologies

Homo Patiens. A socio-philosophical concept

The restitution of 'alienation' as a theoretical benchmark for socio-critical approaches. How the transcendental aspects of suffering hint to its progressive potential.

Supervisor:

Prof. Claudio Bonvecchio

Ph.D. Thesis of

Cornelia Stefan

Matriculation nr. 726023

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Foreword

Years ago when I decided to study philosophy I was driven by the enthusiasm to really understand what I was interested in and to get to the bottom of the matter. Quick and easy answers didn't satisfy my curiosity. I really wanted to understand what I was interested in, what moved me and in particular what irritated me. As a result I quickly found that the results of my research were much more fruitful and productive when my philosophical considerations were complemented with other scientific disciplines. My special attention has always been concentrated on social and socio-political issues. These scientific issues risk narrowing their perspective if they exclusively stick to philosophical approaches because psychological and sociological aspects play fundamental roles as well as cultural or biological ones.

When I wrote my diploma thesis, I got very interested in the human psyche and its dynamics. At that time I focused primarily on defense mechanisms and how they influence our thinking and/or thinking models in general. I was fascinated by the unconscious motives, the denied or repressed parts and their effects on our thinking as well as the consequences that resulted from philosophical considerations and questions, especially those of political philosophy.

Since then the fascination with these interdisciplinary contexts has accompanied me and when I decided to do my doctoral thesis it was important for me to find an open-minded faculty where an interdisciplinary approach would be accepted. Luckily I have found one and I am glad about the willingness to welcome such scientific links/approaches.

The thesis is located in the scientific field of social and political philosophy and in many cases the willingness to understand things is not a neutral thirst for knowledge, but a thirst for knowledge that wants social change. If dissatisfaction or criticism of certain social circumstances serves as an occasion for subsequent scientific research activities, as in my case, a clear distinction between positive (descriptive) science and normative value judgments is not possible and a fluent transition to political issues is likely. There are enough scientists who are convinced that normative questions do not belong to science and that they cannot be answered with scientific

methods. Those scientists usually insist on sticking to the classic role of a natural scientist who observes, who analyzes and measures and does not deal with political issues because it is not his/her concern. But even in the sciences, things are not always that easy. When it comes to research programs that deal with biological weapons or exploring the possibilities of psychological warfare, it is unlikely that anyone would deny that the frequent calls for neutrality in the scientific field are simply cynical considering such research topics.

It must be clear that even 'neutrality' itself is a form of opinion, namely an apolitical one, which considers the obvious connection between research and society as insignificant. Especially in the social sciences, scientific questions are explicit and very often at the interface between normativity and facticity. Although I largely share the view that science should primarily provide analysis, explanation, interpretation and knowledge deepening, I also believe that scientists bear responsibility as intellectuals and should criticize when it comes to injustice or suffering; perhaps scientific studies can even stimulate political changes. The essence of science is a dialogue between theory and practice and it always in some way serves the society in which it is located. This applies to medicine, technology, biology as well as social sciences, philosophy or psychology although the methods often differ greatly.

Quantification has become the role model in the scientific community and it leads to a questionable compulsion to justify qualitative methods and different scientific approaches in the humanities and cultural sciences, but also to a strong restriction of the creative potential within the sciences that regards non-classical methodic entries as well as the need to leave well-known paths and try others, wanting to achieve progress and identify new aspects, new views. The original idea of method, which only means *path* - *methodos* - μέθοδος, refers to the fact that it is about the path of knowledge that leads to the understanding of things. But nothing would be more wrong than to assume that there is only one proper way. The increasing restriction of quantitative methods impedes us from using the greatest tool we have – our mind. It is far from being merely logical-rational, it combines, negates, associates, imagines, analyzes, creates, differentiates, evaluates - and does so with the help of pictures, models, symbols, with reference to our experiences, memories and values as well as to our culture and the environment in which we are embedded. It is worth defending

the autonomy of the humanities and their particular methods and more space should be given to creativity and interdisciplinary approaches.

Introduction

A long and intense study of *Critical Theory* and its fruitful combination of psychoanalysis and economic theory helped me get a better understanding of the relationship between the individual and society, as well as deepen the sensitivity of psychological and unconscious dynamics. There is a clear proximity to mental illnesses and other human forms of suffering if you deal with these kinds of topics.

Of course, these various experiences of suffering can never be understood fully if they are treated separately from socio-political or cultural conditions and circumstances. The interconnectedness of the individual and the social is fundamental for this thesis.

Suffering has many faces and it manifests in many different forms. The fact that there are remarkably high numbers of mentally ill people and a striking amount of emotional suffering in our societies was one of the first matters that excited my curiosity. Not only because of the unnecessary forms of suffering due to changeable conditions, but also because a lot of so called ‘wealthy’ people suffer from mental illnesses.

Despite the fact that we are one of the wealthiest and safest regions on Earth, there seem to be some factors that contribute to people's mental health more than prosperity. If you investigate more closely, you will even recognize an upward trend. Both the number of people suffering from depression and the range of anxiety disorders and all forms of addiction are steadily increasing (according to the WHO).¹ That all these disorders have increased certainly means that in some way it is a social phenomenon and cannot be interpreted only as individual mismanagement or individual pathology. Burn-out disorders have become well known in our societies and despite their individual numbers, they have to do with the rise of the vulnerability,² as sociologists call it, of our western societies. This means that the susceptibility to mental illness has grown significantly. And a look at the social

1 See <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs396/en/> (seen on 15.01.2018).

2 Vulnerability means the inability of a person, a system (society) to withstand the effects of a hostile and potentially damaging environment.

changes of recent decades confirms this diagnosis. Precarious working conditions, increasing stress, pressure to perform, fear of poverty or social decline, individualization tendencies including social isolation - all these are keywords that point to difficult social conditions.³

Even though not everyone is getting mentally ill, we are increasingly reaching the limits of our capacity and resilience.⁴ Of course, one could argue that there is a general medicalization and pathologization tendency in our societies and that it is a lucrative business to make diagnoses, prescribe medicine and offer therapies - especially in times when self-optimization is very popular and the pressure to compete has become greater than ever. The fact is that a detailed analysis of the cultural context is essential for a better understanding and to be able to assess its meaning and development.

The social dimension of mental suffering cannot be denied and its increasing growth should worry us. Unfortunately a broader politicization of this topic is not taking place and obviously political topics hardly play a role in therapy settings. The primary aim of therapy is to help the patient develop adequate individual solutions or to make one fit for social requirements again. But especially discourses in therapist rooms point out the social dimension of the individual diseases and their different excessive demands in the everyday life of neoliberal societies. Due to the fact that we have to face a broad range of challenges, like climate change, refugees, unemployment, social injustice etc, it is bad news that we maneuver into a situation in which we are less willing to act with solidarity (keyword *depoliticization*)⁵ and that we actually seem to self-sabotage our capacity to deal with those difficulties by creating an environment that tends to make many of us suffer or even become ill (burnout).

Nevertheless, there are many people in many different fields (literature, music, documentaries, social science etc.) that are dealing with such issues which show that these developments and problems concern a lot of people. In recent years numerous

3 See R.-D. HEPP, *Prekariesierung und Flexibilisierung = Precarity and flexibilisation*, Westfälisches Dampfboot Verlag, Münster 2012.

4 See A. GIDDENS, *Die Konstitution der Gesellschaft. Grundzüge einer Theorie der Strukturierung*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt am Main/New York 1988.

5 See C. CROUCH, *Postdemokratie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2008.

publications have emerged which have tried to theoretically grasp those phenomena of psychological suffering and their social dimensions, including some bestsellers like Alain Ehrenberg's *Das Unbehagen in der Gesellschaft* (2010)⁶, Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979)⁷, Charles Taylor *The Malaise of Modernity* (1991)⁸ or Zygmunt Bauman *Postmodernity and its discontents* (1997)⁹. All these discourses and theories deal with social pathologies and seek a global perspective to explain their causes. Social diagnoses are provided and the starting point is almost always a feeling of discomfort, dissatisfaction or suffering, and consequently a desire to improve the situation. These theories are attempts to understand the current socio-political developments and give them a frame of interpretation.

What does it mean for a society when mental suffering increases? Could it be an indicator that our western society is developing into a problematic direction? And if so, can the experience of suffering caused by socio-political conditions be interpreted as symptoms of pathological social developments that show psychological (sometimes even anthropological) limits? And furthermore, could we possibly interpret suffering as a (borderline) experience that gives us orientation for political and social criticism?

Particularly in the context of political and social philosophy of the *Frankfurt School*, mental illness and its social dimension play an important role and almost every author (Adorno, Fromm, Marcuse, Horkheimer, etc.) considers them in their philosophical theories. Therefore, it would be obvious to assume that these socio-philosophical approaches may refer to experiences of suffering as the starting point for their criticism. But that is not the case. Instead, the theoretical starting point for most socially critical works is the idea of alienation or normative-idealistic beliefs that are not realized in our societies. Although there is often an indirect reference to suffering, it is by no means used as a basis for social criticism, and in some cases even a reference to suffering is omitted, which means that criticism only takes place

6 See A. EHRENBURG, *Das Unbehagen in der Gesellschaft*, Suhrkamp, Berlin 2011.

7 See C. LASCH, *The Culture of Narcissism. American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York/London 1979.

8 See C. TAYLOR, *The Malaise Of Modernity*, (CBC Massey Lectures) House of Anansi Press Concord Ontario, 1991.

9 See Z. BAUMAN, *Postmodernity and its discontents*, New York University Press, New York 1997.

at the level of different cultural values. The more I dealt with the notion of deception or the so-called *Entfremdung*, the more I came to believe that it is an extremely problematic concept and that the time may have come to replace it.

That is why I began to deal with the question of what a meaningful socio-philosophical critique would theoretically have to provide and whether it would be possible and reasonable to base a critical theory of society directly on the experience of suffering of men. This evolved into the project of this dissertation.

Scientific goal

The initial question is whether suffering can be used as a meaningful reference for a critical socio-philosophical theory (*Frankfurter Schule*). Therefore, on the one hand, the problematic concept of alienation which plays a prominent role especially in socio-critical theories will be precisely analyzed and problematized, and on the other hand, I will focus on the philosophical dimensions and implications of suffering.

If we compare the various theories of alienation, at least those that I consider to be meaningful and well-argued, then they have one thing in common: they all need reference to human suffering, otherwise the call for change or criticism remains idealistic, questionable and abstracted from men.

Of course, suffering manifests itself in various forms and the intensity of the diverse sufferings also differs greatly. In this respect, the term of suffering should be analyzed accurately and examined in detail to understand which forms of suffering could be used for a socio-critical approach. What suffering is can ultimately be said only by those who suffer. Therefore it is very important to capture the collective dimension of suffering. It is not always clear where suffering begins or where and when it will appear. It shows itself in the very moment and the very context. Only in

concrete everyday life and in the intersubjective context can suffering be recognized¹⁰ as suffering and may productively be used for a socio-critical discourse.

Social and political developments can only be at the service of human beings if they put concrete and real people at the center of their considerations and efforts. In this respect and for this thesis, men will fundamentally be considered as *homo patiens*, as sufferers. So suffering is to be taken seriously and where social causes appear to be the cause of suffering, suffering is undoubtedly worthy of politicization - if one strives for social development and a more human society. So we have to search for the societal reasons of the particular suffering that we refer to. It is the only way to formulate reasonable critique and to be able to provide socio-political recommendations or political demands.

But it is not only about ethics. To put suffering at the center of the theory does not only mean to prevent suffering, as suggested in *negative utilitarianism*, but it also seeks to work out the productive moment of suffering. The most common approach to human suffering in our *postmodern societies* is to eliminate it because it is seen as bad and senseless. But the thesis of this dissertation is that suffering in most cases has at least one function and that is to reveal our anthropological interconnectedness between the social, the psychological, the biological and the cultural spheres. To claim a productive moment of suffering is not a cynical valuation, but the mere recognition that many forms of human suffering carry a potential for social development and point to the need of more adequate and suitable societal conditions for people.

To make this possible, it is proposed to read human suffering as a symptom. First of all symptom is a *sign*, whose meaning is not revealed at first sight and instead refers to something hidden. In this sense, they are "signposts" that represent a certain truth. To stay with this metaphor, the occurrence of a symptom means first of all that something is going wrong; something is problematic or has become dysfunctional. It does not say anything about the causes yet. Fever, for example, can have many causes, but the sign of fever is a kind of "*defence mechanism*" of the body that tells us that we need to change something. The same applies to the experience of

10 See A. HONNETH, *Kampf um Anerkennung. Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1992; C. TAYLOR, *Multiculturalism: Examining The Politics of Recognition*, Princeton University Press, 1994.

suffering. Suffering a symptom, is primarily a sign that something has become problematic. This can be on an individual level, this can have social, biological, psychological or completely different reasons. Furthermore suffering draws our attention to a *boarder* that we cannot cross without being consequently confronted with suffering. So one could say that suffering interpreted as a symptom is a kind of negation of the actual state. Something is missing, is problematic, contradictory and therefore produces suffering or pain. Where we encounter suffering we have the chance not only to combat this suffering as quickly as possible, but to penetrate it analytically, to understand it, and above all, to recognize and clarify its causes and connections to get to its productive moment. Since the initial question is directly related to the question of social development, the main concern is to look at the social dimension of suffering and pay particular attention to that aspect. That is the only way to point out where political changes could have important and desirable effects for the society and reduce unnecessary suffering.

This concept insists on the importance of anthropocentric conceptions for political and social theories which are interested in improving our social lives. Postmodern theories often lose the "vulnerability and limitations" of man, out of sight because they give too much importance to the cultural and flexible aspects of human beings and consider humanity almost infinitely malleable, while mainly systemic and cultural limitations or restrictions are perceived. But it is precisely the experience of suffering that proves that people are not infinitely shapeable and cannot adapt themselves perfectly to all external conditions without suffering from them. Suffering is always an interwoven phenomenon of culture, nature and sociality.

Although I share the very skeptical attitude of anthropological essentialism, I also believe that questions like what is man, what distinguishes us etc. still need to be asked and discussed. Because answering those questions seems to be difficult, tricky or almost impossible, it is even more risky not to think about them at all. In every theory of society there must also be a theory of man and implicitly it is almost always included. Often it is not explicitly addressed and then theories tend to base on idealistic and unrealistic ideas of mankind which determines the further theoretical approach in an undesirable and problematic way. Of course, it makes a difference to socio-philosophical theory whether I start from the nature of man, which I believe good in itself and that gets distorted by society or if I believe that people in their

natural state are beasts and culture needs to civilize their human nature. If such implicit assumptions are not examined for their soundness, this can have problematic consequences for the development of an entire social theory.

Therefore I choose a very pragmatic approach in which I do not attempt a general determination of *human essence*, but I try only to specify the anthropological ‘coordinates’ of reference that I consider useful for the possibility of a meaningful social criticism. There is no need for essentialist assumptions, since the relation to suffering itself has a process-like character and changes, shifts or re-constellates over and over again. At the same time, however, consistent patterns can be identified in this natural process which we can call anthropological constants (while possible changes are not excluded). This affects a variety of features that most people share, such as sociality, vulnerability, mortality or the matter of fact that all humans suffer under certain conditions.

With the concept of suffering a socio-political criticism can be formulated, which starts with the subject in a first step and then interrogates suffering and its *bio-psycho-social* dimensions in order to open or widen the field for a political and ethical discourse. What are the general implications that underlie these particular experiences of suffering? A meaningful politicization of subjective experiences of suffering can only take place and contribute to stimulating social development after this question will be resolved.

Methodology

Because of my long and intense study of the scientific tradition of the *Frankfurt School*, I feel very connected to it. Although I now have a much more critical approach to it, I consider the principle of interdisciplinary combination of philosophy, social science, psychoanalysis and economic theory to be extremely profitable for political and social philosophy. Despite the great differences that will emerge in the present work, I have acquired this interdisciplinary approach for my own work. The proximity to Marxist theory, for example, has been adopted formally as an insight into the importance of economic topics for socio-philosophical considerations and how important it is to take these societal influences seriously, to

problematize and analyze them. Likewise, I believe that the deliberate recourse to psychoanalytic theories is an important step towards a better understanding of the relationship between the individual and society as well as to a better understanding of the *intra-psychic dynamics* that influence and sometimes determine our behavior. Especially, very rationalistic theories quickly run the risk of fabricating idealistic models because they underestimate psychological aspects, such as feelings, desires, unconscious motives, etc., and obviously do not enter into their considerations. There will also be references to empirical sociological outputs because I am convinced that the value of philosophical considerations can only be measured and evaluated in comparison to empirical data or experience.

The reference to psychoanalytic theory is certainly an important approach on which parts of my reasoning are based. However, the literature used extends from its founder *Sigmund Freud* to *Erich Fromm* and *Jacques Lacan*. Some original approaches may be considered obsolete and in some cases they are simply overtaken or considered irrelevant speculations. Nevertheless, psychoanalytic theory offers a rich psychodynamic vocabulary and contains a highly elaborate meta-theory that can be used in many cases. I think that psychoanalytic meta-theory does a great deal to understand the complexity of the human psyche, its socialization, its structures and its influences on our specific behaviors and worldviews.

Even though there is a long tradition of criticizing psychoanalysis and I partially agree with it (like the *Todestrieb* – death drive concept), there are hardly any alternative schools that do not rely on psychoanalytic concepts in their meta-theory. (Except radical behaviorists, whose models, however, for culture and social theory are extremely poor and hardly usable – stimulus-response-reactions, black box models.) But many of these theories were also largely expanded in the last decades during the *cognitivist turn* and basically approximated to psychoanalytic models including motivational and cognitive aspects as well as emotion theory which is reflected *cognitive-behavioral therapy*.

The main reasons for choosing certain psycho-individual theories (while others will simply be ignored) will be quickly explained. Only those models will be adopted that can be applied to my own philosophical contemplations and that are convincingly argued, that can be understood and related to one's own experiences. The priority isn't to adopt a stringent theory of one psychoanalytic author, but to

broaden and supplement the philosophical perspective by including other scientific tools that help clarify the research questions. Therefore, the choice of the authors is significantly linked to their models and their terminology, which proved to be useful for my work in order to get a deep insight of the essential aspects of the human world experience. It is all about using what is useful for my own access and if necessary also to modify the concepts to make them suitable for a socio-philosophical perspective; and not primarily about a precise reproduction of the original models.

The selection of these three authors was relatively fast, due to their strong social and societal references in their models or the whole work. Freud, especially in his later works, wrote many cultural-philosophical texts,¹¹ just as Fromm did within the research of the Frankfurt School, unfolding a very socio-critical position. Lacan's theory has often been cited by social critics, especially in France, and many of his models were adopted and developed for societal areas (Cornelius Castoriadis)¹². Adorno and Fromm will be the primary socio-philosophical references, both from the tradition of the Frankfurt School. In addition, Nietzsche's thinking will supplement or sometimes contrast the various psychoanalytical models as well as the socio-critical ones of the Frankfurter Schule, since his special sense for psychic and social phenomena has not lost importance until today. Due to the fact that large parts of the thesis are referring to German speaking authors, the quotes are maintained in their original language. Nevertheless, the aim of the thesis was to assure that one who does not speak German at all will equally be able to understand and follow the argumentation of the thesis.

Structure

The *first chapter* attempts to give a brief overview of the beginnings of *critical social theory* within political philosophy and to show the central role that the concept of *alienation* (*Entfremdung*) plays in these theories. Some essential features will be highlighted and discussed. The focus will be on implicit and explicit anthropological

11 See S. FREUD, *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion* (1939), *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930), *Zukunft einer Illusion* (1927).

12 See C. CASTORIADIS, *L'institution imaginaire de la société*, Le Seuil, Paris 1971.

assumptions, which are closely related to concepts of alienation and their soundness will be examined precisely. Based on a critical analysis of the most prominent representatives (Rousseau, Marx, Adorno) who all base their work on some kind of alienation model. Additionally, two new redesigns of the alienation concept of Hartmut Rosa and Rahel Jaeggi, which have recently been published, will be discussed shortly because they recognize many of the problematic tendencies of the alienation concept and review it carefully. The aim of this chapter is to analyze the difficulties and problematic tendencies of the different concepts of alienation and to point out and prepare a reasonable basis for my own socio-political approach which is based on suffering experiences instead.

In the *second chapter*, preliminary philosophical considerations and theoretical presuppositions will follow to provide a clear theoretical basis and well-chosen reference points. These considerations are mainly related to postmodern theories. A lot of postmodern critiques have had fundamental effects on philosophical thinking. Therefore, some of the most important criticisms shall be discussed. That regards the critique of *logocentrism* (Derrida¹³, Lyotard¹⁴), ethical relativism, social constructivism (Luckmann)¹⁵, subject theories and the modernist belief in progress – all these will be critically discussed to elaborate a clear positioning, which is of great relevance for the present work of critical social theory. All in all, it will provide a framework for the further thesis, including theoretical presuppositions and normative references (commitments).

The *third chapter* discusses anthropological considerations, which are necessary reference points for the drafting of social theory based on suffering. The main focus will be to clarify the relationship between humans and their nature and the relationship between the individual and society. These considerations are supplemented by psychoanalytic concepts and models that help to ensure that the different questions are closely related to the concrete human being and that they do not fall into idealistic speculation. Human adaptability and the psychoanalytic

13 See J. DERRIDA, *Grammatologie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1976.

14 See J.F. LYOTARD, *Das Inhumane. Plaudereien über die Zeit*, Passagen, Wien 2004.

15 See T. LUCKMANN, P.L. BERGER, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Anchor Books, New York 1966.

conception of sublimation will play an important role in this chapter and shall help deepen the understanding of human adaption and its limits.

In the *fourth chapter* I will try to give a global perspective on what suffering is and how it is seen in different areas. The experience of suffering will be illuminated from the philosophical, psychological and religious perspectives, and the various forms of suffering will be discussed (social, physical, psychological, existential) as well as how these various forms of suffering are handled culturally and how they could possibly be categorized in patterns of behavior.

In the *fifth chapter*, finally, suffering shall be presented as the center point of a socio-critical theory. Therefore, suffering will be examined for its functions to expound their underlying dimensions which can be useful for a socio-philosophical approach. Through the imminent desire for its self-abolition, suffering opens up a space of possibility to transcend the current status-quo and wishes to change it. First, it will be shown that suffering can be a useful starting point of socio-critical considerations instead of the concept of alienation and that it carries the potential of a developmental moment. The interpretation of suffering as a symptom serves to highlight the necessity to precisely analyze the dynamics of suffering and to work out the causes of suffering, especially if they are caused by societal conditions. So if societal causes of suffering can be identified, this can be the starting point for serious social criticism as well as for the politicization of suffering.

Chapter I

Farewell to the concept of Alienation

*Abschiede sind Tore in neue Welten*¹.

One of the most prominent terms, especially within left-wing social theory, is certainly *alienation*. It is used in almost all important theories as a reference point for social criticism, sometimes only implicitly, and theoretically not very well founded, but in most theories it is used explicitly and with clear references. Therefore it should receive special attention.

In the review of relevant literature it almost seems as though social criticism could hardly be formulated without some kind of idea of alienation. And in fact, right up to the recent past, it played an important role that should not be underestimated, especially in Marxist theories. But it has slowly disappeared in recent decades. Nevertheless, authors like Hartmut Rosa or Rahel Jaeggi, for example, most recently have again taken up the discussion about the concept of alienation and have seriously tried to rehabilitate it. In their reformulations, they take up important points of criticism in order to take them into account and to master the various difficulties that come along with this term trying to liberate it from its unreflected ballast. All in all, these experiments can be interpreted as interesting and inspiring approaches to this rather bulky term and I will also briefly discuss Jaeggi's and Rosa's work in the end of this chapter and explain why I prefer not to reactivate the idea of alienation anyway. In the following critique, various conceptions of alienation will be deconstructed to clearly work out what I believe to be the most important reasons to abandon it.

Since the work is based on the socio-critical tradition of the *Frankfurt School* in particular, a brief overview should be given about the main concepts of alienation within *Critical Theory*. The selection will be limited to the socio-critical works of Adorno and Fromm and regarding *Die Dialektik der Aufklärung*, this includes Max

1 A. EINSTEIN (1879 – 1955).

Horkheimer as he was the co-author of this famous book. These two authors and their socio-philosophical works will play a constant role in this thesis. For this reason, it seems sensible for a better understanding to analyze their socio-critical arguments in more detail.

In addition, it will be shown in historical retrospect that the idea of alienation of man from his origin goes back to at least the time of the *Old Testament*, possibly even further. From there it is like a red thread of the alienation-idea running through history. This theoretical benchmark is to be followed and will be located and examined via Rousseau, Hegel and Marx to the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School. In particular, the explanations regarding the concept of alienation serve the purpose of identifying exactly how it is used and highlighting what the various problems associated with the use of this term are. All this serves as a preliminary reasoning for my proposal to replace the concept of alienation with suffering.

The reason for the intense study of the notion of alienation on the one hand is due to the frequency and centrality of this theorem in social theory because although it has seemingly vanished its main underlying assumptions are still valid in socio-critical thinking, namely the dichotomy between *right* and *false* in the societal field, which means right and false behavior or the idea of authentic live vs. alienated societal life and so on. The dichotomy proposed in this thesis instead is those between *suffering* and *not suffering*. In the 5th chapter this will be discussed in more detail.

1.1. What is Alienation?

They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts².

The idea of alienation goes far back in history. This motive can be found in the *Old Testament*, and even though it is not named *alienation*, the resemblance of the idea is striking. I will later come back to this in more detail. Since the present work pursues not historical, but philosophical interests, it is left open whether older

2 *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 4, 18.

references could be found, for example in antiquity (Egyptian high culture). The reasoning is primarily oriented to show that there is a long tradition of this idea.

In addition, it shall be shown that within this discourse there is a mixture of two completely different concepts of alienation, which, however, must be strictly separated from each other because otherwise an unnecessary complication of this conceptual field occurs. On the one hand, it is about an *existential concept* of alienation that cannot be translated meaningfully into a socio-critical style and that does not even pursue this goal; on the other hand, it is about those concepts of alienation that explicitly target social criticism and try to identify specific cultural practices as problematic. The aim of such theories is certainly emancipatory or at least illuminating.

Nonetheless, until the 1980s it was even hard to imagine public discourse without referring to alienation.³ But it was also often criticized and certain intellectuals always had serious doubts about its conclusiveness and usefulness. The most powerful criticism refers to its essentialist traits, which suggest or even assert an original or true human essence that has been lost by an alienating process. There are various disagreements on the concrete anthropological assumptions that are made to justify these ideas.

If one attempts to give an overview of the different meanings of alienation, the list quickly gets long: sometimes the *objectification* of interpersonal relationships is characterized as a form of alienation, which only uses humans for different purposes (Adorno). This includes the fundamental form of alienation, which Marx characterizes as the exploitation of people by people⁴ and which can be seen as the reason why people are ultimately degraded to mere commodities. Sometimes alienation refers to the general *marketization* or *commodification* of the modern life in western capitalist societies, including the transformation of previously non-market sectors (Marcuse).⁵ Then it is associated with the division of labor and its *specializations*, or with the degeneration of human potential due to monotonous and dull working conditions that would stifle any creativity and individuality (Fromm).

3 See R. JAEGGI, *Entfremdung, Zur Aktualität eines sozialphilosophischen Begriffs*, Suhrkamp, Berlin 2016, p. 11.

4 See K. MARX, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*, in: K. MARX, F. ENGELS, *Kleine ökonomische Schriften*, Berlin 1955, p. 98.

5 See H. MARCUSE, *Vernunft und Revolution*, Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, Darmstadt 1976.

Another meaning is the enslavement of man through the material world produced and created by men itself, which is also called *estrangement* (Marx) and alienation also means the socialization in our complex modern living environment in contrast to past, smaller structured life forms in communities (Tönnies)⁶.

Furthermore the one-dimensionality of modern life in a consumer and mass society (Adorno). In other circumstances, alienation means the loss of social and religious traditions (Durkheim)⁷ or the deprivation of the way of life through the expanding rule of rationality and the *disenchantment* of the lifeworld (Weber).⁸ And finally, as just mentioned, there are also existential concepts of alienation which interpret social structure itself as a place of being objectified by the fellow man (through the gaze of the other – Sartre) or alienation due to the suppression of an irrepressible desire for meaning in the face of a meaningless world (Albert Camus).

I think it suffices to break off the list at this point, even though not all the facets of this dazzling term have been cited. But it certainly illustrates the difficulty one faces when referring to this term. Much of the stated ideas are closely related to Marxist thought, and despite this connection the variety of the term is difficult to grasp.

The starting point for the various conceptualizations of alienation is mostly a specific area of life, a specific way of life, a specific appropriation of the world that seems to be problematic (working conditions, marketization, rationalization) and leads the subject to an alienating process. This process of alienation begins with a division, a distance, a dissociation from something. At this point, it has to be clarified what this essence could be from which one may have moved away. Because otherwise the criticism which the term implies runs the risk of becoming arbitrary. There are many different ideas about what this original true essence could be. A large proportion of the authors argue with an idealistic reference to ideas such as the *lost paradise*. Freud's conception of the *primordial horde* (*Urhorde*)⁹ can serve as an example, as well as Rousseau's *homme naturel* or the Christian mythologist of the former paradise.

6 See F. TÖNNIES, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundbegriffe der reinen Soziologie*, Profil Verlag, München/Wien 2017.

7 See E. DURKHEIM, *Die elementaren Formen des religiösen Lebens*, Verlag der Weltreligionen, Frankfurt am Main 2007.

8 See M. WEBER, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, Beck, München 2006.

9 See S. FREUD, *Totem und Tabu*, Fischer Taschenbuch-Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1995.

Most alienation concepts are based on speculative ideas and have to be evaluated as pure claims. Presumably, this is one of the reasons why the alienation concept is rejected by many theorists: because it remains too often a romantic term. The question about the human essence from which someone gets alienated is about a human anthropological nucleolus. Only if we can state the essence of man can we meaningfully speak of alienation. But we will later see that anthropological definitions do not necessarily lead to essentialism. Some authors who use the alienation concept do not refer to some kind of human essence, but claim a certain way of relating to the world, that is considered sane and natural, but that has been lost, or replaced by an unnatural or insane relation to the world. Nonetheless, these kinds of concepts are problematic as well because they do not take into account that the world and humans constantly change and that it may be part of human nature to adjust in order to survive, and that not every alienation is automatically bad. But we will turn to this problem in more detail in chapter three.

A large portion of alienation concepts are based on a critique of the current societal conditions. In any case, this means that one does not agree with the status quo, considers it as a disabling experience, as harmful and wants to improve the situation. The perceived and unpleasant distance should be removed again, if this is considered possible.

At this point, we face the question of how to deal with the alienation. Depending on the concepts of alienation, the solutions differ quite a lot. Some solutions suggest educational ideas, others therapeutic proposals, but you can also find revolutionary projects or utopian drafts. The discourse about alienation is therefore close to the ethical question of a good and happy life, what characterizes it and how to reach it.

1.2. Historical location of the Alienation motif - giant strides from paradise

*Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen*¹⁰.

10 T.W. ADORNO, *Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2003.

As already mentioned, the motif of alienation can historically be tracked a long way back. The Christian doctrine of the *Fall of man* or the *original sin* (*primum peccatum*) can certainly be interpreted in this form. The story of the *Old Testament* about the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise refers to the idea of an original homeland of men in paradise, where they lacked nothing, and abundance was everywhere. Because of female curiosity the serpent was able to seduce her to transgress God's only prohibition (eating from the tree of knowledge), and therefore they were expelled from paradise.

Since then, their descendants have been wandering around, suffering, living in sin and damned to death. The metaphor of this myth is about the meaning of suffering or the existential hardships and worries that have always accompanied people as well as showing a way out of this damnation. The answer to the cause of suffering is the disobedience to God and the hubris associated with disobeying him and instead gaining a fatal knowledge that blocks the return to Paradise forever.

Of course, the story would be pointless without the provided salvation in the form of Christian eschatology, which finally allows for redemption to be achieved. Through godliness and divine grace this can be a possible way for everyone. Although this story seems to be a fateful tragedy, it does provide something essential, namely an explanation for the often inexplicable suffering experiences, as Nietzsche already stated: «Was eigentlich gegen das Leiden empört, ist nicht das Leiden an sich, sondern das Sinnlose am Leiden»¹¹.

Secondly, it also offers hope for a final salvation through faith. This religious template has been a kind of alienation thesis of the Fall from Western societies for centuries and can certainly be interpreted as an attempt to deal with negative existential concerns and questions about seemingly meaningless suffering and feelings of injustice. To give these grueling feelings and urgent but unsolved questions a discursive framework, they were embedded in a symbolically meaningful explanatory model. Of course, this notion of alienation is still far from being social criticism. Nonetheless, its main features reflect all the existential concepts of alienation which will be taken up by Sartre or Camus and other existentialists in the 20th century.

11 F. NIETZSCHE, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, in: K. Schlechta (Ed.), *Friedrich Nietzsche: Werke in drei Bänden*, Hanser Verlag, München 1954, p. 898.

1.3. Rousseau and the romantic idea of the *homme naturel*

Jusques ici j'ai vu beaucoup de masques,
quand verrai-je des visages d'hommes?¹²

With one of the pioneers of the Enlightenment, namely Jean-Jacques Rousseau, social criticism in the modern sense was practiced for the first time. The ecclesiastical demands for world explanation and truth, which had been indisputable authorities for centuries, were increasingly questioned from the Reformation onwards. During the modern age, socially critical writings diffused more and more and their number constantly increased. Of course, this was directly related to the omission of metaphysical explanatory models and new modes of reasoning, which opened the way for reflection and for criticizing the concrete historical, social conditions as they were no longer God-given and fateful, but modifiable and man-made. When Rousseau writes, that in contrast to the *savage*, men in culture are completely dependent from the judgment and opinion of the others¹³ and because of courtesy and mannerliness we do no longer listen to our inner voices, but only the tradition¹⁴, it is clear that for Rousseau, society itself is considered as a deficient state that alienates humans from their true nature. It also reminds us of the existentialist work of Sartre, who identified the other (or the glance of the other) as the cause for alienation, which is a fundamental a-social concept of human nature.¹⁵ This obviously romanticizes cultural and social criticism which blames civilization for forcing people to renounce their original autonomy, authenticity and individuality and even impedes an immediate intuitive encounter with the world. The civilization process is therefore interpreted as a process of decay. The theoretical foundation for his cultural criticism is the manifestation of moral decay in his day, «[...] soziale Phänomene der Ungleichheit und der Arbeitsteilung, politische Phänomene des

12 J.-J. ROUSSEAU, *Julie ou La nouvelle Héloïse. Lettre de deux amants habitants d'une petite ville au pied des Alpes recueillies et publiées par Jean-Jacques*, p.140, https://www.ecole-alsacienne.org/CDI/pdf/1301/130128_ROU.pdf, (seen on 12.01.2018).

13 See ID., *Abhandlung über den Ursprung und die Grundlagen der Ungleichheit unter den Menschen*, in: *Schriften zur Kulturkritik*, Meiner, Hamburg 1971, p. 265.

14 See ID., *Über Kunst und Wissenschaft (1750). Über den Ursprung der Ungleichheit unter den Menschen (1755)*, in: *Schriften zur Kulturkritik*: Meiner, Hamburg 1995, p. 11.

15 See J.-P. SARTRE, *Das Sein und das Nichts*, Rowholt, Hamburg 1993.

Tugendverfalls und der Unfreiheit, ökonomische Phänomene des Luxuskonsums und der Geldabhängigkeit».¹⁶

The anthropological reference for his cultural criticism is the idea of the *homme naturel*. While Hobbes, on the contrary, assumed the natural state to be the *bellum omnium contra omnes*, Rousseau assumes that men are naturally good, and that it is society that promotes his vices. In the romance novel *Julie or The New Heloise* (1761), feelings, passion and naturalness are compared to suppressed society and its conventional moralism. The educational utopia of *Émile* (1762) is directed against the social conditioning of the human being by parents, school and church.¹⁷

The romantic construction of the past, when humans were natural and good and healthy in themselves, is based on a meaningful functionality of nature, that ruled the ancient life. Nevertheless, Rousseau does not believe that a return to this nature would be possible¹⁸. The conception of the *Contrat Social* supports this point of view. In the book *Émile* he conceives an education that is geared to the specific peculiarities of the educated person, so that it finally satisfies ones needs.¹⁹ The social diagnosis and the subsequent ‘therapy’ of Rousseau is the opposite of the religious salvation idea of expecting paradise in the hereafter and praying for the grace of God and salvation. He pleads to change concrete social conditions and miseries.

Thus, a clear break can be identified between a metaphysical explanation and a secular and educational one. While religion calls for the assumption of fate, Rousseau's criticism leads to concrete instructions and specific practices with a socially changing character: politics and pedagogy. It is therefore not surprising that Rousseau was zealously quoted in the course of the *French Revolution* and became one of their philosophical, intellectual and political reference points.

16 G. BOLLENBECK, *Eine Geschichte der Kulturkritik: von J.J. Rousseau bis G. Anders*, C.H. Beck, München 2007, p. 42.

17 See *ibid.*, p. 30.

18 See U. REITMEYER, T. ZUMHOF (Ed.), *Rousseau zur Einführung*, LIT Verlag, Berlin 2014, p. 35.

19 See *ibid.*

1.4. The concept of Alienation in Hegel and Marx

Wir haben uns über unser Dasein vor uns selbst zu verantworten; folglich wollen wir auch die wirklichen Steuermänner dieses Daseins abgeben und nicht zulassen, dass unsre Existenz einer gedankenlosen Zufälligkeit gleiche²⁰.

If we go one step further in history, we come across Hegel, who first introduces the notion of *alienation* - not just the term itself, but the actual concept as well. He refers to the process of alienation in which man alienates from himself by experiencing the results of his work as a separate, strange entity. In his conception of *Dialektik*, the idea of alienation plays an important role. His dialectic principle is based on a three-step process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. The idea is that the inherent contradiction of things produces a dialectical process with a progressive tendency that leads to higher levels. This process also eliminates self-alienation and finally ends in the conclusion of history. For Hegel, therefore, alienation is a necessary part of the incompleteness of the world and cannot be prevented or removed. The implicit idea of progress, which approximates the absolute spirit (*absolute Weltgeist*) step by step, also reduces the alienation process.²¹

Hegel's influence on Marx was immense and Marx adopted a wide range of his ideas, including his *dialectic*.²²

First of all he analyzes the relationship between humans and their work as an *animal laborans* which is considered specific to humans. Due to the needs of life, man is compelled to work, and according to Marx, nobody can escape from the principle of alienation in the working process. This alienation takes place in the form of objectification and is constitutive for Marx's idea of work.²³ Goethe's *Sorcerer's Apprentice* metaphor (*Zauberlehrling*) describes the mechanism of work par excellence. Everything created by humans becomes an alienated, autonomous power. The products of men become independent and subordinate men to their own laws, which we, modernly speaking, would probably call system-constraint. But Marx's idea of radical alienation implies that the products created have to be expropriated.

20 F. NIETZSCHE, *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, in: K. Schlechta (Ed.), *Werke in drei Bänden*, Band 1, Hanser Verlag, München 1954, p. 289.

21 See A. KOJÈVE, *Hegel. Eine Vergegenwärtigung seines Denkens: Kommentar zur Phänomenologie des Geistes*, I. Fetscher (Ed.), Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1997, p. 49.

22 See G.W.F. HEGEL, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in: J. Hoffmeister (Ed.), *Meiner Verlag*, Hamburg, 1952.

23 See H. MARCUSE, *Vernunft und Revolution*, Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, Darmstadt 1976, p. 249.

This expropriation leads to an asymmetrical form of power and is the basis of exploitation. This asymmetry points out quite clearly that people who have no means of production are forced to sell their labor to guarantee their livelihood and thus find themselves on the side of the exploited. The situation is fatal and unjust because the worker himself does not receive the output of his work and neither the added value which is generated by the workers - the capital owner does. This makes it impossible to get out of this situation because the income gap gets bigger and bigger and therefore at least the power gap. At this point, the general role of money comes into play. Through the business of exchange, everything seems to become available through money (love, talent, work) or as Liessmann writes «Geld zieht alle menschlichen Potenzen an sich»²⁴ The principle of the venality of everything and everyone changes all the relationships, reifies and alienates them.

So let's take an accurate look at Marx's anthropological ideas. According to his statements, men are neither altruistic nor selfish, but through their activity they make themselves what they are in a certain historical period.²⁵ So he follows Hegel in this conception, that men fulfill themselves by their actual doing «Das wahre Sein des Menschen ist vielmehr seine Tat».²⁶ This means that in contrast to a common prejudice, Marx does not assume a static human nature:

«Das menschliche Wesen der Natur ist erst da für den gesellschaftlichen Menschen; denn erst hier ist sie für ihn da als Band mit dem Menschen, als Dasein seiner für den anderen und des anderen für ihn, wie als Lebenselement der menschlichen Wirklichkeit, erst hier ist sie da als Grundlage seines eigenen menschlichen Daseins. Erst hier ist ihm sein natürliches Dasein sein menschliches Dasein und die Natur für ihn zum Menschen geworden. Also die Gesellschaft ist die vollendete Wesenseinheit des Menschen mit der Natur, die wahre Resurrektion der Natur der durchgeführte Naturalismus des Menschen und der durchgeführte Humanismus der Natur»²⁷.

24 K.P. LIESSMANN, *Karl Marx. 1818-1989. Man stirbt nur zweimal*, Wien 1992, p. 81.

25 See I. MÉSZARÓS, *Der Entfremdungsbegriff bei Marx*, List Verlag, München, 1973, p. 184.

26 A. KOJÈVE, *Hegel. Eine Vergegenwärtigung seines Denkens: Kommentar zur Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1997, p. 72.

27 K. MARX, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte, Texte zur Methode und Praxis II*, Reinbeck, 1966, p. 186.

This shows that he conceptualizes human nature as completely social and society as the humanization of nature. This means that Marx assumes a fundamental social and genuinely social nature of human beings and does not think that culture and society are necessarily alienating factors.

In Marx's conception, alienation arises only within certain social conditions that are considered abolishable and changeable. In the Manuscripts, Marx conceives the main features of a new science of men. The whole idea is based on alienated work, which is seen as the causal root of the entire alienation complex. However, Marx's concept of alienation is very complex and there are about four dimensions that can be distinguished.

Man can be alienated from:²⁸

- nature
- himself
- work
- other human beings

In any case, all these different facets have a common origin rooted in the capitalist world which does no good to humans. This circumstance could only be reversed and abolished if first of all people recognized social and economic contradictions and their contradictory consequences. As we know, Marx thinks that the way to change society is to abolish private property, which he imagines taking place in the form of the emancipation of the working class. The realm of freedom begins when work does not have to be done because of distress anymore.²⁹ This utopian or at least romantic hope is very close to the modernist belief in technical progress which would somehow make it possible to create a world without the compulsion to work.

1.5. Alienation and Critical Theory - Adorno and Fromm

Seit je hat die Aufklärung im umfassenden Sinn fortschreitenden Denkens das Ziel verfolgt, von den Menschen die Furcht zu nehmen und sie als Herrn

28 See H.P. DREITZEL, *Die gesellschaftlichen Leiden und das Leiden an der Gesellschaft*, dtv, Stuttgart 1968, p. 4.

29 See K.P. LIESSMANN, *Karl Marx. 1818-1989. Man stirbt nur zweimal*, Wien 1992.

*einzusetzen. Aber die vollends aufgeklärte Erde strahlt im Zeichen triumphalen Unheils*³⁰.

The approaches of the *Frankfurt School* within the Critical Theory are also significantly influenced by Marx and his historical materialism. Nevertheless, their focus of alienation shifts significantly. Although the idea of alienation is always present in Adorno's work Ritz draws attention to the fact that e. g. in Adorno there is no consistent use of the concept of alienation,³¹ which makes it difficult to examine his work. For this reason, in the following remarks as many different facets as possible will be shown, so that one gets a feeling of the idea of alienation in Adorno's scientific work.

One of the key works of the Critical Theory is the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno and it is also a reference point for many authors of this concept of alienation. In this famous book, the two authors base their social criticism on the insight that the alienated ratio in rationalized societies continuously increases its systematic power over people. The supremacy of instrumental rational orientation dominates the capitalist production machinery as well as the bureaucratically controlled economic system. So, the concept of alienation in the Critical Theory characterizes the peculiar perversion of the enlightened world.³²

By controlling nature, through the instrumental relationship of western culture, everything has become a mere tool of men, and so both internal and external nature are only seen as an object of *exploitation* and as a *resource*. Horkheimer and Adorno clearly recognize that the purpose is to decide about the value of reason. This problematic tendency of reason itself can be shown by the horrible crimes during the Holocaust, which pursued completely inhumane goals, but whose means were absolutely rational and technically effective and thereby amplified the effects of the barbarism infinitely.

30 M. HORKHEIMER, T.W. ADORNO, *Dialektik der Aufklärung und Schriften 1940-1950*, in: G. Schmid Noerr (Ed.), *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 5, Fischer Taschenbuchverlag, Frankfurt am Main 1987, p. 25.

31 See E. RITZ, *Entfremdung*, in: J. Ritter, K. Gründer (Ed.): *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Band 2, Darmstadt 1971/1998, pp. 509-525.

32 See M. HORKHEIMER, T.W. ADORNO, *Dialektik der Aufklärung und Schriften 1940-1950*, in: G. Schmid Noerr (Ed.), *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 5, Fischer Taschenbuchverlag, Frankfurt am Main 1987.

To Horkheimer and Adorno, the ideological affinity of Kant's *Kategorischen Imperativ* and instrumental reason, which subordinates everything to its calculating thought, seems to be obvious.³³ In the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* they dedicate this issue to the chapter Juliette oder Aufklärung und Moral about Marquis de Sade, whom they interpret as the covert truth of Kant.

«Die Unmöglichkeit, aus der Vernunft ein grundsätzliches Argument gegen den Mord vorzubringen, nicht vertuscht, sondern in alle Welt geschrien zu haben, hat den Haß entzündet, mit dem gerade die Progressiven Sade und Nietzsche heute noch verfolgen. [...] Indem die mitleidlosen Lehren die Identität von Herrschaft und Vernunft verkünden, sind sie barmherziger als jene der moralischen Lakaien des Bürgertums»³⁴.

The two authors clarify that they are not concerned about reason in general, but their criticism is mainly directed against a particular use of reason and that it is essential to recognize and accept the neutrality of reason regarding its purposes.

In the book *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Horkheimer and Adorno trace how the cultural industry, the use of mass media, advertising, radio, etc. create an all-embracing socialization, the *Totale Vergessellschaftung* (total socialization) as they call it, which inevitably constitutes people and their disposition. Löwenthal (who belongs to the tradition of the Frankfurt School comes to a similar evaluation concerning the influence of the cultural industry. He uses the metaphor of *inverted psychoanalysis* (*Verkehrte Psychoanalyse*). While in the classical psychoanalytic setting, the leitmotif is to elucidate (*wo Es war soll Ich werden*) and to become aware of unconscious motives and beliefs, the goal of the entertainment industry is to address the affects and motivate unreflective actions, which at least shall stimulate the economic market.³⁵

Modern societies tend to capture and penetrate every social area. According to these statements, it can already be seen that the critique of society in Critical Theory

33 See. M. SCHWANDT, *Kritische Theorie. Eine Einführung*, Schmetterling Verlag, Stuttgart 2010, p. 96.

34 M. HORKHEIMER, T.W. ADORNO, *Dialektik der Aufklärung und Schriften 1940-1950*, in: G. Schmid Noerr (Ed.), *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 5, Fischer Taschenbuchverlag, Frankfurt am Main 1987, p. 142.

35 See L. LÖWENTHAL, *Untergang der Dämonologien. Studien über Judentum, Antisemitismus und faschistischen Geist*, Reclam, Leipzig 1990, p. 278.

aims to understand the *totality of society* and not its single areas. Adorno is convinced that modern societies tend to grasp and penetrate every area that once was the concern of individuals. The economic as well as the political and the cultural system have become omnipresent: mass consumption, extensive public administration and the cultural industry are the protagonists in this process. The logic of the overall social progress does not obey human purposes, but rather follows the abstract dynamics of economic expansion.

Regarding this topic, Adorno's studies on the *authoritarian character* helps him to clarify how the cultural imprinting of individuals in a certain society takes place. These studies mainly use the psychoanalytic model to explain the processes. Adorno's analysis comes to the conclusion that the *sadomasochistic compulsive character* of the bourgeois era is characterized by an intra-psychic structure of submission, which arises from a libidinous relation to its own subordination. Thus, any independent identity of the former individuality disappears behind the complete identification with the in-group, which finally means alienation.³⁶

At this point, however, it remains unclear how the ability to think critically can be understood, if socialization is claimed to be total and therefore individuals no longer have their own identity. Necessarily, the question arises of how Adorno imagines a non-alienated society, where society does not penetrate all areas and where identities are not yet culturally captured (transformed) completely. Even though it is illegitimate for Adorno to ask for the objectives of a proper society (because he thinks that the existing state would only provoke false answers), he considers the question inevitable. The criticism of today's society itself implies the possibility and realizability of another world.³⁷ However, due to his consistent but definite negation of the current situation in which he submits his criticism, what he may understand as a non-alienated society can only be concluded indirectly. The image suggested includes satisfying individual needs, as well as freedom understood as the freedom to increase productivity and as freedom to cautiously deal with both the internal and

36 See M. SCHWANDT, *Kritische Theorie, Eine Einführung*, Schmetterling Verlag, Stuttgart 2010, p. 97.

37 See G. SCHWEPPENHÄUSER, *Theodor W. Adorno zur Einführung*, Junius Verlag, Hamburg 2003, p. 95.

external nature.³⁸ Here, Adorno and Fromm are largely in agreement, but Fromm is generally less concerned about the formulation of positive or desirable goals.

Fromm develops the concept of alienation on the basis of psychoanalytic theory, concentrating much more on the subject and the subjective experience. For him, alienation means:

«[...] daß der Mensch zu einer rezeptiven und Marketing-Orientierung regrediert und aufhört, produktiv zu sein; daß er sein Selbst-Gefühl verliert und von der Zustimmung anderer abhängig wird, weshalb er dazu neigt, mit den anderen konform zu gehen und sich trotzdem unsicher zu fühlen. Er ist unbefriedigt, gelangweilt und voller Angst, und er verwendet seine Energie größtenteils auf den Versuch, diese Angst zu kompensieren oder sie einfach nur zu verdecken»³⁹.

This will then be the kind of concept of alienation to which Rosa and Jaeggi in their reformulation refer and which implies the lack of relationship for men in modern societies (relationship to themselves, to others as well as to the world in general). But even Fromm's concept of alienation appears in very different aspects and refers to the most varied forms of suffering, even though the capitalist structure of society certainly attracts the greatest criticism and is regarded as a decisive factor for alienation.

The whole process of life is regarded as an analogy to a favorable investment, whereby one's own life and one's own person are the capital value. Under the concept of the *Marketing-Charakter*, Fromm summarizes the alienated character of capitalism:

«Da der moderne Mensch sich gleichzeitig als Ware auf einem Markt und als Verkäufer dieser Ware empfindet, ist seine Selbstachtung von Voraussetzungen abhängig, die sich seiner Kontrolle entziehen. Hat er Erfolg, dann ist er wertvoll, wenn nicht, ist er wertlos. Das hieraus entstehende Gefühl der Unsicherheit kann kaum überschätzt werden. Wenn man glaubt, der eigene Wert sei nicht von eigenen menschlichen Qualitäten abhängig, sondern von dem

38 See *ibid.*, p. 104.

39 E. FROMM, *Auf dem Wege zu einer neuen Gesellschaft*, in: R. Funk (Ed.), *Erich Fromm-Lesebuch*, Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, Stuttgart 1985, p. 132.

Erfolg bei ständig sich wechselnden Marktbedingungen, dann muß die Selbstachtung unsicher werden und ein ständiges Bedürfnis nach Bestätigung durch andere entwickeln»⁴⁰.

If men gain their self-esteem only through self-promotion and the recognition of others, it obviously is a very unreliable situation, which tends to fail quickly. Here, one can notice Fromm's psychological sensitivity that grasps the formative influence on the psyche or the self-esteem of the human being very precisely. In addition to this, we can find a lot of reference to the Marxist tradition on what alienation is,

«Der Mensch hat sich eine Welt aufgebaut, er baut Fabriken und Häuser, er produziert Autos und Textilien, er erntet Getreide und Früchte. Aber er ist den Erzeugnissen seiner Hände entfremdet, und er beherrscht die Welt nicht mehr, die er gebaut hat. Ganz im Gegenteil ist diese vom Menschen geschaffene Welt zu seinem Herrn geworden, dem er sich beugt, den er zu besänftigen und so gut er kann zu manipulieren versucht»⁴¹.

Here he refers to the alienating process as we have already seen in Adorno and Marx that concerns the production of material world which becomes an autonomous power. Furthermore he claims the reification of human relationships that get merely shaped by interests, which have manipulative character. He also addresses the alienation of man to his fellow human beings,

«Die konkreten Beziehungen zwischen den Menschen haben ihren unmittelbaren und humanen Charakter verloren. Stattdessen manipuliert man einander und behandelt sich gegenseitig als Mittel zum Zweck. In allen persönlichen und gesellschaftlichen Beziehungen gelten die Gesetze des Marktes»⁴².

40 E. FROMM, *Der Marketing-Charakter*, in: R. Funk (Ed.), *Erich Fromm Lesebuch*, Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, Stuttgart 1985, p. 65.

41 E. FROMM, *Die Furcht vor der Freiheit*, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, Frankfurt am Main 1966, p. 98.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Another aspect of the experience of alienation that can be found in Marx is the alienation from oneself, which arises from the tendency to treat oneself as a product to sell on the market (self-optimization):

«Wie bei anderen Waren ist es auch hier der Markt, der über den Wert dieser menschlichen Eigenschaften, ja sogar über deren Existenz entscheidet. Wenn für die Eigenschaften, die ein Mensch zu bieten hat, kein Bedarf besteht, dann hat er sie auch nicht, genauso wie eine unverkäufliche Ware wertlos ist, wenn sie auch ihren Gebrauchswert haben mag. [...] Die Abhängigkeit der Selbstachtung vom Erfolg der Persönlichkeit der Betreffenden verleiht der Popularität ihre ungeheure Bedeutung für den modernen Menschen. Von ihr hängt es nicht nur ab, ob man im praktischen Leben vorankommt, sondern auch ob man seine Selbstachtung behaupten kann oder in einen Abgrund von Minderwertigkeitsgefühlen versinkt»⁴³.

As one can see, it is not only the social philosopher speaking, but also the psychoanalyst Fromm, who precisely knows the various psychological sufferings that are caused by social conditions and cultural ideologies. Nevertheless, a romanticizing tendency, which reminds of Rousseau and Freud, must be admitted. Humans' genuine dependence on their social environment seems to be underestimated by Fromm. He, too, imagines the proper individual in an ideal environment, as completely independent of the recognition of others. This problematizes social life itself and the essential interdependence of individuals and thus misses the opportunity to indicate what a non-problematic social relationship might look like and to recognize how much every one of us depends on others and their recognition. At this point, I refer to theories that address the *subjectivization-process* of the individual genuinely situated in the social field and as a process of mutual recognition (Lacan, Butler)⁴⁴.

These approaches can help to avoid overly individualistic ideas of men. However, Fromm's criticism clearly points out that some ideals of society are unrealizable for many people, which of course can have a host of causes.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁴⁴ See J. BUTLER, *Psyche der Macht. Das Subjekt der Unterwerfung*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2001; J. LAPLANCHE, J.-B. PONTALIS, *Vokabular der Psychoanalyse*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1972, pp. 474-476.

Such ideals may be unrealizable, for example, because they conflict with external conditions that stand in the way of achieving a goal, or they may exceed the abilities of individuals or even exceed the capacity of most individuals. The latter case points to the fact that presumably the ideals and values of society may cause problems. Fromm clarifies this idea on the basis of a neurotic person. In a neurotic, he recognizes a person who suffers from the alienating experiences of today's society. Fromm therefore characterizes him as a man, who is not withstanding the ideological draft of inhuman societal conditions and unfortunately gets ill:

«[...] der nicht bereit ist, im Kampf um sein Selbst völlig die Waffen zu stecken. Sicherlich war sein Versuch, das individuelle Selbst zu retten, nicht von Erfolg gekrönt, und anstatt sein Selbst produktiv zum Ausdruck zu bringen, suchte er sein Heil darin, daß er neurotische Symptome entwickelte und in ein Phantasieleben zurückzog. Trotzdem ist er vom Standpunkt der menschlichen Werte aus weniger verkrüppelt als der Normale, der seine Individualität völlig eingebüßt hat»⁴⁵.

This is an attempt to show that *pathological phenomena* of a society allow conclusions about their society's overstretching and problematic tendencies. All in all, Fromm's social criticism here and there has romantic features. Furthermore, the very fact that he was a psychoanalyst, and thus always in close proximity to pathological areas, clearly shaped his perspective. So it happens that he is not averse to the idea of pathology of society and refuses functionalist approaches to societies, which perceive the lack of adaption as problematic (because there are not functional) and thus cannot provide any socio-critical approach.

«Von einer ganzen Gesellschaft zu sagen, ihr mangle es an psychischer Gesundheit, impliziert eine Annahme, die im Gegensatz steht zu dem soziologischen Relativismus, der heute von den meisten Sozialwissenschaftlern vertreten wird. Sie postulieren, daß jede Gesellschaft in dem Maße normal ist, wie sie funktioniert, und daß man nur bei einer mangelnden Anpassung des einzelnen an die Lebensweise seiner Gesellschaft von Krankheit reden kann»⁴⁶.

45 E. FROMM, *Die Furcht vor der Freiheit*, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, Frankfurt am Main 1966, p. 114.

46 E. FROMM, *Die kranke Gesellschaft – von der Pathologie der Normalität*, in: R. Funk, *Erich Fromm Lesebuch*, Deutschen Verlagsanstalt, Stuttgart 1985, p. 123.

Overall, Fromm assumes that the nature of alienation differs from culture to culture and that each culture produces completely different social characters, such as the *marketing character* of capitalist society or the *authoritarian character* of fascist societies.⁴⁷ But Fromm also assumes that alienation is by no means an exclusively modern problem, although its effects are almost total in modern societies. The phenomenon of alienation may be under the profound influence of capitalism, but Fromm claims that it has accompanied humanity throughout its whole history. That's where he leaves the field of socio-critical alienation thought and gives us a link to the second type of alienation, the *existential-philosophical* one.

1.6. The Existential Alienation motif

*L'enfer, c'est les autres.*⁴⁸

For existential philosophy, the assertion of alienation is not rooted in a concrete historical situation with certain economic or socio-cultural conditions, but in the anthropological constitution of the human being itself. The exact reason for alienation is determined differently by existentialist authors. Heidegger, for instance, sees in man, *homo faber*, who tends to subject the world and is therefore claimed to be the root of every alienation.

For Sartre instead it is the relation to the *thou*. Man's constitution as a social being, *homo socialis*, means that through the mere existence of others we get alienated. Just the possibility of being seen by someone, off-centers us.⁴⁹ For Camus, however, we are estranged and alienated because we are *homo sapiens*, who searches for meaning while we condemned to live in a world that is meaningless, perhaps even absurd. Nevertheless, for Camus men long for meaningful action and in his

⁴⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 53.

⁴⁸ J.-P. SARTRE, *Huis clos. suivi de Les mouches*, Éditions Gallimard, 1947, <https://la-philosophie.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Sartre-Huis-clos-Texte-complet-pdf.pdf>. (seen 12.01.2018), p. 93.

⁴⁹ See J.-P. SARTRE, *Das Sein und das Nichts. Versuche einer phänomenologischen Ontologie*, in: Jean- Paul Sartre, *Gesammelte Werke. Philosophische Schriften I*, Rowohlt, Hamburg 1994, pp. 474.

opinion nobody can escape the contradictions and absurdity of this life. He refers to great thinkers of the occident, who have also dealt with the absurdity of the human situation, as Sören Kierkegaard, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Martin Heidegger, Franz Kafka and Friedrich Nietzsche. Because of the absurdity of life the idea of suicide appears to evade or escape this tragic situation. Against this solution, he proposes an absolute life affirmation as it is well known from Nietzsche. Men have to accept the absurd situation and accept that there is no escape from the principal alienation, but instead one can assert himself in a defiant revolt.⁵⁰

In the phase of revolt, men gain sense through the rebellion against all inhuman states. However, his demand is not to advocate any revolt at any price. In this phase, Camus developed his characteristic criticism of bloody revolutions, totalitarian and inhumane systems, like Communism. The slogan ‘the end justifies the means’ (*Der Zweck heiligt die Mittel*) was strictly rejected by Camus, while Sartre advocated and supported such a radical attitude. But Camus elaborated another aspect for a meaningful life which regarded the intersubjectivity of men. This concept is most clearly expressed in the episode of revolt in *Die Pest*, which is all about a humanistic attitude and the great interpersonal significance of compassion.⁵¹

Sartre, on the other hand, assumes in his book *Das Sein und das Nichts* that men attempt to compensate their original lack of unity within themselves through creating ever new concepts of existence. In addition, the basic relationship between people, as we mentioned before, is problematic for Sartre. In his famous sentence saying others would be hell, he outlines this negativistic approach to intersubjectivity and relations in general. The metaphor of the sight of the other is used to illustrate that we get reified and committed by the other to be something that we are not or that we do not want to be. This means that through the gaze of the *Other*, one becomes the object of a valuation and in addition this is interpreted as the *death of my possibilities*⁵², which

50 See A. CAMUS, *Der Mythos des Sisyphos: ein Versuch über das Absurde*, Rowholt, Hamburg 1959.

51 See H. CSEF, *Sinnorientierte Lebensentwürfe bei Albert Camus. Ein Brückenschlag zwischen Existenzphilosophie und Psychotherapie*, Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Psychosomatik 10, online-ressource: http://www.izpp.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Ausgabe_10_1-2014/IZPP_1-2014_Csef.pdf (seen on 12.01.2018), pp. 1-8.

52 See J.-P. SARTRE, *Das Sein und das Nichts. Versuche einer phänomenologischen Ontologie*, in: Jean- Paul Sartre, *Gesammelte Werke. Philosophische Schriften I*, Rowohlt, Hamburg 1994, pp. 474-475.

means to be deprived of any possibility to create oneself on one's own. For Sartre, estrangement or alienation is grounded in the sociality of men.⁵³

This problematic conception of unavoidable self-alienation in the social field (socio-ontological) does not only mean that the social field is necessarily understood as conflictual, which may be true, but also that we are condemned to failure within every relationships and thus to misfortune because there is no way out of this entanglement, at least for Sartre. Notwithstanding these differences, the various thinkers of existential alienation uniformly understand it as a permanent structural moment of human existence that cannot be abolished, but can only be countered in different ways. This makes the existential idea of alienation useless for any socio-critical analysis.

The motif of alienation mentioned at the beginning, which appears in the Bible, can also be taken as an existential version of alienation. It may seem strange to many people today because the former symbolic order of religiosity and the power of Christian mythology has become almost insignificant. Nevertheless, the story of the Fall can be read as a metaphor for an existential alienation experience. The perception of awkwardness, of being exposed to the overpowering and dangerous nature, the uncontrollability of destiny or the inconceivable and meaningless incidents of human life - all these worries and concerns are expressed by religious stories. It is only the form of symbolization and its manners, how to search for solutions that have changed completely since the ancient times of the *Old Testament*. The existentialist point of view, which assumes essential human freedom, of course sees the human being as responsible for his own life. It is his own decision how he wants to face the very fact of alienation and, accordingly to various authors there are quite different approaches to how one could deal with this.

53 See *ibid.*, pp. 481-482.

1.7. Alienation today - its slow disappearance

Ob Leben gelingt oder misslingt, hängt davon ab, auf welche Weise Welt (passiv) erfahren und (aktiv) angeeignet oder anverwandelt wird und werden kann. In der Traditionslinie der Kritischen Theorie bildet die Suche nach einer anderen Form der Weltbeziehung von Anfang an ein manchmal dominantes, häufig aber implizites Thema⁵⁴.

«Kaum ein Begriff hat das Schaffen der Kritischen Theorie stärker und mit größerer Selbstverständlichkeit bestimmt als der der 'Entfremdung'».⁵⁵ This is how Axel Honneth begins his introduction of Rahel Jaeggi's large-scale study about alienation. The goal of her work is to reconstruct or reformulate the alienation concept: Jaeggi criticizes the problematic consensus, especially within the Frankfurt School, in connection with this term. Hardly anyone questioned its problematic implications, but most socio-theoretical works were based on the idea of alienation. Jaeggi has a very realistic assessment of the tradition she derives from. She knows very well that in the field of Marxist-oriented theory, the concept of alienation was adopted too quickly and unquestioned, sometimes almost arbitrarily, as the basis for socio-critical argumentation. That may be the reason why the once flourishing concept almost disappeared from the theoretical field.⁵⁶

The reason for Jaeggi to re-elaborate and re-appropriate the concept of alienation is due to the fact that she locates herself in the tradition of the Frankfurt School and is convinced that a modified version of alienation could be very fruitful for socio-theoretical approaches. Therefore, she profoundly discusses the problematic aspects of its usage. Furthermore, to use the concept of alienation in a current philosophical discourse means to get associated with Marxist theory - which has proven its misjudgments in many cases in the past.

Nevertheless, Jaeggi's concern is clear: she wants to breathe new life into this concept, found it on a non-essentialist basis and make it fruitful for current critical theory.

54 H. ROSA, *Resonanz. Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung*, Suhrkamp, Berlin 2016, (e-book), p. 103.

55 R. JAEGGI, *Entfremdung, Zur Aktualität eines sozialphilosophischen Begriffs*, Suhrkamp, Berlin 2016, p. 7.

56 See *ibid.*, p. 11.

To prepare her argument, she refers to famous authors, like Richard Sennet, who identifies the current effects of capitalism with an increasing erosion of social cohesion and considers the spreading *marketization* (commodification) extremely problematic (*The Flexible Man*).⁵⁷ She is convinced that the idea of alienation can meaningfully be connected with such interpretations of societal relationships. In her opinion, this term offers a basis of evaluation, which allows one to criticize disturbed, problematic or deficient social circumstances, institutions etc., under which people generally suffer. Starting from the very fact that alienation diagnosis presupposes assumptions about the general structure of human conditions, of the self and of the world, Jaeggi tries to redesign the concept of alienation through various forms of unrelatedness: «es ist gerade die Unmöglichkeit, sich die 'Welt' als Resultat der eigenen Tätigkeit anzueignen, die Entfremdung ausmacht. Weltentfremdung bedeutet also Selbstentfremdung und umgekehrt, das Subjekt ist 'von sich' entfremdet, weil es von der Welt entfremdet ist».⁵⁸ Thus, the alienation of the world means self-alienation and vice versa, the subject is alienated from itself because it is estranged from the world. In this new conception, alienation is not separable from self-alienation and defines the particular way of connecting with others, with work or with the world in general.

Hartmut Rosa reconsiders the concept of alienation for socio-political theories in quite a similar way. He conceptualizes the theory based on a lack of resonance, which concerns various spheres, like to oneself (others, the world in general):

«Damit versucht die hier avisierte Soziologie der Weltbeziehung das Problem ungerechtfertigter Essentialisierungen zu überwinden: Es bedarf keiner substanzialistischen Annahmen über das wahre Wesen der menschlichen Natur, um Aussagen über das Gelingen oder Misslingen des Lebens machen zu können; vielmehr kann dieses Wesen als historisch und kulturell ebenso wandelbar akzeptiert werden wie die soziale und kulturelle Ein- und Ausrichtung der Welt»⁵⁹.

57 See R. SENNETT, *Der flexible Mensch. Die Kultur des neuen Kapitalismus*, Berlin-Verlag, Berlin 1998.

58 R. JAEGGI, *Entfremdung, Zur Aktualität eines sozialphilosophischen Begriffs*, Suhrkamp, Berlin 2016, p. 14.

59 H. ROSA, *Resonanz. Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung*, Suhrkamp, Berlin 2016, p. 67.

I largely agree with this theoretical explanations and I also share the evaluation of what is missing in the old conceptions of alienation. Although I consider the new concepts to be successful approaches to the alienation motif, it seems to me that only a part of the criticism-worthy problems can be addressed with these concepts. Unrelatedness or the lack of resonance are without question important aspects, but they do not cover all societal-induced problems that have negative effects on humans. And not every lack of resonance or every form of disconnectedness can be considered problematic. In this respect, the suggestion to relate to human suffering is clearly broader, but at the same time more specific, as suffering is considered to be problematic itself. In addition, there is quite a historical burden of the Marxist tradition, which someone who uses this notion has to deal with. Although this criticism may certainly not always be justified, it seems to me a laborious work to continuously contradict its conceptual suggestive power. And it is not only about suggesting Marxist vicinity, but also the essentialist aspect of this term, that leads to the conclusion that it may not be worth maintaining endlessly.

1.8. The most important criticisms of the concept of alienation

Kritik ist kein abwertendes Werturteil, sondern nur Hilfe für das Werdende⁶⁰.

The first point and certainly one of the most important criticisms is the problem of *essentialism*. It clings to the idea that there is a true essence of man. Such ideas lose sight of the cultural changeability of man and tend towards the idea that cultural formation itself is already part of a kind of alienation from the true nature of man. However, if you are assuming the alienation of man, it needs to be clarified what exactly causes this alienation and in addition how the original state may have looked before. In order to describe the non-alienated, essential state of man, theoreticians often resort to images such as the "golden age", "paradise" or "childlike innocence". These pictures refer to utopian ideas of an original wholeness which unfortunately

⁶⁰ German proverb, which freely translated means that criticism is not pejorative, but helping to progress.

has no place in history, and their essential "state" is based on idealistic or metaphysical speculation.

The second point concerns the diversity of alienation conceptions. As we have already mentioned, we are not able to identify only one uniform way of using the concept, but many different approaches to what alienation may represent. Each author means something different and even when the term is used in similar contexts or in the same tradition as in the Frankfurt School, they refer to different aspects or highlight different significations. This is mainly related to the fact that it is mostly a constructed concept that is not self-explanatory or intuitively clear. Without knowing the concepts, one does not know exactly what it actually means. Although they are oriented towards feelings, especially negative ones, of disconnectedness and dissociation, and they almost always have some kind of relation to the experience of suffering, the concepts are not exclusively related to feelings. In many cases, cultural ideals and values as well as ethical and normative demands are the starting points for the assertion of alienation. The problem with these kinds of theoretical foundations is that the reasoning is very weak.

The third point of concern is that the concept of alienation implies specific human abilities as alienating. This concerns those theories which, for example, problematize the capacity of reasoning and rationalization or the capacity to reflect. These human capacities would create a gap between human beings and the natural world. So analysis, segmentation, objectivization, critical distance impede an intuitive and immediate world experience.⁶¹ This obviously leads to esoteric and spiritual approaches and nourishes romantic ideas of unity. Such theories, in fact, usually assume an original unity of man and nature and suggest a paradise-like state in some ancient past. This *intact era* is thwarted by the separation of reason, which can be restored by various forms of spiritual practice to finally find one's inner peace and unity. There are numerous examples in the field of New Age that refer to similar romantic ideas. For some, inspiration comes from the *noble savage*, for others it is the ideal of a carefree childhood that nourishes the idea that the present moment is deficient. In these cases, fantasies are stimulated and longings fueled that can withstand no rational argument. But their ideas of alienation mostly address the individual and do not have political ambitions.

61 See. M. LANDMANN, *Entfremdende Vernunft*, Klett Verlag, Stuttgart 1975, p. 186.

The *fourth point* regards theories that claim culture itself as an alienating factor. These concepts include, for example, Rousseau or Freud's cultural criticism. The problem is that it must be regarded as almost pointless to assert an alienation of this kind, since culture cannot be abandoned and constitutes the indispensable foundation of our human existence. What a human existence would be like without culture and society is pure speculation and does not bring us any further. Nor does it make sense for theoretical discourse or for our everyday practice. It is like postulating clothing as an alienating practice, even though it might be essential to many people's survival, especially in cold regions. But even to authors who do not fall prey to such romanticizing tendencies, such as Adorno or Marcuse, the idea of alienation is sometimes elitist tendencies. For example, when Adorno portrays the American mass culture as alienated, or condemns its cultural industry as an alienating factor and adds a merciless criticism of this culture, we have to admit that it seems more an elitist attitude than a serious assessment of problematic social conditions with very pessimistic implications. Adorno's interpretation of American culture reduces the consequences of such a culture in terms of mental stagnation or mental enfeeblement, that prevents any critical thinking, has elitist aspects and pessimist implications. To assume that the influence of culture on humans would be total means to doubt the possibility of critical distance at least in capitalist societies. This contradiction in Adorno reveals his weak position when he argues against American mass culture which is only seen as an alienating factor that produces stultification and uncritical minds.⁶² Adorno certainly overestimates the impact of socialization and misjudges, to use the words of Hegel '*den nie aufgehenden Rest*' (the indivisible remainder) of human nature, which does not fit easily into culture.

At least Marcuse does not share this point of view with Adorno and solves this problem in *Eros and Civilization* by attempting to pinpoint forces in individuals that can resist totalitarian social tendencies. Through a reinterpretation of psychoanalytic instinctual structure, he tries to give a way out of the gloomy prognosis of *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. He succeeds by splitting the Freudian model of instinctive energy into a physical-anthropological part and a socio-historical part, where the first

62 See M. HORKHEIMER, T.W. ADORNO, *Dialektik der Aufklärung und Schriften 1940-1950*, in: G. Schmid Noerr (Ed.), *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 5, Fischer Taschenbuchverlag, Frankfurt am Main 1987, pp. 144-196.

represents the culture-resistant part that allows one to gain the necessary distance and freedom to criticize.⁶³

The *fifth point* concerning criticism of the alienation concept has to do with the tricky mixing of the existential concept with the socio-critical concept. It is therefore necessary and useful to keep these two terms strictly apart and to always differentiate exactly what alienation actually means for specific authors or to show where the term is not used consistently and becomes a mixture of the two terms, like in Fromm's case. And furthermore, it is problematic that the concept of alienation could often be replaced by other terms that would better illustrate what it is describing and in some cases also the authors tend to substitute the term with other, more precise, denominations. For example, when theorists speak of reification, objectification, rationalization or commodification while they are still implicitly talking about the super-category alienation. On the one hand, this shows that the term is not always as accurate as it may seem; on the other hand, that the term itself is too vague and requires specification.

But what is actually the reason why so many authors refer to this concept?

First of all the idea of alienation simply stands in a Leftist-Marxian-tradition, whose prerequisites and presuppositions have often not been questioned and instead have been adopted and filled with one's own ideas.

Secondly, I think it is because serious social criticism needs an anthropological and psychological reference and the idea of alienation in some way does provide both.⁶⁴ It is indispensable to refer to humans, explain what and how they are, and tell why someone claims certain social circumstances are good for humans while others are considered bad. Social developments can only be claimed to be harmful as they refer to our body and our psyche. It is this connection which is provided by the notion of alienation. The use of alienation as a reference point for critique almost always implies distinct specifications of individual and social relations, culture and nature. These are questions that play an important role in this context and may often be too speculative or too idealistic, but in principle they are meaningful and necessary. Even if we prefer a non-essential approach, it is important to take into account

63 See H. MARCUSE, *Eros and civilisation: a philosophical inquiry into Freud*, Beacon Press, Boston 1974.

64 See R. JAEGGI, *Entfremdung, Zur Aktualität eines sozialphilosophischen Begriffs*, Suhrkamp, Berlin 2016, p. 13.

anthropological questions and reflect them. In the natural sciences, they usually have fewer philosophical doubts when it comes to defining what or how humans are because they tend to feel quite safe considering their empirical-research results. The main problem with these definitions is that they often have deterministic or biologicistic traits and do not consider any philosophical or cultural approach. That is why they often remain very one-sided.

Third, I also suspect that the concept of alienation is a kind of *crossover-concept*. This means that for a long time the reference to feelings within philosophy was not considered to justify any philosophical standpoint. In contrast to this, the idea of alienation has always been very close to feelings, but does not explicitly name them as a reference point of social critique. Strangely enough, metaphysical and speculative conceptions seem to have irritated less than the idea to incorporate feelings in philosophical theory. The predominance of reason-oriented, the dominance of the logical and rational together with the body-hostile Christian tradition in western societies obviously had an immense influence on philosophical thinking for centuries. Its excluding effects on emotions and feelings as a subject of studies used to be encompassing. Otherwise, it would be difficult to understand why especially social theories did not refer explicitly to suffering for example, which would have been quite a natural starting point.

The fifth reason may be that the concept of alienation, furthermore, is not a purely descriptive term, since it presupposes that it may be different and refers to a potentiality that rejects current conditions. After all, it is about nothing less than the question of good life. All the authors mentioned so far have more or less one goal in common: to contribute to a more humane life in society. The present work associates itself with this purpose.

In summary, it can be said that by showing the problematic tendencies of the alienation-concept it becomes clear which considerations are necessary and basic. The whole socio-critical theory depends on which kind of presuppositions it refers to and which kind of reflections are made beforehand. So it is all about the conditions of the possibility of meaningful critical social theory. In this field it mainly concerns anthropological issues, normative determinations, cultural assessments and psychological theories. These elements are essential for a reasonable evaluation. On the other hand, we have to understand the relationship between culture and nature as

well as between the individual and the social sphere and at least to examine more in detail what emotions are.

Therefore, the next chapter will clarify the theoretical preconditions for this objective.

Summary

1. The alienation motive goes back at least to the time of the Old Testament
2. The use of alienation is very diverse and cannot meaningfully be reduced to one single meaning
3. The concept of alienation suggests a problematic essentialism, a true primordial nature or similar ideas
4. The concept of alienation is a hinge concept and produces an indirect connection to feelings, but nevertheless is constructed and therefore not intuitively comprehensible
5. The existentialist concept of alienation does not permit socio-critical application
6. With the concept of alienation, only a fraction of critical social problems can be grasped
7. The concept of alienation should be dropped as the point of reference of socio-philosophical criticism

Chapter II

Theoretical requirements

What must a socio-critical theory provide theoretically if it wants to be taken seriously? This is the central question of the present chapter. For this purpose, some philosophical prerequisites have to be clarified. In particular, it will deal with more recent postmodern theories that certainly have a transformative character for socio-philosophical considerations. Some of the most important theoretical assumptions of modernity have radically been questioned and deconstructed. Especially those critiques which are relevant to this work have to be discussed in a proper way to elaborate a theoretical standpoint that considers the most important theoretical changes.

2.1. Postmodern or self-reflective modernity?

Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives¹.

The term *postmodernism* was first introduced to describe the intellectual-cultural movement around Jean-François Lyotard who named one of his philosophical writings *La Condition postmoderne. Rapport sur le savoir*². The work was first published in 1979. It was originally a study of the role of knowledge in post-industrial societies. Lyotard's thesis claims the end of the *grand narratives* (*metanarratives*) and prepares the basis for many developments in philosophy, culture as well as the social sciences. According to Lyotard, there are three great metanarratives: Enlightenment, Idealism and Historicism. He speaks of the fact that the

1 J.F. LYOTARD, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1984, p. xxiv.

2 See J.F. LYOTARD, *La condition postmoderne*, Les éditions de minuit, Paris 1979.

meta-narratives are no longer credible, that is, neither emancipation nor enlightenment nor idealism or hermeneutics. In postmodernism, these no longer constitute unifying legitimacy and goal orientation. The emancipation of the individual, the idea of absolute freedom, the idea of a meaningful progress of history and the knowability of everything by science are the meta-narratives that one can no longer believe. According to Lyotard, postmodernity is not the (*anything goes*)³, in the sense that anything is possible, as is claimed by Feyerabend, but rather a farewell to the belief in a superior narrative, which stands above all others in the sense of a master discourse.⁴

The term *postmodern* in this chapter subsumes all those critiques of authors who can be considered essential critics of modernity or modern philosophical positions. This means that among postmodern critics there will be some that normally are not counted among the typical representatives of postmodernism, because they clearly differ in their conclusions and do not represent pluralistic or relativistic truth concepts, but who nonetheless have provided a more self-reflective positioning of modernity (modern ideas).⁵ For example, authors such as Adorno or Foucault, who generally don't get categorized under classic postmodern theory, but who definitely share an elaborate and serious critique of modernity. Thus, postmodern theories here are characterized mainly by the deconstruction of modern presumptions and their precise identification of inconsistent theorems and problematic scientific conditions, which are commonly covered by the term *modernity*. They have played an important part in liberating the modern age from overly idealistic concepts and replacing optimistic rationalism with skepticism and doubt. Although many consequences of postmodern thinking must be evaluated as problematic, like the idea of complete ethical relativism or anti-rationalist tendencies, one cannot easily dismiss the legitimate critiques and insights that have appeared.

3 See P. FEYERABEND, *Wider den Methodenzwang. Skizze einer anarchistischen Erkenntnistheorie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1983; ID., *Erkenntnis für freie Menschen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1979.

4 See J.F. LYOTARD, *Das Postmoderne Wissen*, cit., pp. 112-113.

5 When I speak of *postmodern societies*, it means our Western societies since the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989). This historical moment indicates the final transition to a capitalist world order and its changes of the way of life within these cultures. Essentially postmodern societies are characterized by the loss of traditional ties, sectorialization of social life into a multitude of groups and strong liberalist tendencies and a radical cultural plurality (subcultures).

For this reason, the most important theoretical points of postmodern criticism will be highlighted and taken into account. This shall provide a meaningful basis for a socio-philosophical work in order not to become entangled in the same classical problems that have shown up with the concept of alienation. In the course of the discussions, there will be a clear positioning of which theoretical standpoints might be considered too radical and too one-sided and which I firmly reject. The focus, however, remains on those postmodern reflections which I consider theoretically valuable. Many postmodern perspectives have shaped our philosophical approaches and allowed new theoretical possible, as well as broadening and changing the discourse as a whole. (In particular I refer to the changes that involve the inclusion of emotions, the psyche and the body in general).

2.2. Ideology of progress - how can we evaluate our social situation?

Ein Engel ist darauf dargestellt, der aussieht, als wäre er im Begriff, sich von etwas zu entfernen, worauf er starrt. Seine Augen sind aufgerissen, sein Mund steht offen und seine Flügel sind ausgespannt. Der Engel der Geschichte muß so aussehen. Er hat das Antlitz der Vergangenheit zugewandt. Wo eine Kette von Begebenheiten vor uns erscheint, da sieht er eine einzige Katastrophe, die unablässig Trümmer auf Trümmer häuft und sie ihm vor die Füße schleudert. Er möchte wohl verweilen, die Toten wecken und das Zerschlagene zusammenfügen. Aber ein Sturm weht vom Paradies her, der sich in seinen Flügeln verfangen hat und so stark ist, daß der Engel sie nicht mehr schließen kann. Dieser Sturm treibt ihn unaufhaltsam in die Zukunft, der er den Rücken kehrt, während der Trümmerhaufen vor ihm zum Himmel wächst. Das, was wir den Fortschritt nennen, ist dieser Sturm⁶.

One of the theoretical presuppositions which is now shared by almost all the humanities is that one no longer believes in a continuous progression of history and it is neither considered necessary nor natural. The radical critique of historicism and its varieties has, for good reason, more or less prevailed within most theories. Progress as an inherent necessity according to a *Hegelian dialectic*, which logically leads higher through the three-step process of *thesis*, *antithesis* and *synthesis*, thus belongs to history. If in the modern world the majority trusted in unstoppable progress, today

6 W. BENJAMIN, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, in *Gesammelte Schriften I*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1980, p. 697-698.

we only rate this as dangerous dogmatics. In fact, the meaning of the term *progress* became fragile, which sometimes plunged it into a serious crisis.

What is meant is the alleged absence of real improvement and the exposure of progress as a mere illusion.⁷ Extreme positions link all sorts of catastrophes directly to the ideology of progress: planetary barbarism in the form of environmental destruction, eugenics, imperialism⁸, mass murder as well as the depravation of the south then seem to be a direct consequence of our so-called western progress⁹. One of the most impressive portrayals that illustrate the postmodern ambivalence or rejection of the idea of progress is Walter Benjamin's allegory based on Paul Klee's image of *Angelus Novus*, which has been chosen as a quotation at the beginning of this chapter. It makes history appear as the only accumulation of human catastrophes.

But also Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialektik der Aufklärung* suggests a similar perspective. The philosophical critique of progress calls for reflection on the destructive tendencies of progress.¹⁰ So they seek an answer to the question of why mankind instead of finally entering into a truly human state sinks into a new kind of barbarism: «[...] anstatt in einen wahrhaft menschlichen Zustand einzutreten, in eine neue Art von Barbarei versinkt»¹¹ Also in Wolfgang Bergsdorf's essay with the characteristic title, *Ist der Fortschritt noch zu retten*, progress appears as the force that always wants good and yet only creates evil.¹²

So must we give up the idea of progress completely, because we have to realize that it has caused too much damage? Or is there still a way to save the idea of progress? And if so, when could we still speak of progress in our postmodern world?

When we are talking about progress, it usually means that there has been a development that is perceived as an improvement compared to the past. But of course it has to be clarified in what respects something has become better than it was.

7 See M. L. SALVADORI, *Fortschritt – die Zukunft einer Idee*, Wagenbach, Berlin 2008, p. 7.

8 See G. LABICA, *Beitrag zur Umfrage, Was kann Fortschritt heute bedeuten*, in: *Das Argument*, Nr. 230, Heft 2/3, 1999, pp. 212-214, p. 212.

9 See J.-F. LYOTARD, *Postmoderne für Kinder*, cit., p. 123.

10 See M. HORKHEIMER, T.W. ADORNO, *Dialektik der Aufklärung und Schriften 1940-1950, Gesammelte Schriften*, G. Schmid Noerr (ed. by), Band 5, Fischer Taschenbuchverlag, Frankfurt am Main 1987, p. 21.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

12 See W. BERGSDORF *Ist der Fortschritt noch zu retten? Über die Ambivalenz eines historischen Zentralbegriffs*, in: H.M. Baumgartner et al. (Ed.), *Fortschritt als Schicksal? Weder Verheißung noch Verhängnis?*, Ernst Klett Verlag, Stuttgart 1997, pp. 119-130.

As an example I will choose a technical one that may easily demonstrate the principal idea of what progress is:

A combine harvester would be better than a scythe because it allows one to work faster and more efficiently, or perhaps it requires less manpower. And most people will follow the example and except the reasoning so far. However, if I consider the entire context, I may notice that the combine harvester is inferior to the scythe in terms of the damage it causes to the environment: the combine harvester, for example, hardens the soil by its heavy weight, requires more equipment to loosen the soil again, takes the risk of killing birds nesting on the ground or other small animals, it may be driven by an internal combustion engine and thus pollutes the air, it is more complicated to use, etc. After such an evaluation and considering a much broader field of impact, it is no longer clear whether it is still appropriate to talk about progress or what progress means under such conditions at all. At this point, several consequences compete with each other, some of them are positive, others negative. And it seems obvious that one has to give up the idea of automatic progress, as well as the *salvific expectations* that are still often associated with technical process. Even if someone from the humanities gets the impression that the idea of continuous progress is now rejected by the overwhelming majority as a naive "modern" concept, this is far from being true in the field of natural sciences. That is why it is still important to insist on the deconstruction of the belief in progress and to emphasize again and again how ambivalent this term is and how problematic it is especially when it remains unreflected and provokes unrealistic expectations of salvation. Nevertheless, it does not mean that we have to completely renounce this term or the idea of progress at all. It is all about clearly defining under what circumstances it makes sense to talk about development or progress and that there is no guarantee of automatic progress in any scientific field.

When it comes to social science research, the situation is similar or perhaps even more difficult. What do we mean when we speak of social progress or social development?

Most of us still believe that our state legal system is progressive or at least more meaningful and sensible than arbitrariness. Even if it is not in vogue in the

postmodern humanities or defamed as *ethnocentric*¹³ or *Eurocentric*,¹⁴ there is something sensible about it that can hardly be reduced to cultural causes. Of course, it makes a big difference whether there is a formal legal system that gives everyone the right to have a public defender as well as the right to a trial. If that does not exist and jurisdiction is arbitrary and differs from case to case, it may be politically incorrect, but most people, especially those personally affected, would likely prefer a legal system where everyone is equal before the law to arbitrary decision-making.

Such social institutions are reasonable and meaningful to a society, even if they are Eurocentric and related to the democratic value of the equality of all human beings (or to universal human rights). Even if such a legal system does not have an all-time or absolute significance by itself, it is therefore not relative or equivalent to arbitrariness and one can give very clear criteria for the reasoning. That is why it still makes sense to speak of progress even in the social context, when circumstances improve and one is able to give reasonable criteria for the assessment (That does not mean that there could not be other equivalent judgments, but there are surely better and inferior ones). Therefore, I explicitly distance myself from postmodern cultural relativistic approaches, which generally reject any idea of progress as useful (Baudrillard)¹⁵. Since the present work is in a socio-critical tradition, it would downright be absurd to refuse a meaningful discourse of progress. The very idea of progress or development serves to indicate the direction to 'go' or what is considered desirable for a society

2.3. The End of meta-narratives

Für Horkheimer und Adorno heißt das, den blinden Fleck der Aufklärung zu beleuchten. Denn aus ihrer Sicht haben Misanthropen und zynische anmutende Autoren, wie Machiavelli, Nietzsche oder Schopenhauer durch ihre Ablehnung humanistischer Ideale mehr dazu beigetragen Wahrheiten über unsere

13 See J.G. KELLAS, *The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, MacMillan, London 1998.

14 See D. CHAKRABARTY, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial thought and historical difference*, Princeton University Press, Princeton/Oxford 2000.

15 See J. BAUDRILLARD, *Der Tod der Moderne: Eine Diskussion*, Konkursbuch-Verlag, Tübingen 1983.

*Gesellschaft auszusprechen als die harmonisierenden und erklärenden Schriften manch humanistisch gesonnener, aber unkritischer Menschenfreunde*¹⁶.

Another important point, which has also become widespread, is the idea that we must say goodbye to the *grand narratives*. Some of them have tragically demonstrated in the twentieth century that utopian visions can carry the danger of leading to totalitarianism and human catastrophe, and that the belief in the superiority of a perfect social system was based on a fatal misconception. The rejection of universalisms is directly related to these human tragedies, since totalitarisms and utopian delusions are interpreted by some authors as direct or indirect consequences of Universalist worldviews and ideologies (Baumann¹⁷, Adorno, and Foucault).

The legitimate doubt about absolute truth-claims, the skepticism towards idealistic models, which are founded on the intellectual drawing board, the disrespect of the importance of practical experience or the underestimation of the necessary interplay between theory and practice are certainly very important postmodern theory inputs. On the one hand, today's crisis of the Left is certainly based on the blatant failure of *socialism*, which was charged with overloaded hopes and utopian world views and still has to process the shock of the victory of capitalism. On the other hand, it is also due to the consequences which were drawn from this failure. Along with the rejection of Universalist claims, a certain relativistic approach has emerged that may sometimes masquerade behind a simple attitude of tolerant pluralism, but essentially means the same, and whose theories get exhausted in mere deconstruction.

What can still be interpreted as a reaction to the traumatic experiences of the Holocaust in Adorno's theoretical work, which was no longer willing to design idealistic projects, today prevents many intellectuals from expressing their critical view. Equally fatal, they fear that their criticisms get stuck in deconstruction and they no longer want to risk the step further from analyzing society to formulating concrete political goals. It seems that, if criticism is only possible as long as one can believe in a utopian counter-model and with the abandoning of any collectivist alternatives, every critique has lost its reference point.

16 M. SCHWANDT, *Kritische Theorie, Eine Einführung*, Schmetterling Verlag, Stuttgart 2010, p. 96.

17 See Z. BAUMAN, *Dialektik der Ordnung. Die Moderne und der Holocaust*, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, Hamburg, 1992.

Even though the time of the great narratives is over, more than just deconstruction and a postmodern solidification and indefinite pluralistic attitude are needed. In the following examination it shall be shown that this solidification must by no means be a necessary consequence of postmodern theories. On the contrary, a serious criticism must, of course, know about its requirements as well as be aware of the potential dangers they face. It is good and important that we can no longer resort to idealistic speculation and that we know about the fragility of a theoretical thesis and its positioning. That helps us not to succumb to the hubris of believing that insights and knowledge can claim to be eternal truths. But in the wake of post-modern critique unfortunately also *narratives* and *ideals* were dropped that contained the hope of a more humane world, like the *Humanism*.

The critics are numerous. Starting with Heidegger, to Plessner or Foucault there are many others that keenly rejected any *humanistic world view*. For Foucault, for example, it was a necessary obligation of a truthful intellectual to free himself from humanism because he blamed it for the crimes of the twentieth century.¹⁸ What unites Foucault and other critics is that they criticize a particular type of humanism, and in this case they are completely right. In the name of humanism, countless crimes have been committed, especially in the wake of colonialism, but that does not mean that everything is bad in humanism and must be rejected. It shall not be discussed in detail, but above all it is about emphasizing that humanism in intellectual circles has lost more and more attraction as an ethical model and that has certainly contributed to the now prevalent ethical relativism. The full rejection of humanism is considered to be of little use for a socio-critical work. Therefore, the focus should be directed to those approaches of humanism that could still be of ethical relevance today and provide guidance as an anthropocentric directive. Fromm's *normative humanism*¹⁹ is certainly of greater interest on this issue. Fromm claimed that it would be necessary to start with the concrete human being as a feeling, living, suffering and thinking person if we want to overcome the idealistic and abstract categories of reference to ethical considerations. Fromm's normative humanism includes biological needs as well as taking into account psychological

18 See M. KELLY, *Introduction*, in: M. Kelly (Ed.), *Critique and power. Recasting the Foucault/Habermas debate*. MIT Press, Cambridge 1994, pp. 1-16, p. 3.

19 See E. FROMM, *Humanismus als reale Utopie*, Ullstein, Berlin 2005.

characteristics. Men have not only basic physical needs, but also basic social needs which are rooted in their existence.²⁰ Thus Fromm concludes one could indicate anthropological criteria of the mental health of man, which can either be promoted or suppressed by the social, economic or cultural systems

*«Der Ansatz des normativen Humanismus gründet sich auf die Annahme, daß es – genau wie bei jedem anderen Problem auch – richtige und falsche, befriedigende und unbefriedigende Lösungen für das Problem der menschlichen Existenz gibt».*²¹

His judgment furthermore includes the idea that there are at least some criteria that could even be used to examine the state of “health” of a society.²² Although I would not go as far as Fromm, his approach is certainly considered to be a useful orientation towards men and their needs. It is therefore proposed, on the one hand, to definitively drop those varieties of humanism that emanate from an idealistic human image that interprets human nature as fundamentally positive or good and to classify them as a romanticizing distortion of reality. But on the other hand to adopt at least the basic idea, to put the concrete human being in the center of our considerations and to point out the connecting anthropological features, to pick up and maintain:

*«Ich glaube, daß jeder Mensch die Menschheit repräsentiert. Wir unterscheiden uns in Bezug auf unsere Intelligenz, unsere Gesundheit und unserer Begabung. Und trotzdem sind wir alle gleich: Wir alle sind Heilige und Sünder, Erwachsene und Kinder, und keiner steht über dem anderen oder ist sein Richter».*²³

A Fromm claims humans share a wide range of common features (e.g. as saints, sinners or children). Such an approach to humanism offers a good starting point for the present work. In addition the socio-philosophical consideration that societies can promote or hinder mental health, it offers a useful basis for evaluating the current

20 See E. FROMM, *Die Furcht vor der Freiheit*, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, Frankfurt am Main 1966, pp. 21-22.

21 R. FUNK, *Erich Fromm Lesebuch*, Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, Stuttgart 1985, p. 125.

22 See *ibid.*, p.123.

23 E. FROMM, *Die Seele des Menschen: Ihre Fähigkeit zum Guten und zum Bösen*, in: *Erich Fromm. Gesamtausgabe*, R. Funk (ed. by), Band II, dtv, München 1964, pp. 159-268, p. 222.

state of a society. Whether it can only be evaluated through pathological phenomena of society, should of course be questioned. This thesis provides a different approach and argues that human suffering instead should be taken as the main reference of evaluation. This is formulated somewhat differently in the present work by the general reference to human suffering. The general reference to various forms of suffering makes it possible to indicate a human limit that could serve as guidance for societies where it is going in the wrong direction. In the fifth chapter we will apply to this pre-reflection.

2.4. Social constructivism - with what kind of material are we building our world?

Genauso wie der Mensch die Welt um sich her verwandelt, so verwandelt er auch sich selbst als Prozeß der Geschichte. Er ist sozusagen seine eigene Schöpfung. Aber genauso wie er die Stoffe der Natur nur entsprechende ihrer Eigenart umwandeln und verändern kann, so kann er auch sich selbst nur seiner eigenen Natur entsprechend umwandeln und verändern²⁴.

The next point concerns *Social Constructivism*. Social Constructivism refers to a meta-theory in sociology based on the book *The Social Construction of Reality* released in 1960 by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. The focus of social constructivism is to trace the ways in which social reality and individual social phenomena are constructed. The associated sociological method investigates how people create and institutionalize social phenomena. Social reality is viewed as something dynamically processual, constantly produced and reproduced through the actions of human beings and their interpretations: social order is a human product, or more precisely, an ongoing human production. Moreover, social constructivist positions do not accept any essentialist social-theories, which obviously applies equally to alienation concepts in general.²⁵

This results in a strong focus on cultural studies, performative models (gender studies) and cultural practices in general. But also social constructions are created by

24 See R. FUNK, *Erich Fromm Lesebuch*, Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, Stuttgart 1985, p. 124.

25 See P.L. BERGER, T. LUCKMANN, *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit: eine Theorie der Wissenssoziologie*, Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1972.

subjects' flesh and blood. Therefore, social constructions of reality encounter in humans, for example, organic conditions and limits: the biological constitution of individuals, their hunger, their mortality, their sexuality:

«Der Mensch ist biologisch bestimmt, eine Welt zu konstruieren und miteinander zu bewohnen. Diese Welt wird ihm zur dominierenden und definitiven Wirklichkeit. Ihre Grenzen sind von der Natur gesetzt. Hat er sie jedoch erst einmal konstruiert, so wirkt sie zurück auf die Natur. In der Dialektik zwischen Natur und gesellschaftlich konstruierter Welt wird noch der menschliche Organismus umgemodelt. In dieser Dialektik produziert der Mensch Wirklichkeit - und sich selbst»²⁶.

But even if it is true that there is a mutual influence or we could say a dialectic process of nature and society in men, we will later see that just the concept of suffering represents a limiting point, which refers to the hard materiality of human life, which cannot be shaped randomly and which is not as flexible as one might think. Our social reality is, to a large extent, performatively constructed through cultural practices. But just where cultural practices create suffering, there may be a need to modify and adjust those actions in order to adapt them to us as human beings.

For example within gender studies, gender is conceived as a socio-cultural and not as a natural disposition. This point of view understands gender predominantly as a social phenomenon, which gets constructed by social and cultural practices and unfortunately tends to be too one-sided. Although there is a theoretical difference between gender and sex, in many works, biological sex and its potential influence are completely excluded from theoretical considerations, leading to a tendency for gender to be considered as completely variable and changeable.²⁷ In particular, queer theories assume that self-definition is the only valid declaration of identity,²⁸ which equates to a complete exclusion of the human sciences and furthermore ignores the biological basis and its determining implications. The assumption that gender

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

²⁷ See TH. FREY STEFFEN, C. ROSENTHSL, A. VÄTH (Ed.), *Gender Studies: Wissenschaftstheorien und Gesellschaftskritik*, Königshausen u. Neumann Verlag, Würzburg 2004.

²⁸ See S.A. WOLTER, *Marx' Gespenster*, in: H.-J. Voß, S.A. Wolter (ed. by), *Queer und (Anti-) Kapitalismus*, Schmetterling Verlag, Stuttgart 2013, p. 45.

identities are mere individual constructions must therefore be seen as a postmodern variety of philosophical idealism.

So finally, we can assume that constructions do not take place in a vacuum, but are generated by real existing subjects. Anyone who wants to construct something necessarily needs building blocks in order to build, and these building blocks follow their own laws and have their own limitations. If we want to stay with the metaphor of the building blocks, gravity for example or its specific materiality influences the possibilities of realization and consequently it is not possible to construct or realize everything which the human mind comes up with. In this respect, overly *radical social constructivist* positions must be rejected if they assume that everything would merely be a question of performance. According to Heidegger, «wir sind immer schon Geworfene» (thrown into this world) which means that we cannot choose how and where or as whom we come into the world and so certain determinants are given in space and time that we can change with difficulty (the fact that I can only give birth to a child as a woman cannot be easily deconstructed and has particular consequences, and inevitably affects the social construction). Luckmann himself points out that social constructs do not claim radical indeterminism and that is of especially great importance to the limits of humanity. Despite our great plasticity in order to survive, we reach our limits in many places (e.g. mental illnesses). And often such limits become visible or perceptible through different experiences of suffering.²⁹

2.5. From the critique of logocentrism to ethical relativism

Die mit dem klassischen Wissensideal verbundene Forderung nach sicherer Begründung ist schon deshalb fragwürdig, weil jede Erkenntnis, die man für eine solche Begründung benutzen will, selbst wieder in Frage gestellt werden kann. Man gerät so also in eine Situation, die der des Barons Münchhausen entspricht, als er versuchte, sich am eigenen Schopf aus dem Sumpf zu ziehen. Diese Münchhausen-Situation läßt sich vermeiden, wenn man die Forderung nach absoluter Begründung und damit auch das alte Erkenntnisideal aufgibt und einen konsequenten Fallibilismus vertritt, also die Auffassung, daß der Mensch

29 See P.L. BERGER, T. LUCKMANN, *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit: eine Theorie der Wissenssoziologie*, Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1972, p. 138.

*bei der Lösung seiner Probleme stets fehlbar ist, sich also immer irren kann, so daß keine Erkenntnis jemals absolut sicher ist*³⁰.

The critique of *logocentrism* has been presented in many different ways and with different intensity that ranges from the general rejection of reason to the criticism of particular forms or effects of rational thinking (Adorno, Foucault, and Derrida). One is a critique of *instrumental reason* which characterizes the key categories in Horkheimer's and Adorno's *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. It describes the transformation of reason or truth that is only related to expectations about behavior reduced to mere categories of calculation. Another critique of reason is given by Foucault, who asks for the genesis of reason and tries to figure out at what point reason turns into various forms of irrationality. One of his examples is racism, which presents itself completely rational when it refers to scientific research that proves the superiority of a certain race, by means of intelligence tests or arguing with social Darwinist thinking to justify the predominance of certain social groups.³¹ It is above all due to the critique of logocentrism that has exposed the other side of reason, which can be cruel and violent and serve completely inhumane objectives. Reason itself is a neutral, indifferent instrument that makes no choice which master it serves. The former euphoric hope that reason or rationality will bring progress and make the world a better place, as Kant was entirely convinced, must be abandoned.

During the time of the *European Enlightenment*, the guiding principles were clear: reason, freedom, criticism and responsibility were the values to follow. The progressive motto of Kant «Sapere aude» (*Habe den Muth dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen*)³² should be able to uncover errors and prejudices of all kinds as well as help release the *general human reason* (*die Allgemeine Menschenvernunft*). This rational optimism is no longer adequate today and to rely only on reason (logic) and to trust in it unconditionally must be rated as dangerous or at least naive. But does that mean that reason and rationality have to be given up or rejected in general? Even Foucault agrees with the critique of Habermas against

30 H. ALBERT, *Kritischer Rationalismus*, in: H. Seiffert, G. Radnitzky (Ed.), *Handlexikon zur Wissenschaftstheorie*, Ehrenwirth, München 1989, pp. 177-182, p. 180.

31 See M. FOUCAULT, *Der Wille zum Wissen. Sexualität und Wahrheit 1*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1977, pp. 178-179.

32 One of the most important essays of Immanuel Kant which he published in December 1784 in the journal *Berlinischen Monatsschrift* as an answer to the question: *Was ist Aufklärung?* (What is Enlightenment?).

Lyotard, and warns to completely give up the idea of reasoning or the whole work of Kant and Weber who dedicated much of their work to the various forms of reason. If we do so, we run the risk of succumbing to irrationality, arbitrariness and real thorough relativism.³³

The so-called *Sokal affair* (*Sokal hoax*) has become famous in this context. A professor of the New York University, Alan Sokal, tried to publish an article in a post-modern, peer-reviewed journal, which was complete nonsense, but written in a certain 'postmodern' jargon that criticized scientific realism and surprisingly got accepted. Sokal's aim was to illustrate that the defect, the lack of intellectual standards, had led to absurd developments in certain postmodern academic circles.³⁴ The serious criticism regarding postmodernists for having a penchant for irrationalism as well as their alarming giving up of scientific categories such as objectivity must be seriously taken into account. This is because the arbitrariness and 'whateverism' that follow from such theoretical positions, as well as the impossibility to distinguish between various claims for truth, at least mean accepting the equivalence of esoterism and science.³⁵ That, of course, must be refused as an unacceptable theoretical position. Furthermore, it clarifies that the orientation towards reason cannot be given up and that it especially depends on how reason is used, under which conditions and which guidelines it follows. Above all, reason is a tool and not the purpose itself - and therefore it should always be asked which interests it serves or which values it represents.

This directly leads us to the question of ethics. *Ethics* is about looking for universally valid answers to the question of the right action and thinking and discussing the possibility of such universally valid ethical norms and their justification. That is why ethics is a practical science which serves a certain practical purpose. It is not about knowledge for its own sake (*θεωρία* - *theoria*), but about a responsible practice (*πρᾶξις* - *praxis*). It should provide orientation to people for their

33 See T. LEMKE, *Eine Kritik der politischen Vernunft – Foucaults Analyse der modernen Gouvernementalität*, Hamburg/Berlin 1996.

34 See A.D. SOKAL, J. BRICMONT, *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science*, Picador, New York, 1998; J. BRICMONT, *Eleganter Unsinn. Wie die Denker der Postmoderne die Wissenschaften mißbrauchen*. C.H. Beck, München 1999.

35 See P.R. GROSS, N. LEVITT, *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels With Science*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1994; P. R. GROSS, N. LEVITT, M. W. LEWIS, *The Flight from Science and Reason*, New York Academy of Sciences, New York 1997.

moral decisions. But above all, the task of ethics is to determine universally valid norms and justify them comprehensibly.

But what is the value of ethics within postmodern thinking? As we have already heard in the course of logocentrism critique, there is a fundamental skepticism about reason, which is why *Kantian ethics*, which found their ethic principles in human reason, is no longer supportable. For postmodern theories, radical plurality and radical diversity are the main values for ethical and moral designs. However, a rational justification of standards cannot be generally ruled out. Habermas' (as well as Karl-Otto Apel's) *Discourse ethics*³⁶ can certainly be seen as an attempt of designing an ethic in the Kantian tradition that does not only rely on reason, but complements it with intersubjective discourse. The core of this ethical approach is the argumentation of the pros and cons which finally decides if a certain position is reasonable or not. But, as we have just mentioned, not only on the basis of reason, because the problematic aspects of reason are largely acknowledged and reason is primarily seen as a mere tool or an instrument that helps defend, explain and reflect on our desires and interests, or simply helps us reach our goals. Instead, the values which shape our point of view and what is considered ethically good or valuable are fundamentally based on concrete historical, cultural, social, biological and psychological factors.

The position of ethical relativism abstains from moral judgments because it fears the inappropriate idea that one could not reasonably put oneself in a meta-position that decides which ethical ideas are more meaningful than others. The explanation for this point of view is the assumption that there are no valid criteria by which one can distinguish morally bad from morally good judgments, and as a consequence, it is proposed to be tolerant of all forms of ethics. This means that ethical relativism claims one order as good and as bad as any other. That such a position must be regarded as untenable, especially in the face of suffering, acts of terror or genocide, such as the Holocaust, needs not be further emphasized. The attempt to reject a meta-position creates a paradoxical situation in which precisely the relativistic arguing

36 See K.-O. APEL, *Diskurs und Verantwortung. Das Problem des Übergangs zur postkonventionellen Moral*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1988; ID., *Das Apriori der Kommunikationsgemeinschaft und die Grundlagen der Ethik: Zum Problem einer rationalen Begründung der Ethik im Zeitalter der Wissenschaft*, in: K.-O. Apel (ed. by), *Transformation der Philosophie*, Band 2, Frankfurt am Main 1973, pp. 358-435; J. HABERMAS, *Erläuterungen zur Diskursethik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1991.

attitude must be regarded as a meta-position. In fact, as human beings, we are not only human, but because of our humanity, we always find ourselves in a concrete position in space and time, which is necessarily the basis for ethical considerations in the first place. Any ethics is meaningful exclusively for and within a social context. Only a completely abstract ethical position, which is detached from the reference to humans, could assert that ethical positions are completely relative. In this respect, the consequence can never be an ethical relativism. Thus it is all about the question in which respect, which ethical action is more reasonable than another (and of course it cannot be excluded that sometimes there is more than one reasonable ethical standpoint).

Even in intercultural comparisons or in the multiculturalism debate, contours of a core of universal morality can be seen, and one quickly realizes that there are great similarities between moral concepts in general.³⁷ In fact, intercultural discourse may be regarded as much more promising if it is not based on that what separates people, but on what connects them. The hasty abandonment, for example, of the European idea of *human rights* due to its immanent ethnocentrism, suggested by the cultural relativistic *zeitgeist*, can only be countered by an intercultural discourse that seeks to work out the general links of the specific cultural forms and to find political agreements on that basis.

Ethics is for and from human beings, in a concrete social context. Therefore, ethical relativism should be dropped as an abstract (especially abstracting from humanity) and unworldly gimmick that too quickly forgets to take into consideration human suffering, mortality or vulnerability which elucidate the absurdity of relativistic standpoints by themselves.

37 See E. FROMM, *Psychoanalyse und Ethik. Bausteine zu einer humanistischen Charakterologie*, in: R. Funk (ed.by), *Erich Fromm Gesamtausgabe in 12 Bänden*, Band II, *Analytische Charaktertheorie*, Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, Stuttgart 1999, pp. 1-154, p. 151.

2.6. Subject between freedom and determination

*Das Ich ist nicht Herr im eigenen Haus*³⁸.

Finally, the last point concerns *subject theories*. The subject-concept, which has its origin in philosophy, is the object of a multitude of sciences that look at it from different perspectives. These include, above all, psychology, anthropology, political science and not to forget sociology. In philosophy for a long time the subject was conceived only as a conscious, rational entity (Descartes) whereas the body, the emotionality or the unconscious were strongly neglected or even excluded. Finally the subject-concept, thanks to psychoanalysis and the philosophy of the body (Merleau-Ponty)³⁹ started to change. All these important aspects of being human, the psyche, the body and with it all forms of emotions, instincts or unconscious impulses finally got the attention they deserved.

For this reason, we want to approach the concept of subject in particular from a philosophical and psychological perspective, because theoretical discussion in these fields has taken place for the longest time and very intensively; also, the most significant changes can be explained well within these scientific fields.

In philosophy, one can distinguish between two essential subject concepts. On the one hand, the *epistemological* one and on the other hand, the *action-theoretical* approach. Since for the present work the action-theoretical subject-concept is the more relevant. In the theory of action, everything is concerned with the subject of free will and the subject that makes decisions and is able to act. In classical subject theories, from Descartes to Kant, the function of reason, which means the thinking, self-reflexive and judgmental subject, was the primary interest of philosophical considerations. Questions, for example, about the free will of human beings were discussed in the light of these rationalist considerations.

After Kant, it was Schopenhauer and Nietzsche who illuminated new aspects of the subject question. Among these reflections one of the most significant observations regarded the *free will* which finally was resolutely denied by both

38 S. FREUD, *Eine Schwierigkeit der Psychoanalyse*, in: *Imago. Zeitschrift für Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften*, Band V, 1970, pp. 1-7.

39 M. MERLEAU-PONTY, *Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung*, Walter de Gruyter & Co, Berlin 1974.

authors and claimed as a blind natural force in human beings (which is reminiscent of Freud's *drive-theory* – *Triebtheorie*).⁴⁰

Although the dominance of Kantian and Cartesian subjects essentially persisted until the 20th century, postmodern authors took up Nietzsche's thoughts in particular. Adorno, for example, distanced himself from Kant's transcendental subject; precisely because he did not sufficiently take into account the subject's societal condition and paid too little attention to the unfree expressions of will (impulses). Adorno conceptualizes the subject as an empirical subject, which is not only self-determined, but dependent on the power structures prevailing in a society, which are also reflected in the psyche of man (for example as social ideals, values etc. which are reflected in the superego). And Foucault, too, is guided by the concrete empirical subject, which is determined both culturally and historically.⁴¹

As can clearly be shown, above all there are two fundamentally different approaches to the consideration of the subject. First, those theories that consider the subject rather as underlying (*ὑποκείμενον* - *hypokeimenon*) and second, those notions that emphasize more the subjected (*subiectum*) aspect of the subject and its different contingencies. But there are also theories that emphasize both aspects equally. For example, if we consider how the subject is understood in psychoanalysis, then we can say that it is conceived as subjugated, because it is on the one hand subjected to unconscious internal structures, such as the superego (*Über-Ich*) or the it (*Es*), and on the other psychoanalysis has a strong subject-concept because the primary aim of analysis is to strengthen the ego (*Ich*) of the patient. This goal is, of course, emancipatory, one that aims to liberate the ego from its unconscious determinations through an enlightening approach. But even in social theory from Marx to modern sociology, there is always a fluctuation between these two ideas, depending on what someone is emphasizing when he observes the subject.

For example, Marx sometimes talks about the subject characterizing it by its social conditions, which is well expressed in his famous sentence «Es ist nicht das Bewusstsein der Menschen, das ihr Sein, sondern umgekehrt ihr gesellschaftliches

40 See A. SCHOPENHAUER, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, in: *Arthur Schopenhauer. Zürcher Ausgabe. Werke in zehn Bänden*, A. Hübscher (Ed.), Band 2, Diogenes, Zürich 1977, p. 234.

41 See M. FOUCAULT, *Subjekt und Macht*, in: M. Foucault, *Schriften in vier Bänden*, Band 4, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 2005, p. 255–279.

Sein, das ihr Bewusstsein bestimmt»⁴², which means that human consciousness gets primarily shaped by the societal conditions (and not the other way round) whereas he simultaneously conceives a deeply autonomous, revolutionary subject who is able to liberate himself and to emancipate from harmful social conditions.

Furthermore, there are also positions that are a kind of mixture of these two, such as the subject theory of Judith Butler. She points out that Nietzsche offers a political insight into the formation of the psyche and the problem of subjectivation, paradoxically understood not merely as a subordination of the subject to a norm, but as the constitution of the subject through this subordination:

«[...] uns eine politische Einsicht in die Formierung der Psyche und das Problem der Subjektivation bietet, und zwar paradox verstanden nicht bloß als Unterordnung des Subjekts unter eine Norm, sondern als Konstitution des Subjekts durch ebendiese Unterordnung»⁴³.

Butler adopts this idea from Nietzsche and believes that subjectivity as a stable entity before submission does not exist. This approach illustrates the interweaving of culture and nature in relation to the human being and conceives human subjectivity as a genuinely social constitution which is not imaginable beyond society or the social sphere.

In postmodern theories, the focus is less on identity, and more on the fragile, the decentralized, the subjugated and the conditioned. These concepts become problematic at the point where they tend to become one-sided and exclusively underline the culturality or historicity and only analyze the changing and the chaotic while the constant and stable is ignored. Some theories even talk about the disappearance or the *death* of the subject which consequently implies that the idea of a free subject is completely rejected. But this means to conceive the subject as mere results and plaything of external (and internal) powers, which, in the end, provokes fatalistic devotion to the given conditions.

42 K. MARX, *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, in: *Marx-Engels-Werke (MEW)* Band 13, pp. 7-160, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1971, p. 9.

43 J. BUTLER, *Zirkel des schlechten Gewissens. Nietzsche in Freud*, in: J. Butler (Ed.), *Psyche der Macht. Das Subjekt der Unterwerfung*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2001, p. 16.

Nevertheless, there is a very important insight at the core of such theories. The changeability and the process-like character of subjectivity as well as its culturality and the contingency of external and internal factors are finally given appropriate consideration. However, in order to escape the all-too-radical, post-modern positions and thus have to give up any political subject or emancipatory ideas, it makes sense to regard the changing identity as a unity within diversity.

The insight into the non-static, processually changing identity and into the necessarily socialized nature of man, which means to recognize the essential sociality of human beings, should be considered as well as the conditionalities of genetics or external circumstances. All these aspects are part of the framework of our existence through which we act freely.

In the next chapter there will be a useful clarification of the anthropological determinations which should help define in more detail the coordinates and the framework in which we constantly act and move as social beings and furthermore give a possible interpretation of how we will approach feelings and emotions. This is needed to fully understand the socio-philosophical conception, which identifies human suffering as a *social-ontological* and *anthropological* border.

Summary

1. The idea of progress is not completely dropped; a conceptual idea of social and societal development is understood as a meaningful category for the ability to evaluate societies
2. The "great narratives" are to be classified as problematic in their claims to absoluteness; however, essentially they still contain useful ideas; Humanism is therefore considered a possible meaningful directive, because of its anthropocentric approach, but it has to be carefully loosened from its idealistic ballast of so-called ideas of a "good human nature" or others
3. The criticism of logocentrism has drawn attention to the dangers of the sole rationalist conceptions; thus, in order to enable philosophically more realistic and comprehensive considerations, dimensions such as corporeality and emotions should also be considered
4. Social constructivism offers insights into the cultural and social construction of societies, but remains incomplete without reference to biological aspects
5. Postmodern ethical positions quickly lead to an ethical relativism which is rejected in this thesis; ethical views are not equivalent, there are more and less meaningful ethical positions and they are always in connection with our humanity and our sociality
6. The identity of subjects is considered processional, which is why essentialist concepts must be rejected; human subjects are not able to be completely self-reflective and to a large extent other-directed (nature and society); however, there is no doubt about the fundamental freedom of man
7. All these theoretical assumptions are necessarily considered for a meaningful conception of social-philosophy

Chapter III

Socio-Anthropological Requirements

Das, was die Psychoanalyse der Soziologie zu bringen hat, ist die – wenn auch noch unvollkommene – Kenntnis des seelischen Apparates des Menschen, der neben technischen, ökonomischen und wirtschaftlichen Faktoren eine Determinante der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung darstellt und nicht weniger Berücksichtigung verdient als die anderen eben genannten. Es ist die gemeinsame Problemstellung beider Wissenschaften zu untersuchen, inwieweit und in welcher Weise der seelische Apparat des Menschen verursachend oder bestimmend auf die Entwicklung oder Gestaltung der Gesellschaft gewirkt hat¹.

It is not new that science deals with men. What is new is a conflict of competence between natural and cultural sciences. In particular, today's so-called life sciences claim the authority to interpret and define aspects of humans that traditionally belonged to the humanities, social sciences and philosophy. Whether in brain research, genetic engineering or evolutionary biology, everywhere one meets the demand to offer a better, i.e. natural scientific alternative to the views that were once to be found in the humanities' tradition.

Thus, the public debate of classical philosophical questions, such as free will, is more shaped by researchers from the field of brain research than of any other discipline. This would generally not be bad if the subsequent reflection and the following conclusions which are drawn from these scientific results were combined with representatives of the humanities who could counteract the current one-sidedness and reductionist tendencies of natural sciences who treat men like a pure product of nature (evolution). But that is not what is happening right now for very different reasons, and of course this situation is not favorable to science at all. The two scientific positions are becoming more and more in opposition with each other and their different understandings of the world, as well as their different approaches to their scientific subjects, mutually tend to be excluded and ignored in their considerations and theoretical reflections. In current scientific discourse, this is regrettable for the shortened view in the natural sciences, which for example exclude

1 E. FROMM, *Die Gesellschaft als Gegenstand der Psychoanalyse*, R. Funk (Ed.), *Frühe Schriften zur Analytischen Sozialpsychologie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1993, pp. 11-12.

subjective positions and experiences, but it is downright fatal for the humanities. This is because the humanities, cultural studies and their specific approaches are increasingly in distress due to the dominance of the scientific and empirical paradigm. The fact that man is not just a biological organism or the result of evolutionary variation and selection is often forgotten in the natural sciences. However, it is not only the subject, but also the method and the scientists themselves that are part of a specific cultural context with a certain cultural-historical and scientific tradition. An illustrative example of this cultural interdependence of science and research is the research of homosexuality. Only in 1973 was homosexuality removed from the DSM II Catalog², published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), which classified homosexuality as a mental illness. The ICD (International Classification of Diseases)³ removed it only in 1992. Due to cultural change, it seems absurd today that once they have tried to treat homosexuals with medicine and psychotherapy. But in those days, few people seemed to be irritated by this approach. This testifies to the fact that science as well as any other sphere of life is exposed to and shaped by cultural changes. Nevertheless, the scientific method tries to observe the human being as an object and, if possible, to abstract it from any cultural condition. That this in principle is expedient for the methodology in the natural sciences is not questioned at all, neither will it be disputed here. The criticism of this approach aims to create awareness of the fact that the results of the natural sciences need to be re-contextualized if they do not want to risk a complete misinterpretation of their scientific results just because they exclude the possibility of cultural and social influences to their works. Unfortunately, that does not take place sufficiently and therefore many of these discussions (e.g. about free will) remain inadequate and unsatisfactory from a philosophical or a sociological point of view.

As the present work is instead a philosophical one, the above presented criticism of the reductionist approach of many natural scientists shall be rescheduled for the philosophical approach as well. What does this precisely mean? The humanities also tend to exclude scientific results and often do not concern themselves with biology or natural sciences at all. To prevent this kind of one-sidedness, the philosophical

2 It is the name for the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA).

3 It is the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) which is released by the WHO.

approach shall be supplemented by sociological and psychological perspectives, and if necessary also biological ones.

For this reason, the formulation of the *bio-psycho-social model* according to Engel (1962)⁴ as an intermediary function seems to be an adequate starting point. The assumption of the mutual influence of the three spheres of this model allows to design a systematic overall perspective. According to this model, monocausal explanations of the given problems are to be classified as reductionist and therefore insufficient. Thus, the following explanations should be at least a theoretical attempt to meet the diversity of the subject: above all, this means that philosophical discourses will include psychological considerations such as individual psychological dynamics as well as inter-psychological dimensions which are of relevance. The present chapter intends to clarify anthropological and related socio-anthropological questions in particular, as well as to provide a conception of man which shall serve as a reference point for the idea of suffering as a socio-critical starting point.

The interdisciplinary approach should help not to create too abstract theoretical conceptions of what men are. In order to clarify the anthropological prerequisites, psychoanalytic models should therefore be used in particular. The most important requirement that should be provided by these psychoanalytic models is predominantly the plausibility and applicability to the questions that we will deal with. That is the reason why only specific models of the different psychoanalytic authors are selected.

The reason why especially psychoanalytic models have been chosen as reference points is due to their meta-psychology, which is strongly oriented towards the inner life of the subjects. None of the other psychological schools has a meta-psychology which is equivalently elaborated in such a comprehensive way. On the contrary, many psychological schools are based on psychoanalytical foundations and numerous concepts and models have been adapted. And even within behaviorist schools, which are classically considered to be the greatest opponents of psychoanalysis (among which even the harshest critics of psychoanalysis can be found) have established the importance of inner life for an appropriate psychological

4 See G.L. ENGEL, *The need for a new medical model: A challenge for biomedicine*, in: *Science*, 196, pp. 129-136.

understanding (like imagination, perception, emotion, cognition etc.), after the *cognitive turn*.

Using psychoanalysis for the investigation of social phenomena has a long tradition, especially for the *Frankfurt School*. Since its inception, it has been concerned with the damage and delusions of life in capitalist society which many thinkers have elaborated through the analysis of psychological phenomena.⁵ In the first generation, these were in particular the works of Alexander Mitscherlich, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm. Later came Jürgen Habermas, Alfred Lorenzer and Klaus Horn, and finally the works of the latest generation by Axel Honneth, Horst-Eberhart Richter and Robert Heim. They all incorporated psychoanalytical models, approaches or perspectives, in many different ways. So their socio-critical view is highly influenced by those concepts. Once it is used for social diagnosis (Mitscherlich)⁶, then as a method against the reductionist approach of positivist shortening of instrumental reason (Habermas)⁷ or to clarify the question of how subjectivity within the sciences could be emphasized appropriately (Horn).⁸

Therefore, the relationship of man as a cultural being on the one hand and as a natural being on the other shall be discussed. Some basic concepts of Freud's psychoanalysis will be introduced, such as the model of ego (*Ich*), superego (*Über-Ich*) and id (*Es*), as well as the concept of sublimation (*Sublimierung*). Sublimation in this chapter will be used in a broader sense. Not only to indicate the classical psychoanalytical concept, but as a general psychological mode of human adaptation to the environment. We will soon see how to understand this. In particular, we will highlight the limits of adaptation, which often express themselves in various forms of suffering. Furthermore, we shall clarify the relationship of people as individuals to society and their social environment. At this point, we will also introduce some psychoanalytic theories of Lacan and Lorenzer and Fromm. And finally, the question

5 See H.J. BUSCH, *Psychoanalytische Sozialpsychologie in Frankfurt – eine Tradition und ihre Zukunft*, in: H.-J. Busch (Ed.), *Spuren des Subjekts, Positionen psychoanalytischer Sozialpsychologie*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2007, p. 15.

6 See A. MITSCHERLICH, M. MITSCHERLICH, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern: Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens*, Piper Verlag, München 1987.

7 See J. HABERMAS, *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie: was leistet die Systemforschung?*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1972.

8 See K. HORN, *Psychoanalyse und gesellschaftliche Widersprüche*, Psychosozial.-Verlag, Gießen 1998.

of the *body-soul dualism* will be discussed as well as the classical rational orientation and the idea of man as *animal rationale*, which will be theoretically supplemented by a detailed study of the transformation of psychological theories of emotion; and show how it could be applicable to a socio-critical theory of suffering.

3.1. The discomfort in culture - human beings between culture and nature

*Das Unbewußte ist das eigentlich reale Psychische, uns nach seiner inneren Natur so unbekannt wie das Reale der Außenwelt, und uns durch die Daten des Bewußtseins ebenso unvollständig gegeben wie die Außenwelt durch die Angaben unserer Sinnesorgane*⁹.

The entry into this topic should begin directly with Freud. One of Freud's most famous cultural-theoretical works is without question the essay entitled *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*¹⁰. In the following discussion, this text by the Viennese psychoanalyst, published in 1930, will serve as a reference point to clarify the question of men's relationship between culture and nature. The main reason to use this text is because this cultural-theoretical work starts at the same point as the present work. Although Freud deals with the question of a general discomfort in culture while the work presented here intends to refer to concrete individual experiences of suffering, they nevertheless share the same fundamental question: namely, how to assess the role of society or culture for humans and clarify what would be appropriate consequences for a theory about humans that genuinely considers our culturality. Despite many clever insights of Freud's well known analysis, I do not share Freud's pessimistic judgment.

Freud assumes that cultural preservation can only be achieved through sacrificing drives (*Triebopfer*). Therefore, life in culture inevitably leads to a feeling of discomfort and even of hostility towards culture. While culture was actually there to arm against the vulnerability and weaknesses of one's own body and regulate the relations with fellow human beings (*homo homini lupus*) and to be more able to

9 S. FREUD, *Die Traumdeutung*, in: *Freud. Gesammelte Werke II-III*, Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1976, p. 617.

10 See ID., *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 1953.

defend oneself against the superiority of nature, it has now become a source of discomfort because of the renunciation of sexual impulses. Thus, the cultural man exchanges a great chance to be happy for being secure instead. Furthermore, Freud is convinced that the greatest human freedom was before any culture existed. In detail, this means that the *eros* (*Lebenstrieb* - life drive) must be suppressed, because cultural development requires all the psychic energy. The idea is that culture demands certain sacrifices, which are imposed by laws, implicit rules and values etc. and that these forces make human beings suppress or even scarify certain instincts. These finally cause a permanent inner-psychic conflict with the existing norms:

«Das Kultur-Über-Ich hat seine Ideale ausgebildet und erhebt seine Forderungen. Unter den letzteren werden die, welche die Beziehungen der Menschen zueinander betreffen, als Ethik zusammengefaßt. Zu allen Zeiten wurde auf diese Ethik der größte Wert gelegt, als ob man gerade von ihr besonders wichtige Leistungen erwartete. Und wirklich wendet sich die Ethik jenem Punkt zu, der als die wundeste Stelle jeder Kultur leicht kenntlich ist. Die Ethik ist also als ein therapeutischer Versuch aufzufassen, als Bemühung, durch ein Gebot des Über-Ichs zu erreichen, was bisher durch sonstige Kulturarbeit nicht zu erreichen war»¹¹.

So, ethics is clearly seen in its functionality for culture as a “therapeutic” attempt to internalize the demands of the super ego and at least to deal with them, although its demands are meant to cause discomfort. He assumes that the ego inherently unites two impulses, the sexual drive and the instinct of aggressiveness (*Sexualtrieb* and *Aggressionstrieb*) which, however, would be sanctioned by an external authority. In childhood this is mostly represented by the father figure, through the withdrawal of love. The fear of loss of paternal love will then be installed in a longer process as the superego. This finally leads to a guilty conscience due to socially unwanted thoughts. This is possible because the inner psychic dynamic of conscience is based on the redirected aggression of the destructive instinct on the superego and finally gets introjected against one’s own ego.¹²

The system of self-regulation is successfully established as soon as the father

11 *Ibid.* p. 126.

12 See *ibid.*, pp. 111 sq.

figure has been replaced by social instances such as the law or the current ethics or norms. The price for culture is thus actually the feeling of guilt, which manifests itself as discomfort. In the idea of the super-ego, several aspects come into play. On the one hand, it is the place where collective norms and values find their expression. So this inner psychic dynamic of the superego can only be established through an auto-aggressive act. This is reminiscent of all those subject conceptions that highlight the submission act. Here, too, a subjugation takes place that makes one, through the additional internalization of norms, a subject of society, and thus simply means socialization. It is also interesting to notice that the more the superego is trained, the greater the threat of punishment or the fear of wrongdoing becomes, the greater the feeling of guilty. This sometimes causes pathological cases, which consequently produces a neurotic personality structure:¹³

«Es benimmt sich umso strenger und mißtrauischer, je tugendhafter ein Mensch ist, so daß am Ende gerade, die es in der Heiligkeit am weitesten brachte, sich der ärgsten Sündhaftigkeit beschuldigen»¹⁴.

However, it must be clear that the socialization process is never absolute. Of course, certain individual proportions always remain preserved, so to speak unsocialized, and one can certainly assume that it is these subjective, resistant parts that actually lead to cultural changes and criticism of existing conditions. Unfortunately, they sometimes lead to mental illness as well, especially where the suffering becomes overwhelming. The neurotic symptom can be interpreted as a compromise between the *instinctive drive* and its refusal due to *socio-cultural reality*. This can be illustrated by the instances of ego, superego and id. That which is socialized settles in the instance of the superego, while much of the id remains untouched. The instance of the *I*, on the other hand, represents the conscious, rational parts of the human being and at the same time it is the mediator between the *superego* and the *id*. In spite of the limitations of every subject, the *I* is to be regarded as the place of freedom of the subject.

Furthermore, Freud assumes that the meaning of life realizes itself in the pleasure

13 Indeed, many therapy schools they seek seek to loosen the superego structure in order to gain more personal freedom (which works very well for compulsory personalities).

14 S. FREUD, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 1953, p. 112.

principle (*Lustprinzip*) which can be interpreted as the pursuit of happiness. Therefore, men seek all kinds of substitutes for their unsatisfied needs and wishes:

«Das Programm, welches uns das Lustprinzip aufdrängt, glücklich zu werden, ist nicht zu erfüllen, doch darf man – nein, kann man – die Bemühungen, es irgendwie der Erfüllung näherzubringen, nicht aufgeben».

«[...] man möchte sagen: die Absicht, daß der Mensch "glücklich" sei, ist im Plan der "Schöpfung" nicht enthalten»¹⁵.

Whether it is only culture that impedes human beings to exclusively pursue their *Lustprinzip* (*libido*), remains doubtful. Rather, life itself, and the way the world is created, seems to provide the reason why the pursuit of happiness is permanently thwarted. Even if one accepts the idea of a time before culture, as Freud does, happiness seems to have been scarcely greater. It is not only the renunciation of libidinal instinct caused by the compulsion of human culture, but as we think of a pre-cultural existence, the various miseries and distresses of life would force all to renounce instinctual desires permanently in order to survive.

Freud also speaks of the suffering caused by the fragility of our own bodies and the hostile outside world, which constantly threatens our life with its destructive forces, and finally he discusses the suffering that comes from the relationships among people.¹⁶ With regard to this multitude of possibilities for suffering, the task to avoid suffering moves into the spotlight while the pleasure principle gets transformed under the influence of the outside world into a more modest reality-principle. According to Freud, intoxication, yoga practices, the mastery of nature through technical developments, artistic and cultural development, spiritual employment as well as withdrawal from reality through escape into fantasy, or just withdrawal from social life, are possible methods to combat suffering. In Freud's theoretical conception, the idea of sublimation is of special importance because it is seen as the inner-psychic strategy to deal with the oppression of instincts. This functions through the transformation of the original instincts to substitute objects or activities, such as science, art or politics.¹⁷ At this point, we will consider in more

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 80 and 75.

16 See *ibid.*, p. 75

17 See *ibid.*, pp. 75-82.

detail the Freudian theory of sublimation to fully understand its consequences as well as its limits.

3.2. Sublimation or the limits of adaptability

Unter 'Sublimierung' hat man nichts anderes zu verstehen als die psychogentische oder idiogenetische Seite der Sozialisation: die Sozialisation der Psyche als psychischer Prozeß. Dieser Prozeß kann nur unter bestimmten, wesentlichen Bedingungen stattfinden, die ihm selbst äußerlich sind; er besteht darin, dass die Psyche die gesellschaftlich instituierte Formen (eide) und die mit ihnen einhergehenden Bedeutungen übernimmt, sich als das Gesellschaftliche aneignet, indem sie zwischen der privaten und der öffentlichen oder gemeinschaftlichen Welt eine Berührungsfläche entstehen läßt¹⁸.

The notion of sublimation is central to the genesis of culture in Freud's theory, and is due to the libidinal occupation of non-sexual objects.¹⁹ Although it is seen as a defense mechanism, it has a special significance for Freud and is to be distinguished in its dynamics from other defense mechanisms such as repression, regression, projection or reaction formation. In the process of sublimation, the impulse of the instinct is simply taken over by the ego and directed to another goal. This provides energy for the ego which can be freely used for every kind of activity.²⁰ The question that arises here is whether the replacement or the substitute may provide the same pacification and satisfaction as the original (sexual) objects or urges do. Or whether this produces a great discomfort, as Freud suggests, and eventually leads to aggressive outbreaks of frustrated sexual desires.

«Ins Unbegrenzte fortsetzen lässt ich dieser Verschiebungsprozeß aber sicherlich nicht, so wenig wie die Umsetzung der Wärme in mechanische Arbeit bei unseren Maschinen. Ein gewisses Maß an direkter sexueller Befriedigung scheint für die allermeisten Organisationen unerlässlich, und die Versagung dieses individuell variablen Maßes straft sich durch Erscheinungen, die wir

18 C. CASTORIADIS, *Gesellschaft als imaginäre Institution. Entwurf einer politischen Philosophie*, Frankfurt am Main 1990, p. 515.

19 See J. LAPLANCHE, J.B. PONTALIS, *Das Vokabular der Psychoanalyse*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1972, pp. 478-481.

20 See W. REICH, *Charakteranalyse*, Kiwi Taschenbuch, Köln 1971, pp. 208-209.

infolge ihrer Funktionsschädlichkeit und ihres subjektiven Unlustcharakters zum Kranksein rechnen müssen»²¹.

Even if the focus is too much on the refusal of sexual instinctual impulses, it is clear that there is a limit of adaptation through sublimation, which can also end in psychopathological phenomena. Within psychopathology, these disorders express themselves in the form of various symptoms which are to be seen as signs of such difficulties of adaption, or even as distortions of adaption, or as overburdening conditions, social contradictions or generally conflictual states. Freud is not afraid of claiming that if his patients had a sufficiently well-developed ability to sublimate, the development of neuroses could be prevented.²² At this point he is certainly too idealistic, because such an assertion would ultimately mean that adjustment difficulties in general must be regarded as a psychopathological dysfunction. Such an approach ignores the possibility that the causes of such adjustment difficulties may also lie in the inadequacy of social conditions that do not correspond to our human nature. Fromm also criticizes such a position, because otherwise humans would merely be marionettes of societal conditions: « [...] wäre der Mensch nur eine Marionette irgendwelcher sozialer Übereinkommen, aber niemals ein aktives Wesen, das im Verlauf seiner Geschichte Beweis erbracht hat, daß es immer wieder gegen den übermächtigen Druck sozialer und kultureller Verhältnisse ankämpfen will, die seiner Veranlagung nicht entsprechen.»²³

3.3. Nietzsche against Freud

Du solltest Herr über dich werden, Herr auch über die eigenen Tugenden. Früher waren sie deine Herren; aber sie dürfen nur deine Werkzeuge neben andren Werkzeugen sein. Du solltest Gewalt über dein Für und Wider bekommen und es verstehen lernen, sie aus- und wieder einzuhängen, je nach deinem

21 S. FREUD, *Die 'kulturelle' Sexualmoral und die moderne Nervosität- 1908 Band 9*, in: A. Mitscherlich (Ed.), *Sigmund Freud. Studienausgabe*, Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1982, p. 19.

22 See ID., *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie (1905)*, Band 5, in *Studienausgabe*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 1982, p.141.

23 E. FROMM, *Psychoanalyse und Ethik*, Stuttgart, Konstanz 1954, p. 36.

*höheren Zwecke*²⁴.

In contrast to Freud, Nietzsche's approach to sublimation, despite some similarities, is somehow different and broader. First of all, the application of the term can be reduced to three dimensions:

- a cultural-theoretical,
- an individual-psychological and
- a philosophical one.²⁵

The *first* form of the cultural-theoretical dimension of sublimation means that it denotes the process that controls pre-cultural chaos: «Nehmen wir dagegen den Wettkampf aus dem griechischen Leben hinweg, so sehen wir sofort in jenem vorhomerischen Abgrund einer grauenhaften Wildheit des Hasses und der Vernichtungslust.»²⁶ So, the establishment of the state serves to sublimate the *bellum omnium contra omnes*, which previously was random and savage, and now placed within the framework of legality. Nietzsche's insight into the need for rules to structure the pre-cultural chaos and defy the dangers of the *Apeiron* (ἄπειρον) leads to the notion that man creates institutions, permanence and stabilization for this reason:

*«Erster Satz der Civilisation. - Bei rohen Völkern giebt es eine Gattung von Sitten, deren Absicht die Sitte überhaupt zu sein scheint: peinliche und im Grunde überflüssige Bestimmungen (...), die aber die fortwährende Nähe der Sitte, den unausgesetzten Zwang, Sitten zu üben, fortwährend im Bewusstsein erhalten: zur Bekräftigung des grossen Satzes, mit dem die Civilisation beginnt: jede Sitte ist besser als keine Sitte»*²⁷.

The *second*, psychological dimension means that sublimation can be regarded as the epitome of instinct refinement and that every cognitive will (thirst for knowledge) can be regarded as instinctually rooted. «Gesetzt, dass nichts Anderes als real 'gegeben' ist als unsre Welt der Begierden und Leidenschaften, dass wir zu keiner

24 F. NIETZSCHE, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, in: *Friedrich Nietzsche: Werke in drei Bänden*, Hanser Verlag, München 1954, p. 443.

25 See E. GOEBEL, *Jenseits des Unbehagens*, «Sublimierung» von Goethe bis Lacan, Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld 2009, p. 78.

26 F. NIETZSCHE, *Fünf Vorreden. Homer's Wettkampf*, in: *Friedrich Nietzsche: Werke in drei Bänden*, Hanser Verlag, München 1954, p. 296.

27 ID., *Morgenröthe*, in: *Friedrich Nietzsche: Werke in drei Bänden*, cit., p. 1025.

andren 'Realität' hinab oder hinauf können als gerade zur Realität unserer Triebe – denn Denken ist nur ein Verhalten dieser Triebe zueinander [...]»²⁸ This conception of the will that has its origin in the instincts is certainly in great proximity to Schopenhauer's idea of human will.²⁹

And finally, the *third* meaning of sublimation as the philosophical, ontological dimension of the being, conceives the capacity to sublime as a presupposition of human survival in a world that is changing continuously (*ewiges Werden* – eternal becoming). In addition, the sublimation of Nietzsche is given further significance, which is to be seen as the human possibility to liberate themselves from nature and increase their human power. As Goebel writes, Nietzsche's doctrine of the corporeality of reason (*Leiblichkeit der Vernunft*) and the doctrine of the *will to power* (*Wille zur Macht*) eventually merge under the concept of sublimation into a structural unity.³⁰ Whoever understands sublimating has a strong will to power, which indicates nothing else than an instinct for freedom (*Instinkt der Freiheit*).³¹ So we are not only powerful, but at the same time free. Or as Andreas Salomé put it, the greater the erotic energy, the more possibilities to sublime:

«Je kräftiger erotisch jemand veranlagt ist, desto größer auch die Möglichkeiten seiner Sublimierungen, mit desto längerem Atem hält er die an ihn gestellten Ansprüche aus, ohne Triebdurchsetzung und Realitätsanpassung in Zwiespalt miteinander geraten zu lassen. [...] Wüschelrutengänger, denen noch im Scheinbar trockensten Boden Quellenpunkte spürbar werden, [...]»³².

Here we can notice the very difference between Nietzsche and Freud, who argue in completely different ways. Freud claims in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* that the greatest freedom of man is to be found before every human culture, because only there no limitations were imposed by society's prevailing *reality principle*

28 ID., *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, in: *Friedrich Nietzsche: Werke in drei Bänden*, cit., p. 599.

29 See A. SCHOPENHAUER, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, in: *Arthur Schopenhauer. Zürcher Ausgabe. Werke in zehn Bänden*, A. Hübscher (Ed.), Band 2, Diogenes, Zürich 1977.

30 See E. GOEBEL, *Jenseits des Unbehagens*, «Sublimierung» von Goethe bis Lacan, cit., p. 87.

31 See F. NIETZSCHE, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, in: *Friedrich Nietzsche: Werke in drei Bänden*, cit., p. 826.

32 L. ANDREAS-SALOME, *Lebensrückblick*, Inselverlag, Frankfurt am Main 1974, pp. 157-158.

(*Realitätsprinzip*).³³ This equation of freedom with the unlimited dominion of the pleasure principle appears quite naive in Freudian theory.

Nietzsche definitely contradicts this idea and his assessment seems to be the much more realistic and appropriate.

«Das ist die erste Vorschulung zur Geistigkeit: auf einen Reiz nicht sofort reagieren, sondern die hemmenden, die abschließenden Instinkte in die Hand bekommen. [...] das Wesentliche daran ist gerade, nicht 'wollen', die Entscheidung aussetzen können. Alle Ungeistigkeit, alle Gemeinheit beruht auf dem Unvermögen, einem Reize Widerstand zu leisten – man muss reagieren, man folgt jedem Impulse.[...] In vielen Fällen ist ein solches Müssen bereits Krankhaftigkeit, Niedergang, Symptom der Erschöpfung, – fast Alles, was die unphilosophische Rohheit mit dem Namen 'Laster' bezeichnet, ist bloss jenes physiologische Unvermögen nicht zu reagieren»³⁴.

Nietzsche argues here as a thinker of freedom. For him, sublimation is not only the liberation from the need of life of overpowering nature, but also liberation from the instinctual nature that presses from within every human being. The human ability to choose between various forces and not succumb automatically to inner drives. Nietzsche, in contrast to Freud, does not see culture as problematic in itself, but only certain forms of culture. One of his critiques on culture regards Christianity, for example. In this religion, he identifies the victory of the weak over the strong, who by the *transvaluation of the values* (*Umwertung der Werte*) of good and bad to good and evil, drove the West into ruin.

«Die ritterlich-aristokratischen Werthurtheile haben zu ihrer Voraussetzung eine mächtige Leiblichkeit, eine blühende, reiche, selbst überschäumende Gesundheit, sammt dem, was deren Erhaltung bedingt, Krieg, Abenteuer, Jagd, Tanz, Kampfspiele und Alles überhaupt, was starkes, freies, frohgemuthes Handeln in sich schliesst. Die priesterlich-vornehme Werthungs-Weise hat — wir sahen es — andere Voraussetzungen: schlimm genug für sie, wenn es sich

33 See J. LAPLANCHE, J.B. PONTALIS, *Das Vokabular der Psychoanalyse*, cit., p. 427; which means the ability of the mind to evaluate the reality and to act upon it accordingly.

34 F. NIETZSCHE, *Götzen-Dämmerung*, in: *Friedrich Nietzsche: Werke in drei Bänden*, cit., p. 986.

um Krieg handelt! Die Priester sind, wie bekannt, die bösesten Feinde — weshalb doch? Weil sie die ohnmächtigsten sind. Aus der Ohnmacht wächst bei ihnen der Hass in's Ungeheure und Unheimliche, in's Geistigste und Giftigste. Die ganz grossen Hasser in der Weltgeschichte sind immer Priester gewesen, auch die geistreichsten Hasser: — gegen den Geist der priesterlichen Rache kommt überhaupt aller übrige Geist kaum in Betracht»³⁵.

3.4. Individual and society - homo sociologicus

[...]a man is called the same, and yet in the short interval which elapses between youth and age, and in which every animal is said to have life and identity, he is undergoing a perpetual process of loss and reparation—hair, flesh, bones, blood, and the whole body are always changing. Which is true not only for the body, but also of the soul, whose habits, tempers, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, fears, never remain the same in any of us, but are always coming and going³⁶.

Fromm claims that for psychoanalysis it has been clear from the beginning that man is not a *homo psychologicus*, but a genuinely social being.³⁷ He assures that one of the foundations of psychoanalysis is the recognition of humans' sociality. The mental constitution of man is thus essentially determined and developed by the relationships among humans. And for Freud too, the sociality of man is an unavoidable fact, even a vital constituent of his humanity, which is also reflected in the psyche of man, where the other continuously appears as an enemy, as a helper, as an idol: «Im Seelenleben des einzelnen kommt ganz regelmäßig der andere als Vorbild, als Objekt, als Helfer, als Gegner in Betracht, und die Individualpsychologie ist daher von Anfang an auch gleichzeitig Sozialpsychologie in diesem erweiterten, aber durchaus berechtigten Sinn.»³⁸

The first social reference is usually the family, which is what Fromm calls the

35 F. NIETZSCHE, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, in: *Friedrich Nietzsche: Werke in drei Bänden*, cit., p. 777.

36 PLATO, *Symposium* (classics.mit.edu/Plato/symposium.html, seen on 12.01.2018).

37 See E. FROMM, *Analytische Sozialpsychologische. Texte aus den Jahren 1910-1980*, 2 Bände, in: H. Dahmer (Ed.), *Psychosozial Verlag*, Frankfurt am Main 1980.

38 S. FREUD, *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1973, p. 9.

psychological agency (*psychologische Agentur*) of society.³⁹ It means that the family is the facilitator of social values and norms which are communicated through its interactive forms. Basically, we have already heard in Freud's theory how socialization works and how the superego gets formed. But since Fromm is a much more political author, mere analysis is not enough for him. Furthermore, he takes the active and creative aspects of human beings more into account:

«Die menschliche Natur ist weder eine biologisch von vornherein festgelegte, angeborene Summe von Trieben, noch ist sie der leblose Schatten kultureller Muster, dem sie sich reibungslos anpaßt. Sie ist vielmehr Produkt der menschlichen Entwicklung [...]»⁴⁰.

So Fromm's social psychology understands the psychic structure of man as the product of his activity and his way of life, and less as a reflex of his bodily impulses, as Freud understood it. And the mutual influence of society and the individual increasingly becomes a major focus.

It is the mode of production and the material life which conditions the social, the political and the intellectual sphere. So there is a primacy of the material being over the rest. So, how people are essentially depends on what they produce and how they produce it. Fromm has formulated this idea in the concept of the *social character* (*Gesellschafts- und Sozialcharakter*) that must be seen in this theoretical Marxist context. The idea is that the social character internalizes external necessities that are useful in accomplishing the tasks of a particular economic and social organization.⁴¹ In doing so, he believes that society forces individuals to repressive dynamics in order to guarantee the functioning of a society:

«Als das gesellschaftlich Unbewusste möchte ich jene Bereiche der Verdrängung bezeichnen, welche bei den meisten Mitgliedern einer Gesellschaft anzutreffen sind. Bei diesen von der Allgemeinheit verdrängten Elementen handelt es sich um Inhalte, die den Mitgliedern der jeweiligen Gesellschaft nicht bewusst werden dürfen, wenn dies Gesellschaft mit ihren spezifischen

39 See E. FROMM, *Der Gesellschaftscharakter und seine Funktionen*, in: R. Funk (Ed.), *Erich Fromm Lesebuch*, Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, Stuttgart 1985, p. 50.

40 ID., *Die Furcht vor der Freiheit*, Europäische Verlagsgesellschaft, Frankfurt am Main 1966, p.24.

41 See *ibid.*, p. 221.

Widersprüchen reibungslos funktionieren soll»⁴².

Societal filters, like ideologies, distort the perception of reality and thus prevent obvious contradictions from being perceived. Fromm's work strongly emphasizes the question of the human power to shape and create social conditions freely and intentionally. Even though Fromm thinks that psychoanalysis is a good tool for a better understanding of social relationships and their representation in the psyche, as well as understanding their effects on the psyche in general and the behavior of people, he clearly sees where a meaningful application of psychoanalysis ends and instead political action comes into play.

To really fully understand Fromm, we have to look at him above all as socio-critical and political philosopher. It is important for him to clarify that, for example, the '*quasi-neurotische Verhalten der Massen*' the seemingly neurotic behavior of the masses is to be seen basically as an adequate behavior towards harmful and inappropriate living conditions, it is obvious that he is harshly criticizing society and longs for societal changes. Only by modifying or eliminating these harmful living conditions those neurotic behaviors will vanish; all the rest (individual therapy etc.) must be considered merely superficial treatments.⁴³ Furthermore he claims that normal well adopted people must sometimes be considered less 'sane' than the neurotic because he often has lost his spontaneity and authenticity in order to perfectly adopt to societal expectations:

«Der gut angepaßte, normale Mensch ist im Hinblick auf die menschlichen Werte oft weniger gesund als der neurotische. Nicht selten ist er nur deshalb so gut angepaßt, weil er sein Selbst aufgegeben hat, um mehr oder weniger so zu werden, wie man es von ihm erwartet. Dabei kann ihm jede echte Individualität und Spontanität verlorengegangen sein»⁴⁴.

And in a different part of the text he assumes that human nature is modifiable, but not ad infinitum: «Wenngleich es keine festgelegte Natur des Menschen gibt, so ist so

42 ID., *Das gesellschaftlich Unbewußte und Verdrängte*, in: R. Funk (Ed.), *Erich Fromm Lesebuch*, Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, Stuttgart 1985, p. 109.

43 See ID., *Die Furcht vor der Freiheit*, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, Frankfurt am Main 1966, p. 21.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

dennoch nicht unbegrenzt formbar»⁴⁵ Here he demands to identify and highlight the problematic social conditions that need to be changed by means of political actions, instead of curing people with psychotherapy who are basically suffering with good reason from society. Here, at last, Fromm becomes tangible as a political author who wants to enlighten and who does not want change on a mere individual level.

3.5. Conscious and unconscious symbolization – between psyche and soma

*Die Medizin, die Pathologie vor allem, ist die Heimat und Quelle des Materialismus. Und diese Quelle kann leider nicht durch philosophische Gründe verstopft werden; denn solange noch die Menschen leiden, wenn auch nur Hunger und Durst, und diese Leiden nicht durch idealistische Machtsprüche, durch wunderwirkende Worte, durch kategorische Imperative geheilt werden können, solange werden sie auch, wenn auch wider Wissen und Willen, Materialisten sein*⁴⁶.

Lacan also elaborated and devolved the sociality of men in the field of psychoanalysis in a theoretically very useful way. Above all, for Lacan it is language (*langue*) which is the basis of our social world and the supreme structure that speaks through every human being. Of course, the proximity to Saussure linguistics is obvious. Language precedes the use of language (*parole*), intrudes on the child and structures his being. The human being as an *animal symbolicum* is thus spoken of by language, instead of being able to freely and autonomously use it. This means that human beings are absorbed by the *symbolic order*, as Lacan calls the realm of societal musts and ideologies etc. Our thinking is formed in and through language and only according to its rules and to its structure can we think or even criticize thoughts themselves. The principle is the very same regarding norms or social rules. Norms constitute us: we are socialized in and through them. Nevertheless, it is possible to explore these incorporations at least a bit reflexively, though Lacan never gets tired of pointing out that neither one's own being nor that of others or the world

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁶ L. FEUERBACH, *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 11, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 1972, p. 125.

in general can ever be completely understood or analyzed.⁴⁷ At this point, one of the most evident differences between Fromm and Lacan is that Lacan certainly is above all a thinker of the unconscious and its different effects, while Fromm is more a thinker of the autonomous (creative) and political person.

Regarding subjectivation, Lacan refers to the special function of the *imaginary* in relation to the so-called mirror phase (*stade du miroir*)⁴⁸. Between the 6th and the 18th month of life, the baby begins to recognize itself in the mirror, while its bodily feeling is predominantly uncoordinated. Therefore, there is a fundamental illusion of the child of itself as a unity, a certain self-misrecognition:

«Das Imaginäre ist der Bereich des Bildes und der Vorstellung, der Täuschung und Enttäuschung. Die grundlegenden Illusionen des Imaginären sind die Ganzheit, die Synthese, die Autonomie, die Dualität und vor allem die Ähnlichkeit. Das Imaginäre ist demnach die Ordnung der oberflächlichen Erscheinungen, der täuschenden, beobachtbaren Phänomene, die die darunterliegenden Strukturen verbergen»⁴⁹.

The mirror serves as a metaphor or structural concept of a decisive misconception, which means that the child imagines itself in the eyes of others as complete and unified. That is the general social structure for Lacan, we perceive ourselves through the other. In addition the phantasmatic wholeness of the subject has a stabilizing dimension for the psyche and henceforth it will become an anchor point of the ego-feeling.⁵⁰ *The other* is thus fundamentally within Lacan's theory for the development of the psyche itself. This type of subjectivation will later be adopted and developed by Judith Butler.⁵¹

Lorenzer, another psychoanalytic theorist, presupposes a genuine sociality of man as well. However, he distances himself significantly from the instinctual theory of Freud and instead tries to formulate a *Kritische Theorie des Subjekts* (critical theory

47 See E. RAGALAND-SULLIVAN, *Jacques Lacan und die Philosophie der Psychoanalyse*, Quadriga, Berlin 1989.

48 See J. LAPLANCHE, J. B. PONTALIS, *Das Vokabular der Psychoanalyse*, cit., pp. 474.

49 D. EVANS, *Wörterbuch der Lacanschen Psychoanalyse*, Turia und Kant, Wien 2002, p. 146.

50 See J. LACAN, *Das Spiegelstadium als Bildner der Ichfunktion*, in: *Schriften I*, Walter-Verlag, Olten 1973, pp. 66.

51 See J. BUTLER, *Psyche der Macht: Subjekt der Unterwerfung*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2001.

of the subject). Although he assumes that men are always tense between the poles of nature and culture, nature, according to Lorenzer, encounters us in the form of the autonomous rules of the body, like the aging processes, eye colors, sexual maturity, etc. as well as in the form of psycho-somatic symptoms. Lorenzer, therefore, designs a system of interaction-forms that can run consciously or unconsciously and express themselves in sensual-symbolic forms.⁵² The child, therefore, understands the mother before all language thanks to the successful sense-motoric interaction. His conception of *Szenisches Verstehen* (scenic understanding) means that embodied interaction formulas which derive from preverbal childhood experiences are repeated later in life.⁵³ Symbolizing is for the child first and foremost the acquisition of culture through playing and interaction. According to Lorenzer, these interactions and re-enactments affect all relationships between a person and his environment. These interactions, furthermore, are integrated with and through language into a network of general rules and norms and thus socialized. Moreover, these structures are accessible to the subject by reflection. Both Lacan and Lorenzer conceive language to be the fundament of every social system and the inevitable mediator of social order.⁵⁴

His design of psychoanalysis is in an intermediary position between psyche and soma. The psyche has a formative effect on the body, somatization (Konversion)⁵⁵, and the body in return affects the psyche. Although psyche and soma are not completely equivalent, their interaction is so complex that the boundaries between these two spheres blur. Especially in the field of psychosomatic medicine. Hardly every disease can be 'psychosomatic', namely when it emerges out of psychosocial circumstances or when its maintenance is directly linked to mental and psychosocial conditions. The psychosomatic reaction is not a special case but the norm: every emotion has an effect on the autonomic nervous system and thus causes a physical reaction. Mentally unprocessed or unprocessable stress can produce a somatic

52 See H.-J. BUSCH, *Psychoanalytische Sozialpsychologie in Frankfurt – eine Tradition und ihre Zukunft*, in: H.-J. Busch (Ed.), *Spuren des Subjekts. Positionen psychoanalytischer Sozialpsychologie*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2007, p. 22.

53 See A. LORENZER, *Sprache, Lebenspraxis und szenisches Verstehen in der psychoanalytischen Therapie*, in: U. Prokop, B. Görlich (Ed.), *Szenisches Verstehen. Zur Erkenntnis des Unbewußten. Kulturanalysen*, Band I, Marburg 2006, p. 208.

54 See H.-J. BUSCH, *Psychoanalytische Sozialpsychologie in Frankfurt – eine Tradition und ihre Zukunft*, in: H.-J. Busch (Ed.), *Spuren des Subjekts. Positionen psychoanalytischer Sozialpsychologie*, cit., p. 24.

55 See J. LAPLANCHE, J.B. PONTALIS, *Das Vokabular der Psychoanalyse*, cit., pp. 271-273.

symptom. If, in case of a psychosomatic symptom, the treatment covers only the somatic level, there will be no long-lasting improvement, or the symptom will merely shift.⁵⁶

At this point, the closeness to the theory of *embodiment* becomes apparent, which is one of the modern variants of the philosophical *body-mind discussion*. The question of how to understand the connection between the body (i.e. body, substance, brain) and soul (i.e., perception, emotion, thinking) is a fundamental philosophical problem that runs through the entire history of philosophy and was predominated for a long time by Descartes' "cogito ergo sum", as the primacy of thinking over the body. In contemporary debate, where the philosophy of mind has been extended by psychological and neuroscientific research, this problem is still largely unresolved.⁵⁷ The essentially new insight on the basis of neurosciences is that interaction patterns as well as behavior and communication, etc. manifest themselves in the body, but how these different qualities actually interact is still not clear at all. The neurobiologist Joachim Bauer, for example, conceives the body-mind idea as an actual memory of the body that imprints all mental experiences into physical structures.⁵⁸ «Sie (*Embodiments*) bilden die Basis der weiteren psychischen und somatischen Entwicklung und zwar nicht nur, wie dies bisher oft verstanden wurde, als "nonverbales Kommunikationsverhalten", sondern als basal konstitutive Elemente psychischer Prozesse ganz allgemein».⁵⁹ Thus, the theory of embodiment assumes the principle entanglement of the two qualities, but it still cannot explain how this interconnectedness functions and how these different modes intermesh. Nevertheless, these new scientific results broaden the discourse towards a more interdisciplinary direction that was long overdue and already criticized by Feuerbach.⁶⁰

«Das 'beleibte Ich'[...] ist kein abstraktes, geschlechtsloses Ich; es faßt den

56 See *ibid.*, pp. 631-632.

57 See A. BECKERMANN, *Analytische Einführung in die Philosophie des Geistes*, de Gruyter Verlag, Berlin 2001.

58 See J. BAUER, *Das Gedächtnis des Körpers: Wie Beziehungen und Lebensstile unsere Gene steuern*, Eichborn Verlag, Köln 2010.

59 LEUZINGER-BOHLEBER ET AL., *Psychoanalyse und Neurowissenschaften: Chancen, Grenzen, Kontroversen*, Stuttgart 2015, p. 31.

60 L. FEUERBACH, *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft*, in: *Kleine philosophische Schriften*, Felix-Meiner Verlag, Leipzig 1950, § 26, pp. 130-131.

lebendigen Menschen zusammen, stellt ihn als Individuum in die Gemeinschaft, durch die er seine individuelle Existenz im Verhältnis zum anderen realisiert, so daß auch die Gemeinschaft als sinnlich-leibliches Vollzugsgeschehen in die denkenden Sinne fällt. Die sich die Welt aneignenden Sinne beziehen sich daher nicht auf das platt auf der Hand liegende, sondern auf das sich versinnlichende Geistige, was global ausgedrückt soviel heißen will, daß Geist nicht von körperloser Beschaffenheit ist»⁶¹.

Feuerbach, in contrast to Hegel, claimed that (speculative) philosophy must return to the human world in its sensual-physical reality, because there is only the world for us humans.⁶²

3.6. From the animal rationale to the animal emotionale

[...] Gefühle keineswegs im Gegensatz zur Erkenntnis stehen, sondern selbst eine Form der Erkenntnis – über die Notwendigkeit des Aktivwerdens – sind. Sie „verkörpern“ die subjektive Bedeutung/Bewertung der konkreten Realität, die sich auf organismischen Entwicklungsniveau nicht für jede Dimension der Umweltbeziehung spezifisch, sondern als Gesamtwertung bzw. "Komplexqualität" äußert, über die sich dem Tier quasi auf kürzestem Weg, ohne "reflektiven" Zeitverlust – Informationen über die Zu- und Abträglichkeit der Situation vermitteln, so daß es sich rechtzeitig auf sie einstellen und existentielle Gefährdungen weitgehend vermeiden kann⁶³.

Since man is not only a rational thinking creature, but an emotional being, feelings should receive special attention, especially because their importance has been overlooked and ignored for far too long. To gain an authentic image of man, they must be taken into account as well. Moreover, as this thesis wants to elaborate a socio-critical approach by the reference to human suffering, the apparent proximity of suffering to feelings speaks for a closer look too.

However, until today it is not clear at all what emotions or feelings are. There is

61 U. REITMEYER, *Philosophie der Leiblichkeit*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1988, p. 14.

62 See *ibid.*, p. 12.

63 U. OSTERKAMP, *Zum Problem der Gesellschaftlichkeit und Rationalität der Gefühle / Emotionen*, in: Forum Kritische Psychologie, Nr. 40, 1999, p. 6, <http://www.kritischepsychologie.de/1999/zum-problem-der-gesellschaftlichkeit-und-rationalitaet-der-gefuehle-emotionen> (seen on 12.02.2018).

still no consensus, nor is there a broadly recognized definition or theory of emotions. Some researchers define emotions as physical reactions that have developed in the *phylogenetic* struggle for survival, others see emotions as mental states, and for some it is a kind of unconscious assessment of events in the outside world.⁶⁴ Due to this lack of unity, the focus of the following discussion will be on the change and thus the diverse notions of the concepts of feeling in modern psychological research. The aim is to highlight what kind of theory could be useful for a social-philosophical and critical perspective on suffering.

As we just mentioned, feelings in the Western tradition did not receive sufficient attention or were outclassed, especially as negatively assessed phenomena. Plato already compared passions with *wild horses*, which would have to be restrained by the mind.⁶⁵ Feuerbach and Nietzsche can certainly be considered among the first to attribute feelings a positive meaning and their own rationality. But now we will leave aside philosophical considerations and instead take a more accurate look at the psychological approaches. In the older psychological emotion research, the description and classification of emotions was clearly in the foreground. One of the most important representatives of this period was Wilhelm Wundt. At the end of the 19th century, what is stressed are the non-localizability of feelings in contrast to perception, their independence from certain sensory organs, and finally their inherent evaluation as unpleasant or pleasant. Wundt starts from the assumption that the almost unmanageable variety of emotions can be summarized into six complexes based on the principles of

- pleasure – pain,
- arousal – calming
- tension – relaxation.⁶⁶

Volkelt develops a slightly different idea in the theoretical context of classical, descriptive-phenomenological psychology. Within this theory, it is assumed that feelings are not yet conceptualized knowledge and thus there are two forms of thinking.⁶⁷ This idea assumes that feelings are a kind of preliminary stage of

64 See <http://www.spektrum.de/lexikon/neurowissenschaft/emotionen/3405> (01.12.2017)

65 See PLATO, *Phaidros*, in: *Sämtliche Werke. Band 2*, Lambert Schneider, Berlin 1940, p. 434.

66 See W. WUNDT, *Grundrisse der Psychologie*, Alfred Körner Verlag, Leipzig 1918.

67 See J. VOLKELT, *Die Gefühlsgewißheit. Eine erkenntnistheoretische Untersuchung*, München 1922, p. 24.

thinking. Krueger⁶⁸ draws similar conclusions when he claims that all activities take place against the background of emotions, which strongly recalls Heidegger's *Gestimmtheit* (moodiness). They form the social matrix that unites the individual experiences to a common emotional state.

In more modern psychological emotion research, we come upon the so-called *functionalist turn*, which is accompanied by a methodological behaviorism and causes a stronger concentration on measurable physiological reactions. This leads to a kind of equation of feelings and their physiological arousal. Probably the most well-known representative of this approach is William James, who claims that we do not cry because we are sad, but we are sad when we are crying.⁶⁹ However, this idea could not prevail, because in a short time it became clear that similar physiological reactions accompany a variety of emotions (for example, one can also cry because of joy). Kurt Lewin then conceived a performance-enhancing model. According to him, feelings create a kind of 'tension' that forces us to complete tasks and discharge the dammed energy.⁷⁰ However, this approach has also been questioned by several theorists. Mandler and Sarason show that certain feelings, such as self-esteem, anxiety etc. can significantly disrupt concentration and often limit performance, which is decidedly inconsistent with the coping-function.⁷¹

On the other hand, the cognitive-theoretical approach of Schachter and Singer de facto upsets the assumed relationship between physiological activation and cognition. They argue that the way in which physiological changes are experienced depends on the particular environmental conditions. This claim is substantiated by the fact that in experiments in which the test-subjects were given *epinephrine*⁷² (which results in physiological arousal), it could be shown that the same physiological arousal (unless it was attributed to the injection), significantly depended on the specific environmental signals: once they were interpreted as trouble and other times as euphoria. This led to the conclusion that the physiological

68 See F. KRUEGER, *Das Wesen der Gefühle. Entwurf einer systematischen Theorie*, Leipzig 1928.

69 See W. JAMES, *What is an emotion?*, in: *Mind* Vol. 9, No.34, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1884, pp. 188-205.

70 See K. LEWIN, *Vorsatz, Wille und Bedürfnis, mit Vorbemerkungen über die psychischen Kräfte und Energien und die Struktur der Seele*, Springer Verlag, Berlin - Heidelberg 1926.

71 See G. MANDLER, S.B. SARASON, *A Study of anxiety and learning*. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 47 (5), 1952, pp. 166-173.

72 Known as *adrenaline*.

arousal was insignificant for the content of the emotions and could only be determined by social and cultural interpretations, and therefore could be arbitrarily controlled externally.⁷³ Lazarus sharply criticized this interpretation of the results and emphasized the cognitive quality of physiological arousal, which was completely overlooked by Schachter and Singer. Rather, one must ask how such excitement would come about under normal circumstances. Because it is precisely the evaluation of the situation itself that leads to a physiological arousal or not and not the other way round.

In addition to psychological emotion research, extra-psychological disciplines such as philosophy, ethnology, sociology or even history have become more and more involved in the discussion over time. Solomon, philosopher by profession, was one of the first to question the fundamental dichotomization of cognition and emotion. He was able to prove that this split could already be traced in the pre-Socratic time and had, with almost no exception, been accompanied by a harsh devaluation of emotions. The *metaphor of master and slave* was often used, as in Aristotle. Emotions were considered animalistic, and therefore should be subordinated to reason. Solomon also criticizes the focus on the individual as a shortening perspective, which could be reinforced by scientific methods (call for objectification, measurability). For Solomon, the main problem is that social conditions that may also play a role are not taken into account.⁷⁴ That is why Solomon advocates an overcoming of psychological physiologism, as he calls it. Emotions are interpretations, (moral) judgments about situations, ourselves or other people. For example, what constitutes an insult varies from culture to culture, so emotions are never private. They represent a socially mediated world view that determines our interpretations of the world.⁷⁵

Solomon clearly emphasizes the sociability of emotions, but becomes one-sided when he claims that we perceive everything through the grid of our stereotypes and

73 See S. SCHACHTER, J.S. SINGER, *Cognitive, social, and physiological determinants of emotional state*, in: *Psychological Review*, 1962, pp. 379-399.

74 See R. C. SOLOMON, *The Philosophy of emotions*. in: M. Lewis, J.M. Haviland, (Ed.), *Handbook of emotions (3-14)*, New York 1993.

75 See ID., *Getting angry. The Jamesian theory of emotion in anthropology*, in: R.A. Shweder, R.A. LeVine (Ed.), *Culture theory. Essays on mind, self and emotion* Cambridge 1984.

cultural interpretation which makes every emotion only a matter of interpretation.⁷⁶ This is where the considerations of Elaine Scarry appear very interesting. Using the example of pain or suffering, she illustrates that these feelings are pushing for their objectification. By this she means that their aim is to be recognized by the public, in order to change the concrete conditions which lead to this pain, and finally to lift them. So the chair implies knowledge about the fatigue of the legs and the mantle the knowledge about the sensitivity of humans to the cold. In this conception, the feelings of human suffering are seen as a possible source of social development.⁷⁷ This very idea of Scarry's will later be linked to the thesis of the present work which interprets suffering in a very similar way:

In the next chapter we will take a further look on the various facets of suffering in general and try to give a global and general perspective on what suffering is.

76 See R. C. SOLOMON, *Emotions and choice*, in: A. Oksenberg Rorty (Ed.), *Explaining emotions*, Los Angeles, London, Berkeley 1980, pp. 251-281.

77 See E. SCARRY, *Der Körper im Schmerz. Die Chiffren der Verletzlichkeit und die Erfindung der Kultur*, Frankfurt am Main 1992.

Summary

1. Human beings are understood as genuinely social
2. The need and the capacity for adaptation belongs to the essence of men
3. Sublimation is conceived as a form of adaptation,
4. Sublimation does have its limits; it encounters anthropological and natural boundaries
5. These limits are indicated by various forms of suffering, for example
6. The ego of the human being is seen as a place of freedom mediating between the superego and the id on the one hand, and the outside world on the other
7. The body-soul dualism is understood as an entanglement of both aspects, as it is realized within embodiment theories
8. Feelings cannot be exclusively described either culturally or biologically
9. Feelings of human suffering can be interpreted as drivers for social change

Chapter IV

A global perspective on Suffering

Ein Philosoph, der den Gang durch viele Gesundheiten gemacht und immer wieder macht, ist auch durch ebenso viele Philosophien hindurchgegangen; er kann eben nicht anders, als seinen Zustand jedesmal in die geistige Form und Ferne umzusetzen – diese Kunst der Transfiguration ist eben Philosophie. Es steht uns Philosophen nicht frei, zwischen Seele und Leib zu trennen, wie das Volk trennt, es steht uns noch weniger frei, zwischen Seele und Geist zu trennen. Wir sind keine denkenden Frösche, keine Objektivier- und Regisitrier-Apparate mit kaltgestellten Eingeweiden – wir müssen beständig unsre Gedanken aus unsrem Schmerz gebären und mütterlich ihnen alles mitgeben, was wir von Blut, Herz, Feuer, Lust, Leidenschaft, Qual, Gewissen, Schicksal, Verhängnis in uns haben¹.

Since the next chapter outlines the draft of a social philosophy that places the concept of suffering at the center of its considerations, the present chapter will provide a general look on what suffering is and how is it seen and dealt with in various fields. These matters should be examined from different angles to ensure a meaningful overview of the different aspects of suffering. Therefore, etymological, religious, philosophical and biological-medical questions are to be treated, such as the causes of suffering, the different forms of suffering and the way in which suffering can be dealt with, or the possible ways of dealing with suffering.

4.1. What is suffering?

Leid adelt den Menschen. Nur wer Leid erträgt, wird Glück erfahren².

What exactly do we mean when we speak of suffering? Every human being can, on the basis of his or her own experience of suffering, immediately establish a mental

1 F. NIETZSCHE, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, in: *Werke in drei Bänden*, Band 2, Hanser Verlag, München 1954, p. 11.

2 Dalai Lama (Quote from 14th Dalai Lama; Spiritual leader of Tibetan people).

connection to what is meant when someone is speaking about suffering. It belongs, like its opposite, joy, to the *conditiona humana*. Sometimes it almost seems as if joy or happiness could only be perceived through their dialectical relationship with suffering. This is especially true for joy. Many believe that joy can be experienced only in contrast to suffering and misfortune and can only then be valued appropriately. True to the motto, only thanks to the fact that I can be an unhappy and suffering person, I am able to know what happiness and satisfaction is. But conversely, this isn't believed equally. Hardly anyone claims that first one has to feel real joy to at least know what suffering is.

But why is that? On the one hand, it can be said that suffering, in contrast to joy, represents a movement away from something and suffering desires its self-removal, while joy and pleasure, according to Nietzsche's famous formula «Doch alle Lust will Ewigkeit, will tiefe, tiefe Ewigkeit»³, yearns for eternity. Freud's pleasure principle also hints that our life is geared towards happiness-seeking, well-being and *lust*. In suffering, on the other hand, we are confronted with something that makes us suffer because it harms us or hurts us. And that which does no good to us, follows its own rules. Therefore our will finds its limits, because we can hardly want something that hurts us or that harms us, although there are exceptions to this rule, like *masochism* (but at least also a masochistic attitude is only limited to specific areas). All this indicates that suffering provides a kind of orientation for human beings that have been recognized as destructive and harmful.

But what exactly does man really suffer from? It is not very easy to narrow down this question, because man can suffer from all sorts of things: because of his mortality, various diseases, because of the loss of beloved people and things, because of social exclusion, because he is not achieving goals which are considered worth striving for, because of solitude and an unmanageable number of other experiences and situations. By trying to enumerate the various forms, it becomes clear that there is a wide range of different types of suffering. However, later we will see that also the most diverse forms of suffering have certain structural features in common and we will then try to order them according to a meaningful discussion.

The expression of suffering, on the other hand, is strongly culturally shaped and is therefore interpreted very differently. While in one culture it is habitual to stoically

3 F. NIETZSCHE, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, Insel Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2007, p. 328.

withstand pain and suffering, or even to consciously seek suffering and pain to face it and become stronger, as the Spartans supposedly did, in other cultural contexts the expression of pain is actually staged, as it can be seen in the example of the mourners (*weeping women*) in Montenegro (*narikača*).⁴ It essentially depends on the cultural context and the associated assessment, which is attributed to suffering and how it is dealt with.⁵

Cartesian dualism as well, which led to a strict separation of the physical from the mental, had its impact on our cultural perception of suffering and must be counted as a cultural peculiarity. The very fact that our body or our physical state has an impact on our thinking or at least influences our thinking has hardly been reflected in western philosophy. The dominant concentration of rational thinking and idealistic philosophy has not considered the human body at all, or has considered it as the bad profane materialism that is not worthy of philosophical contemplations. Of course, this is also in very close proximity to the Catholic thinking and its separation of the profane and sacred. It seems quite strange that certain obvious facts could not have been perceived because of this ideological orientation. But at the same time, the classical Western distinction between physical suffering (pain) and mental suffering has been increasingly abandoned in recent decades in favor of a *bio-psycho-social model*. Psychosomatic medicine, too, testifies how difficult and quite problematic it can be to clinically separate the different areas that often intermesh and influence one another. But of course it also helps to explore the single areas of suffering more precisely and especially in the clinical field of medicine to define the specific area of competence and the appropriate responsibilities.

At first glance, suffering is usually perceived as merely negative. Something that is not wanted and points to the downsides of life and that one absolutely desires to escape. Therefore, the prevalent goal in most cases is to dissolve the suffering in some way. Especially in Western culture, which is strongly hedonistically oriented, suffering is assessed very negatively, which is not automatically the case in other cultures (Hindu asceticism, fakirs on Hindu nail-beds). The fastest possible resolution of suffering seems to be desirable. Thus, in many areas, such as medicine,

4 See <http://www.taz.de/15163945/> (seen on 12.02.2018), (*Klageweiber heute- weeping women today*).

5 See G. DEVEREUX, *Angst und Methode in den Verhaltenswissenschaften*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1998, p. 67.

we can notice a rash reliance on therapies or medication whose sole objective is to alleviate the suffering as quickly as possible. The problem is that it often results in a mere symptom treatment. Someone has a headache, he immediately takes a tablet and in a short time he is freed from his pain. The problem with such an attitude is that the causes of suffering seem not to be relevant and disappear in favor of a quick relief. But both the pain and the suffering have a function. If not treated adequately, symptoms tend to shift and to express themselves in another way (in another symptom) until the real problem gets solved. The importance of suffering and pain can be shown by people who suffer from *analgesia*, i.e. have no pain or at least do not experience any feeling of pain. Those people have a very low life expectancy because they lack the protective function of pain for human life. Thus, if pain is not taken seriously, or the cause is not explored and remains unrecognized and therefore untreated, it is very likely that the problem will return. To take the same example, we know from the psychosomatic field that headaches can have psychological causes and sometimes refer to a mental conflict. In such a case, the headache symptom will recur until its triggering conflict is resolved or remedied.

If you deal with the topic of suffering in detail, you can hardly ignore the positive sides or the positive consequences of suffering that sometimes occur. It is not uncommon that suffering is at the beginning of a process of change. And although such changes involve painful and sad experiences, they can sometimes lead to psychic and spiritual growth of human beings. So we colloquially say that we are emerging strengthened from a life crisis. Or take the famous ambiguity of the Chinese graphic character for crisis (the Greek term *κρίσις* – *krísis* has a similar aspect as a turning point) which can also be read as an opportunity and a chance, which indicates this double meaning.

Even what is commonly designated as progress in many areas is directly related to human suffering, though it is often forgotten. Many inventions have been made to facilitate the hard struggle for survival and the sufferings caused by the hard and laborious need to work. The same applies to advances in medicine. Thanks to medical achievements, many forms of suffering can be alleviated or even completely eliminated. And even in the antiquity, the connection between *pathein* and *mathein* was known - between suffering and knowledge. And Nietzsche also writes:

«Erst der große Schmerz, jener langsame Schmerz, der sich Zeit nimmt, in dem wir gleichsam wie mit grünem Holze verbrannt werden, zwingt uns Philosophen, in unsre letzte Tiefe zu steigen und alles Vertrauen, alles Gutmütige, Verschleiernde, Milde, Mittlere, wohinein wir vielleicht vordem unser Menschlichkeit gesetzt haben, von uns zu thun. Ich zweifle, ob ein solcher Schmerz verbessert. Aber ich weiß, dass er uns vertieft»⁶.

He highlights the connection between suffering and knowledge especially for philosophy and for deepening his knowledge, but one could conclude that it is the same for other areas too.

In addition, suffering bears witness to the anthropological boundaries that human beings repeatedly encounter during their lifetime. Anthropology is clearly understood as the interconnectedness of men in their bio-psycho-social and cultural contexts. At the same time, suffering can serve as an orientation because it indicates limits that we, as such, do not always know beforehand. Suffering calls for changes and the urgency to get rid of it pushes us further to find solutions. In any case, it provides a useful starting point to discover through exploration and reflection the hidden layers of suffering and to understand much more about ourselves as human beings.

4.2. Etymology

Leiden, Suffer, Soffrire, Souffrir, πάσχειν, Patos, दुःख, duḥkha

In the Romanic Languages, variations of the Latin *sufferre* are used in the sense of suffering, which means to endure, withstand, tolerate. This includes the French *souffrir*, the English *suffer* as well as the Italian *soffrire*. It is a composed word which on the one hand contains the verb *ferre*, which means to carry and on the other hand the preposition *sub*, which means under. The mentioned language traditions refer to the fact that the sufferer is a subject that has to withstand adversities that he has to bear and endure them. The term of subservience already implies an antithesis to free

6 F. NIETZSCHE, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, in: *Werke in drei Bänden*, cit., Band 2, p. 12.

choice, which does not choose suffering and which implies subjection and indicates a certain passivity and, as a rule, striving for being free of suffering. Also, the Greek *πάσχειν*- *pathein* emphasizes the enduring aspect of suffering as well as the Sanskrit दुःख, *duhkha*, where it means difficult to bear.

In German the word for suffering is *Leiden*, which probably comes from the Germanic root *laiþa*⁷ and means as much as unpleasant, hated and disgusting. According to the German *Duden*⁸, the verb suffering from the Middle High German *liden* means driving, traveling or experiencing. In further development, various phrases are mentioned which express illnesses and emotional pain.⁹ When looking for philosophical literature on the subject of suffering, it quickly becomes apparent that these are predominantly religious subjects, which is also obvious because of the Christian and Buddhist centrality of suffering. Nevertheless, it was surprising to find much less literature on suffering or sorrow than may have been expected in the face of its central importance to every human life. Although many treatises deal with various forms of suffering, the notion or the term suffering is hardly named because most of the time the authors use the specific reference term for the phenomena they treat. As Hauser rightly states, suffering must be seen as an abstract category, in the sense of a super-category, which subsumes various syndromes and negative emotions. Nonetheless, this means that there is little literature on the subject of suffering as a general phenomenon. Hauser does his literature research in the field of psychology and medicine and not the field of philosophy, but the astonishment about finding so little on the topic of suffering remains in these areas as well.¹⁰ Cassel, one of the few who wrote a monograph on pain and suffering, but from a medical perspective, writes:

«When I discussed the problem of suffering with laypersons, I learned that they were shocked to discover that it was not directly addressed in medical education. My colleagues of a contemplative nature were surprised at how little

7 See *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der Primäradjektive*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin 1993, p. 357.

8 German Dictionary

9 <https://www.dwds.de/wb/Leiden> (seen on 12.01.2018).

10 See J. HAUSER, *Vom Sinn des Leidens: die Bedeutung systemtheoretischer, existenzialphilosophischer und religiös-spiritueller Anschauungsweisen für die therapeutische Praxis*, Königshausen und Neumann, Würzburg 2004, p. 114; This concerns many works in the field of psychopathology, medicine and various therapeutic directions, which usually deal with specific issues and treat the general category of suffering only as a partial aspect.

they knew about the problem and how little thought they had given it, whereas medical students were not sure of the relevance of the issue of suffering to their work»¹¹.

The similarity of the situation regarding philosophy and its explicit examination of suffering in this field leads to the supposition that on the one hand it has been a topic classically located in the field of religion and whose employment was left to theologians and priests, and on the other hand, that the body hostility in Western culture impeded especially in the field of philosophy theoretical activities that regarded feelings in general.¹² Suffering refers directly to the evanescence, the vulnerability and the fragility of our bodies and our lives. It confronts us sometimes in a brachial way with our humanity and especially with the bad, the ugly, unwanted, frightening, even shocking aspects of our existences. The patient personnel that works with suffering people, mortal illnesses or those who work in hospices know the best how terrible and awful life can show itself to be. It has nothing to do with the idealistic world of transcendental philosophy. Lacan would say that suffering is the moment when we meet the *Real*. That which is not easily symbolized and processed in culture, what we fear, what threatens us, even what may kill us. Therefore it is comprehensible that suffering is important in the contexts of religion and the spiritual world in general, where we seek reassurance and consolation.

4.3. The subjectivity of Suffering – difficulties for the sciences

Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen¹³.

As we all know, suffering is a feeling - and feelings of course are subjective experiences which refers to the inner perspective of the sufferer. To be able to talk meaningfully about suffering, we have to emphasize the subjective level and its importance for an adequate understanding. Psychotherapeutic schools and related research projects perfectly know the difficulties and the disadvantages of dealing

11 E.J. CASSELL, *The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1991, pp. 30-31.

12 Exceptions like Spinoza at least treated feelings always as a secondary phenomenon in the light of reason.

13 L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, Satz 7, in: *Werkausgabe Band 7*, Frankfurt am Main 1984, p. 85.

with subjective human experiences. It is very complicated to operationalize it adequately for scientific-empirical research. However, a social-philosophical consideration must somehow take into account the subjectivity if it does not want to fail the essential quality of suffering and to accomplish useful outputs. Physical symptoms are measurable, visible, localizable, objectively ascertainable, but already the experience of pain is hardly objectifiable with conventional methods. The same problems occur for social, existential as well as mental suffering. So what should be done? Do such questions have to be considered unanswerable because they raise an epistemological and methodological problem?

«Ich habe jetzt hier einen Schmerz im Arm – wie ist er entstanden, wie kann er beseitigt werden? Das festzustellen ist ein Problem der positiven Wissenschaft, der Physiologie, der Psychologie, der Medizin. Ich kann denselben Schmerz in einer distanziertere, besinnlichen, kontemplativen Haltung zu diesem selben Erlebnis auch als Beispiel fassen für den höchst seltsamen und höchst verwunderlichen Wesensverhalt, dass die Welt überhaupt schmerz-, übel- und leidbefleckt ist; dann werde ich anders fragen: Was ist denn eigentlich Schmerz selbst, (...) und wie muß der Grund der Dinge beschaffen sein, daß so etwas wie Schmerz überhaupt möglich ist?»¹⁴

This short quote demonstrates the complexity of suffering and its broad and multidimensional nature. So it raises the problem of how to properly ask questions and how to approximate the phenomenon of suffering. Mere third person observation is often impossible or at least senseless because this means that we could only observe those sufferings which are expressed in some way, by moaning or crying for example. But many sufferings are only experienced internally and can only be shared by talking; we fully have to trust in someone's words, because we have hardly any techniques to prove if it is true or not.

Experiments are problematic too, insofar as conscious suffering induction for studying purposes raises ethically problematic questions and also reaches the limits of conventional science. If we want to relate to suffering as a subjective experience, to really put the human being in the center of our contemplation, it certainly pushes us to the limits of conventional scientific methodology. Maybe it is one of the

14 M. SCHELER, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, Bouvier, Bonn 1995, p. 46.

reasons why suffering has not been the subject of many philosophical works and why instead it has always been a central topic of art and literature. It may be true that it is easier to process the experiences of suffering and to approximate adequately to this topic with artistic methods. One way to adequately address this subjectivity of suffering could be a descriptive approach from the first person perspective, hermeneutically, or comparatively.

Holzkamp, for example, calls for a *Critical Psychology* which means considering men explicitly from the subject standpoint, since all human beings are essentially shaped by inner processes and have their *intentionality* in common. Human beings are therefore never just neutral objects, but sensual-physical, needy and interested subjects. For Holzkamp the subjective-scientific approach is also different from qualitative social research. He criticizes all objectifying methods and qualitative methods that formulate their thesis from an external standpoint as problematic, while real subject-scientific theories would have to be formulated from a *first-person perspective*. Here, critical psychology clearly opposes conventional empirical psychology, which obtains its essential insights from the classical experiment and where the subject should be as isolated as possible, without any social and cultural influences. Holzkamp, however, conceives human nature as fundamentally social and thus classical psychology excludes exactly what is essential for the understanding of the interaction of subjects and their environment. It is important for this kind of approach that the scientist himself and the context in which science is located and positioned must be reflected as a part of social interests and power relations.¹⁵

For socio-philosophical considerations, this approach means that one has to allow the sufferer to speak for himself or that the scientist himself speaks as a suffering human being, about his experiences. Here one can notice a certain closeness to the psychoanalytic method, which also assumes that unconscious mental processes cannot be reached by the observation of others, but that they are reachable especially by inner observation (self-observation) and by letting the sufferer (the patient) speak and express himself. Critical Psychology claims to combine fundamental criticism of society with psychology to develop an emancipatory psychology as a science, which

15 See K. HOLZKAMP, *Kritische Psychologie. Vorbereitende Arbeiten*, Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1972, pp. 9-34.

elucidates societal and dependencies.¹⁶ Since the social-philosophical approach of this work places suffering at the center of its interest, in order to elaborate its socio-critical dimension, critical psychology seems groundbreaking and pioneering (meaningful) for this approach.

4.4. Suffering in Religions

Das Leiden ist der stumme Fels, an dem die Religion der Moderne, die Fortschrittsidee, zerschellt. Die moderne Welt hat Grosses hervorgebracht, aber sie konnte und kann keine wirkliche Antwort auf die Frage geben, welchen Sinn das Leiden hat. Die Moderne kann im Leiden nur etwas sehen, was es eigentlich nicht geben darf. Die Fortschrittshoffnungen der Moderne sind immer verbunden mit dem Programm der Leidensminderung, und das Endziel soll eine Welt ohne Leiden sein. [...] Die Quelle solcher aberwitzigen Utopien liegt in der Vorstellung, dass Leiden keinen Sinn hat, dass es Leiden nicht geben dürfte und dass der Fortschritt Leidensüberwindung leistet. Die christliche Kultur ist dagegen dadurch ausgezeichnet, dass sie ein tiefes Bewusstsein von dem über uns verhängten Leiden mitbringt. Das Christentum hat sich immer als eine Kraft des Trostes, als eine Kraft der Hoffnung verstanden, diesem Leiden widerstehen zu können. Das Christentum wurde letztlich immer als die Macht der Überwindung des Leidens verstanden¹⁷.

The subject of suffering is, as we already heard, a central theme within religions and different spiritual paths. Buddhism in particular is known for the centrality of suffering in its doctrine. One of the foundations of Buddhism are the *Four Noble Truths*. The first truth is that life is *suffering (dukkha)*, the second is that suffering is caused by hatred, greed and delusion, the third truth is that future suffering can only be achieved by avoiding these causes, and the last one says that the emergence of happiness can be found through the practice of the *Noble Eightfold Path*. The idea of an endless cycle of birth and rebirth under the sign of suffering (*samsara*) can be broken by the *enlightenment* or entry into *nirvana*, which ultimately leads to the dissolution of suffering and its eternal cycle. That would be the ultimate goal of all creatures on Earth.

In Christianity, however, the *Passion of Christ*, or the ordeal of Jesus of Nazareth, is of central importance. His crucifixion and self-sacrifice for the salvation of all

¹⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁷ G. ROHRMOSER, *Nietzsche als Diagnostiker der Gegenwart*, Olzog, München 2000, p. 174.

human beings forms the vital part of the *New Testament* writings. Although the core of the Christian religion represents the love of God, which is all-encompassing, it is precisely for this reason that the philosophical-theological question of theodicy comes up.¹⁸ The discussion that arose here ignited the question of why an omnipotent, omniscient and good or loving God allows suffering in the first place or why he had to sacrifice his son for the salvation of men. There are a great number of different attempts to answer this tricky question through the centuries of church history. To find an appropriate explanation for human suffering, especially when it is seen as unjust and absurd, is quite difficult and to find an answer that is not contradictory to some Christian doctrine is even more difficult. But it didn't lack temptation. From the assumption of the incompleteness of creation, or due to a *transitional* character of the world in Hegel, which has not yet come to its end, up to the idea of the best of all possible worlds by Leibniz (*beste aller möglichen Welten*)¹⁹, a lot of ideas were generated, but until today they have not allowed a conclusive agreement and clarification.

In the *Old Testament* too, suffering plays an important role again and again. But in contrast to the God of the New Testament, God is not yet the God of love, but a mighty and sometimes furious God. Nonetheless, God is just, so also in the context of the Old Testament similar problems occur. Especially in the *Tanakh* – 7"27 (Jewish Bible), which deals with the sufferings of *Job* (*Ijob*), who is tested by *Yahweh* (*YHWH*) through great suffering, even though he is a just and good person. However, this figure of Job revolts his suffering and accuses God because he cannot understand why he would deserve or how he had caused all his suffering. He is then rebuked by God and when asked if he ever took the role of the Creator to judge what is just and what is unfair, Job must confess that he cannot judge things he does not know and finally endures his suffering.

This story illustrates the problematic construction of God as just and exposes the inconsistency of this religious world view in the face of human suffering. However, in the Old Testament many references to suffering can be found, like the biblical story of the expulsion from Paradise as mentioned in the first chapter. According to

18 See F. HERMANNI, *Das Böse und die Theodizee. Eine philosophische-theologische Grundlegung*, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Gütersloh 2002.

19 See G.F. LEIBNIZ, *Theodizee*, in: *Philosophische Schriften* 2, I, § 21, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1996, pp. 240-241.

theology, people in Paradise had supernatural gifts of full integrity and health (*dona integritatis*) as well as being free from any suffering of the body and external adversities (*donumim passibilitatis*). Only through the fall of mankind did the pain or the sensitivity for pain enter the human world.

All these religious stories can be summarized as the attempt to comfort the suffering by a symbolic order and meaning. Almost always, suffering is connected to the question of the meaning of suffering. This draws attention to a dimension that certainly should not be underestimated: namely, the desire of man for meaning, for understanding, the need for meaningful explanations. This directly leads us to the philosophical contemplation of suffering. As Kierkegaard is a philosopher who contemplated on suffering from a Christian perspective, in this thesis he is located in religious thinking. Although he was very critical with the church, his philosophical dedication was oriented on the question how to establish a true Christian way of life. Kierkegaard is convinced that only in the deliberate acceptance of personal suffering (and in search for it) can true Christianity find its expression. Therefore Jesus and his life are the paradigm for every true Christian:

«Das geduldige Leiden ist gar nicht das eigentlich Christliche – aber frei das Leiden zu wählen, von dem man auch frei bleiben könnte, es frei zu wählen um der guten Sache willen: das ist christlich. [...] Und welche Ähnlichkeit besteht denn auch zwischen dem geduldigen Leiden (dem unumgänglichen Leiden) und der Tatsache, daß Christus Gott war und doch das Leid wählte?»²⁰

4.5. Suffering and Philosophy

Das Leiden, die Not gehört zum Leben dazu, wie das Schicksal und der Tod. Sie alle lassen sich vom Leben nicht abtrennen, ohne dessen Sinn nachgerade zu zerstören. Not und Tod, das Schicksal und das Leiden vom Leben abzulösen, hieße dem Leben die Gestalt, die Form nehmen. Erst unter den Hammerschlägen des Schicksals, in der Weißglut des Leidens an ihm, gewinnt das Leben Form und

20 S. KIERKEGAARD, 1813-1855: *Die Tagebücher*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 2, Diederichs, Düsseldorf 1963, p. 160.

*Gestalt*²¹.

As mentioned earlier, the theme of suffering appears much less explicitly than one would expect. Nevertheless, it can be found, above all, indirectly in connection with the *philosophy of life*, with ethics or *existential philosophy*. The ancient philosophical movement of *hedonism*, for example, saw its goal in the greatest possible gain of pleasure and joy as well as in the avoidance of pain and suffering. Epicurus defines a happy life as freedom from pain and restlessness. Only then can it be ensured that peace of mind is found (*ataraxia*).

Jeremy Bentham, the founder of *classical utilitarianism*, also oriented his ethics towards the question of suffering and benefit. His ethical position was that an action should be judged solely by its social consequences. Which means that something would be morally right if it benefits the general public (or the largest number of people), but morally wrong if it harms the general public. In this sense, utilitarian ethics is consequentialistic, because internal motives do not play a particular role in the evaluation of an action. As we can see, those two examples deal with suffering only in an indirect way and do not explicitly concern suffering.

One who really dedicated great parts of his philosophy to suffering was Arthur Schopenhauer. He can be considered one of the most impressive examples of dealing with suffering. His critique of reason challenged the dominant and classic position of reason within the philosophical discourse of his time. His philosophical turn to suffering was due to a shift to feelings in general, because it was not the achievements of reason that caught his interest, but the omnipresence of suffering in the human world. Schopenhauer claims that every cognition is shaped by emotions and that the idea of pure reason is mere idealism. Reason, therefore, does not appear as a regulating agency for the emotional, but the emotional determines reason instead, and emotion therefore is considered a priori to reason.²² This resulted in a dramatically different view of the world compared to the conceptions of Hegel and Kant. In sharp contrast to those traditions, for Schopenhauer, reason is merely

21 V.E. FANKL, *Ärztliche Seelsorge. Grundlagen der Logotherapie und Existenzanalyse*, Deuticke, Wien 2005, p. 118.

22 See D. BIRNBACHER, O. HALLICH, *Schopenhauer: Emotionen als Willensphänomene*, in: H. Landweer, U. Renz (Ed.), *Klassische Emotionstheorien*, Berlin 2008, p. 486.

secondary.²³ If we soberly analyze this, the philosopher claims, the rational influence on our actions is much less than has ever been admitted. Instead of reason, Schopenhauer places a blind will in the root of every being. The consciousness and the real self of every man have roots in his willpower, in his instinctual nature. For Schopenhauer it is the will that is the true basis of our actions.²⁴ But the philosophy of suffering denies any sense of suffering. Suffering generally has no function for Schopenhauer. According to this meaninglessness of suffering, he consequently recommends resignation as an attitude towards suffering.

In his *ethic of compassion*, it is all about the fact that men recognize that the same blind will lives in all other living beings and makes them suffer as well as themselves. Compassion overcomes the egocentric perspective and by identifying with the other through insight, all human beings are affected by suffering.²⁵ Since our will is the reflection of a blind will, the true willfulness of life remains obscure. For this reason, freedom results in fundamentally different ways than for traditional philosophers. So it is no longer a question of rationality and reason-oriented idea of freedom. On the contrary: freedom, according to Schopenhauer, begins with an awakening look inside. Its foundation is the knowledge of the strongest motives for action - only if we know what drives us can we be free.

Nietzsche was a great admirer of Schopenhauer and strongly influenced by his thinking. Nevertheless, he did not adopt the pessimistic philosophy of his great role model and instead developed a radical-optimistic vitalism. Nietzsche's life was marked by illness, pain and suffering. Throughout his life he suffered from migraines, stomachaches, vomiting, temporary blindness and was often confined to bed for days, which also led to his very early retirement. Certainly, it cannot be denied that his own experiences of suffering had a significant impact on his philosophical thinking.²⁶ He devoted himself to suffering in great detail and wanted to understand the purpose of suffering. Nietzsche is well aware of the influence of his

23 See A. SCHOPENHAUER, *Die beiden Grundprobleme der Ethik. Preisschrift über die Grundlage der Moral*, in: A. Hübscher (Ed.), *Arthur Schopenhauer. Zürcher Ausgabe. Werke in zehn Bänden*, Band 6, Diogenes, Zürich 1977.

24 See ID., *Preisschrift über die Freiheit des Willens*, in: A. Hübscher (Ed.), *Arthur Schopenhauer. Zürcher Ausgabe. Werke in zehn Bänden*, Diogenes, Band 6, Zürich 1977, pp. 60.

25 See ID., *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, in: A. Hübscher (Ed.), *Arthur Schopenhauer. Zürcher Ausgabe. Werke in zehn Bänden*, Band 2, Diogenes, Zürich 1977, pp. 341-509, § 67.

26 See K. JASPERS, *Nietzsche: Einführung in das Verständnis seines Philosophierens*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin 1981, pp. 110-111.

health status on his thinking and that it necessarily transforms one's philosophy. In another writing he even claims that the illnesses had done him much good and as a matter of fact that he had become stronger, «Und was mein langes Siechtum angeht, verdanke ich ihm nicht unsäglich viel mehr als meiner Gesundheit? Ich verdanke ihm eine höhere Gesundheit, eine solche, welche stärker wird von allem, was sie nicht umbringt!»²⁷

His mythical reference point for a great sufferer was Dionysus, the god who was dismembered by the Titans. For Nietzsche, he represented a kind of promise of life because he was eternally reborn and a life principle emerging regardless from every destruction. For Nietzsche, suffering is a fundamental part of human existence, because without pain and suffering men would not even ask questions about the meaning of existence,

«In der Mysterienlehre ist der Schmerz heilig gesprochen: die `Wehen der Gebälerin´ heiligen den Schmerz überhaupt, – alles Werden und Wachsen, alles Zukunft-Verbürgende bedingt den Schmerz...Damit es die ewige Lust des Schaffens gibt, damit der Wille zum Leben sich ewig selbst bejaht, muß es auch ewig die `Qual der Gebälerin´ geben...Dies alles bedeutet das Wort Dionysos: ich kenne keine höhere Symbolik als diese griechische Symbolik, die der Dionysien»²⁸.

So suffering is even perceived as holy. Saying yes to life means saying yes to suffering. Thus Nietzsche made his misery a virtue, which resulted in the absolute affirmation of all suffering.

Another philosopher in whose philosophy suffering plays a central role is Camus. The Sisyphus essay is one of the best known writings of Camus. In this text he refers to the ancient myth of Sisyphus, who is cursed to repeatedly roll a heavy stone up a mountain, which then rolls down again. Similarly, men are trapped in an absurd life situation. According to Camus, men cannot escape the contradictions and absurdity of their life.²⁹

27 F. NIETZSCHE, *Der Fall Wagner. Nietzsche contra Wagner*, in: *Friedrich Nietzsche: Werke in drei Bänden*, cit., p. 1058.

28 ID., *Götzen-Dämmerung*, in: *Friedrich Nietzsche: Werke in drei Bänden*, Hanser Verlag, München 1955, p.1031.

29 See A. CAMUS, *Der Mythos des Sisyphos*, Reinbeck, Hamburg 2001, pp. 159-160.

His philosophy is a *philosophy of the absurd*. This expresses the fact that every experienced suffering and misery of people ultimately has no meaning. At the same time, however, men yearn for meaning. In this respect, for Camus, men are torn and divided human beings and through their absurd life they strive for meaning and yet live in a meaningless world. The experience of futility is fundamental to Camus. Nevertheless, he proclaims an absolute life affirmation. In his essay *l'homme révolté* he gives a basic description of the absurd which leads to a meaningful revolt. The way to overcome the absurd is permanent revolt, affirmation, affirming life. That is the answer Camus gives to the question how to deal with the absurdity of life and its suffering. Out of this existential philosophy a great number of psychotherapeutic schools emerged. Of course not only referring to Camus but also Heidegger, Sartre, Jaspers, and some other representatives of existential philosophy. Some of the most important psychotherapies are the *Logotherapie* and the *Existenzanalyse*³⁰ of Frankl, the *existential psychotherapy*³¹ of Yalom, or the *Daseinsanalyse*³² of Binswanger.

I will briefly reflect on the *logotherapy* of Frankl, as it is quite reminiscent of Camus' life affirmation in the face of the absurd. Frankl's bestseller *...trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen*, points to this counterforce of fully saying yes to one's own life. The psychotherapist Frankl recalls with his title a Buchenwald³³ song and describes how he has processed his experiences in the concentration camp. Frankl tirelessly emphasized that men do not aspire to lust or pleasure, as Freud thought, but to meaning. Logotherapy was therefore founded by Frankl to fill this therapeutic vacuum. The claim is that every despairing man can find a sense for his life. However, this sense is not given and must first be explored and elaborated. Frankl's thesis is that any situation, however meaningless or even hopeless it may seem, still has a meaning in it. As a former concentration camp prisoner, Frankl felt entitled to this thesis, because even in such extreme conditions he had never lost his sense of meaning and could thus give fellow prisoners support and orientation. In logotherapy and existential analysis, therefore, the central methods are self-transcendence and self-distancing, which means devotion to a task or a person on the one hand and

30 See V.E. FRANKL, *Logotherapie und Existenzanalyse. Texte aus sechs Jahrzehnten*, Beltz, Weinheim 2010.

31 See I.D. YALOM, *Existential Psychotherapy*, Basic Books, New York 1980.

32 See L. BINSWANGER, *Der Mensch in der Psychiatrie*, Neske Verlag, Pfullingen 1957.

33 *KZ Buchenwald* is a Nazi concentration camp in Germany.

humorous distance from oneself on the other. So unavoidable suffering can be endured in dignity. Frankl claims that if one manages to recognize any meaning, even in the worst fate, it would be equivalent to an inner triumph. For Frankl it is always about the ability to find the meaning of every situation.³⁴

4.6. What kinds of Suffering exist?

Von drei Seiten droht das Leiden, vom eigenen Körper her, der, zu Verfall und Auflösung bestimmt, sogar Schmerz und Angst als Warnungssignale nicht entbehren kann, von der Außenwelt, die mit übermächtigen unerbittlichen zerstörenden Kräften gegen uns wüten kann, und endlich aus den Beziehungen zu anderen Menschen. Das Leiden, das aus dieser Quelle stammt, empfinden wir vielleicht schmerzlicher als jedes andere³⁵.

For the sake of simplicity, I propose to divide suffering into four basic categories and then to look at their specific aspects in more detail:

- physical suffering
- mental suffering
- social suffering
- existential suffering

The subdivision refers above all to the causation of suffering, which should be expressed in these four basic forms. However, for the first three forms of suffering one could also say that they are expressions of suffering. As everyone knows from experience, suffering manifests itself either psychologically or physically, or both, since psychosomatic forms of suffering are no exception, and again Cartesian dualism does not always represent the appropriate perspective for understanding what suffering is. Moreover, there is always a socially mediated way of making one's own suffering visible to others.

34 See V.E. FRANKL, *Wer ein Warum zu leben hat. Lebenssinn und Resilienz*, Beltz, 2017.

35 S. FREUD, *Unbehagen in der Kultur*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main, 1953, p. 75.

4.6.1. Physical Suffering

*Motus asper in corpore, alienus a sensoribus*³⁶.

Classical medicine is based on the causality paradigm. That means that it is assumed that every disease has a certain cause. This cause has therefore to be explored and researched. In this sense, *etiology* seeks to locate the causes of a disease in a *noxe* (harmful entity for humans), a causative agent of a situation, a behavior or something else. This means that if someone suffers physical pain or has some physical symptoms, the first step is to conduct a detailed anamnesis. And a good doctor will ask the patient a lot of questions because he knows that many factors can cause suffering. A dilated pupil can be caused by a brain tumor as well as by damaged nerves or drug use. So it is essential for a good diagnosis to explore precisely what could be the *noxe*. On the basis of the diagnosis then will follow a therapy or a medication. In our Western medicine there is a wide range of possibilities to cure and to medicate, but the request to be cured as quickly as possible is very strong in general. So in Western culture, getting rid of suffering or pain swiftly is a normal attitude and taking analgesics is just as natural as the anesthesia before surgery.

The problem is not only that a great number of these treatments reaches only the symptomatic level, but that it is not always clear at all why someone suffers or what causes the suffering. There are still many things that are not understood, so medication as well as therapies are often groping in the dark and have a very experimental character of trial and error. In many cases this functions quite well, but in some cases it does not work at all, which is very frightening for the persons concerned. As personal life is inextricably linked to the body, dysfunctions of the body are experienced as immediately threatening. Physical suffering can have massive effects on the mental state as well. That is actually an adequate observation. Even a moderate toothache or a rotten stomach is enough to spoil the pleasure of everything else. Severe physical pain pushes everything else into the background and in some cases we can hardly concentrate on anything else, which obviously emphasizes the urgency to resolve it as quickly as possible.

36 B. KOCH, *Philosophie als Medizin für die Seele. Untersuchungen zu Ciceros Tusculanae Disputationes*, Steiner, Stuttgart 2006, pp. 151-164.

On the other hand, mental conflicts can also manifest as physical symptoms. Abdominal pain can be an expression of concern, as well as headaches or gastric ulcers. So the psychosomatic aspect is also quite present in the physical dimension of suffering.

Pain and Suffering

The terms suffering and pain, which are often used synonymously, should be distinguished from each other in this chapter to clarify their precise characteristics for a better understanding. Mostly pain (medical *dolor* and *algesia* from the Greek *άλγος*) is perceived as an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience. Pain, like suffering, is a subjective perception and cannot be clearly reduced to neuronal signals, but refers to an acute psychophysical and social condition. Neuroanatomical is the name of the processing including the perception of pain, which is called *nociception*. Pain is a reaction to various forms of irritation. These include thermal, mechanical and chemical stimuli. In the limbic system, pain is finally consciously and emotionally evaluated. And pain expresses itself in many different ways. To mention just a few, it can be piercing, burning, oppressive, throbbing and many more. The processing of stimuli, which are interpreted as a painful sensation, takes place at the earliest in the thalamus and then in the cerebral cortex. Among other things, pain is considered a motivation to prevent injuries of all kinds and it helps avoid harmful behavior. However, the sensation of physical pain can arise also if there is no mechanical, chemical or thermal irritation. This includes, for example, the *broken-heart-syndrome*. Various studies have shown that similar areas of the brain are activated, as in the case of physical pain, and those who are affected feel an acute chest pain.³⁷ In addition, there is also *social pain*.³⁸ With similar imaging techniques, it could be demonstrated that people tend to have an affective activation when they see that others are experiencing pain, or when they hear moaning sounds of suffering. These effects are comparable to the experience of suffering in the first person.³⁹ This

37 See P. HENNINGSEN, H. GÜNDEL, A. CEBALLOS-BAUMANN, *Neuro-Psychosomatik – Grundlagen und Klinik neurologischer Psychosomatik*, Schattauer, Stuttgart 2006, pp. 19-22.

38 See N. I. EISENBERGER, M.D. LIEBERMANN, K.D. WILLIAMS, *Does rejection hurt? An fMRI study of social exclusion*, in: Science, Band 302, nr. 5643, October 2003, pp. 290-292.

39 See C. LAMM, J. DECETY, T. SINGER, *Meta-analytic evidence for common and distinct neural networks associated with directly experienced pain and empathy for pain*, in: NeuroImage, Band 54, Nr. 3, February 2011, pp. 2492-2502.

approves the thesis of Scarry's research on emotions which claimed that emotions have a social orientation and address others. All this suggests that the role of empathy and the social dimension are central factors when we want to understand suffering.

But after these reflections, what is the difference between pain and suffering? I obviously cannot say that I'm hurting, so pain is something that is perceived, but not directly identified with or as the subject. In the case of suffering, on the other hand, it is the subject himself who suffers and does not perceive suffering. In addition, the concept of suffering as a meta-category can be applied to all sorts of areas, such as social suffering, mental suffering, existential suffering, and captures the human being as a whole person, while pain draws an especially physical reference. But the corporeality of human beings is in general an essential feature of the ability to experience suffering, which results from the vulnerability of man. The mortality, the transience and the autonomous nature of the body point to the powerless side of existence as a human being.

If we now expand the view of physical suffering to the current social situation, we cannot avoid mentioning the so-called civilization diseases. These include caries, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes mellitus type 2, high blood pressure, obesity, certain allergies, lung and colon cancer or acne. It is well-known that the lifestyle (dietary habits, lack of physical exercise, stress etc.) and certain environmental conditions (waste gases, environmental toxins etc.) have a decisive influence on these epidemiological diseases or their epidemiological distribution of these diseases. The medical sciences have unquestionably brought many improvements, but at the same time new problems have been added or have been created through certain innovations. As examples diseases such as Alzheimer can be named, which are increasingly prevalent in Western industrialized nations primarily because life expectancy has increased significantly. But there are also new and continuously developing multi-resistant germs, which are the result of extensive antibiotic treatments. All these new problems are directly linked to our societal usages and societal factors in general and will play an important role in the next years.

In our Western societies there is a whole guard of medical experts and specialists working in the field of health care. They are responsible for the diagnosis, the therapy, the medication and all sorts of physical ailments. But obviously many questions of these areas are of public concern. The healthcare system, at least in

Europe, is still a part of the democratic mission to provide health care for everyone as a common good and therefore it is important to reflect on the developments of health care also from a societal perspective. Above all, because there are several changes within our societies that directly concern us all and affect the health care system as a whole (ageing etc.)

4.6.2. Psychological suffering

Gefühle sind nichts Letztes, Ursprüngliches, hinter den Gefühlen stehen Urtheile und Werthschätzungen, welche in Form von Gefühlen (Neigungen, Abneigungen) uns vererbt sind. Die Inspiration, die aus dem Gefühl stammt, ist das Enkelkind eines Urtheils⁴⁰.

Psychological suffering, as we have already heard, stands in close proximity to emotions. The mood of suffering is a negative one and the accompanying feelings can range from anxiety to despondency, hopelessness, shame, basically all negative emotions. Therefore, psychological suffering of course is very near to mental disorders. According to the DSM-IV definition, a mental disorder is characterized by clinically significant disorders in a person's cognition, emotion regulation, and behavior. They are associated with distress, disability, increased risk of death and they cause a significant loss of autonomy, but they exclude deviant behavior for political, religious or societal reasons. Mental disorders are an expression of dysfunctional psychological, biological or developmental processes underlying psychic and mental functions. Mental disorders are typically associated with significant suffering or disability in terms of social, professional and other important activities.⁴¹ As one can see, it is difficult to define mental disorders and the grey zone of mental disorders and normal suffering sometimes blurs. But before we take a more accurate look on mental disorders in general, we will try to deliberately exclude the meta-perspective and attempt a more phenomenological look at what mental suffering is.

Anyone who suffers first of all feels definitely uncomfortable, maybe tormented internally. Often a wide range of worries comes up, possible horror scenarios, fear of death and all kinds of fantasies are triggered - even phantasies about a life without

40 F. NIETZSCHE, *Morgenröte*, in: *Friedrich Nietzsche: Werke in drei Bänden*, cit., p. 1037.

41 <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/history-of-the-dsm> (seen on 12.01.2018).

suffering. All these internal, mental and psychological dynamics can accompany suffering. The cognitive processes play a significant role, also when it comes to the evaluation of what suffering means to one personally. In general, we can speak of a primacy of the psychic, because every suffering has a psychological component and we have to decide how to behave towards it: whether rejecting it, stoically, hopefully, anxiously or maybe in an angry way. In any case one cannot not behave - to paraphrase Watzlawick's *one cannot not communicate*.

Psychological suffering in itself often has its reasons in contradictions. This applies to contradictions that refer for example to a desired value that does not correspond to the current situation (I should or want to be successful, but I am not; others should appreciate me, but they do not etc.). These conflicting situations become visible above all through the usage of modal verbs that include intentionality, and/or normativity. That concerns the modal verbs *must* and *should*, *must not* and *should not*, *to want* and *not to want*, as well as *cannot*. Referring to psychoanalytic categories, one could say that it concerns conflicts of the *ES* (id), the *Ich* (ego), and the *Über-Ich* (superego). Examples for these conflicts are: musts or societal shoulds in general (law, rule, values) that are incompatible with other musts and shoulds (double bind; values of a certain social context that conflict with the general values of a society); to be unable to do something that one actually has to (being successful, but having limited social opportunities); not wanting something that one should actually do/want (when my own values are conflicting with social values); the same applies to things that one must not, but would like to (Freud's theses on the inhibition of sexuality in society); wanting something, but not being able to (realize their own ideas); not wanting something that actually is (beauty ideals) - all this can cause suffering.

Furthermore, one can also conflict with other people or by seeing that someone else can or may do something that he cannot or must not, (this could cause envy, aggression or even hate). Specific people have to do something or are not allowed to do certain things (which could cause feelings of discomfort, shame, hate, envy etc.). All these situations have a conflicting character. Of course, the concrete situation and the reactions are strongly influenced by cultural habits, values and circumstances. A culture in which the rich consider their riches to be more valuable than their poor fellow citizens will probably seldom be ashamed of having more privileges while in

a cultural context where equality is highly valued the same situation will probably cause discomfort.

Nevertheless, feelings and suffering are not exclusively cultural. Fear signals that I experience something as threatening or grief shows that I have lost something beloved. All relationships, whether to things, animals, humans, or even habits to which a libidinous relationship has been established, can, if destroyed, cause severe suffering. Of course, what is of high value in a culture differs so what I presumably get attached to will be culturally shaped. In our culture, in which pigs are seen as livestock, an emotional bonding is rarely made, and thus probably there will be less emotional impact when a pig needs to be slaughtered, than when a dog is run over by a car and dies. But the structure that underlies them is the capacity for emotional attachment, which is found in all cultures. The same is true for social exclusion. In every culture, people suffer strongly from being excluded from others, although the causes of being excluded differ enormously. Another factor that can be found in every culture is that when it comes to suffering, humans get affected by the pain of others and they are not indifferent to it. So there are definitely anthropologic constants that still shine through these cultural differences.

Psychopathology

A big part of mental suffering refers to the whole range of psychopathology. According to the currently valid WHO manual, the ICD-10⁴², this includes disorders ranging from eating disorders to personality disorders, which, like dementia, limit cognitive abilities, affect the emotional-affective area, or disorders that occur within the relationships with our fellows. As it comes to the question of what a mental disorder is, the following definition of the official WHO-homepage may help:

«There are many different mental disorders, with different presentations. They are generally characterized by a combination of abnormal thoughts, perceptions, emotions, behavior and relationships with others. Mental disorders include: depression, bipolar affective disorder, schizophrenia and other psychoses, dementia, intellectual disabilities and developmental disorders

42 See International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, <https://icd.who.int/dev11/l-m/en> (seen on 12.01.2018).

including autism»⁴³.

On another page, the ten most common mental illnesses are listed. Among other things, this includes burnout, anxiety disorders, sleep disorders, depression, ADHD and addictions.⁴⁴ All these forms of mental illness are pathological disorders and therefore worthy of treatment. In the past, diseases were classified on the basis of their etiology, their origin. This is also the basis for the common use of the terms *neuroses* for easier mental disorders and the term *psychosis* for severe disorders. Because, in the first case, a cause of developmental psychology was assumed, in the second case an organic one.

These divisions have largely been abolished and are no longer tenable in this form today. Instead, the newer classification is based on descriptive criteria of disease forms, that means how they are expressed symptomatically (at least in the ICD-10 classification). This reflects above all the fact that people react very differently to the same event. So it is obvious that the personality and other factors play an important role in the development of mental diseases and which kind of disturbance will actually be formed. One person reacts more with an addictive behavior, while another might feel depressed or anxious. In any case all these reactions are in some way unconscious or at least uncontrollable. This means, nonetheless, there can be a strong willingness to change one's behavior or to change one's mood; it is not only a question of will, but much more complex. This is very difficult to accept in our very self-disciplined culture which strongly emphasizes self-creation and self-regulation and instead underlines the finiteness of individual capacities. It shows us our dependence on others, how much we depend on the help of others and that we cannot force life into our idealistic concepts.

A large number of scientists believe that mental illness is increasing in Western countries and the WHO confirms this impression.⁴⁵ These worrisome claims are certainly to be taken seriously. However, the question of whether this is actually true is not so easy to answer. The problem is that on the one hand it is difficult to make comparisons because the data is not always complete, and on the other hand not all people who get sick at a certain time can also be covered by the statistics - if at all,

43 <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs396/en/> (seen on 12.01.2018).

44 See <http://lexikon.stangl.eu/5045/psychische-storung/> (seen on 12.01.2018).

45 See <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs396/en/> (seen on 12.01.2008).

then only those who receive therapy, which means those who can afford it or those who have an illness insight. Then certainly the removal of taboos regarding psychotherapy plays an important role as well, which should not be underestimated. In certain social contexts where in previous times it might have been considered embarrassing to visit a therapist, today the inhibition to go to a psychotherapist is much lower. Another noteworthy point concerns the so-called *disease mongering*. This has become sadly known, because the theory behind this name says that even the smallest behavioral disorders (abnormalities) are pathologized, so that an immediate medication or treatment is reasonable. The motivation for this trend is quite obvious - it is a lucrative business.⁴⁶

Furthermore, if we claim that mental disorders have increased, we must also look at the actual cultural changes in the field of mental diseases. There are not only new diseases such as burn-out or ADHS/ADHD⁴⁷, but there are also disorders which have actually disappeared, such as hysteria, which at the beginning of the 20th century, when Freud lived, was considered a popular disturbance. This psychological phenomenon was closely linked to a sexually restrictive society, which does not meet today's society anymore and in fact has lost its important role in the field of psychotherapy. At this point one can see how social and cultural changes are reflected in the psyche. This makes it very difficult to rely on statistical data and demonstrates that comparisons should be handled very carefully and the traps and difficulties just mentioned must be taken into account in some way. In any case, the percentage of mentally ill people in our society is very high and requires an accurate and serious analysis of the causes, the contextual factors etc. and in the light of the fact that the percentage is that high, especially the social context and situation have to be considered in detail.

What causes mental disorders?

In psychology, there are many different models about mental suffering and how it develops. These include theories, such as Freud's, which decisively place imprints of pathological patterns in childhood (classic Psychoanalysis). But there are others which claim that it is hardly ever the single individual who is the problem, but rather

46 See R. MOYNIHAN et al., *Selling sickness: the pharmaceutical industry and disease mongering*, in: BMJ, Nr. 324, 2002, pp. 886-91.

47 *Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder*: it is a mental disorder of neurodevelopmental type.

the systemic order that has developed pathological forms and so the analysis as well as the treatment concentrate much more on the conflictual relationship between the affected people (*Systemic Therapy*). Other approaches assume that every symptom and problematic behavior has been the best possible individual attempt of solving a problem which unfortunately did not succeed or may even have been successful in certain situations, but could not be adopted or transferred usefully to other areas (*Psychodrama*)⁴⁸. Behavioral approaches also think that the origin of pathological forms is especially rooted in incorrectly learned behavior.

Another approach comes from Fromm, who speaks of so-called *basic needs*. The assumption is that these basic needs must be fulfilled in some form if the person does not want to become mentally ill. Above all, he claims that it is essential for men to be able to relate to other people and their environment.⁴⁹ All in all, Fromm has a very societal approach, as we saw in the third chapter. So his theory is based on the insight that society itself can cause mental diseases if it does not meet with people's needs.

Antonovsky has a similar approach. In his so-called *Salutogenetic model*, he first of all tries to determine internal human and external factors that contribute keeping people mentally stable:

«To sum up my discussion of salutogenesis versus pathogenesis: I have proposed that, throughout our lives, we are all swimming in a river full of potential danger. Or, to change the metaphor to one which may be more appropriate to winter in Germany, we are all skiing down a long mountain slope, at the end of which is an unavoidable cliff with no bottom. The pathogenic orientation deals primarily with those who have hit a rock, a tree or another skier, or who have fallen into a crevice. Second, it tries to perpetuate the illusion that one should not ski at all. The salutogenic orientation asks, first, how the ski slope can be made less dangerous, and second, how do people learn to ski with a high degree of skill?»⁵⁰

48 Psychodrama is a psychotherapy developed by Jacob L. Moreno and uses methods of dramatization and role playing.

49 See E. FROMM, *Sozialpsychologie als Verbindung von Psychoanalyse und historischem Materialismus*, in: R. Funk (Ed.), *Erich Fromm Lesebuch*, Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, Stuttgart 1985, pp. 21.

50 A. ANTONOVSKY, *Studying health vs. studying disease*, Lecture at the Congress for Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy, Berlin, 19th February 1990, <http://www.angelfire.com/ok/soc/aberlim.html> (seen on 12-01.2008).

So the question of the salutogenetic model is why some people, despite many potentially harmful effects, remain healthy while others become ill. His conception of mental health is strongly influenced by system-theoretical considerations. Therefore, health is not a normal, passive state of equilibrium, but a labile, active and continuously dynamically regulating state. The basic principle of human existence is imbalance, disease and suffering:

«I can now come to my major thesis, which points to the fundamental inadequacy of the pathogenic paradigm, its Achilles' heel. This is its assumption of homeostasis as the normal state of affairs, its belief that, unless some special combination of circumstances occurs, people do not contract a disease. They stay what is called healthy [...]»⁵¹.

In addition, the state of health or illness is determined by the general attitude of an individual towards the world and one's own life, which means it is essentially shaped by the world-view and the specific attitude.⁵² Antonovsky is well aware that external factors can seriously endanger mental health. Nevertheless, there are differences in the health status of different people even under the same external conditions. So what are these factors that influence our mental state? He assumes three factors to be significant:

- comprehensibility
- meaningfulness
- manageability

The feeling of *comprehensibility*, which describes people's expectation or ability to process stimuli as ordered, consistent, structured information, rather than being confronted with stimuli that are chaotic, arbitrary, accidental, and inexplicable. By comprehensibility, Antonovsky means a cognitive processing pattern.

The second feeling that is crucial is the sense of *manageability*. This component describes a person's belief that difficulties are solvable. Antonovsky emphasizes that it is not just about having your own resources and competencies, but also about trust and belief. The belief for example that other people or a higher power will help

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² See A. ANTONOVSKY, *Complexity, conflict, chaos, coherence, coercion and civility*, in: Social Science & Medicine, Nr. 37, 1993, pp. 969-981, p. 972.

overcome difficulties matters quite a lot. And finally, the sense of *meaningfulness*, which means the extent to which one finds life emotionally meaningful. Without the experience of meaningfulness or without positive expectations of life, the other two components are not sufficient for an increased resistance, which he calls *coherence*. Whether one is able to develop a strong sense of coherence depends primarily on social conditions, which means the availability of generalized resistance resources.⁵³

The three most important factors of the salutogenetic model are thus comprehensibility, meaningfulness and verifiability. What does this model mean for our postmodern societies if we try to transfer it to today's situation? First of all we have to assume that there are increasingly many areas that are beyond our comprehension. Due to the specialization and mechanization of our lifeworld, a lot of things are not quite understood. In addition, many of our modern technologies have (negative) effects on a global scale and certain interrelations are not even understood by the experts and in many cases urgent solutions for these negative effects are still pending (global warming). A great number of sociological bestsellers, which speak exactly about such phenomena, *Risikogesellschaft* (risk society),⁵⁴ reflect the multiple uncontrollability of many areas in today's societies. Many people are worried about our future and for a large group of people there is no longer a general trust in progress.

The same applies to the question of manageability, which is closely related to it. Many issues, especially those of global proportions, seem to overstrain our capacities. But it is not only the single individual that feels overwhelmed, but also politics often do not know how to deal with such problems and their agencies and responsibilities mostly end at the national border. We could name many other examples, but it is all about demonstrating that the feeling of being exposed to problematic global phenomena that can affect anyone is widespread and reasonable. The fear of unmanageable global phenomena grows and leads to general societal insecurity. The third point concerns meaningfulness. And that, I think, concerns the longest-running crisis of our postmodern societies. The traditional responsibility of

53 See ID., *Gesundheitsforschung versus Krankheitsforschung*, in: A. Franke, M. Broda, (Ed.), *Psychosomatische Gesundheit. Versuch einer Abkehr vom Pathogenese-Konzept*, dgvt- Verlag, Tübingen 1993, pp. 3-14; ID., *Salutogenese. Zur Entmystifizierung der Gesundheit*, dgvt-Verlag, Tübingen 1997, p. 36.

54 See U. BECK, *Risikogesellschaft: auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1993.

the church for such questions has largely disappeared and the meaningful interpretive power of religion has lost its credibility. But there are no other significant institutions which provide a meaningful interpretation of our worlds. This directly regards our ethical orientations, too. The ethical commitment in our culture is still predominantly a remnant of the Christian imprint combined with values of the Enlightenment (freedom, democracy), but the binding power disappears and gets increasingly replaced with an individualistic trend that can hardly be considered sufficient when it comes to collective responsibilities regarding social or even global problems. In other words, if we transfer the social status of our postmodern societies to the salutogenetic model, the sobering observation is that we live in a highly risky world when it comes to our mental health.

Who is responsible for the occupation of mental suffering?

The area of responsibility for mental suffering is quite clear in Western societies. Psychiatrists, psychotherapists, coaches and life and social counselors form the class of experts that provide help, therapies and individual solutions. In addition we can notice a tendency of pathologization as well as various forms of medicalization in our societies. Many forms of suffering, life crisis or conflicts are far from being pathological and are simply part of a normal life. The tendency to classify more and more of these quite normal problems as pathological problems leads to the assumption that certain economic interests play an important role in this development. Furthermore, this has become the predominant approach to the self in postmodern societies and can be summarized as the discourse of *self-optimization*. The fact that people want to make the best of themselves (to be able to compete with others) makes every illness, every disturbance, every crisis in one's life a big problem. And the market is responding to this worry to function well and continuously by providing an army of professionals that help people in the quickest way possible to return to normality or even to best performances. It is obvious that making money with unhappy people is quite a secure income opportunity. And it is even more so when society tends to problematize every crisis as a loss of productivity. The meritocratic orientation does not leave any room for illness, crisis, dysfunction although these phenomena are natural to human lives. In combination with the sectorialization of the health care system, the focus is quite reduced to the

individual sphere and individual responsibilities. But these developments concern a societal level and it is necessary to reflect on this situation from a global perspective, if we want to evaluate the whole situation. This problem accompanies us also in the concrete field of psychotherapy or other offers of assistance and support.

In any case, treatment options for mental disturbances are extensive in Western societies. Depending on what is identified as the cause of a certain mental problem, the treatments and approaches that are recommended differ quite strongly. From resource-oriented therapies, to systemic, behavioral and depth psychological directions, pretty much everything can be found. But there are also quite a lot of dubious approaches that suggest an infinite human adaptability and attract people with slogans that remind of the simplicity of programming a computer (NLP⁵⁵ techniques, such as *six-step refraining*)⁵⁶. Many of these therapies suggest promises of happiness that are unlikely to be realized, but the suffering and the desire to improve oneself is quite pronounced that the exaggeration of such promises is not always realized. It is no coincidence that Lacan refers to therapists that promise absolute happiness to suffering individuals, as the *indulgence traders* of the 20th century. But most of these approaches remain concentrated on the individual level and have no socio-critical approach. There are exceptions, especially those who emphasize empowerment, political participation and political shaping of societal conditions. The psychoanalytic approach, for example, which has an emancipatory-enlightening ideal, must also be considered as one of the comforting exceptions in this self-optimizing atmosphere. The *Lacanian school*, in fact, has a very sober and realistic approach on how to help people:

«Obzwar der Therapeut weder Glück noch Heilung versprechen kann, kann er, wenn notwendig, das Versprechen einer neuen Sichtweise auf die Dinge herausschinden, eine neue Umgangsweise mit anderen Menschen und eine neue Art, in der Welt zu verkehren»⁵⁷.

55 Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) is a psychological approach which aims to model skills by NLP techniques.

56 1. Problem identification, 2. Establish communication, 3. Positive purpose, 4. Activation of resources, 5. Eco-check, 6. Target agreement

57 B. FINK, *Eine klinische Einführung in die Lacansche Psychoanalyse. Theorie und Technik*, Turia und Kant, Wien 2005, p. 26; A. RUHS, *Der Vorhang des Parrhaisos. Schriften zur Kulturtheorie der Psychoanalyse*, Sonderzahl Verlag, Wien 2003, p. 19.

One of the main techniques for personal changes is to loosen the power of the superego:

«Das Ziel, eine Separation vom Anderen herbeizuführen und es dem Subjekt zu ermöglichen, seinen Weg zu verfolgen ohne all die Hemmungen und Einflüsse, die sich von konkreten anderen, die das Subjekt umgeben, oder von den internalisierten Werten und Urteilen des Anderen herleiten, bleibt bestehen»⁵⁸.

Finally, the individual approach of psychoanalysis considers the societal context and wants to gain autonomy for the individual from social conditionings and problematic values. This means that a certain individualization seems to be necessary to establish greater independence from social values, judgments or the recognition of others.⁵⁹ This allows the individual at least to create a new relationship with his inner desires and finally gain satisfaction from it. Moreover, the claim of psychoanalysis is essentially based on the speaker's truth and his idiosyncratic and subjective perception of the world. Above all, psychoanalysis seeks to expose self-delusions as well as self-denials. It is, so to speak, the science of the unconscious, of unconscious motives, the effects of language as well as other societal influences on men. As one can easily see, the psychological forms of suffering cannot be clearly differentiated from the societal context and they interlock on many levels. But this elucidates even more the importance of bringing these areas together to really understand how they interact.

4.6.3. Social Suffering

If the sociologist has a role, it is probably more to furnish weapons than to give lessons⁶⁰.

Social suffering affects all those types of suffering whose causes are related to problematic relationships in the social field and societal reasons in general. This can be social injustice, social exclusion of particular groups or individuals, structural

58 *Ibid.*, p. 274.

59 That does not mean to egoistic concentration on one's own personal happiness, but to loosen the super ego and its values. The super ego of today's society is individualistic in fact, which means, the egoistic tendency would be more than ever to follow the super ego commands.

60 P. BOURDIEU, *Talk at a Conference of the AFEF, Limoges, October 30, 1977.*

violence⁶¹ or ideological views that cause social suffering. The experts in these fields are, of course, sociologists who provide a lot of scientific material about social suffering in our societies and do not lack diagnostic judgments. Beginning with diverse attempts to grasp postmodern society and its peculiarities by a term, like *adventure society*⁶², *risk society* to large-scale studies of specific problems as in Bordieu's studies about the banlieus in Paris,⁶³ one can find a lot of interesting sociological perspectives. The difficulty in this context is to reduce the theories to the most important ones. For the sake of simplicity, I propose to limit ourselves to theories that attempt to give some kind of global perspective on our Western societies, despite the fact that there are, of course, local differences and specificities.

Ulrich Beck is certainly one of the most received sociologists. Many of his theses are known to a wide audience and his works have a consistently socio-critical style and he criticizes in many places what he identifies as problematic. Strikingly, however, a majority of sociologists come to similar conclusions and judgments. The greatest similarities can be found in phenomena of *individualization* (Zygmunt Baumann)⁶⁴, *meritocracy* (Heiner Flassbeck)⁶⁵, various tendencies of *flexibilization* (Richard Sennett)⁶⁶, *depoliticization* (Colin Crouch)⁶⁷, and the increasing of *inequality* (Thomas Piketty)⁶⁸. However, the focus of many sociological discourses and studies is increasingly shifting to questions of subjectivity and also the psychological aspects of those who are suffering are getting more and more attention in the different considerations and analyses.⁶⁹ And these are especially interesting for the present work, as it concerns suffering and its various forms. Baumann, for example, writes that every time has its dominant fears and the fear to personally fail,

61 See J. GALTUNG, *Strukturelle Gewalt. Beiträge zur Friedens- und Konfliktforschung*, Rororo, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1982.

62 See G. SCHULZE, *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft. Kultursoziologie der Gegenwart*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1992.

63 See P. BOURDIEU et al., *La misère du monde*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1993.

64 See Z. BAUMAN, *The individualized society*, Polity Press, New York, 2001.

65 See H. FLASSBECK et al., *Irrweg Grundeinkommen. Die große Umverteilung von unten nach oben muss beendet werden*, Westend Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2012.

66 See R. SENNETT, *The Corrosion of Character. The Personal Consequences Of Work In the New Capitalism*, Norton, New York 1998.

67 See C. CROUCH, *Postdemokratie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2008.

68 See T. PIKETTY, *The economics of inequality*, Harvard University Press, 2015.

69 See, R. HAUBL, *Be cool! Über die postmoderne Angst, persönlich zu versagen*, in: H.-J. Busch (Ed.), *Spuren des Subjekts, Positionen psychoanalytischer Sozialpsychologie*, Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, Göttingen 2007, p. 118.

according to him, is one of the greatest today.⁷⁰ American sociologists Richard Sennett (*The Fall of Public Man*, 1974) and Christopher Lasch (*The Culture of Narcissism. American Life in Age of Diminishing Expectations*, 1979) have contributed in the 1970s through their work to establishing the notion of a narcissistic society which reflects Baumann's idea. Today's suffering is not produced by the social obligation and the feeling of guilt associated with it, but today one suffers from the pressure of self-responsibility which is closely linked to the problem of personal failure. And in fact, personal failure is a trigger of narcissistic depression.⁷¹ Ehrenberg, in his book *The Uneasy Society* has impressively described the changes and ideas of subjectivity and autonomy in our societies. He makes it clear that it is precisely the problem of autonomy, the increasing striving for freedom of our postmodern societies and the incessant demand for self-responsible action that lead to a rapid increase in narcissistic personality disorders and depressive illness.⁷²

Here, one can easily recognize that the different divisions into social, physical, psychological and existential suffering cannot be distinguished one from another that easily. Mostly, they merge with each other and so several aspects are always simultaneously affected. In addition, the discourses just mentioned illustrate the variety of postmodern suffering and elucidate that these problems are not singular problems of one specific country, but that they seem to be somehow global within postmodern societies.

Related to these, there is another discourse that attempts to theoretically grasp the perceived increasing of social suffering. It is about the question of the *vulnerability* of a society.⁷³ Originally, this term comes from individual psychology and means the susceptibility for mental illnesses due to individual-problematic dispositions. In sociology, the vulnerability of people in the face of social and societal threats should

70 See Z. BAUMANN, *Flaneure, Spieler, Touristen: Essays zu postmodernen Lebensformen*, Hamburger Edition, Hamburg 2007, p. 183.

71 See S.117, R. HAUBL, *Be cool! Über die postmoderne Angst, persönlich zu versagen*, in: H.-J. Busch (Ed.), *Spuren des Subjekts, Positionen psychoanalytischer Sozialpsychologie*, Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, Göttingen 2007, p. 116.

72 See A. EHRENBURG, *Das Unbehagen in der Gesellschaft*, Suhrkamp, Berlin, 2011, pp. 23-24.

73 Vulnerability is defined as the vulnerability of a person, a social group, an object or a system in the face of existing hazards, risks, crises, stress, shocks or harmful events that have already occurred. The injury or damage usually means that important functions are restricted or no longer exist. An essential condition of vulnerability is due to inadequate coping capacities of individuals, groups and systems; H.-G. BOHLE, *Soziales oder unsoziales Kapital? Das Konzept von Sozialkapital in der Geographischen Verwundbarkeitsforschung*, in: *Geographische Zeitschrift*, Nr. 93, 2005, pp. 65-81.

be indicated. In close proximity to Beck's speech about the risk society, Vogel sees social and occupational risks on the rise, such as precariousness in the sphere of the working world (the flexibilisation of production and the labor market) as well as new social insecurities (erosion and endangering social stability).⁷⁴ This manifests itself in feelings of powerlessness and insecurity, as well as in feelings of being exposed to risks, shocks and stress that can scarcely be controlled by individuals. The zone of social probabilities associated with relegation and declassification threats has increased too, while stability hopes decrease.⁷⁵ The reason for the popular notion of vulnerability in sociology seems to be a crucial point that clearly reflects a worrying unanimity when it comes to assessing societal status. A somewhat different discussion, but often related, concerns the discussion of *resilience*⁷⁶. As a categorial counterpart to vulnerability, resilience is referred to as the power of resistance or ego-strength that enables recovery or maintaining health and the ability to compensate external stress. In contrast to the issue of vulnerability, resilience does not focus on countering the root causes of factors leading to increased vulnerability (political changes etc.), but instead focuses on making subjects (also in the form of collective subjects) more resistant, which leads to a systemic conservative approach. Thus, a *depoliticization* of social problems takes place and focuses only on the change of the individuals themselves. All in all, the problem of depoliticization is no longer a peripheral phenomenon in our Western democracies, and neo-liberal ideology continues to drive the withdrawal of state institutions and their securities (health care, education, security systems such as pension schemes, etc.) and to subsume everything under the regime of the free market. Of course, this plays an important role in the context of social suffering. Because when it comes to social problems that affect many people, solutions should be sought on a larger scale and it is not enough to find individual solution, if you want to get a grip on certain structural problems. That is why in our Western democracies, the state and political commitment certainly must be given first priority when it comes to combating the causes of social suffering. On the other hand, there are many NGOs which are active

74 See B. VOGEL, *Der Nachmittag des Wohlfahrtsstaats. Zur politischen Ordnung gesellschaftlicher Ungleichheit*, in: Eurozine, 2004, (pdf-online Ressource www.eurozine.com; (seen on 12.02.2018), p. 2.

75 See *ibid.*, p. 7.

76 *Resilience* is the individual's ability to adapt in the face of adverse conditions.

in such areas too. They especially supplement the gaps where the state system does not care or does not feel responsible and support, for example poor or homeless people. Although their work is important and helps a lot of people, the Caritas or other non-profit organizations unfortunately just reach the symptomatic level, and it is only on the level of politics where significant changes could take place. But the role of civil society will presumably continue to grow in the next few years, because the vacuum created by the retreat of the political (depoliticization) from ever more areas of responsibility will not be closed by the market, since a common good orientation is alien to *neoliberalism* and contradicts its meritocratic orientation.

4.6.4. Existential Suffering

Wir haben etwas verloren, etwas fehlt uns, um glücklich zu werden. Da ist eine schmerzhaft Leere, ein Loch, das gefüllt werden muss. Unser ganzes Leben ist darauf ausgerichtet, dieses verlorene Objekt, dieses begehrte 'Ding' wiederzufinden, an dessen einmal genossene Präsenz uns tatsächlich oder vermeintlich das 'ozeanische Gefühl' erinnert. Unser Leben ist 'eigentlich' nichts anderes als der Versuch, die Wonnen des primären Narzissmus zu restituieren, denn 'der Mensch hat sich hier, wie jedes Mal auf dem Gebiet der Libido, unfähig erwiesen, auf die einmal genossene Befriedigung zu verzichten'⁷⁷.

The last form of suffering that I want to treat separately concerns existential suffering. As the name suggests, these are questions that concern human existence itself, where human beings reach their limits.⁷⁸ Those kinds of suffering refer to causes like fear of death: «Spannung zwischen der Bewusstheit von der Unausweichlichkeit des Todes und dem Wunsch weiter zu existieren liegt»⁷⁹, but this can also root in the uncertainty and unpredictability of the future and accompanied fears. Also, unexpected strokes of fate caused by serious illnesses, accidents or catastrophes and other disasters and questions about the meaning of life or the meaning of suffering itself. Many of these questions have, so to speak, an ontological character and affect all of us as they form the background of our existences. Although there are enough efforts in this direction, like research projects that are dedicated to the hope of prolonging human life (by stem cell research, cloning etc.), we will probably have to accept that at least in the near future, death will remain a

77 E. GOEBEL, *Jenseits des Unbehagens, 'Sublimierung' von Goethe bis Lacan*, Transcript-Verlag, Bielefeld 2009, p. 245.

78 See K. JASPERS, *Einführung in die Philosophie*, Piper, München 1971.

79 I.D. YALOM, *Existenzielle Psychotherapie*, Haufe-Lexware, Freiburg 2015, p. 21.

certain factor of our human lives, just like the unpredictability of the future and a few other things, unless physical laws change. However, the realm of existential suffering should not obligatorily be left to religions and spiritual or esoteric sects. It is precisely the urgency and inevitability of such questions for every human life that underlines the importance of establishing meaningful social manners for these questions in other sectors too. And fortunately, that happens in many places. Hospices or palliative care, for example, are offers to supplement those areas of conventional medical techniques and treatments where it has been recognized that medical knowledge alone is not enough, and where another form of rapprochement is needed - an existential argument for coping. The continuing spiritual boom, from meditation to yoga, spiritual-retreats and similar offers still testifies on the importance of such existential questions for men and the importance of having places where it is possible to deal with such topics also in our very rationalistic and above all secular world. For the radicalness of these questions for our lives, they obviously generate great fears and less social space is left for dealing with such questions. Ritualizations, symbolizations are all attempts to create security in a universe that unfortunately has little security to offer, except that everything changes constantly and that we can hardly rely on anything. «Die Wohltat der Ordnung ist ganz unleugbar [...]»⁸⁰ As the quote shows Freud knew very well of the benefit of a structured human world for our psyche. In any case, existential suffering provokes the question of the meaning of life:

«Meine Frage, die Frage, die mich im fünfzigsten Lebensjahr zu Selbstmordgedanken brachte, war die allereinfachste Frage, die in der Seele eines jeden Menschen ruht [...]; 'Was wird das Ergebnis sein von dem, was ich heute tue, was ich morgen tun werde – was wird das Ergebnis meines ganzen Lebens sein?' Anders ausgedrückt wird die Frage so lauten 'Wozu Lebe ich? Wozu handle ich? Noch anders kann man die Frage so ausdrücken 'Ist in meinem Leben ein Sinn, der nicht zunichte würde durch den unvermeidlichen, meiner harrenden Tod?'»⁸¹

Tolstoi's quote illustrates the difficulty for men to really contemplate their own

80 S. FREUD, *Unbehagen in der Kultur*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 1953, p. 88.

81 L.N. TOLSTOI, *Meine Beichte (1882)*, Düsseldorf, Köln 1978, p. 44.

death and to find a decent answer to the question of *Why do we live?*. Frankl is convinced that anyone who fails to give meaning to his life can get into a serious life crisis that can even be expressed in pathological ways, in the form of depression or suicide. Frankl even believes that twenty percent of all neurosis come from the lack of meaning in life. He had won his persistent conviction because of his experiences during the concentration camp:

«Die Frage nach dem Sinn des Lebens, mag sie nun ausgesprochen oder unausdrücklich gestellt sein, ist als eine eigentliche menschliche Frage zu bezeichnen. Das In-Frage-Stellen des Lebenssinns kann daher niemals an sich etwa der Ausdruck von Krankhaftem am Menschen sein; es ist vielmehr eigentlicher Ausdruck des Menschseins schlechthin – Ausdruck nachgerade des Menschlichsten im Menschen»⁸².

Frankl's motivational concept contains a kind of will to meaning and he locates this existential urge in humanity itself as the most normal thing to express humanity. In his view, people in concentration camps who had no meaning for their lives, no goals or specific values or ideals fell much more likely into resignation and their probability of survival dropped drastically.⁸³ The existentialism of Camus and Sartre also deals with these questions. As we just heard, both authors claim the absurdity of human existence and yet both believe that men strive for meaning and need to find it, although their solutions and ideas on how to gain it look very different. Men should invent meaning, because there is no such thing as meaning in the world itself. Yalom, for example, believes that meaning could be found in both, in altruism as well as in devotion to something or in the creativity and self-realization or the pursuit of the greatest pleasure possible.⁸⁴ Freud, on the other hand, does not pay much attention to this question because he does not think that it is possible to answer it adequately, or as he says: «Die Frage nach dem Zweck des menschlichen Lebens ist unzählige Male gestellt worden; sie hat noch nie eine befriedigende Antwort gefunden, läßt eine

82 V.E. FRANKL, *Ärztliche Seelsorge: Grundlagen der Logotherapie und Existenzanalyse*, Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 1991, pp. 56-57.

83 See R. SCHEERER, *Logotherapie und Existenzanalyse. Viktor E. Frankl, Elisabeth Lukas und Alfred Längle. Eine Einführung*, ISA, 2014, p. 23.

84 See I.D. YALOM, *Existenzielle Psychotherapie*, cit.

solche vielleicht überhaupt nicht zu.»⁸⁵

But there are many others who tried to give answers to this question. One of the most known and influential authors of the 20th century is Martin Heidegger. In 1927, he presented his monumental work *Sein und Zeit*. In this work fear (Angst) as well as the uncanny (*Unheimlichkeit*) and unfamiliarity (*Fremdsein*) are presented as the basic conditions of being in-the-world for humans. According to Heidegger, men are at home neither in the world nor in themselves, which is exemplified in the concept of being thrown into the world (*Geworfenheit*). Death and its meaning for us as humans cannot be found by thinking about them, but solely by experiencing fear (*Sein zum Tode*). It is fear, according to Heidegger, that allows human beings (*das Dasein*) to come to a self-reflective attitude. Only in the face of existential fear do we have the possibility to find true, authentic and intense life.⁸⁶

Another author who dealt with existential questions was Lacan, and he was influenced by Heidegger too. Lacan starts from an existential alienation of men from his nature, which arises through culture and society as well as through other people and language.⁸⁷ This alienation is experienced as a lack of something, as something that one lacks to be happy. This something is attributed to others. Lacan calls it *object a*.⁸⁸ What I do not have, namely the possibility of an absolute satisfaction, of a totality, the other should have and therefore give it to me. But this is an illusionary misconception because the other one does not have it either and therefore cannot pass it to anyone else. This *object a* is an object that is impossible to reach.⁸⁹ Of course *object a* is only a metaphor for something that rather causes desire, or at least the defect that sets desire in motion in the first place. So there is an existential lack in every human being. Moreover, the ego is exposed to fear, when it meets the *real*.⁹⁰ The real for Lacan is not reality but the traumatizing dimensions that cause fear, suffering and which mean the total lack of any order or significance or sense. In the realm of the *symbolic* (which would be reality) for Lacan everything is woven into an

85 S. FREUD, *Unbehagen in der Kultur*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 1953, p. 74.

86 See M. HEIDEGGER, *Sein und Zeit*, Niemeyer, Tübingen 1967.

87 See E. RAGLAND-SULLIVAN, *Jacques Lacan und die Philosophie der Psychoanalyse*, Quardriga, Berlin 1989, pp. 85.

88 See P. WIDMER, *Angst. Erläuterungen zu Lacans Seminar X*, Transcript, Bielefeld 2004, p. 64.

89 See J. LACAN, *Ethik der Psychoanalyse, Das Seminar Buch VII (1959-60)*, Weinheim, Berlin 1996, p. 160.

90 See ID., *Was ist ein Trauma? Das Trauma ist das, was löchert*, RISS, Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse, 16 (6), pp. 27-51.

intelligible network of coherent orders and securities that virtually obscure the real, because they frighten us and because we cannot live in the *apeiron* or the chaos of the real. So *the real* for Lacan is what we cannot grasp meaningfully and which at least escapes symbolization. Neither religion nor science can banish the real because it has an ontological dimension. Death as an example belongs to the real and it is the last thing that crashes into everyone's life. But it is also the starting point for the symbolic order which creates our human realm. This means we create meaning, sense and order to defend ourselves from the contingencies of life while we try to satisfy object a, which is impossible because it remains an ever-coveted one. Society must therefore have asylums of retreat and symbolization. The subject needs stabilities that because of these existential forms of suffering can unsettle faith in one's life. It used to be religion, as Lacan writes, which offered a great symbolic order that comforted men.⁹¹ The current disappearance in our Western culture of ancient rituals such as the funeral illustrate this as problematic. It has traditionally been embedded in a religious framework, which nowadays receives less and less consent and leads to a situation of social indeterminacy that confronts the individual or, in this case, especially atheistic groups with existential questions of death and how to deal with it. It is clear that it needs some form of symbolic processing, a ritual framing, in which mourners can find security and support in order to process their loss. Here, one can say that most people, also atheists, are oriented toward the rituality of Christian Orthodoxy, but without their religious references. It turns out that many symbols, such as flowers, music, songs, grave speeches, a gathering farewell and grave decorations, the meaning of the last epitaph or the meaning or the idea of the last will are mostly maintained as symbolic orientations.

When voices are raised, especially by conservative critics who denounce the decay of our Christian values, criticism may fail the central point, but nonetheless it reveals the insecurity that accompanies these cultural developments which release a wide range of existential questions that were symbolically bound by the Christian culture and which anyway need some societal forms on how to deal with them if wanting to provide a social framework that provides stability, meaning and which is comforting. In the case of the funeral, one can easily see how we can adopt and transform old traditions to find a new, changed way of dealing with these existential

91 See ID., *Ethik der Psychoanalyse, Das Seminar Buch VII (1959-60)*, cit., p. 160.

questions. On the other hand, there are also new questions on the existential level that cannot make use of such a point of reference. For example, how to deal with technical achievements, which increasingly bring serious existential problems and consequences, such as nuclear waste disposals or the exploitation of resources (scarcity of resources). Such issues have played little or no role so far, and we cannot lean on any model that helps us meet these new challenges although they are of an existential dimension.

4.7. How to deal with suffering?

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference*⁹².

«Begegnete ihm je eine Verdrießlichkeit, so würde sie doch gleich wieder gut gemacht.» That is how Hans from the Brother's Grimm fairy tale *Hans im Glück* gets characterized: as a man who knows how to transform bad situations into good ones. Hans was on his way home with a clump of gold. At a certain point the gold became too heavy for him and so he exchanged it for a horse. After a while the horse dropped him and so he exchanged it for a cow. But the cow did not give milk, so he swapped it for a pig. But even the pig caused trouble and so he finally swapped it for a goose. In the end, Hans had nothing left, and yet: «So glücklich wie ich, rief er aus, gibt es keinen Menschen unter der Sonne». Mit leichtem Herzen und frei von aller Last ging er nun fort, bis er daheim bei seiner Mutter angekommen war.»⁹³ Although he has nothing left, he seems to be the luckiest man on Earth.

How one encounters suffering, whether one just wants to eliminate it, whether one avoids it, stuns it, endures it in the service of a better future, or tries to learn something from it, determines how one will feel. The message of the fairy tale is: the person who gives away possessions is free. The person who is free is happy. This short summary of the fairy tale of the Grimm Brothers thus reports a possible avoidance of suffering, which suggests getting rid of material goods, which are considered desirable, because they cause suffering and grief. The similarity to many

92 R. Niebuhr (1892 – 1971) is an American theologian and famous for this *Serenity Prayer*

93 GEBRÜDER GRIMM, *Hans im Glück*.

spiritual directions, which also promote an ascetic life and strive for a true non-alienated life, is undeniable. As already mentioned, there are cultural differences in how suffering is dealt with. On the one hand because of its different meaning as we will see soon, but also on the other hand, as far as institutionalization is concerned and its different coping strategies in general. Of course, this heavily depends on the worldview and the ideological and ethical convictions. If one thinks of the times when the Old Testament was taken for the Word of God, we can probably assume that one's own fate was received far more stoically, because the explanation for the suffering was rooted in the original sin or the sinfulness of one's own life. A God-fearing person could only show humility and ask for the forgiveness of his sins and God's mercy. In contrast, someone who has an atheistic and liberalistic view of the world is probably less likely to begin praying in a situation of suffering than to actively work to remedy his suffering. Likewise, dealing with suffering is quite different when someone thinks that suffering strengthens him or that it makes him wise. Maybe suffering is actually searched for or even desired.

In our modern societies, which are based on the division of labor, a wide range of specialists has emerged and for every suffering there can be found someone with special skills to provide help. This has many advantages, because one can find an expert for almost every problem, but on the other hand, all these problems are just handled on an individual level and the societal and collective dimension is left behind. Also, unilateral problem treatments, because of this vast sectorialization, often only reach the symptomatic level. Psychotherapists, doctors, coaches, priests, spiritual masters, various nonprofit organizations or aid organizations, etc. are all in one way or another devoted to the suffering of people.

As there are many ways of dealing with suffering in the history of humanity, for the sake of simplicity and a systematic view I will now divide the strategies to deal with suffering into four broad reaction patterns and look at them separately:

1. Stoic endurance of suffering
2. Escape or repulsion of suffering through various strategies
3. Self-optimization, self-transformation, self-education
4. Changing the environment, society

4.7.1. Stoic endurance

The first strategy is to withstand suffering. In the religious context, enduring of suffering is a common form of dealing with it. One should only think of Jesus and the martyrs who followed him in Christianity, as well as some monastic orders that interpreted ascetic and deplorable lifestyles as godly (mendicant orders). In general, in the spiritual realm, meditation and contemplation are often used to immerse oneself into suffering and thereby dissolve it, or to understand it and penetrate it, or gain a transcendent and even spiritual dimension from it. The classic example of this is the haggard Hindu ascetic, who endures his torments on nail boards. He actively joins suffering for a favorable influence on his own destiny. Also Nietzsche's *amor fati*⁹⁴ refers above all to the acceptance of the negative destiny that causes one's suffering (because obviously nobody would have troubles with a happy and satisfied destiny). It is clear that the sense of enduring one's experience especially regards experiences of suffering. But what may be wanted or even indicated in the esoteric, spiritual or religious contexts can be a strategy that comes into play where you have no other choice but to react somehow differently: for example, when you cannot escape suffering (terminally illnesses) or no solutions can be found for whatever reason (chronic pain), or the hope for solutions is minimal. This concerns above all the areas of existential suffering or personal unalterable destinies. On the one hand, the conscious acceptance of suffering can be a considerable overall relief for the sufferer. In fact, it is now known that the acceptance of pain for many patients leads to an actual reduction of the pain, especially in the case of physical ailments. This is due to the fact that the negative attitude to the pain reinforces it additionally. On the other hand, the situation of constant suffering must be considered an increase of the vulnerability of the person. So if additional stress is added, this can lead to an emotional overload, which then often has psychopathological consequences. Patients with chronic pain that cannot withstand this permanent burden any more often slide into depression.

Another form of resistance to suffering that is close to endurance is proposed by Freud. He interprets hermitism or yoga as techniques which help master one's own needs: «Diese Art der Leidabwehr greift nicht mehr am Empfindungsapparat an, sie

94 See F. NIETZSCHE, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, in: *Werke in drei Bänden*, cit., Band 2, p. 161.

sucht der inneren Quellen der Bedürfnisse Herr zu werden»⁹⁵. But this means that the pain is to be endured and to accepted, the aim is specifically in hardening oneself against the pain and at least making oneself less sensitive. At the same time, this is reminiscent of the epicurean idea of *ataraxia*, the peace of mind that aims at emotional serenity and affectlessness towards external fate.⁹⁶ However, those who harden themselves to their painful feelings risk an emotional apathy on all levels, because, as we now know, through such practices also positive feelings tend to diminish.⁹⁷ And that even affects empathy. That means you do not only get tougher and cooler against your own suffering, but also against the suffering of others, so less compassionate and thus less solidary and supportive.⁹⁸ And that is probably not the desired effect.

4.7.2. *Escape from suffering*

The second form concerns a strategy that I would like to call the repulsion of sorrow. In psychoanalytic theory, there is the idea of defense mechanisms. Freud used the term for reactions whose goal is to mentally defuse psychic impulses, such as inadequate desires or affects (sexual wishes), in such a way which leads to a conflict-free mental state or no undesirable emotional reaction. So they represent a kind of problem-solving and conflict-handling.⁹⁹ Anna Freud, who significantly expanded the concept of defense mechanisms, names ten as the most important ones. Some defense mechanisms can be meaningfully transferred to the alleviation of pain, such as repression, denial, projection, reaction formation, rationalization and regression. The remaining forms of suffering do not correspond to the Freudian system. However, it is largely refrained from transferring psychoanalytic theory to defense mechanisms. So especially the general principle and the technical terms are borrowed.

95 S. FREUD, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, cit., p. 77.

96 See *ibid.*, p.77.

97 See R.HAUBL, *Be cool! Über die postmoderne Angst, persönlich zu versagen*, in: H.-J. Busch (Ed.), *Spuren des Subjekt. Positionen psychoanalytischer Sozialpsychologie*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2007, p. 119.

98 See *ibid.*

99 See S. FREUD, *Die Abwehr-Neuropsychosen. Versuch einer psychologischen Theorie der akquirierten Hysterie, vieler Phobien und Zwangsvorstellungen und gewisser halluzinatorischer Psychosen (1894)*, in: Sigmund Freud: *Gesammelte Werke, Band I*. Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 2012.

1. Reaction formation

Reaction formation (*Reaktionsbildung*) is understood to be a defense mechanism in which feelings or motives are replaced or displaced by opposing attitudes and behaviors, for example, when sexual impulses are replaced with extreme prudery.¹⁰⁰ For suffering, this would mean that one tries to be in a good mood through enjoyable distractions or through stimulants, such as alcohol and drugs, trying to achieve the same or at least to get relief: «Die roheste, aber wirksamste Methode solcher Beeinflussung ist die chemische Intoxikation»¹⁰¹ Diverse substances are certainly one of the most common ways of warding off suffering in our hedonistic culture. One can resort to legal or illegal drugs or even the medical description of mood-enhancing drugs and the usage of antidepressants can be seen as such because these are very common practices. So it is certainly the number one vanishing point. Of course, the usage or the abuse of illegal drugs causes long-term problems such as addiction, physical damage or habituation effects that require continuous increase and harmful effects of all sorts (psychological, social). Therefore it cannot be considered a sustained or meaningful coping strategy for suffering.

2. Repression and denial

For example, suppression may occur in situations when other things are prioritized and one needs to concentrate on something else.¹⁰² Of course, the repression of suffering succeeds only to a certain extent, after which one must reckon that the repressed returns and sooner or later one will have to deal with his suffering and should then fully dedicate himself to it. Especially in our performance society, the increasing pressure and the additional competition often lead to a hamster wheel of hustle and bustle, which regards any kind of suffering as a major problem, because it makes one less efficient and risk remaining lower than the others. Thus, suffering is repressed and this strategy does not infrequently end in a total collapse, such as burn-out or even a heart attack. Related to this is *somatization*.¹⁰³ This is when defense is accompanied by physical symptoms, or expresses itself only on the

100 See J. LAPLANCHE, J.-B. PONTALIS, *Das Vokabular der Psychoanalyse*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1972, p. 422.

101 S. FREUD, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, cit., p. 76.

102 See J. LAPLANCHE, J.-B. PONTALIS, *Das Vokabular der Psychoanalyse*, cit., p. 582.

103 See S. FREUD, *Die Abwehr-Neuropsychosen. Versuch einer psychologischen Theorie der akquirierten Hysterie, vieler Phobien und Zwangsvorstellungen und gewisser halluzinatorischer Psychosen (1894)*, in: Sigmund Freud: *Gesammelte Werke*, Band I. Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 2012, p. 63.

physical level, which means ignoring mental suffering can occur in the form of physical complaints (psychosomatics) and lead to physical symptoms. This happens according to Freudian psychodynamics, because in some form a transformation or diversion of energy must be made because the bad energy itself does not vanish.

3. Projection and rationalization

Projection is a defense mechanism which attributes one's own suffering to other persons. This means that one perceives one's own suffering especially in other people, perhaps identifies with them and thereby receives relief of his own state of mind.¹⁰⁴ One may care for other suffering people, donate money or get involved in charity. Here, on the one hand, alleviation from one's own suffering seems to occur through the feeling of belonging to others, or by experiencing oneself in comparison as less suffering which can provoke a feeling of gratitude. This can also be seen as a form of rationalization; another form of rationalization at least brings some relief of suffering by understanding someone is suffering.¹⁰⁵ It is very hard for people when they do not get any diagnosis because no one knows what kind of illness or problem they have. And we have heard on several other occasions that it seems to be important for human beings in general to understand why we suffer and what causes our suffering. In addition, there is the existential dimension of suffering which often comes along with the question of the meaning of life in general. In the Catholic view of the world, suffering was often explained as the punishment of God. As long as one could believe in such religious interpretations, it could have been a credible or meaningful explanation, which certainly was helpful. In many therapeutic schools it is therefore attempted to give suffering a symbolic and meaningful framework, as is the case in logotherapy, for example.

4. Regression and masochism

In the case of regressive pain defense, there is a retreat to an earlier stage of development of the ego function in which a "lower" (simpler, earlier developmental structures) organized behavior still functioned (defiance behavior, desire for unconditional care etc.).¹⁰⁶ If, for example, suffering is experienced as too overwhelming, it can lead to such regressive behaviors, which usually consist in escaping completely one's own responsibility (passivation) and putting oneself in the

104 See J. LAPLANCHE, J.-B. PONTALIS, *Das Vokabular der Psychoanalyse*, cit., pp. 399-400.

105 See *ibid.*, p. 418.

106 See *ibid.*, p. 436.

hands of others. The uses of spiritualistic and esoteric miracle teachings, which suggest animistic ideas of the world and use superstitious practices, can also be counted as such. These regressive defenses are based predominantly on beliefs and tend to exclude any rational reasoning. This is especially dangerous when people are so desperate that they completely rely on strangers and then often become victims of fraud and financial damages.

The masochistic defense is all about the principle of masochism and its libidinal attachment to suffering. Although it hurts, suffering can be libidinally bound and thus lead to pleasure. It can be assumed that this is the case with many ascetics, as well as with people who remain in situations that harm them, but where they feel weak and unable to free themselves. This masochistic tendency is often combined with the regressive attitude. The problem is that although suffering itself can be experienced pleasurably, the situation remains harmful for the person and therefore this kind of behavior cannot be considered a constructive strategy.

5. Escape to the imagination

Another way to escape suffering is to escape from reality into one's imagination and phantasies. For Freud, religions are also more or less the same,

«Eine besondere Bedeutung beansprucht der Fall, daß eine größere Anzahl von Menschen gemeinsam den Versuch unternimmt, sich Glücksversicherung und Leidensschutz durch wahnhafte Umbildung der Wirklichkeit zu schaffen. Als solchen Massenwahn müssen wir auch die Religionen der Menschheit kennzeichnen»¹⁰⁷.

But this also includes all sorts of distractions through films, novels, series or daydreaming.

«Man darf sagen, der Glückliche phantasiert nie, nur der Unbefriedigte. Unbefriedigte Wünsche sind die Triebkräfte der Phantasien, und jede einzelne Phantasie ist eine Wunscherfüllung, eine Korrektur der unbefriedigten Wirklichkeit»¹⁰⁸.

107 S. FREUD, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, cit., p. 76.

108 T.W. ADORNO, *Ästhetische Theorie*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 7, p. 26.

The quote illustrates the connection of an insufficient or sorrowful reality and the production of satisfying phantasies and the escape into idealistic worlds. But this is also where the connection between suffering and its hidden desire can be traced. In suffering there can be found at least one wish and that is the annulment of suffering. But as soon as the imagination is activated, the most multifaceted concepts of salvation are connected to this desire. From utopia dreams to the heavenly kingdoms and paradisiacal conceptions of the world, there are no limits to human imagination. This suggests a special position for escape into the imagination, since it contains a thoroughly productive moment: imagining what is not, what might be what is desired instead. Nevertheless, it is not considered a real solution, because there is danger that one will escape into this fantasy world without actually using the creative potential to actively try to change the conditions that cause the suffering.

Finally, it should be noted that the various forms of alleviating suffering are not really meaningful attempts to solve it and therefore the suffering returns. Until one gets to the roots of the problem this reappearance does not stop. That is why an accurate analysis and understanding of the causes is so important.

4.7.3. *Changing oneself*

The third strategy concerns the ego change. Using the *I* as the one to change means either not being able to correct external causes of suffering or assuming that you are actually the problem. The logical consequence of this is a form of ego change and some form of adaptation. This can be done through therapy (also medical of course), coaching, learning and other techniques. One of the most important changes takes place through the changing of beliefs, but also through all forms of educational intervention or behavioral changes, by practicing new habits. Adaptation by sublimation, as discussed in the previous chapter, concerns the psychodynamic level and thus can in some way be used as a term subsuming all these different techniques which tend to change oneself. Even within psychoanalysis, sublimation has a special status. Freud's understanding of converting or diverting libido into *socially useful* achievements corresponds quite closely to this meaning.

Another option besides therapy, which has already been dealt with in psychological suffering, is self-education or education in general. To strengthen one's own resources in order to develop the personality is quite common, especially for our

current culture of self-responsibility and performance orientation. The goal is to develop the most successful “I” possible. Although the methods have changed significantly and we have replaced the former hard techniques of education with softer forms, the goal remains the same. In the book *Genealogie der Moral*, Nietzsche outlines the genesis of memory with the help of mnemonic techniques:

«Man brennt Etwas ein, damit es im Gedächtnis bleibt: nur was nicht aufhört weh zu tun, bleibt im Gedächtnis – das ist ein Hauptsatz, aus der allerältesten (leider auch allerlängsten) Psychologie auf Erden»¹⁰⁹.

Of course, this is not just about mnemotechniques but above all about education and self-education. And even though the principle of such mnemonics seems to have become foreign to us, since our educational styles are non-violent, anyone who wants to deliver top performances in any area knows the torments to face and the efforts that are needed to get better can be quite painful and cruel. Of course, all of this has its natural limits, but until that endpoint is reached, there is a great deal of flexibility in the increase of performance that a human can achieve.

Sublimation

Sublimation as used by Freud, in principle, means transferring the libido to a different "higher" goal, refining your own being. This happens for Freud, for example, by turning one's energy to research, to art, literature or music. Freud was therefore of the opinion that sublimation would be an important motor for cultural development.¹¹⁰ However, for the present case, it is also about sublimating experiences of regret, as was not intended by the theory of Freud.

In addition, the cognitive, psychic aspect always plays an important role in the ego change. This fact has been more and more emphasized within the field of psychotherapies and coaching and is now being applied across all therapy schools, even in the field of behavioral therapy. That means a change in behavior almost always means a change of perspective or a change of attitude. To re-value values, to re-think one's world view in order to possibly reconcile it with external reality. So that includes the possibility that suffering can also arise because of distorted individual or collective perception or idealistic worldviews which are far away from

109 F. NIETZSCHE, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, in: *Werke in drei Bänden*, cit., Band 2, p. 801.

110 See J. LAPLANCHE, J.-B. PONTALIS, *Das Vokabular der Psychoanalyse*, cit., pp. 478-481.

reality and produce too high expectations of people themselves or the environment. However, since the focus of therapies is individualistically oriented, the real problem could of course also lie on the social level and therefore require a collective problematization. Such questions naturally do not play a role in therapeutic discourse and, in such a context, cannot be meaningfully problematized or discussed (for example Nazi ideology etc.).

4.7.4. *Environmental change*

Of course, if someone aims to change the environment, first of all the causes of suffering must have been located in external, social or societal conditions. In order to recognize such connections, however, a detailed analysis is required. Especially sociological and socio-philosophical works endeavored to identify socially problematic relationships, to analyze them and to elucidate the bad consequences of certain societal conditions.

If one proceeds from social causes to a particular form of suffering, there are two principal possibilities for dealing with them, which I will call the:

- individualistic orientation
- collective orientation

In the first case, the attempt means above all to change one's personal environment, while the second orientation aims to strive for changing the situation for a group, or at least for several people up to the societal extents. In free democratic societies, this is either through initiatives of the civic society, in the form of political demands or through the creation of non-profit organizations, like NGOs which deal with social suffering. But also emancipatory orientations, or empowerment movements, which often locate their tasks in the field of education, aim for social change in order to reduce suffering by political information and through empowering people to improve their situations on their own. Freud had a very illuminating approach, which aimed to make unconscious psychodynamics conscious to acquire more personal freedom writes, which reveals his emancipatory aspiration.¹¹¹ Thus, a fundamental interest of psychoanalysis is to make the unconscious conscious through self-reflection, a dialogic discourse and by decoding the symbolized forms of

111 See E. FROMM, *Befreiung und Erleuchtung*, in: R. Funk (Ed.), *Erich Fromm Lesebuch*, Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, Stuttgart 1985, p. 209.

metaphors, symptoms or dreams. Since the unconscious not only concerns one's own motives and drives, but also social values (or Lacans's *Le grande Autre*) and ideals that are reflected in the superego, psychoanalysis can actually contribute to a greater understanding of the connections between culture and suffering. For example, it provides insights into the psychic mechanisms underlying irrational cultural obedience. Freud reveals the irrational foundations of domination in order to make them more accessible for a possible change. The entire tradition of the Frankfurt School has adhered to this emancipatory ideal of psychoanalysis and, with the help of its explanatory models, has contributed much for a better understanding of the psychosocial correlation and its interdependency.

Summary

1. Suffering is a subjectivist term that presents a challenge to science
2. The question of suffering plays a major role in religions
3. In philosophy, the closer examination of suffering is important especially in theological and existentialist works
4. Four different forms of suffering can be distinguished: physical, psychological, social and existential suffering
5. One can encounter suffering in different ways, but suffering tends to return as long as there is no solution on the level of the real causes
6. The four basic manners of suffering are:
 - Stoic endurance
 - Escape from suffering
 - Changing oneself
 - Changing the environment

Chapter V

Homo Patiens

Alle Pathologie bedarf erst noch der Diagnose, einer Diagnosis, eines Durchblicks, des Hinblicks auf den Logos, der hinter dem Pathos steht, auf den Sinn, der das Leiden hat¹.

The aim of this work is to place suffering at the center of socio-critical considerations. On the one hand, this should ensure that the concrete human being is indeed at the center of such investigations, and no abstraction; on the other hand, it should help avoid too idealistic speculations.

In the work presented here, we see humans are considered bio-psycho-social beings, who are essentially shaped by the culture in which they live. But furthermore humans retroact to culture and can therefore change their environment decisively in their favor. This is where the social-philosophical reflections essentially begin. The self-reflexivity of men, especially in relation to their social situation, is, of course, a fundamental condition for recognizing, analyzing and finally changing or dissolving problematic societal relationships.

The orientation towards concrete experiences of suffering for a socially critical work allows conclusions on the current and concrete limits of human formability, adaptability and resilience. For the social-philosophical consideration especially those forms of suffering are relevant, which show up where social factors produce suffering and painful experiences for a larger number of people. In that sense, it illustrates the need for social change. It is therefore clear that one can hardly speak of an adjustment error when a collective level or a group of people is affected by such suffering. In the third chapter, we have seen that feelings can be explicit drivers for social change and this will be the point of reference for the present chapter. So first of all we will start with a return to the first chapter, in which the concept of alienation was problematized and analyzed. So we can once again recall the essential points that lead to a decisive rejection of this concept. Thereafter, the function or the various philosophical dimensions of suffering will be worked out and considered precisely,

1 V.E. FRANKL, *Der Wille zum Sinn. Ausgewählte Vorträge über Logotherapie*, Huber, Bern 1972, p. 148.

as they could be of great relevance to any socio-philosophical consideration.

However, the reference to suffering does not aim primarily for some kind of ethics of suffering, although ethical considerations naturally play an implicit role (since suffering is seen as a reason for change), so there should be a differentiation from *Negative Utilitarianism*, which, of course, is close to the present approach because this ethical conception basically refers to suffering too. However, since this work is located in a socio-critical context, the question of the concrete handling of socially-induced forms of suffering should be brought to the level of political and democratic debate.

5.1. Why abandon the alienation motif?

*Dem Denken geht das Leiden voraus*².

The aim of the first chapter was to elaborate through a selected number of authors, to show the long tradition within social philosophy as well as political philosophy of using the concept of alienation as the central reference point for social criticism. Before I devote myself in detail to the proposal to substantiate social-philosophical criticism through the direct reference of suffering, we will once again look at the problematic aspects of the concept of alienation.

As we have just seen, at least since Marx the concept of alienation has become a central category of social and political philosophy, but also of sociology. Hardly any term played a similarly extensive role in the development of these theoretical sciences as the idea of alienation. So alienation became a term which should express the connection between social suffering and society. At the same time, alienation is one of the most vague concepts of sociology.

The *first reason* to drop the concept of alienation and instead place the relation to suffering at the center of social philosophical considerations is that the concept of alienation can only reach a part of the problematic effects and manifestations of society. However, as we have heard, many things cannot be subsumed under the

2 L. FEUERBACH, *Vorläufige Thesen zur Reform der Philosophie*, in: *Kleine philosophische Schriften (1842-1845)*, Leipzig 1950, p. 62.

problem of alienation, and yet they are highly criticizable. Therefore it would be an unnecessary restriction to describe or grasp social suffering exclusively by means of the alienation concept. In addition, when the relationship of estrangement to some form of suffering disappears, it becomes questionable and tenuous how a socio-critical analysis should be justified. In order to be able to practice such criticism of certain social relations, we need a point from which we can formulate this critique. If we as subjects are not affected by certain forms of suffering from a particular social situation, what reason should we have to criticize the social situation? If there is no kind of suffering, in whatever form, the meaning of criticism becomes either indistinct, idealistic or a matter of taste. In this respect, I would suggest subsuming such forms of criticism under the concept of cultural criticism and clearly distinguishing them from critical social theory, which has an explicitly political-ethical dimension, whereas cultural criticism in the above-mentioned form would rather be a matter of style and taste and allows a great variety of cultural differences. Unfortunately, many authors in the socio-critical field do not make a difference between social criticism and cultural criticism and the mixture of both takes place again and again. But this must be considered as extremely problematic, since there is a qualitative difference between these two spheres that plays a significant role for a meaningful and serious socio-philosophical critique. An example of such cultural critique, which has no explicit reference to suffering, is undoubtedly Adorno's criticism of American mass culture and its different manifestations, which he deeply rejects. It is easy to see that the very type of criticism is rooted above all in the vulgar aesthetics and the superficiality of mass culture and does not have complaints about any serious forms of suffering. Such criticism is extremely elitist and should either be avoided or explicitly treated as a matter of taste. The assumption is that this kind of mixing cultural and socio-philosophical critique occurs only because the social-philosophical foundation for social criticism has no explicit references to suffering.

The *second point* concerns the critique of essentialism within the concept of alienation, which, as we have seen, is not always true (in particular the new conceptions of Jaeggi and Rosa do not claim essentialist concepts), but due to the suggestive power of the term, which hint to the idea of an *original authentic human nature* or a true human nucleus must be regarded as problematic. Thus, the concept of alienation is often about the question of what one may have become estranged

from, or what could have been the *original non-alienated* nature of men or what a non-alienated relationship could have looked like, whereas the relation to suffering is not about the identification of the true authentic, original, sane relationship, but about the question of what caused the suffering. So we assure not to overlook the processuality of men and their essential adaptability and necessity to adopt as an anthropologic constitution, but instead we concentrate only on those which cause suffering. This means the spectrum of human variations or what humans can be, how they can relate to the world is much wider because suffering appears only on the boundaries of our human nature, as we will later see.

The *third point* concerns the diversity of alienation conceptions and the related ambiguity, which differs from author to author. The concept of alienation is therefore regarded as a philosophical construct which is not intuitively understandable because it lacks the direct relation to feelings. This means the idea of alienation is not part of our vocabulary of emotions which we normally use when we are making an emotional assessment of a situation. There may be certain situations where one might say that he feels alien or that he is not in contact with somebody or something, but the concept of alienation is otherwise rarely used in everyday life and this refers directly to the socio-philosophical construction. But this also means that one can use the concept of alienation incorrectly, as it was not intended by a particular author. In contrast, when we are referring to suffering, one cannot say that somebody uses the idea of suffering wrongly, because it is based on a subjective reference per se, and only the sufferer himself can testify to his suffering. Although this subjective level can only be acknowledged in an intersubjective discourse, the experience of the suffering subject is the point of reference. This also does not allow any position that argues paternalistically and where the expert's opinions are valued higher than the experiences of those directly affected. Statements, such as those by Fromm, who wrote in one passage that workers who would claim to be satisfied were unaware of their real alienation. Such claims or theoretical positions must be considered highly inadmissible.³

The *fourth reason* regards the problematic that often it is true that one can speak of alienation, but the pressure of suffering is questionable or minimal. This refers to all those alienation experiences which can be endured without great suffering. This

3 See E. FROMM, *The Sane Society*, New York 1955, pp. 296-297.

concerns, for example, the alienating effects of bureaucratic organizations, which obviously limit immediate possibilities of actions. But in exchange, they represent a necessary and justified evil if we want formalized processes which are designed to treat all men equally and fairly (except, of course, overtaking forms of unnecessary bureaucracy).

The *fifth reason* concerns the proximity of the conception of alienation to Marx's critique of capitalism. Certainly, the adaptation of historical materialism within the Frankfurt School has left its mark and remains an important part of the social-philosophical preoccupation with the pathologies of the social. But the Marxist concept of alienation is essentially based on economic conditions and is strongly oriented towards a materialistic view of society. The disengagement from this term is especially useful if you want to cover more than the economic situation of a society with a socio-philosophical critique. A broad socio-philosophical theory should not be exhausted in the critique of capitalism, but should include diverse forms of suffering within the societal field. There are various forms of suffering in a society, which give rise to socially critical concerns and their causes are far from being reducible to one single reason, like the capitalist economic order. Marx's perspective is that the economic conditions of a society already lead to a fundamental alienation, which consequently means alienation affects the whole society and therefore we are all alienated. Adorno, too, adapts the idea of the totality of alienation in the capitalist society.

The present work aims to avoid such one-sidedness and totalizing, but at the same time reductionist social criticism which often comes along with the idea of alienation. In contrast, the reference to suffering focuses its socio-philosophical critique on the concrete suffering of the individual, to analyze if there is any social dimension and if there are societal conditions that cause this suffering. Overall, it can be stated that the majority of socio-critical theories in the broadest sense refer to some kind of suffering, the only problem is that they do not do it explicitly. The desire for social change always arises in some way from circumstances that are restrictive, negative, problematic, excluding – and for at least one particular group these cause a sorrowful experience. Although Adorno explicitly points out the role of suffering for social philosophy in many passages, he remains inconsistent in his relation and mixes different forms of criticism. Therefore, a social-philosophical

theory of suffering is still missing today.

5.2. What is the meaning of suffering? What are its functions?

Motor des psychoanalytischen Erkenntnisprozesses ist daher nicht das Interesse an Selbstreflexion, sondern sinnlich erfahrbares Leiden, das nach Aufhebung verlangt. [...] Psychoanalyse als kritisch-hermeneutisches Verfahren bezieht ihren Impuls aus der unerträglichen realen Lage der Subjekte, sie lebt vom ‚Widerspruch‘ und zielt auch auf nichts anderes [...] als darauf, blind erfahrene Widerspruchskonsequenzen in bewußte Erfahrung zu verwandeln⁴.

We have already seen in which ways suffering manifests itself, and even though it concerns very different fields, some features of suffering can already be deduced from it.

For example, where suffering manifests, it indicates that something is wrong, something has become problematic, harmful, or somehow dysfunctional. This means that suffering offers a form of orientation which could be seen as an *orientational function*. If we ask for additional functions, there are actually other aspects as well. There is no doubt about the fact that suffering does not always have a function, but at least there are some aspects that can be recognized in many types of suffering. The pain we feel when we touch a hot plate is to protect us from burning ourselves, and this is true for most forms of physical suffering. Chronic pains are excluded, because they often only indicate decay or at least a dysfunction. So we can also claim a *protective function*.

When someone grieves because a loved one has died, according to Freud it is because there has been a libidinal connection which now has to be slowly resolved in the mourning process. The fact that there has been a libidinal attachment at all is due to human nature, which is able to bind itself through friendship, love, or affection to other people and things in general. The pain that arises when such bonds are broken prevents us from quickly detaching ourselves from others, thereby creating a certain constancy of human relationships (a social network) that gives us security. However, in the case of mourning due to the death of a beloved one, we have no choice

4 A. LORENZER, *Über den Gegenstand der Psychoanalyse oder: Sprache und Interaktion*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1973, pp. 142 and 146.

whether we want or do not want to separate. When we look at the suffering of mourning, it is above all a social aspect that can be recognized, which is characterized by empathy. Anyone who sees someone grieving usually feels affected and will probably be more cautious and sensitive than usual because through his ability for empathy, he knows that a mourning person already suffers enough and as a rule, he does not want to put any additional burden on him. Precisely because of such social situations, one can also interpret suffering as a signal or a form of communication. So we can further claim a *communicative function*.

In connection with this example, I would also claim an *expressive function*. That means the way one expresses his suffering, in the form of lamentations, for example, or enacting them, like the mourners in Jerusalem, or whether one withdraws and hides his suffering, or processes it artistically. Suffering contains a great deal of energy that urges discharge or processing. Nietzsche, in particular, often points to his own work, which is closely related to his experiences of suffering, which compelled him to process it. But also many other poets and artists find similar motives for their artistic work:

«Der Noth ist jede Lust entsprossen,
Und unter Schmerzen nur gedeiht
Das Liebste, was mein Herz genossen,
Der holde Reiz der Menschlichkeit»⁵.

Lost love, unrequited love, suffering in the face of illness and decay, because of the fear of death and much more, are topics that are processed in art, literature, music, and other artistic forms. And not infrequently, such works subsequently help others process similar ailments too. All this contributes to greater knowledge of human depths or simply creates beautiful works of art. In this sense, one could say that culture is a network of symbolic artifacts that connects us as human beings with other people.

Another function could be called the *knowledge function*. It is not rare that suffering brings people to fathom their own suffering more deeply and want to understand where it comes from or what the causes for a certain suffering are. So

5 F. HÖLDERLIN, *Neue Thalia. Das Schicksal*, Georg Joachim Göschen, Leipzig 1793, p. 223.

suffering can teach people a lot about themselves, their hidden motives and psychological dynamics, about the relationship with the world and others and how they affect us or how we affect them. Also, Tolstoy points out that suffering can cause spiritual and mental growth: «Das schnellste Tier, das euch zur Vollkommenheit trägt, das ist das Leid; denn niemand genießt mehr ewige Seligkeit, als wer mit Christus in der tiefsten Bitternis steht.»⁶ In fact, we owe many discoveries and inventions to the desire to reduce certain human sufferings. This is reminiscent of Scarry's theory, according to which the chair contains the knowledge of the fatigue of the legs and the coat contains the knowledge of the sensitivity of humans to the cold.⁷

In connection with this, one could also speak of a *developmental function*. Crises often contribute to the fact that one has worked on the suffering to which he had previously been exposed. One may have learned something decisive from the suffering, or changed or improved the conditions of the outside world that caused his suffering. Crises in general often contribute to the fact that humans develop because certain sufferings, to which people are exposed, provide the impulse to make decisive changes in lifestyle or push improvements of any type.

When we look at the existential forms of suffering, it might seem that it has no function at all. But exactly the fact that even today, despite tendentious positivist worldviews and a rather hedonistic lifestyle, the search and the desire for spirituality and questions of meaning have not ebbed. This clearly points to its existential dimension. This means that suffering has an *existential-philosophical function*, in the sense that we turn to the existential questions of life through suffering. We start asking ourselves what defines us as human beings, what the limits are of humanity, our vulnerability and our mortality and these philosophical questions certainly deepen us.

In addition and in proximity to this, suffering also refers to questions of ethics, because the idea of ethics itself is based on at least three reasons. The first one lies in suffering of man himself, which refers to human vulnerability and mortality. If there was no such experience as suffering, talking about ethics would be completely

6 MEISTER ECKHART, *Von der Abgeschiedenheit*, in: *Meister Eckharts mystische Schriften*, Traktat 9, Berlin 1903, p. 178.

7 See E. SCARRY, *Der Körper im Schmerz. Die Chiffren der Verletzlichkeit und die Erfindung der Kultur*, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1992.

without sense. That is the reason why there is no ethics towards the material world and why again and again discourses about animal ethics arise because many people (for good reason) assume feelings, and therefore suffering, for animals. The second reason is the sociality of men and their social life within communities. The sociality of the fact that we live together (depending more or less one on the other) makes ethical rules meaningful or at least necessary because it is one simple way to rely on one another. And the third reason is rooted in empathy because if we were indifferent (uncaring) in the face of the suffering of others, nobody would care if he caused suffering or if someone else suffered. So it can be claimed that suffering has an *ethical function* too because one might start reflecting about ethics due to one's or someone else's suffering.

So we can certainly differentiate 8 *different functions* (philosophical aspects) of suffering, which are neither always true, nor all true at the same time, but at least they represent possible aspects of suffering:

1. Protective function
2. Communicative function (signal)
3. Expressive function
4. Knowledge function
5. Developmental function
6. Orientational function
7. Existential-philosophical function
8. Ethical function

Everyone is, in some way, at the mercy of suffering. The only thing we can freely decide is what attitude we will choose in the face of suffering and how we want to deal with it: questioning, stoically, dismissively, preventing it and changing it or something else. The usual response to suffering in our Western societies is getting rid of it as quickly as possible. So the general approach towards suffering is very negative. Of course, the way we perceive suffering substantially affects how we approach it. The illustration of the eight possible aspects or functions of suffering aims to emphasize the *productive side of suffering* and its *potential* if we approach it in an inquiring and interrogative way. Therefore, we will now look in detail at the role of these aspects and how they might be meaningfully considered for a socio-philosophical approach. A critical social theory that turns to suffering should devote

itself in detail to these eight possible functions.

5.3. Suffering as the experience of limits - protection and orientation

Metaphysik ist die Gestalt des Bewußtseins, in der es versucht, das zu erkennen, was mehr als der Fall ist oder was nicht bloß der Fall ist und doch gedacht werden muß, weil das, was, wie man so sagt, der Fall ist, uns dazu nötigt⁸.

Suffering is a borderline experience. It manifests where one reaches, surpasses, or at least gets too close to one's own, social, cultural, biological or psychological boundaries. One can expand boundaries, but, as we have seen, the price to pay is suffering. The continuous and careful widening of the limits of suffering can lead to maximum performance in many areas, but those who exaggerate their ambitions, risk, for example in the field of sports, injuries, physical long-term damage and thus even more suffering. The same applies to the social level. For example, if we look at societies that are heavily influenced by the performance ethos (meritocracy), such as the Japanese or South-Korean culture, it quickly becomes clear that many people in such societies suffer greatly due to this ideal (cultural super ego), which in extreme cases causes even very high suicide rates. In this case, suffering points to the limit of cultural values and ideals that overwhelm the individual or, in this case, a large number of people (it is doubly bad if your own failure is not due to low ambition, but has systemic causes that make it difficult for certain groups to succeed at all).⁹

Such social aberrations highlight the fact that suffering can also protect us from our own actions, from our own ideals, from our too ambitious visions which do not meet our needs and often overstrain us. What the mind can autonomously create, invent and imagine is often far from meaningful or at least far from practicable. So, suffering warns us and in some way shows us that we are on the wrong path. Thereby it offers a kind of orientation for what should not be as it is. But it also reveals a great deal about what the conditions are in a concrete situation, at a specific time, for a concrete person or a concrete group of people. Therefore, it provides information

8 See G. SCHWEPPEHÄUSER, *Theodor W. Adorno zur Einführung*, Junius Verlag, Hamburg 2003, p. 77.

9 WHO official suicide rates worldwide (http://www.who.int/gho/mental_health/suicide_rates_crude/en/) (seen on 12.01.2018).

about the *social-anthropological* situation as well as the *socio-ontological structure* and its boundaries or what is overstraining us as human beings in the social field. It, furthermore, shows us what is problematic, contradictory or even harmful to us and that it is time to change something.

5.4. Transcendental aspects of suffering – possibilities of development

*Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst das Rettende auch*¹⁰.

Suffering can be understood quite distinctly as a movement away from something. It is a kind of *negation of the status quo*. Freud thought that happiness was not part of men's life plan,¹¹ but the same could be assumed of suffering. In every suffering there is basically a revolt, a rebellion against a current state, even if it is not always clear what the suffering is directed against and even if this rebellion is not deliberately intended (unconscious or in cases of physical illness), and often not even wanted. Suffering wants more than currently is, it transcends, so to speak, the world in which it suffers, denies it and is necessarily critical. It implies that the now is not finished, that it has potentials that are not yet realized.

A world in which suffering is possible, is necessarily creative and productive. This is by no means cynical, but intends to give an extended view of the otherwise so negative approach to suffering. Due to the fundamental incompleteness (imperfection) and unfinished nature of the world, there is room for development as well as for undesirable developments and thus for suffering. Where suffering manifests itself, it presses for solutions, for other solutions or for new solutions.

The psychic conflictual character of suffering is, as we saw in the previous chapter, always intentional and/or of normative nature: if it is not possible to be what one wants to be or if the discrepancy with what is and what should be is too big or if one must be something which he does not want to be etc. But these intentional levels not only and not always work consciously, but also unconsciously, as internalized

¹⁰ F. HÖLDERLIN, *Patmos Hymne*, 1. Strophe, 1803.

¹¹ See S. FREUD, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 1953, p. 75.

values, which are in conflict with reality or with the inner nature, and which first have to be exposed in order to understand these dynamics. All this can be summarized in the formula that reality should not be as it is.

5.5. Let the symptoms talk - knowledge and reflection

*Leiden beredt werden zu lassen*¹².

The urge of suffering, as we have heard in the story of Job (Old Testament), is intimately related to the question of the sense, the meaning or the purpose of suffering. Understanding and being able to answer the question of why someone is suffering, especially where suffering appears to be unfounded, unfair, absurd and incomprehensible is very important for withstanding suffering. To paraphrase Nietzsche's sentence, «Hat man sein Warum des Leidens, so verträgt man sich fast mit jedem Wie.»¹³ Surely, suffering initiates a reflexive process that seeks to understand where suffering comes from, especially when it is not clear at first glance. The concept of suffering should therefore be read as a symptom that refers to something hidden and which has to tell us something.

The choice of the metaphor *symptom* is by no means coincidental, so it should be briefly clarified how it is to be understood exactly. If we look at the various definitions in dictionaries or encyclopedias, the term symptom is mostly defined as: "A sign in medicine or psychology which points to a disease or injury; it indicates the existence of something else; a slight indication; a sign of a disease, a dysfunction, etc." So it especially refers to clinical, medical speech and usage. The term itself comes from Greek and if we look at the etymological meaning of *σύμπτωμα* (symptoma) it means accident, misfortune, that which befalls.¹⁴ Furthermore the term is composed of two parts, *syn* – *συν* which means together and *ptoma* – *πτῶμα*, which means fall. So it means that something is falling together. Mentzos underlines

12 T.W. ADORNO, *Negative Dialektik*, Frankfurt am Main, 1967, p. 27.

13 F. NIETZSCHE, *Götzendämmerung*, in: *Friedrich Nietzsche. Werke in drei Bänden*, Band 2, Hanser Verlag, München 1954, p. 944.

14 See <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3D%2398870&redirect=true> (seen on 12.02.2018).

that something coincidental coincides within the symptom.¹⁵ So it is not about causality, but about correlation. A connection that is not necessary, but which, in a certain situation, is realized in this form. The emergence of a symptom is therefore to be understood as an autonomous process of the system whose exact dynamics are not clear, but in the end there is a sign, a symptom that indicates a dysfunction or at least a problem. So the symptom refers to something else, it is not self-referential. «Das Leben hat seine eigene Dynamik; es hat die Tendenz zu wachsen, sich Ausdruck zu verschaffen, sich zu leben»¹⁶. As the quote claims, life has its own dynamics, it has the tendency to grow and express itself and thus suffering as a symptom should be interpretation in the service of life, just as the medical symptom communicates something that is of great importance to us as human beings, sometimes even vital. So it is not just a sign, but it follows its own logic, which results from the interplay of various factors, like psychological, cultural, biological and social ones (and possibly others). The moment when this interactive dynamic fails or becomes problematic, it is experienced by men as suffering. But at the same time, this gives us the chance to respond appropriately to this symptom and to change and improve our situation.

To read suffering as a symptom means to emphasize the fact that it points beyond itself and transcends the current state, and to focus on the possibility of development. The aim is to use this space of possibility, which is opened by the negation of the present through suffering. The thesis proposed is far from wanting to glorify suffering, but on the contrary, to take suffering seriously, to explore it, and to learn to understand its various dimensions and interconnections in order to facilitate personal or collective growth and change. The proverbial meaning of the Chinese sign of crisis as a chance and an opportunity may be banal, but it reminds us of the similarity of the double meaning.

What is the truth of the symptom, what is its meaning? That is to be elaborated through an analytical process. Reflexivity and exact investigation is necessary, because blind actionism runs the risk of fighting symptoms only, whereas the actual causes, which lead to the respective suffering, remain untouched. However, suffering does not only call for reflection, but ultimately for action. What is hidden in suffering

15 See S. MENTZOS, *Neurotische Konfliktverarbeitung. Einführung in die psychoanalytische Neurosenlehre unter Berücksichtigung neuer Perspektiven*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 2000.

16 E. FROMM, *Die Furcht vor der Freiheit*, Europäische Verlagsgesellschaft, Frankfurt am Main, 1966, p. 149.

is a desire, the desire for self-abolition. But real self-abolition is only successful if the conditions that led to the development of suffering have seriously and adequately been changed. Otherwise, as we shall soon see, there is a return of suffering. The space of possibility, which the not-ought-to-be (rebellious) structure of the suffering establishes, should be questioned genuinely and used as an opportunity for change, creation and development.

The desire within the symptom is its productive moment. It stimulates the imagination and searches creatively for alternatives, solutions, referring to an *utopian horizon* (or rather a potentially topical, new horizon). It is this aspect of suffering that allows us to dream of a better world. But if it is not evaluated by factual arguments, it can actually create utopian projects and ideas of a perfect society without any suffering. Such naive phantasies are downright dangerous, as we ought to know from the historical experiences of Real Socialism or the bloody conflicts which resulted from the idealistic, but fanatic ambitions of the French Revolution. In order to borrow Freudian terminology, it is about reconciling the *pleasure principle* (*Lustprinzip*) with the *reality principle* (*Realitätsprinzip*), because only then meaningful solutions can be worked out.

5.6. The return of the repressed – why we cannot escape the truth of symptoms

*Mir scheint, daß der Grad der Destruktivität beim einzelnen Menschen in einem direkten Verhältnis dazu steht, wie sehr ihm die Entfaltungsmöglichkeiten in seinem Leben beschnitten wurden. Ich meine damit nicht die Versagung dieses oder jenes triebhaften Wunsches, sondern die Vereitelung des gesamten Lebens, die Blockierung der Spontaneität, des Wachstums und des Ausdrucks der sinnlichen, emotionalen und intellektuellen Fähigkeiten*¹⁷.

«Es gibt solche Reformen und solche Reformen; eine Reform kann radikal sein, das heißt, sie kann zu den Wurzeln gehen oder sie kann oberflächlich sein und an Symptomen herumzuflicken versuchen, ohne ihre Ursachen zu berühren.»¹⁸ This

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 148-149.

¹⁸ E. FROMM, *Auf dem Wege zu einer neuen Gesellschaft*, in: R. Funk (Ed.), *Erich Fromm Lesebuch*, Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, Frankfurt am Main 1965, p. 135.

means that if solutions remain on the surface and affect only the symptomatic levels, then the suffering has the tendency to return. It asks us to take it seriously and to devote ourselves to it.

«Was für die Ursachen gilt, gilt natürlich auch für die Heilmittel, mit denen man die Gebrechen des modernen Menschen kurieren kann. Wenn ich glaube, daß die Ursache der Krankheit ökonomischer oder geistiger oder psychologischer Art sei, dann glaube ich natürlich, daß die Beseitigung dieser Ursache zur Gesundheit führt»¹⁹.

What is estimated to be the cause, will shape the remedies with which one will try to cure the afflictions. That is why it is so important to examine suffering in depth because only a person who understands the causes which lead to suffering will find appropriate ways and means of reducing it and harness its potential for possible developments. If not, it is likely that suffering will return in a distorted form. Especially at the societal level, such a return of the repressed often appears in the form of radicalisms (of all kinds), as seemingly irrational phenomena or in the form of mental or physical illnesses. Young people, for example, from poorer social classes are attracted to radical groups (like right-wing extremists etc.), they might discharge their own suffering (frustration) in the form of aggressiveness towards others in order to feel strong and suppress the pain so that they need not feel it.²⁰ If suffering is not taken seriously, it may happen that the situation gets worse. Social conflicts are often related to actual suffering on other unapparent or hidden levels.

«Die gleichen Bedingungen – der Konflikt mit den Erfordernissen der menschlichen Natur und dem daraus resultierenden Leiden, das Gewahrwerden des Verdrängten und die Änderung der realen Situation und der Wertmaßstäbe und Normen – sind auch die notwendigen Voraussetzungen für eine Heilung der Krankheitserscheinungen der Gesellschaft»²¹.

We all know the dangers of the ideological manipulability of afflicted and

19 *Ibid.*, p. 133.

20 See C. BUTTERWEGGE, *Rechtsextremismus, Rassismus und Gewalt: Erklärungsmodelle in der Diskussion*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1996.

21 E. FROMM, *Auf dem Wege zu einer neuen Gesellschaft*, cit., p. 137.

suffering people, who cling to the hope of redemption (fanaticism of all kinds) and who apparently have nothing to lose but their suffering.

5.7. How to symbolize suffering - communicative and expressive aspects

*Sie sägten die Äste ab, auf denen sie saßen /
Und schrieen sich zu ihre Erfahrungen /
Wie man schneller sägen konnte, und fuhren /
Mit Krachen in die Tiefe, und die ihnen zusahen /
Schüttelten die Köpfe beim Sägen und /
Sägten weiter²²*

The level of expression plays a crucial role. How suffering gets symbolized in a society and how it is processed. At least two basic forms of processing must be distinguished: on the one hand, unconscious processing and, on the other, conscious processing. What exactly is meant by this? In the first case many forms of suffering cannot find appropriate expression, for whatever reason, and so they are symbolized, unconsciously. This happens, as we have already seen, through a variety of symptoms and disease phenomena, such as burn-out, depression, anxiety disorders, addictions or psychosomatic complaints and can manifest in extreme cases in the form of radicalism and aggressive outbreaks. All this can be an expression of social suffering that is not solvable for the individual and therefore shifts to other places where it can be expressed in other forms (banlieus, radicalism).

On the other hand, there is the conscious expression and deliberate engagement with themes of suffering. In our societies, suffering is often artistically processed. There are films that address social suffering as well as documentaries, socio-critical books get published, song-lyrics often have socio-critical aims and as we live in a free democratic society, we are allowed to express our dissatisfaction through a variety of social and political forms (e.g. demonstrations, referendum). But, of course, there are great differences between cultures in how suffering is dealt with: whether it is appropriate at all to express it (mourners in Jerusalem), whether one

22 B. BRECHT, *Werke: Gedichte 4*, Aufbau-Verlag, Berlin 1993.

seeks help or feels ashamed of his suffering instead, whether suffering is a private matter or it might become a matter of public debate, whether it gets pathologized and therefore strongly calls for therapy, whether suffering is accepted as normal or as a sign that calls for change and even gets politicized, explored or something else.

It is therefore all the more important to find forms of approaches that seek and enable a serious engagement with various forms of suffering. If a socio-critical approach aims at social development, it is at least important to reduce those forms of unnecessary sufferings which are directly linked to social conditions and which can be changed through political interventions.

5.8. Existential-philosophical and ethical dimensions

*Sehnsucht ist die Nabelschnur des höheren Lebens*²³.

Suffering confronts men with the limits of their humanity, with those things we can hardly bear, what we are afraid of, that even make us shudder. It confronts us with our vulnerability, with our mortality, with the temporal limitations of our existence. Even the most rational people, in the face of death, feel thrown back to the radical ignorance of all men over what dying, what death means to us. But most religious people, too, although they are more protected by their faith, feel existential fears and anxieties as others do because the slightest doubt regarding the consolation of the truth of their religion is sufficient to be overtaken from time to time by existential suffering.

Therefore, many therapeutic directions are based on people's need for meaning and existential questions (logotherapy, existential psychotherapy). Nevertheless, a cautious approach to such questions is appropriate, especially if therapy does not want to become a substitute for religion, but pursues an enlightened, emancipatory thought. Therapy, which addresses existential questions, would consequently confront people with the shock of existential suffering and seek anchor points without religious references. Such an anchor point could be the social dimension, the

23 S. KIERKEGAARD, 1813-1855: *Die Tagebücher*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 2, Diederichs, Düsseldorf 1963, p. 19.

mutual dependence on each other, the equality of all human beings in relation to their humanity, their limitedness, their suffering, their mortality, their anxiety, their ignorance and their vulnerability. These existential dimensions have a connecting moment, because we all share more or less the same existential problems (anthropological limits). This connecting moment of vulnerability as *homo patiens* has an ethical dimension too. The deepening concern with suffering can actually lead to another attitude towards life, which is more humble, more conscious, and perhaps even more empathic. Of course, this capacity for empathy is often hindered by ideological beliefs because we can also believe that a person rightly deserves suffering. And yet there is a principled social connection through suffering which at least does not leave us untouched if someone else suffers. In any case, it can be claimed that suffering is not only a viable starting point for a socio-philosophical approach, but also for dealing with ethical issues.

5.9. Dissociating from negative utilitarianism

*Leidend lernt ich viel*²⁴.

Now, as we have seen, the proposed approach to suffering is not one of simple elimination, but one that understands suffering as a means of development. So the approach is a questioning one which wants to understand what it has to say.

Negative utilitarianism is also based on suffering. However, its approach is completely different. In contrast to classical or positive utilitarianism, which emphasizes the maximization of happiness, it is a question of minimizing suffering as an essential goal. There are different varieties of negative utilitarianism, which are mainly characterized by the different emphasis on positive experiences (happiness) compared to negative experiences (suffering). Strong variants of negative utilitarianism only consider suffering as ethically relevant, while in weak forms of negative utilitarianism positive experiences are given some weight.

The idea underlying negative utilitarianism was first picked up by Popper in his work *Die offene Gesellschaft und seine Feinde*. He begins with a critique of the

24 J.W. GOETHE, *Stella. Ein Schauspiel für Liebende*, Akt 4, 1816.

classical philosophical systems of Plato, Hegel and Marx, whose theories are blamed for having led to the totalitarian systems of the 20th century. Plato, for example, is seen as a decay theorist, according to whom society developed from an originally 'good' natural state to a decadent and degenerative one. He claims that such ideas form the ideological reference point for dictatorships and that these attempts as he does not wrongly write, have often produced hell on Earth instead of societal paradise: «Der Versuch, den Himmel auf Erden einzurichten, erzeugt stets die Hölle»²⁵. Therefore, his counterproposal is an open, pluralistic society that should not be designed on the mental travel board, but, among other things, by focusing on the avoidance of suffering, which, with constant corrections and improvements, could contribute to the advancement of an open society. The main reasons that speak for Popper for a negative utilitarianism are the following. Firstly, it is not meaningful to demand the *good*, because only by eliminating the evil can better living conditions be ensured. He, too, recognizes the social function or the appellative function of suffering, but his overly simple invitation to just abolish suffering misjudges its productive dimension which could be found in suffering. As a result, his idea remains quite superficial. The low attention he gained for this proposal speaks for itself, and the rejections of his ethical proposal are quickly found. The painless destruction of humanity²⁶, which Popper certainly did not consider desirable, is a possible consequence of the shortened view of suffering, but definitely unacceptable for a genuinely ethical standpoint. But even less extreme examples, such as the nationwide allocation of drugs that prevent experiences of regret, point to the same fundamental problem and clarify why it is a barely discussed philosophical alternative to classical utilitarianism.

Of course, closeness to this conception cannot be denied because of the reference to suffering. The essential difference, however, lies in the way in which suffering itself is seen and approached. The dimension of suffering as a negation of the current state and its transcendental dimension which refers to a potentiality have not been recognized by Popper. The suggestion to read suffering as a symptom already points to the fundamental difference. A symptom is a sign that speaks to us. Something that

25 K.R. POPPER, *Die offene Gesellschaft und ihre Feinde. Band II: Falsche Propheten: Hegel, Marx und die Folgen*, Tübingen 1994, p. 277.

26 See R.N. SMART, *Negative Utilitarianism*, in: *Mind*. 67 (268), 1958, pp. 542-43; D. HEYD, *Genetics: Moral Issues in the Creation of People*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1992.

can only be produced by a living body, which follows its own rules that are interwoven with the socio-cultural context. As Popper has correctly recognized, suffering has an appellative function, but suffering has far more aspects, as we have previously seen. It reveals something about our humanity and above all about our humanity in the social context in which we find ourselves. This means that the conception of negative utilitarianism lacks an elaboration of the idea that suffering could be useful, could have a function, that it could lead to important findings and that it could contain a developmental potential. All these possible functions disappear when we simply silence suffering.

5.10. The relevance of the *Homo Patiens* for a critical social theory

Wenn wir gegen unseren jetzigen Kulturzustand mit Recht einwenden, wie unzureichend er unsere Forderungen an eine beglückende Lebensordnung erfüllt, wie viel Leid er gewähren läßt, das wahrscheinlich zu vermeiden wäre, wenn wir mit schonungsloser Kritik die Wurzeln seiner Unvollkommenheit aufzudecken streben, üben wir gewiß unser gutes Recht und zeigen uns nicht als Kulturfeinde. Wir dürfen erwarten, allmählich solche Abänderungen unsrer Kultur durchzusetzen, die unsere Bedürfnisse besser befriedigen und jener Kritik entgegen²⁷.

In the last section we will summarize the advantages of putting suffering or the *homo patiens* at the center of socio-philosophical considerations.

First of all, a socio-critical approach based on suffering needs neither reference to an original, authentic state of nature, nor the idea of a normal state that would have to be restored or achieved. A social philosophy that begins with suffering wants to make the suffering subjects speak for themselves and not judge from a meta-perspective that has already decided in advance what causes suffering in a society. Therefore, it inevitably begins with the subject himself and his experience of suffering, which means that it is an intuitive approach, placing an emotional state at the beginning of philosophical analysis. In spite of Adorno's critique of the totality of society, it tries to focus on the concrete phenomenon of suffering. So the idea that every social problem has its cause in the capitalist system is refused as a reductionist approach.

27 S. FREUD, *Unbehagen in der Kultur*, cit., p. 105.

Instead, the proposed approach aims to phenomenologically and empirically state where and how suffering manifests and foremost in the second step analyze hermeneutically (considering psychological, cultural and biological aspects as well) what its causes are. This analysis has to be made very carefully as it is the basis for any meaningful solution. As we have heard, there are many forms in which suffering manifests and expresses itself, and furthermore there are both conscious and unconscious manifestations. That means an accurate analysis has to consider all these probable aspects, such as psychological diseases (as an example for the unconscious level) as well as cultural peculiarities of dealing with suffering (how it is dealt with in literature etc.).

Furthermore, the reference to suffering allows broad space to cultural differences. This means the orientation towards suffering allows a wide range of cultural manners and diversities because the evaluation of the societal situation (cultural practices, social conditions) is made based on the extension and intensity of the suffering it causes. If it does not cause any suffering, there is obviously no reason for a socio-philosophical critique; if at all, it may concern mere cultural critique.

Another advantage of the reference to suffering in contrast to the concept of alienation is the broader usage, since alienation is not an appropriate term (concept) for every kind of suffering (physical suffering etc.).

Then, as announced in the 2nd chapter, the logocentric philosophical approach accepts only logically rational arguments, which is refused as reductionist. Suffering, since it is an emotion, is the attempt to complement the rationalist gaping hole. The reference to suffering helps not to fall into the trap of too idealistic, rationalistic or speculative considerations, which are merely created mentally and instead remind us that we have to respect certain human limits, especially where suffering arises.

This brings us to the subsequent point which regards the anthropologic question of so-called “human nature”. As discussed in the 2nd chapter, humans are considered bio-psycho-social and culturally formed beings, who have the ability to adapt to their environment to a certain point, which means that essentialist approaches are to be refused. Nonetheless, in this processuality of human beings certain constants are to be found, as it is human suffering itself. Through suffering we can claim to locate anthropologic, socio-anthropologic and socio-ontological limits, because these kinds of conclusions are to be made only by concrete experiences of suffering (which

explicitly means considering the possible changes).

A further point has revealed the appellative aspect of suffering, which directly addresses our empathy and makes us want to help, to consolidate and moreover refers to our genuinely social existence and social connectedness with other human beings.

As the present work is located in the vicinity of the Critical Theory, the interests are quite similar. Critical theory does not aim for the multiplication of knowledge, but for men's emancipation from enslaving circumstances: «nirgends bloß auf Vermehrung des Wissens als solchen ab, sondern auf die Emanzipation des Menschen aus versklavenden Verhältnissen»²⁸. The overall goal of social philosophy is to think about how we can shape our societal life in the sense of a good life for all.

This obviously is in great proximity to ethical questions too. But as the approach is a socio-philosophical one, questions of ethics are considered to be meaningfully answered only within a social discourse. So ethics from the perspective of this thesis starts from human suffering and has then to be elaborated discursively. As a theoretical basis, we have renounced any ethical relativism in the 2nd chapter because it has been considered a reductionist view which does not adequately refer to humans. The claim has been that there are more and less adequate forms of ethics, measured by anthropological limits, such as suffering. So the mere fact of suffering human beings uncovers relativist ethics as absurd and abstract.

Furthermore, suffering as a starting point for socio-philosophical considerations is future-oriented, denies the factual as inadequate, transcends it and demands more. Social change thus aims to reduce suffering caused by societal causes. This means social suffering can also be understood as an opportunity for development. If we want to interpret and use suffering in its productive aspects for a societal development, it is necessary to work out the collective dimension of suffering and to filter the general level which connects specific experiences of suffering and what summarizes the individual fates to a collective fate. At this point, the discourse necessarily turns into a political one. Every suffering has a social dimension, but not every suffering has a political dimension - only where the causes of suffering could be politically remedied, where the main causes of suffering are to be found in the

28 M. HORKHEIMER, *Traditionelle und kritische Theorie* (1937), in: Max Horkheimer (Ed.), *Traditionelle und kritische Theorie*, Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2005, p. 262.

social field and other individual strategies would remain only on a symptomatic level, a politicization.²⁹ All sufferings can have their causes in social conditions. On the physical level, they can be diseases, such as civilization illnesses caused by our hustle way of living and other burdening factors (such as heart attack), on the psychological level today's society especially combats burn-out, depression, anxiety and various addictions because of our very competitive and performance-based way of life and social suffering (like envy or feelings of low self-esteem among the poor), often caused by little solidarity and social contempt for the social losers. Insofar as they have social causes, they could all form a meaningful starting point for social-philosophical criticism and, of course, be problematized on a political level.

To turn to the implicit idea of social development as it has been discussed in the 2nd chapter, the idea of progression (and therefore also of social development) should be maintained. The question that arises regards only the way in which progress or development can be evaluated. The proposal of this theses is to gain assessment through the societal (political) reduction of suffering, which is only considered meaningful if the reduction of suffering does not only remain on the symptomatic level, but aims towards *radical* changes instead (in the original meaning of the word *radical*- it intends to reach the roots of the suffering causes).

Furthermore, suffering contains a great amount of energy and as we have heard, it evokes a range of phantasies and hopes for a better, diverse future, which means it also contains a great creative potential. But to release this productive and creative potential there must be a certain approach to suffering. Therefore, this thesis suggests reading suffering as a symptom. This means that suffering is seen as an autonomous dynamic (dynamic between social, psychological, biological and cultural aspects) which shows up when something has become problematic or overstraining or we are reaching human limits. Thus it clarifies that suffering points at something and at least something has something to tell us. The elaboration of the eight different functions (aspects) of suffering provides a multilayered focus on this phenomenon and especially aims to highlight its positive and productive sides.

So putting suffering at the center of social-philosophical contemplation requires

29 Politicization means making the discourse about the causes of suffering public (public interest); Politicization is seen as the main and moreover most important democratic instrument for social change; See K. HOLZKAMP, *Kritische Psychologie Vorbereitende Arbeiten*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 1972, pp. 183-184.

an approach which questions and investigates suffering soberly in order to uncover its various aspects and possible functions. As long as suffering is seen as merely something that has to be eliminated as quickly as possible, there is a great danger that the attempts for solutions will remain on the symptomatic level because the roots of the problems remain untouched. Which means, the real causes are probably not understood well. In any case, the energy of suffering can be directed to a productive processing of suffering, and it can be mobilized to stimulate social change.

Above all, it depends on the space given to collective reflection on social suffering. Because unfortunately, especially in our very individualistic society, the tendency to search for solutions individually often prevents necessary societal attempts to change problematic conditions. So they remain too often not recognized in their collective dimension. In democratic societies it can be claimed fundamental to have an adequate space for a collective societal-self-reflection.

This thesis claims the centrality of suffering for a socio-philosophical (socio-critical) approach, which means a certain political culture that focuses on suffering seems to be necessary to develop a discourse that takes suffering seriously. That is why discourse within universities is so important and where a critical examination of such topics can take place in all rest. Universities in particular, as critical places, could do much more to not only facilitate, but even accelerate the self-reflection of society. Every society needs a place where it can self-reflectively contemplate the societal situation. Journalism and politics are not suitable for such reflections because they have certain interests (sell journals, are voted) which influence their discourses in a suboptimal way. Furthermore, both have a predominantly unilateral communication which limits normal people above all to passive consumers and a mere audience. There is hardly a place that would be more appropriate for a serious engagement with social issues than universities, which provide the necessary resources of space, time, seriousness, neutrality or the quest for knowledge and understanding.

Summary

1. The reference to suffering is intuitive, begins with the subjective experience of suffering
2. Empathy connects people through suffering, and can lead to social changes
3. The reference to suffering needs no essentialist implications; Suffering experiences are situational, always in a concrete historical, cultural, personal context
4. Suffering needs no assumption of an ideal past, origin, nature, relation
5. Suffering is interpreted as a symptom that refers both to its problematic causes and opens up a space of possibility that enables deepening knowledge and/or development
6. The reference to suffering in the field of social philosophy refers primarily to experiences of suffering that have social causes and concern collective experiences of suffering
7. Suffering manifests itself at the junction of social, psychological, biological and cultural factors whose dynamic interaction in the experience of suffering points to the limits of human resilience and adaptability
8. At least eight different philosophical dimensions (functions, aspects) can be found:
 - Communicative function
 - Expressive function
 - Knowledge function
 - Developmental function
 - Orientational function
 - Protective function
 - Existential- philosophical function
 - Ethical function

Conclusion

Wir aber wollen die Dichter unseres Lebens sein, und im Kleinsten und Alltöglichsten zuerst¹.

As the quote above shows, Nietzsche wants men to develop and realize their highest potential, to grow beyond themselves. Social-philosophical criticism wants the same not only for the individual, but for society.

The first beginnings of nineteenth-century sociology emerged from diagnostic efforts to address the social crisis that has developed since the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. All these efforts have pursued political goals, whether they were reactionary aspirations that sought to restore a pristine state, or enlighteners who fully believed in continuous and automatic social progress. Therefore, social philosophy deals with disturbances, crises, and states of suffering because of social conditions. Men are suffering beings, there is no doubt about that. The sources of their sufferings, on the other hand, are of different kinds.

Basically, the work is about the question of good life and social development. It is about how we can organize our social coexistence and adapt our circumstances preferably to our needs and consequently suffer less from societal conditions. Thus the socio-philosophical question is all about the theoretical starting point for socio-critical theory in general.

The present work initially started with the criticism of the concept of alienation and with the suggestion to refer to human suffering instead. If we do so, it is possible to directly address the subject, which already guarantees that the human being is at

1 F. NIETZSCHE, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, in: K. Schlechta, *Werke in drei Bänden*, Band 2, Hanser Verlag, München 1954, p. 168.

the center of attention rather than any social utopia. In the next step the causes of the respective suffering have to be analyzed precisely. It may concern values that have become problematic due to societal changes and which are no longer considered useful, it can concern social contradictions, but it can also indicate psychological, physical or social limits that we cannot exceed unscathed (burn-out, civilization diseases). One can suffer from the contradictions of values and their unrealizability. But one can also suffer from social overstraining. This is true when the ideals of a society do not correspond to our psychic or physical needs. So we suffer just because of the orientation towards such ideals. For example, because of the extensive individualism of our societies, because this ideology does not meet our deepest social nature and creates a societal situation in which many suffer (competitive struggle, rat race). The concrete experiences of suffering, which have social causes, show us where we can meaningfully improve our society. Each suffering is accompanied by a mental assessment, an attitude, how we behave towards suffering, whether rejecting, accepting, questioning, individualizing or politicizing it. And the way in which a society meets suffering will determine whether it becomes an engine for change and a more humane society, or whether the management of suffering remains at the sole responsibility of each individual. In order to realize the potential for social development, it is indispensable and necessary to transfer the debate to the political-democratic field or at least to transfer it to a collective public level.

There has been much criticism of humanism, especially by postmodern intellectuals. And after the horrors of the twentieth century (the Holocaust, the two world wars etc.) the adherence to the idea of the good in men seems at best to be a cynical transfiguration of reality. However, giving up the humanistic ideal not only results in more pragmatic approaches to what men are and could be, but also forms the basis for far more fatal consequences. The original humanistic values of our Western democracies of freedom, equality, and fraternity have turned into a strong imbalance in favor of freedom. It was no coincidence that the idea of freedom, solidarity and equality formed a triad, because they complement each other and prevent excess. Too much liberalism can quickly turn into an inhuman mentality without solidarity or the idea of equality. Today, above all, the idea of freedom prevailed in form of a strong liberalist tendency on all social levels, which is sometimes called individualism. Although equality is both, ideological and formal,

yet a valid value of our western societies, but de facto it becomes continuously counteracted in the democratic process by the ‘power of money’ in neoliberal societies (plutocracy). By relativizing and rejecting all these humanistic values as Eurocentric or cultural-relativistic, common (binding) humanistic values seem to disappear more and more and become less important. But not only do we escape the danger of being ethnocentric or Eurocentric and imposing our values on foreign cultures, we also run the risk of drifting into arbitrariness and accept the inhuman and undemocratic triumph of neoliberal ideology.

I think we can speak by no means of an equivalence of all values. The memory of the 2000-year-old *homo mensura* phrase seems to have become more urgent than ever. All the too relativistic postmodern approaches misjudge the fragility and vulnerability of human life and that we are suffering beings. Ethics at least, has only a sense for suffering, vulnerable and mortal beings. Thus the call for humanistic values seems to be reasonable and could be approached at least by a new humanism, which does not assume the good human nature, but which is based on the idea of *homo patiens*, and orients its values along this anthropological border.

One last thought in the end regarding the choice of the metaphor: reading suffering as a symptom. It may seem inappropriate or even problematic to use a medical-psychological metaphor in a socio-critical context because the metaphor could lead to a medicalization of the discourse field of social philosophy. Societies are neither healthy nor ill, nor does it make sense to speak about society in such categories, and the metaphor symptom suggests such an interpretation. At the end of his essay *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, Freud asks if one might go so far as to claim that an entire culture is neurotic, and he suggests that someday one may really talk about the pathology of a society.² I would like to respond two things to this thought. First of all, the metaphor of health and illness of a society reaches far back in the history of sociology. In general, in the field of socially critical texts and essays, this medical metaphor is often used. Dealing with social questions, phenomena and problems means dealing with the consequences and impacts that social factors have on people, how they deal with them or how they approach them. The proximity to medicine and the organic metaphors (such as social organism) are therefore suitable

² See S. FREUD, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main, 1953, p. 128.

to talk about society, because they make clear that it is a living entity (collective memory) and that people are capable of suffering, vulnerable and always threatened by death. So the contemplation I want to add is that it is precisely the evaluation of certain conditions as pathological that allows us to make a distinction between social factors that cause suffering and those which are interpreted as undesirable developments, but which do not necessarily have suffering subjects as a result. Which means all cases where one could find wiser, more effective, more efficient, simply better solutions, but where negative effects and consequences will not lead to any kind of suffering experiences.

And last, but not least the aim is to place men as *homo patiens* at the center of socio-philosophical considerations, thus it seems to be adequate to use the term 'symptom' as an indicator, which points to something important, which we should investigate properly. Of course, the metaphor is not to be understood literally, but it seems much more appropriate than abstract categories that avoid anthropomorphizing at all costs, and this is exactly contrary to what the metaphor of a symptom is about. The aim of this metaphor is to raise the awareness that when we speak of society, we always speak of people who live in this society, who suffer in it or from it, and who in the best case can realize themselves and their lives through and within society.

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing.

Oscar Wilde (1854 – 1900)

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