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THE CONTRIBUTION OF EDITH STEIN'S EMPATHY TO A MORE JUST AND EQUITABLE SOCIETY

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Abstract:The paper proposes an in-depth analysis of Edith Stein's contribution of empathy to building a more just and equitable society. Empathy, understood as the ability to understand and feel the experiences and perspectives of others, emerges as a crucial element in promoting solidarity and social inclusion. Edith Stein, a leading figure in phenomenological philosophy, offers valuable insights into the nature and potential of empathy in her works. Her thought highlights the importance of empathy as a fundamental ethical attitude, capable of promoting a deeper understanding of the human person and social relationships. Through empathy, we are enabled to recognize social injustices, to confront prejudice and discrimination, and to work for equal opportunities for all members of society. Stein's empathy is not limited to the individual sphere, but also extends to the community and institutional sphere, inspiring practices and policies that promote compassion, tolerance and inclusion. The paper seeks to explore how Stein's ideas can guide concrete actions and transformative policies aimed at building a more just and humane society. In the end, the analysis highlights the power and responsibility that accompany empathy, emphasizing the need to translate this capacity into concrete actions that address the structural roots of inequality and social exclusion. Through a collective commitment to promoting empathy, we can build a world where everyone's rights and needs are respected and met, following the legacy of Edith Stein and her commitment to an ethic of understanding and solidarity.

Keywords: Empathy, Edith Stein, Social Justice, Inclusion, Solidarity.

INTRODUCTION

The search for a more just and equitable society is an incessant challenge that has permeated philosophical, political and social reflections throughout human history. In this context, the contribution of empathy, especially from the perspective of Edith Stein, a leading figure in phenomenological philosophy and one of the first women to make a significant contribution to this field of study, emerges as a crucial element. Empathy, understood as the ability to understand and feel the experiences and perspectives of others, plays a fundamental role in building more supportive interpersonal relationships and promoting more inclusive social justice. (SILVA et al., 2021)

Edith Stein, also known as St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross after her conversion to Catholicism, offers valuable insights into the nature and potential of empathy in her work. As a thinker deeply committed to ethics and the search for truth, her reflections on empathy are grounded in an understanding of the human person as a relational being, whose dignity and value transcend individual and cultural barriers (LUDWIG; LOUREIRO, 2020).

The notion of empathy has been widely discussed in various fields, from psychology to philosophy. However, a particularly interesting approach is that of Edith Stein, a philosopher and disciple of Husserl, who has explored empathy in connection with the dimension of justice. Stein proposes that the act of putting oneself in the other person's shoes, of understanding their experiences and perspectives, is essential to the experience of justice. This interconnection between empathy and justice raises a fundamental question: to what extent does empathy really lead to justice?

This research aims to investigate this question by exploring Stein's works and her reflections on empathy and justice. In addition, it seeks to examine how understanding

the perspective of the other influences our conceptions of justice and our moral behavior. By critically analyzing Stein's ideas and relating them to contemporary perspectives on empathy and justice, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between these concepts and their ethical and social implications.

DEVELOPMENT

Understanding Edith Stein's empathy and its contribution to a more just and equitable society requires an in-depth analysis of its philosophical foundations and practical implications. Firstly, it is essential to understand how Stein conceives of empathy and how it relates to her vision of the human person and social relations (IVO; FARIAS, 2023).

For Stein, empathy is not only a psychological capacity, but also a fundamental ethical attitude. She believed that empathy allowed a person to transcend their own perspective and put themselves in the other person's shoes, recognizing their experiences, feelings and needs as legitimate and valid. This ability to understand others not only enriches interpersonal relationships, but is also essential for building a just society, where everyone's dignity and rights are respected (COELHO; NEVES, 2021).

In her work, Stein highlights the importance of empathy in promoting social justice. She argues that by putting ourselves in the other person's shoes, we are able to recognize the injustices and inequalities they face and act in solidarity to correct them. Empathy enables us to defend the rights of the marginalized and oppressed, to confront prejudice and discrimination, and to work for equal opportunities for all members of society. (DE FRANCISCO FERNANDES; MARTINHAGO, 2021)

The notion of empathy and its interconnection with the dimension of justice represent a topic of profound interest to philosophy, psy-

chology and other human disciplines. Edith Stein, philosopher and disciple of Husserl, proposes a unique approach to understanding this complex relationship. For Stein, empathy is not just an emotional or cognitive capacity, but a fundamental form of moral and ethical engagement with the world. She suggests that by putting ourselves in the other person's shoes, by understanding their experiences and perspectives, we are able to achieve a deeper understanding of justice (STEIN, 2018).

However, the question is to what extent this empathy actually leads to justice. Can empathy lead us to act justly, or is it just a necessary first step towards real justice? These are fundamental questions that require careful and critical analysis (STEIN, 1996).

When examining Stein's ideas, it is important to consider that empathy alone may not be enough to guarantee justice. Understanding the perspectives of others is crucial, but justice also requires concrete action and ethical decisions. Empathy can motivate us to act for justice, but it can also be limited by our own subjectivity and the social and cultural contexts in which we are embedded (STEIN, 2018).

It's also important to consider how empathy can be distorted or manipulated. We are not always willing or able to truly put ourselves in the other person's shoes, especially when there are conflicts of interest or deep differences in power and privilege. Selective empathy, where we identify only with those who are similar to us, can lead to even greater injustices (STEIN, 1996).

On the other hand, empathy can also be a powerful tool for promoting social justice. By recognizing our shared humanity with others, we are able to act in solidarity and defend the rights and dignity of all human beings. Empathy can motivate us to seek more inclusive and equitable solutions to the social and political problems we face (STEIN, 2018).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In light of Edith Stein's reflections on the contribution of empathy to a more just and equitable society, it becomes clear that empathy is not just a quality to be admired, but a transformative force that can shape our everyday interactions, our social institutions and even our political structures. Through empathy, we are able to transcend the barriers of difference and recognize our interconnectedness as human beings. By putting ourselves in the other person's shoes, we pave the way for mutual understanding, solidarity and justice.

However, it is important to recognize that empathy alone is not enough to tackle the complex challenges of social injustice. We

need to translate our empathy into concrete actions and transformative policies that address the structural roots of inequality and exclusion. This requires a collective commitment to building more inclusive systems, where the rights and needs of all members of society are respected and met.

So, as we close this reflection, we are reminded of the power and responsibility that accompany empathy. As Edith Stein taught us, empathy is not just an innate ability, but a conscious choice we can make every day to create a more just and humane world. May we be inspired by her vision and work together to build a society where empathy is truly valued and cultivated as a fundamental principle of our human coexistence.

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