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# limites cognitivos das ciências sociais e do senso comum cognitive limits of the social sciences and common sense

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## Abstract:

The social sciences, like the common sense, have not been sufficiently emphatic in condemning the evil represented by the penitentiary system. The social sciences are averse to biologism, to the biological character of humanity; and to ideology, the way elites deceive submissive populations. Social theories end up integrating elites mission. António Damasio, with the biology of the mind as a starting point, challenges the social sciences to consider human nature: the emotional foundation which sustains consciousness, as different levels of existential reality based on the bodies and life that we are a result of. The scientific opening proposed by Damásio permits us to see the moral significance of modern prisons in a new light: how does the emotional background of sentences (retaliatory) supports the (good or bad) conscience (judicial and social) that institutionalizes the penitentiaries?

From a social sciences perspective, this article presents a critique of the theoretical foundations that underlie the epistemic and institutional difficulty of admitting and fostering collaboration between the social sciences and the natural sciences, participating in Damasio's critique of biological theory.

**Keywords:** Homeostasis, Prisons, Moral, Social theory, Hierarchy, Nature, Borders

## 1 Introduction

For seeing life is but a motion of limbs, [...] For what is the heart, but a spring; and the nerves, but so many strings; and the joints, but so many wheels, giving motion to the whole body" (Hobbies, Leviatã, 1650 cited in Federici, 2017, p.238, our translation).

The social sciences, like the common sense, have not been sufficiently emphatic in condemning evil represented by the penitentiary system or the atmospheric greenhouse effect. They place themselves at an intermediate level of reality, arresting themselves from thinking below it (the biological nature of societies and people) and above it (the legal and moral doctrines produced by elites). Inhibiting, in this process, the development of scientific thought and the capacity for intervention.

The social sciences are averse to biologism and to ideology, claiming the specificity of their object of study and the deontological limits of their method. The practical results of such a consensus are challenged by Antonio Damasio, who, with the biology of the mind as a starting point, defies all science, including the social sciences.

Damasio starts from a holistic understanding of the human being, denouncing Parsons and Harari for their cybernetic use of systems theory, avoiding the obvious presence of living people immersed in an environment, in combined evolution. Complexity, claims the first author, cannot be held hostage by prejudices about the false impermeability of the limits of the central nervous system. In this article we use the case of the prisons to, equally, disprove their impermeability and independence from the social environment of which they are part. Will social theory be able to participate self-critically, in collaboration and cooperation with the natural sciences, to create more opportunity for the development of better theories about the limits of systems?

## **2 Schools, hierarchies and repression**

August Comte (1864) proposed to consider the existence of a structural relationship between social evolution and the cognitive capacity and competence of people in society. His positive philosophy was an innovative way of organizing education, in an era in which, according to the creator of the term sociology, social conditions capable of sustaining rational and utilitarian thinking had never been achieved before. The teaching of positive philosophy should serve to spread the new knowledge, as a way to take advantage of the opportunity offered by social evolution to overcome metaphysics. To avoid partisan wars and political struggles, exhausting, violent and useless, to solve practical problems.

Even today, the idea of schooling as an antidote to violence and political madness has widespread acceptance. After the implosion of the Soviet Union, whose regime was inspired by Karl Marx's political battle for the end of the class struggle, through the creation of a new man educated for communism, school was perceived as existing outside of ideology and politics.

Schools and teachers suffer the responsibilities (and merits) of preventing social problems in general, from the control of sexuality and drug use, to crime and global warming. Charged with curbing social inequalities, neutralizing the practical effects of the different social origins of the students, teachers are expected to be able to minimize the dysfunctions of life in society (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009).

In more and more countries, lengthy compulsory education, including the teaching of science, is a fact. It continues to seem clear that we should treat people who are the most qualified and of the right gender as human beings of first class (up to just a few years back, there was consensus as to how difficult it was for women to think well and act accordingly; that idea having since been discredited, women continue to be discriminated against in relation to men). Therefore, the educational system, besides constituting the hope of improving social functioning, is a way of justifying social hierarchization through educational merit, conditioned also to group, as in social class, including ethnicity and gender.

Schools develop and certify the cognitive skill levels of virtually everyone. The hierarchies of cognitive merit, ideally, should be homologous to the hierarchies of responsibility, influence, prestige and income. Sociology has identified organizational distortions of the institutional aims of schools (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970): teachers, naturally, reproduce their own culture in the schools. They do not know and/or discriminate against other cultures, considered as ignorant or nonsensical, as a form of affirmation of their own cognitive competence, always on trial and in crisis (Bourdieu, 1979; Iturra, 1990a, 1990b).

Hierarchy also works between states, whose nations are stereotyped, as if they were people. Nationals of a given country can be treated, better or worse, as if all that nation's citizens were equal (smart, skilled, rich, violent, or otherwise, according to the attributed national character). As is the case of the nationals of Nordic countries and African countries, or simply Nordic- or African-like people in Portugal. Some pretentiously seen as potentially superior and others as potentially inferior, in the hierarchy between countries attributed by the influence of ideas such as those of Max Weber (2005), on the moral superiority of Protestants, or those of colonialism, about white supremacy. The racist policies currently on the rise in Europe and the United States are precisely based on the alleged immorality of, in a liberal manner, mixing national and international hierarchies. For decades, the whole of European politics has exploited, both politically and judicially, this

aspect of national cultures, constituting what is called institutional racism (Jakobs and Meliá, 2003; Palidda and Garcia, 2010).

Racist morality, therefore, argues that social and political dysfunctions will be exacerbated by the mixing of cultures, from forced assimilation in some cases and multiculturalism in others. The solution, for the racists, is the walls (penitentiaries, immigrant holding centers, ban on aid to foreigners, expulsion of foreigners) that make different cultures impermeable. This policy allows the most vulnerable groups of voters, by adhering to political racism, to feel and represent themselves as (internationally, imaginarily) superior to that part of the population that cannot vote (because they are not nationals), especially recent immigrant workers, still without the right to nationality, or, more broadly, all those that may be presented as inferior in the light of national hierarchies.

Explicit political racism is taking the ground manured by tacit and organizational racism. Eric Holder, the US Attorney General who served in the days of President Obama, questioned on the *Late Show* of the CBS television network in the last days of July 2018, acknowledged that it was true that the separation of immigrant children from their families was practiced when he had government responsibilities. Obama was the president of the United States that more immigrants deported. Holder pointed out that in his day, however, there was no official policy issued by the White House making such torturing separations of children a deterrent to immigration.

In previous mandates, institutional racism in the United States (including Guantanamo or Abu Ghraib (Butterfield, 2004) prevailed (against or not the will of the President.). With Trump, institutional racism won express support among the citizenship, as in the time of George W. Bush the torturers became an officially recognized profession. Also in Europe, before being accused of violating the human rights of immigrants, the police were already practicing racist policies officially and cooperated with the CIA, in the case of secret prisons.

What may the social sciences have to do with maintaining policies that are racist and violate human rights, in Western countries, particularly in prisons (Wacquant, 2000), and with the support those same constitute for the emergence of totalitarian regimes? Are the social sciences accomplices of the citizens' alienation from vigilance over repressive policies, professionally organized (Garland, 2001) or politically assumed, as is the case today with the rightist wave in various parts of the West?

### **3 On the hierarchization in the sciences**

Damasio (2017) criticizes Parsons for thinking of a society of systems without people with whole bodies when making sociology inspired by biology. Mouzelis (1995) notes how the epistemic bases of the North American classical sociologists are kept intact by his most qualified critics, influencing the social sciences in general. The process consists of reducing people and facts to statistics, to ideal types, to individuals parameterizable by surveys or interviews, but not biological. Hariri (2018), referring to the systems theories used in computer science, notes the emergence of a data religion, equally evident in the divided social sciences, specialized in disciplines and sub-disciplines without dialogue between, or knowledge of each other (Lahire). Concerning data production and the reductive operations that this entails, Mouzelis observes the recurrent practice of reifications. Sociologists do fill the data gaps with imagination, interpreting data in a rhetorically and ideologically satisfactory way. Kuhn (2016) refers to the same as an intellectual prison: he criticizes (pre)occupied and critically affirmative thinking, ideologically and professionally aligned with rival mentors and schools of thought, transforming the social sciences into a field of disciplines and sub-disciplines impermeable to each other and to the outside, in particular with respect to the natural sciences and biology. Lahire (2012) analyzes Pierre Bourdieu's field notion to note how it deals with power disputes, as if those involved had come out of nowhere: as if they had never been children and will never be old; as if, in the moment, it were not indispensable for them to care for their bodies and the personal and social identities with which they present themselves to their most intimate and close relations, with whom they are not in a position to dispute power. Therborn (2006) notes the practical results of these guidelines in the work that has been carried out, focusing on power issues, and exaggeratedly downplaying, for example, health and gender problems.

The situation, as this century begins, makes Antonio Damasio's intervention, a neuro-surgeon philosopher and disseminator of science, particularly relevant. He, too, believes in education as the way of reforming the world. This on the condition that the ideas being imparted be more correct, more scientific, more humanistic. Namely, in the field of biology, it is necessary to rectify the ideologically developed ignorance that results in the disqualification of those dimensions of life considered inferior (the cells of the bodies of the higher animals, the bacteria living symbiotically in our viscera, the reticular non centralized nervous systems which evolutionarily precede the central nervous system, the emotions that drive the bodies and the animal and human minds, etc.). In the field of social sciences, the author recommends that the consideration of human life, at the core of our work, not continue be abandoned (Damasio, 2017), reminding us also of the road not

taken in the dialogue between scientific and humanist cultures, since Lord Snow (1956) called it to our attention. A conversation which, even today, is arrested by accusations of the complicity of biology with Nazism (Sacarrão, 1982).

The naturalization of hierarchies, in biology as in the social sciences, ideologically oriented to avoid questioning the merit of higher biological and social organs, could be having cultural and organizational effects that may be favoring the success of political racism, as we will better see ahead concerning the social alienation/isolation of the prisons. Are schools and universities equipped to combat racism in Western cultures? Are biological and social researchers aware of the practical, cognitive, institutional and cultural effects of the lack of discussion of a better understanding of what may be naturally and ideologically, the levels of reality (Dores, 2005)?

#### **4 Reclaiming the sciences to the fight against discrimination**

Damasio's (1994) great battle is against the common idea, classically fixed by Descartes, of thought existing independently of the bodies. An idea that permits transhumanist fictions (Harari, 2018), namely based on the reduction of all natural phenomena to algorithms, such as those used in Artificial Intelligence, precisely presupposing that there is knowledge independent of bodies, as religions also teach about souls or spirits.

Transhumanism, as the hierarchizing religion, helps to diminish people before Technology or the Algorithm, as Deus-ex-machina. Humanity is, in its own eyes, under threat of replacement by artificial means, robots, methods of artificial reproduction, intimately invasive nanotechnologies, etc., at the service of capitalism.

Using the consumerist conception of pleasure, which is to keep the body as still as possible to serve as a material basis for all sorts of services and delivery of goods capable of animating the economy, transhumanism imagines the transfer of human intelligence to machines in such a way that people would stop thinking, out of dissipation. The emotions that are at bottom of the wars, and of torture, would cease to bother us, thus fulfilling Comte's dream of ending with politics – a dream that is currently shared by many people who feel of alienated or even repelled by politics. In this perspective, machines constitute a huge advantage because they are intelligent without being emotional, and without having political rights.

Doctors, aviation pilots, management consultants, military strategists, scientists, may all become dispensable if smart machines learn to learn. Unemployment would be widespread and, if the climate became inhospitable, the human species could go extinct that machines would be our inheritance for cosmic intelligence.

juxtaposed to transhumanism, the last step of Damasio's (2017) reflection in the field of biology shows that a) to the contrary of what happened in the first half of the twentieth century, evolutionary theory can now be a relevant ally in the struggle against the totalitarian tendencies that threaten the world; b) disciplinary specialization in the sciences, and their hierarchization, are obstacles to scientific work and to the combat of common-sense prejudices that science itself reproduces.

The Portuguese-American author insists that consciousness does not exist without body, although it is commonly represented outside the body. Homeostasis, presented in his earlier work as the virtual screen of a computer operated by the brain, a function capable of uniting the particular will of individual and relatively autonomous cells that orderly group themselves together to co-constitute a superior animal, is presented in a different way in this last job.

Homeostasis, besides being an immanence of life, of complexity proportional to the complexity of the bodies to which it is associated, is now presented also as an essence: the essence of life, just as gravity was the essence of the universe and matter to Newton. Homeostasis is the negantropic tendency that makes life different from inorganic chemistry. Homeostasis is the capacity for maintenance and projection in time of the existence of living organisms: it is the breath of life that invades the whole body, at the same time that it constitutes itself evolutionarily into consciousness.

Homeostasis involves life in an essence-immanence dialectic that traverses each living being. Admitting, the hypothesis that sociability is an integral part of how intelligent life is established (Damasio, 2017; Dores, 2005), there is an evolutionary enlargement between the basic levels of life (unicellular beings) and the attainment of experience of life at higher levels of complexity. Feelings of fear and the mystical eagerness to access higher levels of reality (Diel, 2004; Dores, 2011) can thus be treated as objects of study of the sciences, rather than only the humanities.

Homeostasis runs through the life of bacteria, to which many people still call disease microbes. It traverses the life of human beings, promoting the connection between the myriad cells that make up our bodies, and the even greater myriad of bacteria that live in a desirable symbiosis with our viscera, tissues, organs,

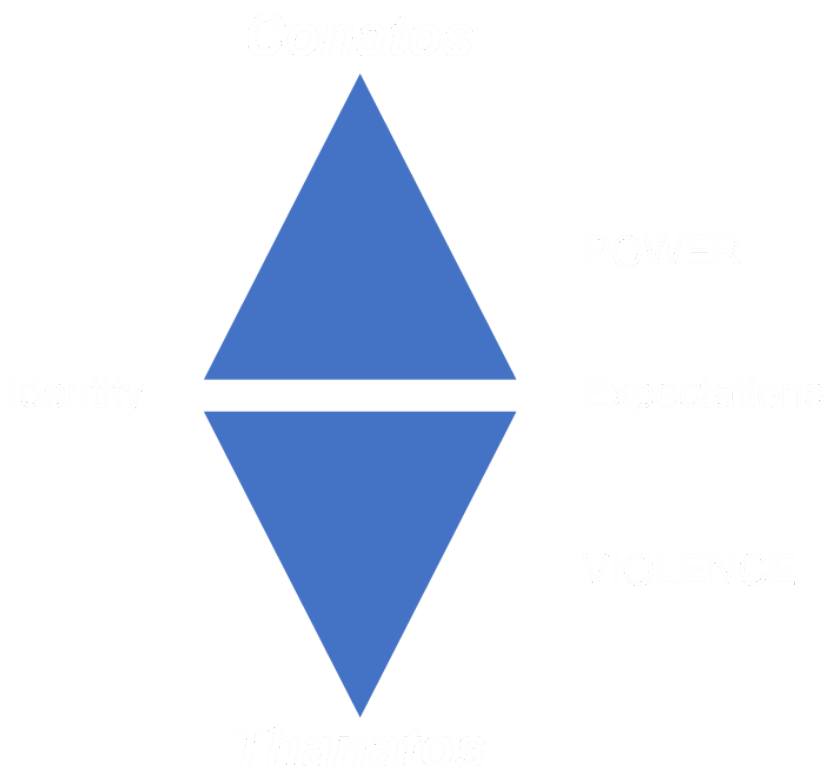
physiological and anatomical systems, creating solidarity between them all under the banner of the survival instinct, including the instinct of reproduction capable of projecting into the future the experience of spent organisms. Homeostasis must also be considered, Damasio insists, in social studies, rather than insisting on the isolation between social phenomena and biological life.

Rational thinking, says Damasio, cannot dispense with the emotions of which it is the most sophisticated evolutionary expression. Higher beings are the how our viscera (organized by a reticular nervous system) have developed capabilities of self-protection vis-à-vis the environment and, at the same time, of transportation and procurement of food, using the cerebral-muscular-skeletal systems to that end. The progress of homeostasis, in the case of the human species, similarly to many other animal species, developed a brain capable of increasing the probability of persistence in time and projection into the future of (visceral) life. The specificity of our species caused thought based on languages to evolve, including the ability to use prostheses such as books, computers and the Internet. The autonomization of this thought relative to life, to the emotions, from where they emerged, is a religious idea much publicized, even in scientific circles. For this reason, Comte imagined that it was also possible to abolish political reasoning and emotions, in the same way that the anti-clericals were able to convince half the world that religion would be spontaneously extinguished by modernization, or, as it was imagined after the Second World War, that abolition of slavery would naturally lead to the abolition of prisons (Davis, 2005), and like now the transhumanists project to the future the discussions they want to avoid now, such as gender discrimination and racism.

## 5 Human nature

The human species is characterized by its recursive mind (Corballis, 2011), by the possibility-necessity to represent time: a constituent past of embodied identities that are projected in, and nurtured by, a future of greater or lesser expectations. Corballis compares this unique human characteristic with a house of mirrors at a fair. It creates an infinity of mutually reflected images which serve as (dis)orientation for the individuals. Cultures are, therefore, particular, socially shared, means of dealing with the difficulties and potentialities of this human characteristic, which makes of us extraordinarily aware and adaptable beings.

The study of cultures, in turn, reveals larger, spectral-like complexities, such as those identified by Charles Cooley and later taken up by George H. Mead (Mead, 1930), known in the social sciences under the designation of *self*: The social construction of the identities of each person, in function of the respective sociabilities and types of interaction, susceptible to being hierarchically ordered (Bourdieu, 1979), on the sacrifices of many people (Peck, 2001; Scott, 2013).



**Fig. 1:** Social organization and self. Source: The author, 2018.

Social hierarchization, as Max Weber has noted, is positive and negative. There are people who live immersed in positive social environments, superior, better defended from the vicissitudes of existence. Just as there are people who are particularly vulnerable to nature and also to other people.

Damasio challenges the fact that, in biology, the study of the brain monopolizes the study of consciousness and intelligence. He protests the calling the nervous system that regulates the viscera the second brain, claiming that this system is the first in evolutionary terms. The second, centered in the brain, can only be formed starting from the first. It only makes sense because it serves it. More important than the hierarchization of the two nervous systems is that both are cohesively integrated in the same body. Body from which thought emerges, not from the brain but from the experience and sociabilities of the whole body, both in the moment and before.

The neuro-surgeon philosopher deals with social theory in a few lines:

Talcott Parsons [...] did invoke the notion of homeostasis in relation to social systems, but in his hands the concept was no connected to life or feeling. Parsons is actually a good exmple of the neglect of feeling in the concept of cultures. [...] unrelated to feelings or individuals (Damasio, 2017, p. 43 and 231, our translation).

The social sciences have mainly developed the study of power (the equivalent of a social brain organized in networks of sociabilities whose biological links may one day be better described if Damasian's proposals succeed (Dores, 2005)) neglecting the contribution of support given to the production of identities and expectations, especially that provided by the less valued parts of societies (Lahire, 2012; Therborn, 2006). Similarly, it can be said that prejudiced in the history of biology were the sociabilities and cultures that organize better and worse organisms, better and worse states of well-being, since such states are produced at the visceral level, which is taken as autonomous and irrelevant to the allegedly algorithmic functioning of the brain. To the disqualification of the homeostatic and social aspects of life in biology, corresponds the disqualification of normative and doctrinal knowledge, taken as immutable, natural, eternal, indisputable, and at the same time stigmatized as ideological, false, mere representations without material basis, in the social sciences.

Biology does not address or recognize the importance of immanent emotions or embodied sociabilities. The social sciences distance themselves from the study of the biological density of people, the repulsive biologism, and the ideologies, both idolized and fixed according to the Weberian formula of axiological neutrality. Biology and the social sciences prostrate themselves in admiration of what the common sense ideologies consider superior, namely, the brain and power, as one who looks to the Heavens for his roots. But, of course, the roots are reflected in the air but live under the soil.

Might we, in biology and in the social sciences, be like physics pre-Einstein? Newton discovered a mechanical algorithm, gravity. Unsuitable to explain, be it the Big Bang (the substance of matter), or the rise of matter to life. Einstein advanced into black holes and gravitational waves, which are far from responding to the essential problems, but which are a path for the elevation of knowledge.

In biology, as in the social sciences, the treatment of the brain, in one case, and of power struggles, in the other, as isolated and autonomous practices from the rest of the bodies (in particular of the nervous system from the viscera) and from societies (for example, prisons where prisoners are treated and identified as criminals) result in and are the result of moral guidance:

[...] pure intellectual processes lend themselves well to an algorithmic account and do not appear to be dependent on the substrate. [...] Once we would remove the current chemical substrate for suffering and its opposite, pleasure and flourishing, we would remove the natural grounding for the moral systems we currently have (Damasio, 2017, p.277, our translation).

The author addresses directly those who imagine/desire a future in which "a caste of superhumans ... treats ordinary humans in the same way that nineteenth-century Europeans treated Africans" (Harari, 2018, p.391, our translation). Indirectly, he refers to the strangeness caused today, even among biologists, by the fact that consciousness and thought are a result of the existential activity of a body, in its entirety, and not only of the action of the brain. Again indirectly, he refers to those who imagine the life of reason without emotion (Hirschman, 1997), which, in practice, is not possible.

"The history of human cultures is, to a large extent, the narrative of our resistance to natural algorithms through inventions that were not anticipated by those algorithms" (Damasio, 2017, p.279, our translation). Cultures are, at the same time, results and contributions to homeostasis, to the struggle of life for survival and projection in the future. Which makes us wonder why prisons are culturally isolated from the societies that promote and finance them, and without which societies could not exist? And the reason for the existence of cultural forms capable of confusing well-being and ill-being, pleasure and pain, power and violence, distributing some up and others down.

## 6 The moral performance of prisons

Even as my hands are busy torturing, strangling, butchering, my heart shuts its eyes and, sincerely, weeps (Francisco Buarque de Holanda in *Fado Tropical*).

One important difference between Western culture at the beginning of the twentieth century and that which came to dominate after the war was the integration of the interests of the working class and of the workers at the center of political decision-making, through social coordination programs associated with party democracy, and the introduction of the universal vote, later also covering, in addition to workers, young people and women. The ideal of social integration, however, ran up against reality. The levels of economic inequality showed no signs of improvement (Piketty, 2013). Despite the best intentions, a social barrier between those at the top and those at the bottom persisted (Figure 1). Between the postwar and the present, the hobos and the dangerous classes, such as the workers, were gradually replaced, in the moralistic imagination, by the poor, drug addicts, immigrants and terrorists, all imagined to have reasons to commit crimes in order to accompany the economic success of the consumerist culture in the second half of the twentieth century (Merton, 1970).

Prisons up to the 1970s, while hope for social integration guided the state's social action (Garland, 2001), were thought of as remnants from the past of class struggle with a tendency toward abolishment. As Wacquant (2016) noted, at that time neither public opinion nor the intellectuals discussed the issue, for the number of prisoners declined steadily, the doctrine of human rights took hold, and, beyond technology and economics, the confidence in progress included an integrative morality, including the integration of the old colonial world into the community of nations and the right of access to consumer societies. The political shift, today known as neoliberalism, which replaced the post-industrial technological visions and the postmodern cultural visions, proved eager to make prisoners (Gilmore, 2007). However, the growth of penal activity, in its different social, policing, judicial and penitentiary aspects, was not flagged in the social sciences before the turn of the century, with Loïc Wacquant (2000).

The social and intellectual secret surrounding the evolution of prisons, and of the people excluded from postwar societies (Young, 1999), as if living in separate societies (Cunha, 2002), was and is one of the ways of social failure of the 21st century to take in account the signs of arising totalitarianism and prevent suffering that it entails. The promised social integration having failed, western societies, social sciences and common sense in tune with each other, used penitentiary secrecy as a sign of the political and moral irrelevance of what might happen in the prisons (including juvenile centers and detention centers for undocumented persons). To the point of the European states, in practice, simply ignoring the current European Prison Rules (Crétenot, 2014).

The irrational way in which, in daily life as in politics, the democrats too discard the close relationship between the practices of sovereignty, real and virtual, and penitentiary practices, is a sign of cognitive dissonance. When George W. Bush inaugurated the era of the global war against uncertain enemies to afford purpose to the US military-industrial complex, when he proclaimed himself as world police, he also abandoned the moral precepts of respecting human rights. He inaugurated Guantanamo and exported torture to Abu Ghraib, heralding the Trump era: the era of post-truth, irrationality, global coalitions between right-wing extremists from around the world; the era of the political defense of concentration camps, allegedly to combat terrorism and illegal immigration. Let us rethink, in this light, what has been said and what is known about morality of prison.

In 1996, I accompanied a group of citizens who complained to the Portuguese prime minister about the state of prisons in the country. One of the members of the delegation asked the legal adviser who received us why a man with close relations to the fascist regime deposed in 1974, continued, after compulsory retirement age, at the head of the prison system, at the request of the state. The aide's response was even more surprising than the question, "Where do you want us to put them?"

To the mind of a Democrat, like our interlocutor, one of the appropriate places for the directorial work of fascists may be the prison system. A few months earlier, Marques Ferreira, then general director of the prisons, had gone to the television to say that the prisons were under the control of mafias (sic). Some days later, he declared that he would not be intimidated by death threats and, shortly after, ceased to be general director. The state never felt a need to clarify the matter, nor did the newspapers seek an answer for such a retreat before an invisible enemy.

The famous penitentiary secret, which refers to the extraordinary characteristic of, in the prisons, no one talking about what goes on in there, covers, with a transparent veil, unnatural alliances, particularly between illicit drug traffickers and authorities. Alliances that do no one can fail to notice, although it is not for that that they have any practical consequences; just as it happens with prison sentences. The clamorous failure of

prohibitionist policies (Woodiwiss, 1988) ends up constituting an absurd and secret purpose of politics (AAVV, 2016), with popular acquiescence and resignation on the part of the social sciences.

There is, therefore, a homology between the difficulty of scientific reason to take into account what goes on behind the struggles for power, the so-called dirty work (Dores, 2017), and the difficulty of public opinion in reacting rationally to social secrets, that is, what everyone knows and is familiar with and, at the same time, everyone denies is happening (Cohen, 2013).

Early in the century, two of the founders of the Portuguese democracy, Mário Soares and Freitas do Amaral (2003), associated George W. Bush's policies with those of Hitler. They were accused of radicalism in the media and politically ignored, despite their great influence. That is the force of social secrecy surrounding state violence (Dores, 2014). Today, the fascist threat continues and evolves in ever more evident ways, in the USA and in several European countries, as a contagion that penetrates societies, by way of politics. The political participation of the common citizen remains low. In the intellectual field, recent *best sellers* by democracy nonbelieving authors appear (Brennan, 2017; Harari, 2018); democracy which, after the end of the Cold War, was imagined eternally assured with the abolition of ideologies and history.

The modern incorporation of the repulsion to violence in civilized people (Elias, 1990) transforms their/our imagination. Modern culture blocks the representation of the violent part of reality (Hirschman, 1997) in a way that has become spontaneous, with the success of modern ideologies. The social sciences do not escape the phenomenon (Malešević, 2010; Wiewiorka, 2005). What is manifestly negative, such as institutional racism and torture in the criminal justice system, or the violation of the human rights of migrants, is ignored by public opinion and by the judiciary, as if it were a technical problem to be overcome at any time.

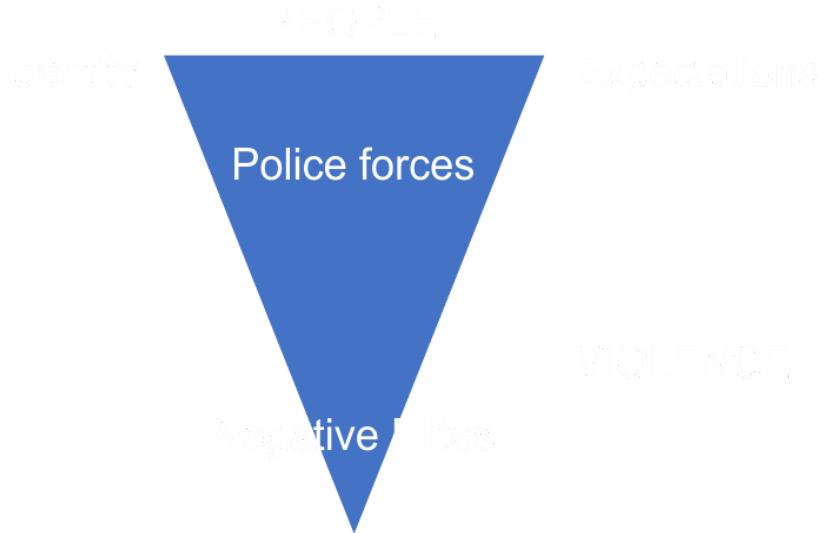
That image inducing of a concept of authority at the same time threatening and protective, torturing and ordering, like the biblical God, corresponds to a hierarchization of qualifications. In biology, the first brain (which regulates the viscera in a reticular way) is considered as nonexistent or secondary, when it is the first in the order of evolution. In society there are also people who go to the city and forget about rural ancestry. In morality, whatever is higher – biologically or socially – must be protected, under threat of threatening the whole complex edifice resulting from the evolutionary process. Senior state dignitaries, for example, come together to make important decisions, and we all know that when human rights questions are raised, it is for reasons other than obtaining protection for the lives of the victims. In criminal proceedings, too, the victim is removed from the proceedings to leave the debate between the prosecution and the defense of the accused. As Damásio would say, the emotions and the integrality of humanity are systematically banished by the processes of modernization.

Morality, the distinction between good and evil, is officially suspended in prisons. Inmates are automatically treated as if they were innate and incorrigible criminals, so that their legally desirable social reintegration becomes even more difficult than before they were imprisoned. Pretrial detainees, despite the principle of presumption of innocence, are imprisoned in the same prisons as the convicted, under conditions that are often worse. The guards are treated as executioners, more or less merciful, in the name of the state. As one court explained to me once, opening someone else's correspondence is a crime, unless it is done by a prison staff. Or, as a member of Parliament explained to me, the use of slander as a political weapon is permissible when security reasons are the motivation.

The ideological manipulation of societies uses, in fact, the inversion of the hierarchical logic when it wants to invert public morality. Any high leader of the state transforms into a representative of the people before representatives of other states, in a process of sovereign identification between subjects and elites (Agamben, 1998). For internal consumption, leaders choose to be closer to certain social classes than to others. This identification between the people and the elites, always leaves out the marginals, those who, of their own will or due to impotence, are not in a position to influence power, but are instrumentally used to atone for immorality, as if the games of power were exempt from it. We should say, with more analytical accuracy and controversially, that prisoners are used to divert popular attention from the immorality of games of power, in particular the inconsequent irresponsibility of a part of the leaders.

In addition to the people who support the elites, represented in the upper triangle in Figure 1, there is a whole sea of people (which can be indicated by the volume of non-voters in elections) whose negative organization depends on various forms of social control (Marcuse, 1991). Drug prohibitionism plays a central role in that organization, in the measure that it allows the construction, among those who do not develop positive life aspirations, to choose between integrating a system of paid routine subordination, or a system of parallel economy advertised by traffickers and police officers as exciting and well-paid (Chaves, 1999).





**Fig. 2:** Representation of the insecure society. Source: Tthe author, 2018.

Prisons are another instrument of control of the disoriented population. They are places favorable to the subversion of dominant moral values due to the disorientation caused by deliberate obstacles to basic socialization (Zimbardo, 2007). Where the dominant morality is inverted: the people, in prisons, are represented by the guards and the elite, by the prisoners (the vertex of the lower triangle of Figure 1). Prisoners have the right to be served, and guards, while having prisoners at their mercy, should serve them. This inversion of the common social logic (in effect in the upper triangle of Figure 1) socially isolates penal practices in such a way that they become difficult to understand. As it is said, only having lived in a prison can one understand (feel) what happens there. Being very hard to believe for anyone who has never lived there (Levi, 2013).

In the lower world of Figure 1, imagined as corresponding to the omnipresence of the threat of the arbitrary use of violence, morality is inverted. Crimes become legitimate, if they are committed by authorized persons, claiming the defense of society, the upper part of life, imagined without violence. Those authorized persons are so in the name of the state, defender of the people.

Prisoners are the representation of the advantages of the elites: those who do not want to work, who enjoy the rights (of defendants) and of the hotel services provided by penitentiaries (with costs several times higher than the minimum wage), who decide, instead of subjecting themselves to the order of things, to invent different lives to satisfy desires of superiority in relation to their origins.

It is clear and obvious, if one thinks rationally, that the inverted logic is unrealistic. But the thinking of people in society is often unrealistic and irrational. For many people, the poor having television, or automobiles, or refrigerators, or brandname shoes, or mobile phones, causes deep feelings of outrage. An outrage that feeds the idea that the poor are rich after all and take advantage of the solidarity of the state. Outrage that also feeds the value of the political argument to impose on the state-assisted poor a panoply of tests of resources and behaviors as if they were imprisoned, albeit outside of penitentiaries: the so-called poverty traps.

The prisoners, in this interpretation, represent those who waste the prospects of living in a society of conformed wage earners, trying to abuse the privileges offered for consumerism, spoiling the lives of others, whose freedom ends when it comes up against the freedom of others. The prisoners represent the inverted elite: they serve as scapegoats to redress the insecurity of job security that serves only to feed basic needs. When necessary, prisons also serve to sacrifice members of dissident or fallen elites.

## **7 Final notes**

The study of the moral performance of modern prisons should take into account how social hierarchization processes, which disqualify prisoners, also disqualify the social sciences from the natural sciences. The scientific rupture proposed by Damasio, of ceasing to treat thought as autonomous with respect to the bodies that make it possible, useful for biology and for the social sciences, opening them upward and downward of the usual fields of specialization, allows the social sciences to inquire about human nature without losing sight of free will. Opens up more room for scientific understanding of the moral performance of modern prisons.

The alienation from what goes on above and below the strata of their respective competences, in the case of the common sense, submissive to the elites and contemptuous of prisoners, migrants, nomads, makes

democracy vulnerable and the development of knowledge more difficult. It is up to the social sciences to avoid getting stuck in such epistemic traps.

Homeostasis spontaneously produces, at a social level, a feeling of insecurity that must be satisfied repeatedly, by reflecting on the past, the identity of each one, and the creation of expectations, in particular on the just hierarchical social level for each one. The secundarization of reticular processing, usually submitted by hierarchical processes, makes social isolation an additional source of insecurity. Many people fear becoming human waste, for example, if they are sick so that they cannot work. What could be opportunities for symbiosis of human diversity, as happens with the bacteria in our viscera – the microbiota – become social diseases, such as "spending beyond our means", to the welfare state and to the financial system.

Elites do not escape insecurity. For them it stems from the uncertainty of their ability to hold on to privileges. These, and the hierarchization that makes them possible, are admitted socially in exchange for social management responsibilities. Taken seriously, such responsibilities can lead to the sacrifice of elites' lives, in the fight against other elites or at the hands of the people (Girard, 1985). Experience has taught the elites the advantage of separating their leadership roles from the scapegoat function. Whenever the threats to the existence of societies prove to be pressing, which can happen at any moment, how to satisfy the wishes of revenge-security of the populations?

The art of domination evolved, first by arms and then by economic means, always abundantly accompanied by ideologies conducive to the construction of a social mirror that separates, virtually, the true society (distinct, economically privileged, analyzed by history and social sciences) from the other society, the servile, foreign and/or morally pathological society (like the dangerous classes). This division also admits the preparation of the other society for the purpose of satisfying desires for retaliation, namely, through the social selection system associated with the criminal-penal system.

In national terms, the social sciences, following the common sense, surround society with foreign societies and, internally, with isolated individuals or societies requiring repression/integration organized by the states (Kuhn, 2016). The response to the ontological insecurity, natural and cyclically in crisis, can be directed by the police and courts, with the help of social workers, resulting in the sacrifice of the dangerous classes.

Nationalism in Russia, China, the USA, Turkey, Hungary, and where it emerges, is characterized by the proposal to subordinate by force, without dialogue, those parts which perform the inferior functions of their respective societies (described graphically in Figure 1.), represented as foreigners (or in the service of foreigners) to facilitate police and ideological maneuvering. What they do is actually increase and prioritize repressive social functions set up by states (such as migrant concentration camps) without any useful criticism of the social sciences. The social sciences limit themselves to considering social integration, as if there were no repression, elites tormented by the scapegoat syndrome, and the transference of that risk to the lower part of societies. As if society and the evidence of its existence were merely expressive and not biological.

Without proceeding to the epistemic deconstruction of social secrets, in the prisons and the social sciences, of state violence under the guise of legitimacy, of the satisfaction of the feelings of retaliation suffered by societies (feelings of insecurity) manipulated by the penal function of the State, between secrets and violence, the social sciences, like the common sense, become submissive and incapable of anticipating and contributing to the prevention of authoritarianism.

The most educated generations ever, today's, are proving so susceptible to supporting the authoritarian irrationality that gradually takes over the states as so tragically happened in the first part of the twentieth century. Are the systemic theories that dogmatically conceive borders as impermeable walls, namely between nature and society, and therefore refuse to take part and to collaborate in building better knowledge about what the world is, free of responsibility?

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