Less than a human condition?

Menos que a condição humana?

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The article written by Dr. Fátima Cavalcante and Dr. Edward Goldson brings a rich and unique discussion, I believe not yet encountered academically in terms of an objective analysis considering the complex level the authors presented. Reading the text and knowing the authors I am convinced that it was not just academic interest that led them to the understanding of the relationship between poverty, disability and violence. Certainly, this Herculean and successful effort is based on their professional experience and compassionate views. Aside from their search for new knowledge they are sensitive for the problems and seek solutions to benefit people with disabilities.

Since the text is very dense and profound I do not intend to repeat it and to comment it entirely. I will discuss only two points, which I feel are important to highlight.

First, let me start with the word compassion that, in my opinion, dictated the tone of the article. With-

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out this tone the text would be just one more “paper” on poverty and inequality in the world, stating that disabled people are the poorest among the poor, and providing prescriptive warnings of what needs to be done. This is one of the criticisms in the review written by Goldson\textsuperscript{1}. We make prescriptions but do not put them into practice. This is why I use the term compassion. According to the Dalai Lama\textsuperscript{2} this is no possible development without the reduction of poverty and inequality.

Nowadays, the same economists propose that there is a union of political and social equality. We should remember however, that there were moments in recent history in which poverty and social inequality were treated passively because, in the economic point of view, it was believed that their existence was fundamental to the capitalist process and profit\textsuperscript{3}. Nowadays, the same economists propose that there is no possible development without the reduction of poverty and inequality\textsuperscript{3}. I want to say in this short discussion that since the beginning of the modern period, the issue of poverty has needed a place in the public agenda and has a reflective status and now a consolidated practical action. This does not mean that poverty and inequality are being reduced to the same proportion we acquire knowledge concerning this topic. On the contrary, as this article demonstrates, its slow reduction is unequal and especially distressing for the poorest among the poor, namely the people with disabilities.

The issue of violence, as treated nowadays, is also a theme of modern times that was incorporated into the moment for the institutionalization of human and social rights among specific advocacy groups. Violence has always existed in human societies. Even in the biblical story describing the fratricidal fight between Cain and Abel and the death of the latter. This history in a certain way reminds us that human society, since its beginning, is not an easy and friendly place to live: on the contrary, we need to civilize ourselves as stated by Freud\textsuperscript{4} through the exercise of companionship, the acceptance of others and the resolution of conflicts through dialogue and words and not through weapons and aggressions. Nowadays, the issue of violence has gained unexpected fame. It has turned into being a public issue, including in the health arena\textsuperscript{5}.

The issue of disability is also an old one. In the New Testament we are reminded of Christ’s healing the blind, the deaf and the crippled. In modern societies the issue of disability is still taboo, having almost the same status as in the time of Jesus; an object of charity or one demanding miracles like a flag at half mast, which only few have the courage to raise and make tremble. So the issue of persons with disabilities is a weak subject in the Latin America society, hidden in our fears of the differences between the disabled and the able-bodied. The authors of this article comment that for a society as economically advantaged as ours, but advanced also in terms of access to health care as the authors of this article comment that for a society as economically advantaged as ours, but advanced also in terms of its social consciousness, people with disabilities are seen as “being less than human.”

Since it is time to finish and let the authors be the protagonists of their reflections, I conclude reaffirming what Cavalcante & Goldson have said of the Latin American scenario: people with disabilities are the poorest among the poor. I say it not only in the material and educational sense but also in terms of access to health care as the authors have already pointed out. I say it in the political meaning as referred to by C. Wright Mills\textsuperscript{6}, because the need to address this poverty still has not really been transformed into a strong public cause. Until the problems of the disabled are seen as being only embedded in the family’s sphere, and relating to health, rehabilitation and social assistance ser-
vices, they will not come to be recognized in the streets and in the public arenas, and so they will be fated to a type of obscurity that makes humanity less human and society cramp in relation to its process of democratization.

References