The Memory and the Ailing Imagination at Immanuel Kant

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Abstract: In the present paper, we substantiate the theory according to which the ailments of imagination presented by Immanuel Kant, especially in his work *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, are sources of artistic creation. It is obvious that not anyone suffering from melancholia, nostalgia, hypochondria or any other ailment of the soul, which Immanuel Kant refers to, becomes a creator of culture. Genius is required for this, but instead of diminishing the creative power of the genius, it seems to be enhanced by the ailments of imagination or generally, by the ailments of the soul. The hypertrophic imagination in the case of a genius plays a major role in the process of fixation in the individual and collective memory of what Immanuel Kant names "aesthetic ideas".
Keywords: memory, imagination, ailments of the soul, aesthetic values.

IMAGINATION AS A MEANS OF FORMATION OF THE AXIOLOGICAL MEMORY

In the section entitled *On Permissible Moral Semblance* from his book *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Immanuel Kant states that "values", or "virtues", as they were named before the modern age, must be cultivated at any cost. This means that they must be attached to the memory of individuals and nations as supreme goals, so that humanity does not return to savagery. During this complex process of attaching virtues to memory, imagination plays an especially important role. As virtues or values cannot be shown in the real world just like an ordinary thing, they have to be imagined, otherwise humankind would collapse given the lack of supreme ideals to provide direction for spiritual evolution. This is the theory Immanuel Kant sets out in his lecture on permissible moral semblance. In this respect, he states, "to slander even a Socrates, in order to prevent anyone from believing in virtue. Even the illusion of good in others must have worth for us, for out of this play with pretenses, which acquires respect without perhaps earning it, something quite serious can finally develop." (Kant, 2006: 44) In other

words, whether Socrates living by the virtues he preached for as the central character of the *Dialogues* of Plato existed or not in the historic reality is unimportant. What matters from a pragmatic point of view is the attachment to the memory of these values, undoubtedly sublime.

"Memory is distinguished from the merely reproductive power of imagination in that it is able to reproduce the former representations *voluntarily*, so that the mind is not a mere plaything of the imagination. Fantasy, that is, creative power of imagination, must not mix in with it, because then memory would be *unfaithful*.—To *grasp* something quickly in memory, to *recall* it to mind easily, and to *retain* it for a long time are the formal perfections of memory. But these qualities are rarely found together. When we believe that we have something in our memory but cannot bring it to consciousness, we say that we cannot *remember* it." (Kant, 2006: 75-76)

This is precisely the case of the aesthetic ideas in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement*. They can never be remembered very clearly, such as they cannot be otherwise transmitted except for in a vague manner by means of works of art. That is exactly why Immanuel Kant says in repeated rows that aesthetic ideas or values "occasions much thinking." (Kant, 2000: 192) In fact, aesthetic ideas or values put the imagination of the person who receives them in motion, thus catching him/her in their game and transforming him/her.

The connection between imagination and memory is possible by resorting to history and time. Imagination "is a trait of sensitivity, which performs its function in updating past through memory and future by prediction." (Kant, 2013: 14) This detail is explained by Immanuel Kant by the fact that "the depiction of past moods is associated with the depiction of future moods of a subject who lives in a particular present, producing a unitary and complex experience." (Kant, 2013: 14) By this recourse of the memory to imagination, we see that depictions well attached to memory will be easily recovered afterwards and, at the same time, they will lead to preservation for a longer period.

"It should be noted that the imagination does not only know how to recall for us occasionally signs of concepts, even after a long time, in a way that is entirely incomprehensible to us; it also knows how to reproduce the image and shape of an object out of an immense number of objects of different kinds, or even of one and the same kind […]."(Kant, 2000: 118)

The power of imagination is so great, Kant tells us, that it will bring to the memory concepts and images from afar, but it will also reproduce shapes of the objects existing within time and place.

Aristotle states that memory is characteristic only to the past, because "there is no memory of the present in the present", but "for the present we have perception, for the future we have hope, and for the past, remembrance." (Aristotle, 1996: 192) When analysing soul, Aristotle asks himself "to which part of the soul does memory belong?", and the answer is somehow obvious: "to the same part imagination belongs to." (*Ibidem*) So, for the Stagirian, memory is closely connected to imagination, a factor that differs from the Kantian perspective when also defining soul in which imagination does not find its place along with memory. Thus, for Aristotle "all that are produce of imagination are objects of the memory in themselves." (*Ibidem*) Through sensitivity takes place the cognition of sensitive things, which may be attached to the memory; at the same time, "the memory of those intelligible is not possible either without imagination." (*Ibidem*) Memory and imagination are listed in the field of Medieval Philosophy as senses; that is, senses because an object is affected by soul, as it is later nuanced in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Indeed, soul is considered a power of sensing or/and thinking, as in the case of Aristotle, for instance.

Man has to sense his interiority and he can do this, states Immanuel Kant, only by means of a single organ, traditionally named "soul". For Aristotle, the soul includes memory, and implicitly imagination, whereas for Immanuel Kant, the soul is the organ of "the inner sense" ("*der innere Sinn*"). From this point of view, we will draw the line, emphasising that "there is then only *one* inner sense, because the human being does not have different organs for sensing himself inwardly, and one could say that the soul is the organ of inner sense." (Kant, 2006: 53) The Königsberg philosopher speaks on this connection about "the inventive power of imagination" as a means of intersecting the inner sense and the outer sense, which may even form a society with ourselves. "The inventive power of imagination produces a kind of intercourse with ourselves, which, though it may consist merely of appearances of inner sense, is nevertheless analogous to those of outer sense." (Kant, 2006: 73)

This aspect is of concern for us to the extent that we are dealing with memory and imagination, seen as parts of sensitivity, but which can also lead to "ailments of the soul" since there may be "deceptions of the inner sense". The state of sensitive ailment appears as an exceeding of normality. "Beside normality or wellness of soul powers, which made the object of the three Critiques, there also is a possibility that these are

subject to error or weakness." (Kant, 2013: 16) Here, Immanuel Kant reminds us of certain soul ailments, such as sadness, that "lacks an efficient reasoning, which may adjust it" (*Ibidem*), or disturbance of the soul, "which lacks conscience censorship, thus the sequence of ideas is arbitrary." (*Ibidem*)

Therefore, on one hand, the inner sense is manifested positively for adequate understanding, and on the other hand, it also constitutes some hints of soul weakening since any ailment is, in fact, a deviation from the normal appearance. For Immanuel Kant, that which forms the "deceptions of the inner sense" is an illusion of "either *enthusiasm* or *spiritualism*" (Kant, 2006: 54). Exaltation, clairvoyance, or other forms of illusion reflected by the enthusiasm specific to a romantic or to a genius may constitute "soul ailments". These are ailments formed on the basis of sensitivity since "the play of ideas of inner sense" (*Ibidem*) is a fiction and not an *a posteriori* understanding, such as it may be generally regarded. Only some apparently negative aspects of the inner sense may contribute to constructing some positive values, some aesthetic values, for instance, whose root is sensitivity.

The core of a culture is made of values, as Geert Hofstede mentions, when defining "culture" (Hofstede, 2012). In order to build up a cultural heritage completely, it is necessary to retain certain values. We can speak here about aesthetic values, which fall into the sphere of 'axiological memory' and which will constitute authentic support for the cultural heritage. The concept of axiological memory is defined as the attachment of fundamental values to the memory of individuals within a society so that they are not forgotten.

Such as sensitivity is a power of understanding, axiological memory acts as if it were a power of understanding. "Axiological memory is a power of the human soul which does not store information, but values and empty spaces which can be filled, in exceptional circumstances, with new values. The concept of *axiological memory* refers to the external dimension, as well as to the internal one of human memory." (Râmbu, 2017b: 19) In the Kantian sphere, aesthetic ideas as depictions of imagination, mean values, which are put into a work of art by means of the creative genius. So that, these works filled with values (aesthetic, and not only) constitute support for the axiological memory.

The connection rendered by the relation between theory and practice in *The Critique of Pure Reason* and *The Critique of Practical Reason* opens a

new relation between morality and aesthetic feelings for the classical values described by Immanuel Kant in *The Critique of the Power of Judgement*. The classic values from this Kantian book are the well-known values (the beautiful and the sublime), practically formed based on sensitivity. The beautiful "directly brings with it a feeling of the promotion of life, and hence is compatible with charms and an imagination to play" (Kant, 2000: 128); and the feeling of the sublime "is a pleasure that arises only indirectly, being generated, namely, by the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital powers and the immediately following and all the more powerful outpouring of them; hence as an emotion it seems to be not play but something serious in the activity of the imagination." (Kant, 2000: 128-129)

Aesthetic values remain in the composition of subjective or collective memory. If we forget or do not remember the primordial values of a culture, that culture disappears. This seems to also be the case of aesthetic values. If we ignore the sensitive part, that is the inner sense, than we will ignore, practically immediately, the conjuncture of some values, especially of the values formed on the basis of sensitivity. The essential instrument in sketching the memory of aesthetic values remains, nevertheless, "imagination".

AILMENTS OF THE SOUL AS A CREATIVE FACTOR

Immanuel Kant speaks about the creative principles of an imagination, but he also brings to light the elements that may weaken an imagination, these being some "partaking of intoxicating food and drink is a physical means to excite or soothe the power of imagination" (Kant, 2006: 62), which leads to avoiding sensitive depictions or too much emphasis of this human part. Getting outside normal or sound patterns of sensitivity leads to ailments, such as disturbance, dementia, madness or diversion of attention. Any ailment means getting outside normal patterns, and the ailments of sensitivity have a special place in creation.

"Despite the great diversity of soul disturbances, Kant acknowledges the fact that these are however *sui generis* coordinated in a system; it is produced by nature, which seeks in these cases of deviation from normality as well, not to let inactive the animalic nature of the human, even if the understanding power is poor." (Kant, 2013: 17)

Imagination, though, will remain the necessary instrument of sensitivity, be it in the area of normality, or the sensitivity enters the sphere of ailments. Only that imagination may also have some defects, but, as we have already shown, in the case of a genius, the ailments of imagination become sources of artistic creation.

Immanuel Kant refers to "defects of imagination" as results of fictions. "The offenses (*vitia*) of the power of imagination are that its inventions are either merely *unbridled* or entirely *ruleless* (*effrenis aut perversa*). The latter fault is the worst kind." (Kant, 2006: 74) In the case of the genius, the defects of imagination are miraculously converted to creative virtues.

Even madness or dementia may turn in the case of a genius from a major deficiency of the human spirit into a source of artistic creation. Moreover, starting from Immanuel Kant's remarks from *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* and from *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, Arthur Schopenhauer made many references to the relationship between genius and madness. Immanuel Kant claims that "Dementia accompanied by affect is *madness*, whose fits, though involuntary, can often be original and which then, like poetic rapture (*furor poeticus*), border on *genius*." (Kant, 2006: 97) These issues are, therefore, creation landmarks for a genius who either defends the ideas fixed in his memory or stands out by the unusual power of his imagination.

As a consequence, for Immanuel Kant, "*Amentia* is the inability to bring one's representations into even the coherence necessary for the possibility of experience" (Kant, 2006: 109), either that we speak about the madness of a genius as a way to creation or we understand it as an ailment as such. For Arthur Schopenhauer, for that matter, madness is also evidenced when someone maintains in a living memory the reason that had him mad (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol. II: chap. XXXII). Madness, according to this philosopher, is a broken "thread of memory" that, although it has continuity, it always loses plenitude and clarity (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol. I: 192). This rather startling aspect is a source of creation for some geniuses whose ideas stem from "pure contemplation" in a Schopenhauerian sense or from "over-sensitivity" in a Kantian sense.

The transition of the genius to madness is caused by a "violent mental suffering" (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol. I: 193), which does not darken their rational part. "Neither the faculty of reason nor understanding can be denied to the mad, for they talk and understand, and often draw very

accurate conclusions. They also, as a rule, perceive quite correctly what is present, and see the connexion between cause and effect" (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol. I: 192), because of their ideas and senses. But, "their malady specially concerns the *memory*; it is not, indeed, a case of memory failing them entirely" (*Ibidem*); since they can recognize people and things, they can resort to pure contemplation and they can create, but "rather is it a case of the thread of memory being broken […]." (*Ibidem*) However, if there is a large amount of fright, then the individual finds salvation in madness and "the mind, tormented so greatly, destroys, as it were, the thread of its memory […]" (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol. I: 193), focusing on fictions, this time.

Madness in a genius is closely related to his "ability to know, independently of the principle of sufficient reason" (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol. I: 194) and at the same time, "these enable him to retain that thoughtful contemplation necessary for him to repeat what is thus known in a voluntary and intentional work." (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol. I: 195) As a result, the ideas contemplated by a genius will be shared with others by means of an artistic work, thus accentuating the process of attaching aesthetic values to the memory.

Apart from madness, which in the case of a genius is often creative, "a frequent weakness of the soul is deviating the attention from some prevalent representations and directing it to others completely different." (Kant, 2013: 17) The attention directed to something else will shape the perspective of another dimension outside the normal patterns. We can infer that directing the attention of an emotionally troubled person is something seemingly abnormal, but which will contribute to creating works of value based precisely on his sensitivity. Genius is the one who usually does this, the one who creates a genuine work starting from the sensitive realm. Genius as well is the one who attaches an aesthetic idea to a work, essentially creating aesthetic values. The memory of the genius, with the possible disruption resulting from its madness, becomes axiological memory merely because it attaches values to an artistic work worthy of being contemplated. Pure contemplation, with the meaning assigned to genius by Arthur Schopenhauer who inspired himself from Kant's aesthetic view, will sketch the necessary ideas so that the genius again may transform them into values by means of imagination. So, the aesthetic ideas of a genius will become aesthetic values placed in a genuine work.

On the other hand, the work bearing aesthetic values itself becomes a work of art with an unquestionable aesthetic value, which will constitute an aesthetic experience.

"A work of art is by definition something intended to produce aesthetic experience and that having aesthetic value is having the capacity to produce such experience, it would seem fairly straightforward to infer that the value of work of art as a work of art is its aesthetic value, that is, its capacity to produce aesthetic experience." (Iseminger, 2004: 7-8)

Another ailment of the soul that becomes a creative source in the case of a genius is melancholia. In this respect, Arthur Schopenhauer stated, "Aristotle's remark is right, that all eminent people are melancholic." (Schopenhauer, 2014: 20) Melancholy implies a firm relation between memory and imagination.

Although melancholia expresses an ailing condition, it appears "as a condition, exceptional in every way, of *great people*." (Klibansky *et al.*, 2000: 94) The latter shall have a "temporary mood, a depression independent of any pathologic or physiologic circumstance, a feeling that Robert Burton defines as a 'passing melancholic disposition', as opposed to the 'melancholic temperament' or to 'melancholic illness'." (apud Klibansky *et al.*, 2000: 277) The melancholic mood of a creator expresses in fact the "permanently renewed tension between depression and exaltation, sadness and the sense of being somebody special" (Klibansky *et al.*, 2000: 298).

Returning to Immanuel Kant's conception on melancholy, we have to point out that he does not insist much on it. What is of interest here is that melancholia, as well as hypochondria, is an ailment of the imagination. Kant says, among other things, that "*Melancholy* (*melancholia*) can also be a mere delusion of misery which the *gloomy* self-tormentor (inclined to worry) creates. It is itself not yet mental derangement, but it can very well lead to it" (Kant, 2006: 107). This "illusion", which Immanuel Kant refers to in the excerpt above, springs from an excess of imagination. Hypochondria, expressly named by Kant as a "diseased imagination" (*Ibidem*) is "[…] the cause of imagining physical disease: the patient is aware that it is imaginary, but every now and then he cannot refrain from regarding it as something real." (Kant, 2006: 106)

Immanuel Kant's propensity for the analysis of the pathologic aspects of the human soul manifestations is, perhaps, surprising. In this respect,

there are two ideas that must be especially emphasized. On the one hand, the ailments of the soul must be treated by "the physician of souls" (Kant, 2006: 150) who is no other than the philosopher and, on the other hand, when we are dealing with a genius, he can treat himself through his creations. It is this last idea, merely suggested by Kant's writings, that we tried to point out in the present work.

CONCLUSION

It was already known from Antiquity, from the Stoics, for example, that there are ailments of the soul where Immanuel Kant found his inspiration when he wrote *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. The novelty Kant brings in this respect is the creative virtue of the ailment, in case the sufferer is a genius, a thesis that will be developed within the German Romanticism. In case we deal with a normal person, he cannot be treated other than by the philosopher as doctor of the soul, an expression Kant adopts from the Stoics.

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