THE SOLUTION OF THE THEORY OF JUSTICE AS EQUITY TO STABILIZE SOCIETY WITH THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

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ABSTRACT

This article makes, through exploratory research, an analysis of the interference of social networks in modern democracies, mainly taking into account the result of the last electoral elections in Brazil and the United States in the years 2018 and 2016. In addition to electoralelections , emphasizes the influence of social networks and fake news on life in society and on the relationship between people.Then, starting from the construction of the understanding that such influence would generate intense social disputes, it seeks to establish elements to understand whether the work "A Theory of Justice" with the theory of justice as equity formulated by John Rawls would find ways to reestablish consensus and public reason considering that kind of influence did not exist before.

Keyword: Democracie. Social Network. Theory of justice.

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PRESENTATION

There seems to be no doubt that the last few decades will go down in history due to the emergence of social networks that brought about profound changes in the way people relate.

Ever since the now extinct Orkut, social networks have gained more and more space in people's lives and with the advent of Facebook, in 2004, their influence has become even more notorious. Thus, since the beginning of the 2000s, the transformation that social networks caused in the way people relate to each other was already visible.

However, after the US presidential elections in 2016, which featured controversy about the leaking of voters' personal data and manipulation by other nations in the practical results of the polls, a hitherto little perceived influence of social networks was evident. It was quite clear, at this time, even for people who were not very attentive to the subject, that social networks also influenced the political position of citizens.

The elections in Brazil in 2018 confirmed this influence, as electoral campaign methods were primarily focused on social networks.

As in the USA, the electoral campaign in Brazil was also marked by problems involving social networks, such as, for example, information about the hiring of robots to disseminate false reports, the so-called "fake news".

The result of the two democratic votes and the consequent election of representatives of the far right, known for positions considered radical, brought up, for many people, the question of where so many voters sympathetic to this type of position would be camouflaged. It was questioned, therefore, how, in a few years, society became so divided in relation to its anxieties and moral values.

This is because, until then, the feeling for the majority of the population was that the preservation of fundamental rights and freedoms, freedom of movement and free choice of occupation and the social bases of self-respect, that is, those items included in the basic list of primary goods of the Theory of Justice as Equity elaborated by John Rawls, were a consensus. However, the aforementioned electoral results raised the question of how this consensus was so intensely diluted.

Radical racial, religious, and sexual segregation groups, which until then were seen as a tiny minority, gained strength and support. Family members could not understand how people so close, often living in the same house, had such different ideas about moral values that had never been approached.

How did these people start to think from this point of view? What would have influenced them?

It was then realized that social networks had a very strong influence on the formation of political opinion and that they were even capable of transforming consensi. A series of studies and documentaries have emerged to explain that social media algorithms were capable of manipulating information in such a profound way so as to transform society and make people appear willing to break with the previously established democratic pact.

According to journalist Franklin Foer (2018), in recent decades, the internet has revolutionized information search patterns. Instead of starting to look for information on the pages of the main news media, a growing share of readers find news stories through Google, Facebook, or Twitter.

Thus, for the aforementioned author, *"communication companies have misrepresented their values. Even the most upstanding journalists have internalized a new mindset; they are concerned with satisfying the algorithms of Google and Facebook and, in the search for clicks, some of the most important news providers have embraced sensationalism, publishing dubious stories."* (Foer, 2018, p.9)

Algorithms are, very briefly, a set of data and rules established by each social network, which are responsible for determining which content and which pages appear first to the public in the timeline of their respective accounts.

The 2020 documentary "The Social Networks Dilemma" from the Netflix streaming channel and directed by Jeff Orlowski, brought this information to the general public, including demonstrating how the entire movement of influence happens and how the algorithms of social networks are able to manipulate the formation of opinion without the creators of the systems having any interference on the subject.

Social networks, therefore, show their consumers only what the algorithms understand they would like to consume. As such, if the person has a more conservative position, they will only receive conservative content and vice versa.

Thus, people who had a moderate conservative political profile, may have changed their position to a radical conservatism, influenced by information received in mass.

Add to the algorithms the fact that a small portion of the world's population is literate and, therefore, does not have access to philosophical currents, higher education or even people different from those with whom they live in their community.

In Brazil, for example, the proportion of people aged 25 or over who completed compulsory basic education, that is, completed at least high school, is 48.8% in 2019 (IBGE, 2021). In other words, more than half of the country's population has not even finished high school.

It seems to us, therefore, that we live in a moment in which the previously established social pact is overwhelmed and that there are difficulties in finding instruments to rebalance this movement.

All over the world, legislators and jurists seek to regulate people's relationships on social media. However, the practice demonstrates the enormous difficulty in tracking and blaming people behind computer screens.

The question to be addressed in this article is, therefore, whether the Theory of Justice as Equity elaborated by John Rawls would find ways to reestablish consensus and public reason considering this type of influence that did not exist before.

John Rawls, by the time he lived, was logically not a Facebook user, but would his Theory of Justice be able to adjust this new type of society? Did Rawls have the formula to adjust the "Networks Dilemma"?

OVERLAPPED CONSENSUS, REASONABLE COMPREHENSIVE DOCTRINES AND PUBLIC REASON

For the Theory of Justice as Equity, very briefly, society is well ordered when all people accept the same principles of political justice and believe that the basic structure of society, that is, its main political and social institutions respect these principles of justice. For

this acceptance to occur, citizens must have an effective sense of justice, that is, a sense that allows them to understand and apply publicly recognized principles of justice, and act in accordance with what their position in society, their duties and obligations, requires.

For the theory to be feasible there must be a fair distribution of goods and freedoms so that people are willing to cooperate with that society.

However, for stability in this cooperation and for the maintenance of this society, John Rawls establishes three basic principles.

The first is reflective equilibrium, which comes from the idea of equal and rational free people imbued with a sense of justice, enabling a rational reflection on social goals with a strong enough tendency to reject injustice to be achieved.

The second principle necessary for balance is what Rawls calls overlapping consensus, in which the conflicting moral, religious, and philosophical views that exist in a society (reasonable comprehensive doctrines) can stably coexist when these different comprehensive doctrines come to a consensus about the political conception of society. Thus, stability is achieved when the doctrines that constitute the consensus are accepted by politically active citizens.

The third and last concept of justification is public reason, which can be translated as the form and capacity of a political society to articulate its plans and place its objectives in a priority order to achieve the good of the public. That is, public reason "*shows how things should be, considering people as a just and well-ordered society would encourage them to be*" (RAWLS, 2000, p. 262)

Armed with the three principles mentioned above, a society could be stable. In other words, the institutions that are part of a constitutional regime will only be preserved if they promote a consensus.

Rawls further states that the principles of Justice as equity are public and characterize the moral convictions publicly recognized and shared by members of a well-ordered society and that he would not be interested in people who question these principles (Rawls, 1997, p. 634). This is because Justice as Equity imposes limits on admissible forms of life, that is, comprehensive doctrines and, therefore, claims that seek to achieve ends that transgress the limit have no weight.

In a very brief way, we try to explain how Rawls justifies the stability of the political conceptions elaborated from the Theory of Justice as Equity.

In this way, and armed with these concepts, we will be able to start thinking about the theme of this article.

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND SOCIAL COOPERATION

As seen in the introduction to this article, we live at a time when there seems to be a democratic crisis, in which the main principles of constitutional democracies are being put on trial, since radical doctrines are presented against the basic distribution of primary goods defined by Rawls, namely, preservation of fundamental rights and freedoms, freedom of movement and free choice of occupation and the social bases of self-respect.

The preservation of fundamental rights and freedoms and the social bases of self-respect are being challenged by representatives of extreme religious movements, as well as racist, sexist and denial movements.

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All over the world, theories that demoralize science are being seen, such as the growing anti-vaccination and flat-earther movements, for example. After so many years of struggle for equality between the sexes, anti-feminist movements are also gaining strength. Not to mention the setback in relation to discussions about racism and homophobia, as the number of nationalist and white supremacist movements also grows.

It is known that this type of position has always existed and, according to the Theory of Justice as Equity, the existence of these doctrines is valid and is in accordance with the idea of Justice as Equity. However, it is important to emphasize that these doctrines, when unreasonable cannot become comprehensive, under penalty of threat to the democratic state and the existence of a well-ordered society.

It so happens that, as mentioned, radical movements and their rapid diffusion in society ended up creating a majority capable of electing political representatives who agree with these ideas and that, although they enter the political system through representative democracy, they seek at all costs to subvert the constitutional principles to meet the wishes of an increasingly radical electorate.

This type of political positioning has been widely publicized and has been spreading and expanding through social networks that sometimes circulate false news and end up influencing voters inappropriately and inadvertently.

How to stabilize these societies that seem so close to a collapse of the constitutional pact, without despising that, at least according to electoral processes, the majority is shown?

According to Rawls, there is nothing to justify that what is the majority is what is right. The author informs the reader that *"none of the traditional conceptions of justice defends this doctrine, always maintaining that the result of a vote is subject to political principles"* (Rawls, 2000, p. 395).

However, it is necessary to argue whether the affront to the majority is not as tyrannical as what is intended to be repressed, since the existence of these movements, according to the author himself, should not be repressed and society should live in harmony with the different existing dominant doctrines.

In response to this question, John Rawls suggests, first, that the principle of equal freedom be analyzed.

Rawls suggests that, above all, the citizen analyze the fairness of legislation and social policies knowing that their opinions will not always coincide with those of others and, therefore, must decide what is fair in order to reconcile divergent opinions.

In other words, for stabilization, a consensus on established political principles would be necessary, or at least some of them. Therefore, *"the political conception can be seen as a part of a comprehensive doctrine, but it is not a consequence of the non-political values of that doctrine. Nevertheless, its political values usually trump any other values that oppose it, <u>at least under the reasonably favorable conditions that make constitutional democracy possible.</u> (I highlighted)"* (Rawls, 2000, p. 203).

The author continues his explanation stating that his theory is liberal and, therefore, protects fundamental rights recognized and already widely disseminated in a society that already has the virtues of tolerance, a willingness to make mutual concessions and also has the virtue of reasonableness.

But Rawls didn't know the profound influence that social media would have on this kind of consensus. Reasonableness does not seem to exist, and even fundamental rights are

not subject to preservation for the intolerant who are increasingly influenced and in greater numbers. Thus, there seem to be less and less favorable conditions for constitutional democracy, as the consensus has been based on unreasonable doctrines.

So far, the Theory of Justice as Equity has not found a solution to the dilemma of social networks.

However, a closer reading of the theory makes us realize that, in fact, social stability is not in the constitutional and apparent principled consensus, but in the way this consensus is formed.

To do so, the depth of the consensus must be analyzed and that is where the vertex appears, the issue addressed.

For Rawls, "once a constitutional consensus is in place, political groups are forced to participate in the public forum for political discussion and address other groups that do not share their overarching doctrine. This fact makes it rational for them to move away from the narrower circle of their own views and develop political conceptions in terms of which they can explain and justify their preferred policies to a wider audience." (Apud Weber, 2011, p. 141)

In other words, Rawls delimits that the dialogue with people who have different positions is essential for the construction of a consensus that has greater depth. It's exactly what social networking has been making impossible.

Dialogue and openness to people with different political views is restricted depending on the way the social network distributes information. Instead of plurality, the social network established the unity of ideals.

It so happens that before the networks, there was fundamental legislation, in most nations, which had the role of guaranteeing fundamental freedoms and guaranteeing citizens full participation in political and social life. This extension of constitutional consensus still exists.

Therefore, we find the solution to the dilemma that is analyzed when it is said that "*the security of democratic freedoms requires the active participation of citizens who possess the political virtues necessary for the maintenance of a constitutional regime."* (Rawls, 2000. p. 254)

Freedom of conscience is limited by the general interest in security and public order and the adoption of this standard does not infringe on the equal freedom of any citizen. Therefore, tolerance towards the intolerant must be guided by this objective, the maintenance of democracy and freedom.

Rawls therefore teaches that "*justice does not require men to remain inert, while others destroy the foundations of their existence*" (Rawls, 1997, p. 237). Therefore, it is up to the tolerant to control the intolerant before the forces of stability do not have the strength to convert it into freedom.

It is, therefore, up to the democratic forces to seek to contain the advance of intolerant forces, as has been seen in several countries.

CONCLUSION

Given the fact that it is unusual in an academic article to take such a forceful stance on a certain type of subject, the present can be considered as an act of civil disobedience, since there is an urgent need to bring about a change in government policies in several countries and as already mentioned, following the teaching of John Rawls in his theory, it is up to democratic forces to contain the advance of the intolerant. In academia, it doesn't seem that positioning can be different.

In Brazil, the Supreme Court, despite endless accusations of judicial interference in government policy, has acted as a guarantor for the application of constitutional foundations to the detriment of intolerant policies, as has also occurred in the United States in relation to the results of the presidential elections of 2020, when the parliament was invaded by representatives of intolerant doctrines who tried to prevent the realization of the democratic electoral result.

Despite the threat to world democracies, basic institutions have still proved strong enough to contain the advance of most public policies and government acts that violate the basic principles of justice, especially in relation to the principle of equal freedom.

However, it is essential that the dialogue between people and between political groups, especially with divergent points of view, be present again. Therefore, regulating social networks and creating policies for their effective use will not solve the entire problem of the "networks dilemma", but it may represent the solution for the next generations to have reinforced their sense of cooperation and their goals, their public reason.

For the current generation, it is necessary to fight for the existential minimum for future generations, ensuring that the basic institutions remain strong for the pursuit of a well-ordered society defined by the Theory of Justice as Equity.

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