

THINKING PEDAGOGY AS PSYCHAGOGY IN THE LATE FOUCAULT

Pensar la pedagogía como *psicagogía* en el último Foucault

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Abstract

The ideas of Michel Foucault have had a great influence on education. Studies on disciplinary society have become an unavoidable reference for understanding the dynamics of the educational institution. However, this influence often remains limited to his critical and a deconstructive approach, without adequately exploring the propositional aspects and constructive influence of his theory. This present work is based on the hypothesis that Foucault's latest studies provide a solid conceptual framework that goes beyond mere criticism of power relations, offering relevant insights applicable to the field of education. Following this line of thought, the current proposal will explore key concepts from Foucault's late thought, including the regime of truth, practices of the self, psychagogy and parrhesia. These concepts will help trace the importance of Foucault's latest work in relation to educational tasks. This work invites us to demonstrate the power of philosophy, not only in questioning entrenched structures but also as a motivating force for ethical transformation processes and possibilities for invention within individuals' life fabric. In summary, the argumentation will demonstrate that Foucault's interpretation of both stoic philosophy and cynicism, through the notion of parrhesia, provides clear guidelines that can be applied to pedagogical work and the teacher-student relationship.

Keywords

Foucault, education, pedagogy, relation of self, psychagogy.

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Resumen

Las ideas de Michel Foucault han tenido una gran influencia en las ciencias de la educación. Los estudios acerca de la sociedad disciplinaria se han convertido en una referencia ineludible para pensar las dinámicas de la institución escolar. Sin embargo, esa influencia a menudo se reduce a su enfoque crítico y deconstructivo, sin elaborar adecuadamente los aspectos propositivos y la influencia constructiva que su teoría puede ofrecer. Este trabajo parte de la hipótesis de que los últimos estudios del filósofo brindan un marco conceptual sólido que va más allá la mera crítica hacia las relaciones de poder, aportando intuiciones relevantes para aplicar al campo educativo. Siguiendo esta lógica, en la presente propuesta se explorarán algunos conceptos claves del pensamiento tardío de Foucault: *régimen de verdad*, *prácticas de sí*, *psicagogía* y *parresía*. Estos conceptos permitirán rastrear la importancia de los últimos trabajos de Foucault para pensar la tarea educativa. Dichos trabajos invitan a considerar la potencia de la filosofía, ya no solo para cuestionar las estructuras sedimentadas, sino también como una fuerza motivadora de procesos de transformación ética y posibilidades de invención para la trama vital de los individuos. En síntesis, la argumentación permitirá mostrar que la interpretación que el filósofo realiza tanto de la filosofía estoica como del cinismo —a través de la noción de parresía— proporciona pautas claras para aplicar al trabajo pedagógico y a la relación docente-alumno.

Palabras clave

Foucault, educación, pedagogía, relación de sí, psicagogía.



Introduction

This work arises from the author's doctoral research on the late work of Michel Foucault and his experiences as a teacher at the secondary and higher levels. The combination of both activities has allowed identifying that Foucault's latest studies offer relevant elements to reflect on education. However, it has also been observed that its application is little explored and studied. The main objective of this work is to contribute to this line.

Michel Foucault's influence on pedagogy is well known. The philosopher developed a critical approach that has contributed to understanding the dominant assumptions of modern normalist education. His studies about disciplinary society have become a *typical ideal* reference (in the Weberian sense of the term) to think the foundations of the school. These ideas have been pivotal, since they have made it possible to question hierarchical and normalizing pedagogical modalities that reproduced the prevailing power structures. However, this influence is usually reduced to its critical and deconstructive aspect without being able to adequately size the proposed aspects and the constructive influence of his theory. For this reason, this paper starts from the hypothesis that the latest studies of the philosopher provide a solid conceptual framework to exceed the criticism towards power relations, developing relevant concepts to extend to the educational field. In these studies, the philosopher favors a turn on his previous work that allows us to think about the func-

tion of truth, not only as a denunciation of the effects of domination, but also as a motivating force of transformation processes for the vital essence of people. There is an experiential dimension that Foucault finds in the ancient philosophy and that is opposed to the pedagogical modality heir to the modern tradition. The philosopher's interpretation of both Stoic philosophy and ancient cynicism allows to frame this distinction. Hence the importance of studying these concepts and their feasibility to improve current educational practices.

Based on the above, the work presents the following structure. Firstly, it will show the way in which the Foucauldian reflection on power has impacted educational studies. Then, this critical dimension will be articulated with the turn propitiated by his last studies, exposing some of his main concepts: *regime of truth*, *practices of the self*, *psychagogy* and *parrhesia*. Based on these, the idea is try to extract clear guidelines to apply to the pedagogical work and the teacher-student relationship. Also, to offer some suggestions to extend these philosophical assumptions to current teaching.



Foucault's Influences on the Pedagogical Discourse

The influence of Michel Foucault's philosophy in the educational field is indisputable. His ideas have become a *typical ideal* reference to think of the school as an institution and its effects on the social fabric. Foucault's theory has at the same time made it possible to understand and question the rationality, objectives and aspirations of the modern school¹. Thus, the impact of the philosopher on pedagogy can be traced in two well-defined aspects. Firstly, from his ideas about the link between knowledge, power, and normalization, and secondly, in relation to his description of the disciplinary society. Both aspects are closely linked and have contributed to promoting various movements and renovations in the settled web of educational practices (among others: legal, criminal, mental health, social assistance, etc.).

In broad terms, Foucault could be placed in the spiritual universe of thinkers who promoted pedagogical *reproductivism*, among whose main exponents are Althusser, Bourdieu and Passeron. Indeed, as Puiggros and Marengo (2013, p. 71) indicate, these thinkers have highlighted the role of education as part of the ideological apparatus of the States and as a reproduction instrument of social structures in the hands of the dominant sectors. While Foucault will maintain his objections to the notions of ideology and structure as will be shown below, he shares some developments

typical of the French scene of the 60s, which tended to think of social institutions as strategies aimed at increasing power and domination².

Beyond this coincidence, Foucault is irreducible. It is not easy to classify him in any school of thought, an issue that he resisted permanently. To analyze the impact of his ideas on education and to evaluate the importance of the last section of his work, it is necessary to briefly review the relationship that the philosopher established between knowledge and power. To make a brief characterization of the archeological-genealogical thought of the author is not a simple task, but it could be said that the French was a thinker who tracked historical traits outside of any *a priori* essentialist, either transcendental or transcendent. Following this line, he has emphasized the importance of maintaining a historicist apriorism that, through a thorough analysis of historical archives, allows us to recognize what he called *speech*. By that term, the philosopher referred to a regime of truth under which, in a specific time, the game of the true and the false, the normal and the abnormal, the acceptable and rejectable, etc. is thought. The historian Paul Veyne, friend and close collaborator of Foucault, synthesizes in a very didactic way the implications of the notion of *speech* in Foucauldian reflection. Veyne says:

Speeches are the spectacles through which, in every age, men have perceived things, have thought and acted; speeches are imposed on the dominant as well as on the dominated; they are not lies invented by those to deceive them and justify their domination. 'The regime of truth is not simply ideological or superstructural; it has been a condition of the formation and development of capitalism' (Veyne, 2014, p. 37).

Thus, the notion of discourse refers to a relational logic of analysis that ties together what is thought, what is believed and what is done in a society. For Foucault, the effects of discourse unfold independently to a superstructural position. The central thing here is that a certain conception of truth leads to the foundation of a duty and, therefore, to the deployment of practical actions on the conduct of others. For this reason, power is not only coercive, it is not limited only to imposing and suppressing, but it is affirmative. In Foucault's terms: "what makes power to be accepted, is simply that it does not weigh only as a force that says no, but in fact goes beyond, produces things, induces pleasure, forms of knowledge and produces speeches" (Foucault, 1992, p. 193). Thus, being founded on this regime of discourse, power relations are articulated with the beliefs that individuals make about the ends towards which they should lead their lives³. As Foucault suggests, power is thus defined as an



action exercised on another action, and becomes visible in attempts or the likelihood of conducting another behavior (Foucault, 2001, p. 253). Thus, the famous link between knowledge and power, a knotting initially developed by Friedrich Nietzsche, which Foucault was responsible for deepening and extending into new fields. In this sense, any idea about a necessary origin of the entity conceals effects of dominance that must be unveiled and questioned. At the origin of things lies nothing but the folly or chance of certain struggles. The problem is that this origin - relational and haphazard - is often lost sight of. Consequently, the effects of those events are naturalized and function as unquestionable truths.

Foucault shifted his theory of power from what was initially thought in more warmongering terms (his own Nietzschean period) to a government of liberties⁴. However, the underlying methodological and ontological question, which is tied to knowledge and power, and which explains the consolidation of a duty according to the demands of a regime, remains relatively constant in Foucauldian concerns. For this reason, in one of his last courses, Foucault stated that the eminent task of his philosophical commitment is to show the lack of need for all power:

If the great philosophical course consists in introducing a methodical doubt that puts all certainties on hold, the small lateral and counter-lane course I propose is to try to intervene in a systematic way, not because the suspense of all certainties, but the lack of need of all power, whatever it may be (Foucault, 2014c, p. 99).

Now, this historical and relational analysis led him to show the knots between knowledge and practices for different times, highlighting that knowledge, subjects, institutions, laws, ways of punishing and educating, are not transhistoric entities, but effects of socio-political relations in a given time. This way of reflection implies a method that tries to start from the inheritance of modern knowledge, but to exceed it and generate new inventions from it. The dichotomies generated by modernity, such as the exclusionary relationship between individual and community, normal and abnormal, etc., deserve to be rethought.

For this reason, Foucault (1996, p. 109) proposed a way of reflection that could think about the reciprocal relations that occur between the axis of knowledge, the axis of power and the axis of ethics. Through this method, the philosopher has described in an unparalleled way what he called *disciplinary society* in which the main institutions that still govern our life experience emerge. Organizations such as the State, prisons, schools and mental health institutions have emerged during this period

analyzed by Foucault with a specific objective: to promote the control and docility of individuals and populations. While in the Middle Ages political regimes were indifferent to the meticulous control of individuals and did not mind killing or dismembering them when they challenged the power of the monarch, the new capitalist production regime will require the care and proliferation of life, as well as strict control of the times, actions, and capabilities of people.

Thus, a set of institutions that aim to increase the knowledge and organization of the faculties of the person to achieve their normalization and effective insertion in a society arises. Following this logic, Foucault calls these methods disciplines that allow the careful control of the operations of the body, which guarantee the constant attachment of the forces and impose a docility-usefulness relationship” (Foucault, 2009, p. 159). The school will be among the main institutions that have this purpose of forming the necessary *habitus* to capture the energies of the person. It can be said that Foucault has managed to highlight the strategic nature of the institutions and their link with certain political relations. The philosopher has succeeded in ensuring that the intentionality of power that lies in the functioning of these institutions is considered.

From there arises the great impact of his work to think about educational issues, an influence that can be seen in two well-defined aspects. The first is a description of these institutions for a better understanding of their objectives and strategies. The sociologist Tenti Fanfani (1999, p. 44), for example, uses Foucault as a *typical ideal* reference to understand the emergence context of the school institution through which the educational phenomenon is concretized in modern Western societies. And the other aspect refers to its critical imprint, because analyzing historicity in the knot that make up knowledge and power, Foucault’s philosophy has managed to move naturalized budgets of pedagogical discourse. As Adriana Puiggros and Roberto Marengo (2013, p. 79) argue, Foucault provided “from his methods, both archeological and genealogical, a logic of theoretical production and a possibility of settled and naturalized practices of social life among which are educational practices”.

Nevertheless, while considering the movements promoted by Foucault’s theory, Inés Dussel (2005, p. 183) traces some aspects in which his ideas have generated a new crystallization or stabilization. His theory about the political nature of institutions and knowledge has become a kind of *cliché* or commonplace used without properly sizing all its implications. Consequently, the Foucauldian position regarding power rela-



tions has led to a certain paralysis in the face of educational action that has been commonly interpreted as a pedagogical abstention:

To claim that the teacher always exercises power over the students, that the exams are disciplinary institutions and that authority always involves a danger led some to pedagogical abstention or to suspect any and all intention to educate. Even if suspicion about the motives that lead us to educate is well founded (as Philippe Merieu ironically points out in *The Option to Educate*), it would be worth stopping and thinking if what Foucault was proposing was an abstention (Dussel, 2005, p. 186).

This paper will try to develop from this idea proposed by the author at the end of the quote. Next, Dussel mentions a famous interview by Foucault in which the philosopher points out that it is necessary to distinguish power relations from domination relations. The former concerns forms of influence that are not bad in themselves. According to this logic, Foucault points out: “I do not see where evil lies in the practice of someone who, in a given game of truth and knowing more than another, tells you what to do, teaches you, transmits knowledge, communicates techniques. Rather, the problem is to know how these practices will avoid the effects of domination” (Foucault, 1999, p. 413). The aim will be to take this line a step further and think around the ideas of the last Foucault in order to show that his theory not only rejects a pedagogical abstention but suggests an effective method to relate it in a transformative way with knowledge and educational institution.



Education and the Real Regimes

One of the main contributions of the last Foucault aims to establish a new relationship between the individual and the truth. While in his previous reflections the philosopher was oriented to a description of the power effects generated by truth, here there is a small twist that, without ignoring the material and political dimension of knowledge that intends to enhance the modification produced by truth in individuals and society. In the course he taught in 1980 entitled *The government of the living* (2014c) Foucault coined the concept of *allergy* to refer to the relationship established between government and truth. This concept is similar to the category of *speech* as defined above. Through this idea, Foucault will insist that the task of government does not depend so much on utilitarian and normative mechanisms but is closely linked to a more general regime of truth. The notion of *regime of truth* allows us to consider that the bond

of government is not based solely on laws, prohibitions or ideologies that condition a subjective entity established beforehand. On the contrary, a regime is constituted through a set of legal and political relations that are immanently intertwined with the life of the individual. Here we can see that relation between knowledge, power and ethics characteristic of Foucault's last texts and on which the argument of this work will revolve. For this reason, the last section of Foucaultean work is oriented to think about a new relationship of the individual with the truths that constitute him. What is interesting is to notice the dynamics of a complex and circular process that leads to reflect on the interrelation between some legal typologies, the formation of individuals and the conformation of interpretation matrices of reality that are established as a framework of dominant transparency to appreciate reality. Foucault accounts for this process when he describes how people are bound to a specific way of reproducing certain truths:

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This regime of truth, by which men are bound to the need to manifest themselves as objects of truth, is linked to political regimes, legal regimes, etc. In other words, the idea would be that, from the political to the epistemological, the relationship to be established should not be in terms of ideology, nor in terms of utility. It should not be done through notions such as law, prohibition, repression, but in terms of regime, of regimes of truth articulated with legal-political regimes (Foucault, 2014c, p. 125).

Thus, there is a submission to the force of truth that does not originate in the positive content of knowledge, but functions as an underlying assumption or a framework of transparency that becomes too familiar. In this point, it is not a logical deduction that connects premises and conclusions within a reasoning, but rather the acceptance of rules that are not problematized, similar to what happens with a statement of faith. It is in this constitutive dimension of truth that the actions of government are deployed.

This conceptualization of *truth regimes* has great relevance for pedagogical reflection. Indeed, educational action is one of the main social mechanisms involved in the consolidation and reproduction of such a regime. The issue is that there are paradoxes that are usually the reason for reflection of the theorists of pedagogy. Education must prepare to enter the labor market but must at the same time develop a critical awareness of the excesses, challenges, miseries, and inequalities caused by a given productive system. It must also train citizens to perform in society, following criteria of respect for morality and current legislation, but, at the same

time, it should develop critical minds against a dogmatic and exclusive morality and encourage people to cross limits on it. As Álvarez González (2006) points out, the task of educating is always deployed from a world view, a category that could compose effectively with the notion of *regime of truth* in Foucaultean terms. The problem is that such a worldview may reinforce prevailing views. For this reason, as the author points out, educating with justice involves doing so from the permanent interrogation of this vision and the institutions responsible for giving it concrete form:

The worldview we are in tends to coincide with the worldview we choose, but such coherence is not indispensable. The educator can break with the vision in which he lives and not under a perspective that goes from worse to better. In short, the world visions are not because there is a discourse that supports it; instead, there are educational practices that reveal its emergence and persistence. For this reason, it is not enough to have a world view in our strategic plans. We need to review the practices of our institutions (Álvarez González, 2006, p. 106).

The question that arises is which tools and concepts must be used to base interventions in this regard. As will be shown below, the latest studies by Foucault offer tools to perform scans and modulations for this purpose. His entire philosophy aims to show the historical contingency on which these world views are based. The difference is that, in his recent studies, Foucault seems to emphasize not only the critical dimension towards naturalization, but also the possibilities of constitution of individuals. The same rationality that can show the lack of need for all power and the historicity of all identity, can guide ways of life and stylization of existence that live up to that truth. In this sense, the reflection on the *techniques of self* and *psychagogy* offer methodological richness to think on this purpose. Given their importance to transform the link that the individual establishes with the truth, it is possible to make relevant modulations to think about educational phenomena.

The athlete of the event: a way to rethink the link with knowledge

As mentioned, Foucault's latest studies aim to establish a new relationship of the individual with the truth. His interest in classical philosophy offers innumerable proof of this situation. For the ancients, the knowledge of the world was not intended to gather objective and instrumental information to provide themselves with the knowledge of the world. When

defining the arts of existence in antiquity, Foucault establishes differences with the pedagogical modality that is established in modernity. Unlike this conception, in antiquity, knowledge and information about the world were thought as factors capable of promoting transformations in the relationship of the individual with himself. The ancient art of living proposed a change in the experience modality of the subject, a question that is distinguished from a purely utilitarian know-how. Foucault Says:

Nowadays, no one would dare to write a book about the art of being happy, the art of not letting oneself be carried away by anger, the way to have a quiet life or achieve happiness, etc. (...) There is undoubtedly an art of behavior in societies like ours, but it has completely lost its autonomy. Now, these models of behavior are, of course, invested, disguised within the great, imposing and massive pedagogical practice (Foucault, 2020, p. 43).

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There is a reason why Socrates claimed that those engaged in philosophy could not commit acts of injustice. This reason was related to the fact that knowledge about the world must transform our attitude towards it, generating changes both individually and collectively. Following this logic, Foucault points out that in the Greco-Roman *culture of the self* when the relationship between subject and knowledge is raised, it is discovered: “the need to modify the knowledge of the world in such a way that assumes, for the subject, in the experience of the subject, a certain spiritual form and value for the salvation of the subject” (Foucault, 2014, p. 304).

In his course at the *College de France* in 1982 entitled *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault analyzes Hellenistic philosophy in detail to show this difference with modern knowledge. Knowledge there acquired the dimension of a kind of transformative exercise, able to stimulate the autonomy of the individual, to promote a self-made with that knowledge and to connect it intimately to the singularity of each one. This autonomy does not imply losing the dimension of the relational links with others, since conceiving an entity in this way is impossible in the perspective of a thinker like Foucault.

The concept of *Athlete of the event* synthesizes very well this practical dimension that enables the link with knowledge. In the following, readers will notice how interesting is the conceptualization about the athletic dimension that was linked with knowledge. Through the *meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, for example, Foucault analyzes that the art of living in ancient times was assimilated to a sporting art or an art of struggle. Fou-

cault says: “The art of living is more like struggle than dance, in the sense that you always have to be on guard and stand up against the blows that fall on us and suddenly” (Foucault, 2014, p. 308). And a little further down he describes the *athlete of the event* as follows: “In essence, the athlete of ancient spirituality must fight. He must be prepared for a struggle in which his adversary is everything that can come to him from the outside world: the event. The ancient athlete is an event athlete” (Foucault, 2014, p. 308). For this reason, the connection with knowledge was conceived as a *work on itself* and aimed to strengthen an *Event Athlete*, an individual capable of developing rational behaviors that allowed him to overcome different adversities:

What is this equipment (paraskeue) made of? The equipment which must be provided, and which makes it possible to respond as soon as necessary and by means which are both simpler and more effective, consists of *logoi* (speeches). By *logoi*, it is not enough to simply understand an equipment of propositions, principles, axioms, etc., that are true. One must understand discourses as they are materially existing statements. (...) the athlete is, therefore, the one who provides himself with phrases that are actually heard or read, remembered, repronounced, written and rewritten specifically by him. They are the lessons of the teacher, the phrases he heard, the phrases he said, that he said to himself (Foucault, 2014, p. 309).

Here, it is necessary to clarify that another essential presupposition of modern knowledge is to assume that subjectivity is a kind of entity given beforehand. The French typifies this assumption as a “Cartesian moment” (2014, p. 36), since, according to Descartes, the subject was the only thing that could remain alive in the sea of doubt. At this point, Foucault seems to be interested in the practices of the ancient self, through which it is possible to notice that the fact of lacking essence, does not prevent the relationship of the self from being stylized and cultivated in the best way possible. For this reason, the study of the ancient *practices of the self* allows to show some possibilities of constitution and transformation of individuals. Unlike the pedagogical modality that establishes modernity, in the ancient arts of existence “it is about allowing the individual to acquire a certain ontological status that opens a modality of experience qualifiable in terms of tranquility, happiness, beatitude, etc. Modification of being, transition from one ontological status to another, opening of modalities of experience” (Foucault, 2020, p. 47). Thus, everything seems to indicate that in this conceptualization carried out by Foucault, the link

with knowledge points to an ethical shift that is fundamental and aims to question the truths and forms of valuation naturalized by the individual.

For this purpose, it is sufficient to analyze the way in which the Frenchman recovers some philosophical exercises proposed by Marcus Aurelius to take some distance from certain forms of hegemonic valuation. The Stoic proposes to decompose some highly valued elements. There are forms of assessment that are made from delirium and excessive imposition, generating in the subject the attachment to a false unity that translates into a kind of spell that dominates it. The recovery of this exercise of stoic deconstruction seems to be a key point in Foucault's reflection, since it combines a decomposition in singularities that recalls the archaeological-genealogical procedure but enhancing its role in the transformation and the reasoned constitution of the individual. Foucault comments:

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We touch the things; we reach their heart, and we go through them in their entirety in such a way that we can see what they are. So, we can strip them down and see from above, see from the top down what little value they have, what cheapness they have. And so, we can get rid of the spell by which they threaten to capture us and captivate us. Exercise has the same goal: it is about establishing the freedom of the subject through that top-down look that we are going to direct at things, that allows us to go through them from side to side, reach their heart and show how invaluable they are. In this passage, Marco Aurelio says: it is not enough to apply this method to things, we must also apply it to our lives and to ourselves (Foucault, 2014, p. 295).

In this fragment, those relationships mentioned above are clearly observed: knowing the world applied also to itself to achieve more autonomy. Note that the idea that guides the fragment points to a use of philosophical knowledge to guide a work of diminishing relations of domination. These reflections allow showing a more proactive dimension of the Foucaultean approach, able to contribute to concretize the proposal of Flores and Villareal (2021) who have noticed the link between self-care and pedagogy in the last Foucault⁵.

It is evident that the work of the last Foucault is aimed at questioning the hermeneutics of a subject given beforehand—more typical of the Christian and then modern worldview—to conceive a constitution process of subjectivity related, mainly, to the ancient ascesis. Through these ideas, the link between knowledge and power that Foucault had realized in his more traditional writings is expanded. As Edgardo Castro points out (2016), Foucault moves, in his last texts, from an analysis of the truth of power to enhance the power of truth and what can be produced from it.

However, this allows to clearly appreciate the amount of interesting and pedagogically relevant remarks made by Foucault in the previous quotations. Through the practice postulates of the Stoic self, the philosopher invites to use various traditional exercises of reading, writing, and listening to the words of a teacher with a transformative sense, i.e., to promote a more elaborate constitution of the person. The materiality of the discourse also constitutes a suggestive invitation to appropriate the knowledge and use it. We do not prepare to follow the norm or to follow what a teacher says, nor do we prepare only to respond to the utilitarian requirements that the world of work poses us. We prepare ourselves first of all for a life, with its good and bad things, with its unsolvable questions and its borderline situations. Through this route, it is possible to radicalize the singularity itself as a point of excess over attempts at normalization. The concept of excess indicates that subjectivation is an irreducible ground for normalization and a propitious space for a singular constitution of the individual. This topic has been extensively studied in the framework of Foucault's studies. The French philosopher Potte Boneville (2007), for example, invites us to think of the category of subject in Foucault as a kind of irreducible fold influenced by the norm, but not totally determined by it. Subjectivation would be a process without subject and at the same time subjective:

The word "yes" is decisive here. By being designated as "yes," the moral subject is well distinguished from a "thing." And yet he does not refer, in French, to a "I" that would constitute his foundation; nor does he come to an I, which would give him a finished form and allow him, finally, at the end of his training, to separate himself from the historical context. (...) Subjectivation is, then, a practice, a *praxis* in the Aristotelian sense; praxis through which the "yes" never gets to be subjectivated (Potte Boneville, 2007, p. 219).

Following this line, the Spanish philosopher Fernando Fuentes Megías (2021) argues that this reflection on the techniques of the self enables a pedagogical reading of the last texts of Foucault. In fact, it allows to think that those points of criticism that the philosopher identified as strategies to exercise power over others, can be, at the same time, spaces to exercise an education as an ethical constitution of the subject:

The idea that there is a set of self-complementary techniques to the domination techniques that Foucault had studied in *Vigilant and Punishing* among other places, contributes to support a pedagogical reading of his work. A central element of any educational relationship is the

guide, the undisputed protagonist of every possible poetic education. The Foucaultean categorization of relationships between subjects turns the concept of government into an alternative to that of domination, allowing the opening of a workspace to the ethics of self-care (Fuentes Megías, 2021, p. 232).

According to these ideas, Foucault's perspective can contribute to the teaching of philosophy courses - both in secondary and higher levels - by appealing to this strategy. Thus, philosophical reflection is not necessarily limited to criticism and distortion of the obvious. It can also point to an exercise of transformation and formation of new relationships with oneself and others. There is a comparable dynamic between those who read, write and listen and those who practice sports, and therefore, in philosophy there are questions of the order of an experience rather than the contemplation of entelechies. Showing this ethical shift from philosophical knowledge can be a very attractive resource capable of resignifying the hackneyed path of mere content transmission.

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The relationship between pedagogy and psychagogy

Thus, in the previous fragments there were many tools typical of traditional pedagogy such as reading, writing, listening to the teacher, but that acquire a renewed idea when thinking from the methodological openness (regarding the modern worldview) mentioned above. All these reflections lead Foucault to show a situation comparable to that which is evident with the function of philosophical knowledge, knowledge of the world and the *techniques of the self*. Just as in ancient times, philosophy was far from being a contemplation element of the entities, the pedagogical exercise went hand in hand with the exercise of *psychagogy*. This concept refers to the use of knowledge that goes beyond the mere transmission of skills and knowledge about the world and points to a transformation of the individual. Following is a fragment of Foucault through which it can be seen the way in which the philosopher relates pedagogy and *psychagogy*:

If calling pedagogical, therefore, the relationship consisting of endowing any subject with skills defined beforehand, I believe that it can be called “psychagogical” the transmission of a truth that does not have the function of providing any subject with any of skills, etc., but of modifying the way of being of that subject to which we are directed. (...) In Greco-Roman antiquity, in the psychagogical relationship, the essential weight of truth, the need to say truthfully, the rules to which we must

submit ourselves when saying truthfully, to say truthfully and for the truth to produce its effect - namely, the mutation effect of the way of being of the subject - falls essentially on the teacher, the director, and even the friend or in any case the adviser (...) Truth and obligations of truth are on the side of the teacher. That is true of any pedagogy. It is in ancient pedagogy, of course, but also in what we might call ancient psychagogy. In this sense and for this reason, ancient psychology is very close to pedagogy (Foucault, 2014, p. 388).

The fragment shows several elements that can only be mentioned briefly, but that allow to have a notion of the still unexplored richness of the last Foucauldian texts to think about educational issues. First, a function of truth appears as a producer of effects in the individual. If the connection between the previous quotations is considered, it may be seen that these effects will no longer be understood solely as the action of a normalizing power on life, but as a way of stimulating the practices of freedom as opposed to naturalized valuations. As Gallo and Espinel (2021, p. 8) point out, such practices make it possible to regulate power relations to avoid domination states. Likewise, an emphasis on another traditional element appears, i.e., the role of a teacher, which is no longer reduced to a role of indoctrinator as could be deduced from the description of the *disciplinary society*, but which exercises an important task when it comes to increasing the possibilities of freedom of individuals.

But beyond the strictly political question—which is always present—it is possible to raise some hypotheses about the use of Foucauldian ideas for the transmission of knowledge. At this point, perhaps we can think of some parallel between Foucault's *psychagogy* and that famous idea of the ignorant teacher proposed by the philosopher Jacques Rancière (2002). For both, the emphasis would not be on the transmission of objective, innocuous and indifferent knowledge for the life of the person — which on the other hand would only reproduce the teacher's perspective — but the key is to promote a transformation process of the individual who learns, so that he can be interested, and, most importantly, turn knowledge into a vital guideline for his own life, an issue that exceeds the utilitarian dimension of knowledge. It is touching the example presented by Rancière from the experience of a young man—Jacotot's son—who possessed limited abilities for studying, but who learned Hebrew instead and became an excellent lithographer. Commenting on this example, Rancière states: "Hebrew, was never helpful for him, only to know what the best gifted and most informed intelligences would always be ignored. It was not Hebrew at all" (Rancière, 2002, p. 14). Note that in

the final sentence of the quote, we can observe this change of perspective that puts the very object of knowledge in the background, to highlight the consequences produced by the process of acquiring it. In other words, knowledge can serve to live because people are animals capable of producing concepts.

One of the last texts written by Michel Foucault is a beautiful reflection that shows the vital dimension of conceptual production: “Forming concepts is a way of living and not of killing life; it is a way of living in a relative mobility and not an attempt to immobilize life” (Foucault, 2012, p. 265). It can clearly be seen the athletic dimension that Foucault wanted to rescue from the relation with knowledge and that even, in the previous example, is combined with a recognition of the singularity of a person. Knowledge also makes sense from the singular plot of the person who exercises it and makes it his own, reason for which it cannot be said that a teacher can transmit a universally utilitarian or meaningful knowledge but must consider the characteristics of the person and be tested on a case-by-case basis. I think that the change from utopia to heterotopia suggested by Foucault (1999, p. 435) could be traced, a topic eloquently studied by the authors Gallo and Espinel (2021, p. 8) in education.

Indeed, the Foucauldian perspective enables an educational process that renounces utopias as ultimate ends and that is predisposed to enable heterotopias, i.e., atypical spaces, indefinable by their non-essentiality, but localizable by their singularity, where everyone can transit in their own way through the paths that enables contact with knowledge. That does not mean a person can walk through those spaces without someone else’s guidance. Both the role of the teacher and the guidelines offered by curriculum designs can be crucial aspects in this process of stimulating *psychagogical* effects.

Importance of Psychagogy in the Digital Age

These ideas offer philosophical assumptions capable of guiding pedagogical intervention in multiple fields of knowledge. When I started teaching philosophy at a technical school, I decided to ask its principal — who, in addition to being an engineer, has a degree in education — what he thinks is the importance of humans in technical specialties. He pointed out to me that the most important thing, in his view, was to develop skills that were not only geared towards repetitive and uncritical technical production, but also to foster joint work and creativity. The world of work



requires being able to operate creatively with technical knowledge, rather than becoming an inert gear of the production system. The two issues are highly relevant. Hence, the importance of the ethical shift generated by knowledge reappears, a process that could be worked even from the technical knowledge if the philosophical approach with which they are addressed is adequate. Indeed, much of the humanistic, social, and pedagogical reflection of recent years has been devoted to thinking rigorously about the impact generated by digital media. The use of these devices has radically changed traditional ways of communication and interpersonal relationship. This is a complete proof of the changes generated by the relation with some knowledge. Therefore, leaving aside the debate of whether digital media are good or bad - since, according to Rancière, centrality is not placed on the object in question - there can be no doubt that its virtuous use can develop if taking a dimension of that psychagogical relationship with knowledge.

In this sense, it is noted that *psychagogy* as derived from the philosophy of the last Foucault allows recognizing an irreducibility point of educational intervention. The digital media has generated many questions in the field of pedagogy: what is transmitted today when the objects of knowledge are already mostly on the Internet? What is the role of the teacher when it seems that digital media is on its way to offer tools to become self-taught, and what is the role of education in this context?

Through a very recent text, Inés Dussel teaches us that the pandemic has generated interesting questions to think about the future of education and its uniqueness in the face of the advance of digital media. The Covid-19 contingency revealed both the usefulness of these means for education, as well as inequalities in access to them; it provided clarifications on which devices are usually useful for education and which are not. Dussel's (2021) diagnosis is balanced and abandons binomial judgments about the media—i.e., for or against. It recognizes their presence in the educational task but points out that there are irreducible issues of it. What the pandemic proved, even with all the things it challenged and even renewed, is that education continues to require spaces, processes and human relationships that can never be emulated by the digital media. The author says:

Google is launching a seminar and a program called “*The Anywhere School*”; I rather think that it should encourage a movement to the contrary, which affirms that school is always about making a place, not necessarily physical, that organizes an intergenerational meeting with specific knowledge, which is not done in public transportation or being

connected all the time to the cell phone. Hopefully, awareness of the hard work of sustaining all this, of its social relevance, and of the need to live up to that work and collective energy will persist (Dussel, 2021, p. 137).

In this context, Foucaultian philosophy is fully valid, since establishing a *psychagogical* relationship with knowledge is also one of the tasks of educational institutions. Education must explore ways of stimulating *psychagogical* processes. Consequently, it is very important to rethink the philosophical approaches, objectives, and dynamics of the educational task. In the age of information, this whole question of the athletic dimension of the relation with knowledge and the ethical shift that it can generate constitute some basic assumptions for the formation of human beings.

For this reason, it is so urgent to show that knowledge transforms and that it has effects on the subject. The case of digital media has been mentioned, but one could also think, among others, of mathematics. The philosopher Alain Badiou mentions the transformations produced in Georg Cantor's subjectivity by the discovery of the infinite. And Badiou himself (2010, p. 121) uses these mathematical ideas to rethink philosophical ontology and develop a theory about the subject. Says Badiou:

Having offered rigorous proof that the set of rational numbers—fractions—is numerable, and thus that those numbers, contrary to all our immediate intuition, are no more 'numerical' than natural integers, he exclaims 'I see it, but I do not believe it!' (Badiou, 2010, pp. 121-122).

Consequently, to show that something is not being learned because it is commanded by parents, the norm, the productive system or anything, in short, to show the "athletic" possibilities of ethical involvement, personal and social transformation that knowledge can generate is a task of education. In other words, we must never lose sight of the fact that the education is a way of exercising the power that can derive, both towards the transformation of the present and towards domination forms that cancel out the possibilities of freedom.

Parrhesia and pedagogy

From the above, it is possible to give a more concrete look of the way in which education could be articulated to promote dynamics capable of stimulating ruptures and promote the invention of new forms of life.

At this point, it may be thought that education always depends on a state, a political project, and even, at present, on the strong influences of



business. So, to what extent can education be said to be emancipatory and not limited to delivering a truly functional discourse to certain sectors? Listening to the teacher, in the end, does not imply a way of submitting to the truthful utterance of another? And taking into account what was discussed at the end of the previous section, what is the uniqueness of this truthful saying that promotes education in the proliferation of multiple places of broadcast of information speech?

The concept of *parrhesia* can help us think about these questions. It is Foucault's latest works. *Parrhesia* comes to fully manifest the power of truth in the constitution of the subject and in the transformation of a regime. Parrhesia promotes speaking frankly, allowing to show a way of articulating a true discourse capable of offering a point of dissent against the prevailing forms of life. As Foucault states (2017, pp.118, 231) this discourse unfolds to the fabric of current devices and valuations, and has a kind of *parrhesistic pact* between the person who tells the truth and who must show willingness to listen to it:

Parrhesia covenant consists on: the prince, the leader, the one who possesses power but does not know the truth, addresses the one who possesses the truth but does not have the power and tells him 'Tell me the truth, whatever that truth, you will not be punished' (Foucault, 2017, pp. 118, 231).

Therefore, it is possible to show two conceptual modulations that can be extracted from there for the purposes of this paper: the first aims to think the relations between education and politics; the second refers to the interactions that occur between students and teachers in the classroom.

Previously it was analyzed how in Foucault's last texts the power of truth is oriented to promote the critique and transformation of the individual. In the aforementioned *Hermeneutics* course of *the subject*, Foucault (2014, p. 246) states that the most important point to think political resistance is in the relationship of itself with itself. The issue is strictly logical. Based on the strategic and microphysical analysis of power -typical of Foucauldian investigations- the relation of the self constitutes an essential node in the whole conformed by the questions of government and power relations:

Which simply means that, in the analysis of power-governmentality-government relations of self and others-the relationship of self to itself constitutes a chain, a plot that is there, around these notions that we must be able to articulate, I think, the question of politics and the question of ethics (Foucault, 2014, p. 247).



In the courses entitled *Government of itself and others* (2014 b) and *Courage of the Truth* (2011), Foucault will fully address this relationship expressed in the quote. Returning to Plato's action against the tyrant of Syracuse, he will describe the role that philosophy plays in the face of politics. The reality of philosophy does not lie in telling politics what to do, but in encouraging an exercise of constant and permanent friction, which systematically reminds of the lack of necessity in the exercise of power. This method, as suggested, leads to show ways and inventions not yet thought out. In his last reflections the philosopher will insist much on the relation that make up knowledge and power, those discourses of truth that show the historical emergence conditions of that relation, enhancing the possibilities of autonomous and singular constitution of individuals. For this reason, philosophy must promote an ascesis, i.e., a proper *self-government* capable of motivating a *truthful* speech to politics. The agent who intends to perform a *psychagogical* act in the other, must give account in himself of a way of life that accompanies that claim:

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To be an agent of truth, to be a philosopher, and as a philosopher to claim for himself the monopoly of *parrhesia*, will not mean only that one pretends to be able to enunciate truth in teaching, in the advice he gives, in the speeches he delivers, but that he is effectively in his own life, an agent of truth. The *parrhesia* as a way of life, the *parrhesia* as a way of accompaniment, the *parrhesia* in the life of the philosopher are constituent elements of that philosophical monopoly that he claims for himself (Foucault, 2014b, p. 327).

In Foucault's analysis (2014b, p. 327), Socrates appears to typify a way of exercising *parrhesia* based on the coherence of a philosophical life taken to the limit, which poses an irreducible distance to political power. But, at this point, one must be careful. Foucault does not fall for the neo-liberal nonsense of apoliticism and neutrality. On the contrary, politics and philosophy are irreducible instances, but they tend to a necessary relationship. Therefore, each one must be irreducible to be real and serve the other. In this sense, Foucault states: "The question of philosophy is not the question of politics, but the question of the subject in politics" (Foucault, 2014b, p. 326). *Parrhesia* is closely linked to this *truthful saying* that philosophy wields to politics:

Philosophy will present itself as possessing the monopoly of *parrhesia* insofar as it manifests itself as an operation on souls, as psychology. And instead of being a power of persuasion that convinces souls of everything, it is presented as an operation that must allow them to distinguish the

true from the false and give, by philosophical paideia, the necessary instruments to make that distinction (Foucault, 2014b, p. 311).

The episode that best typifies the parrhesiastic attitude and that Foucault interprets with great mastery is the classic encounter between King Alexander the Great and Diogenes the cynic. There, a philosopher challenges the investiture of a king without more foundation than his own courage and asserting a radically ascetic way of life assumed as true. The challenge provokes the wrath of the king who for a moment thinks of eliminating the philosopher, but then predisposes himself to listening and transforms himself. The saying of Diogenes constitutes a *psychagogical* saying that points to the transformation of the other. Diógenes does not give political advice, does not give advice about ways to be king, does not offer any psychological or coaching theory to legitimize his authority in the head of people and conduct it properly. What Diogenes does is to perform a *psychagogical* procedure closely linked to questioning the effects of a *regime of truth* that operates on the individual. The cynical philosopher operates from the presupposition of the absence of the need for power; he merely points out to a ruler the difficulties entailed by his imposture and the defects that are always linked to the regal character “inclination for pleasure, the appetite for riches and disorderly ambition in political life” (Foucault, 2017, p. 234).

From the above ideas, a pedagogical reading of the concept of *parrhesia* as recovered by Foucault can be made. First of all, it should be clarified that not all educational action can typify within the implications of the parrhesiastic *truthful saying*. Often, content aligned with specific skills must be taught. But it is also true that any educational action must at the same time concern for reflecting on the visions of the world in which the plurality of knowledge (technical, professional, humanistic, etc.) is used and applied. Even within the field of technical and digital knowledge, it is possible to explore various uses and applications capable of confronting, questioning and trying to move the commands of the dominant common sense. On the other hand, it is true that any education must contribute to strengthening the ethical and moral standards required by a society, but it must be able to enable, at the same time, criticism of those principles and promote the invention of better, more inclusive, pluralistic and diversity-adjusted ones. In this sense, it is evident that the educational task consists in exercising a *psychagogical* role to the politics for which the notion of *parrhesia* becomes important.

Much of the educational task is directed to question the implications of a *regime of truth* that organizes the knowledge and criteria of

government that develops an authority. That does not mean assuming rebellion without cause or believing that education has nothing to do with politics. It involves, perhaps, using that irreducible character of *truthful saying*, to provoke, arouse, stimulate and motivate in others some questions that confuse him and lead him to rethink his more spontaneous actions. To that end, the pact of mutual listening between the poles of the relationship must be accepted as a necessary and indispensable condition for that true word to have an effect.

This task cannot be accomplished without appealing to the smallest plots in which power is played, i.e., the knot formed between the government of itself and of others. For this reason, the pedagogical reading of *parrhesia* also occurs in the interaction between teachers and students. As argued, the parrhesiastic role of the teacher is closely linked to the *psychagogical* function that he can develop. Hence, it is also necessary that the task of the teacher is nurtured by some of the characteristics that presupposes the truthful saying of *parrhesia*. Motivating the transformation of others can only be done from a coherent position with respect to what is assumed as the desire to educate the other. The saying of *parrhesia*, as seen in the fragment cited above, is not limited to the function of teaching and counseling, but is assumed in an integral way, in the life of the person and even in the philosopher.

Foucault points out: “Parrhesia as a way of life, Parrhesia as a way of behavior, Parrhesia even in the very essence of the philosopher, are constitutive elements of that philosophical monopoly that he claims for himself” (Foucault, 2014b, p. 327). Gallo and Espinel (2021) mention the incoherence of a teacher who imposes on others what he is not able to do for himself:

It is curious that the teacher who invites reading, studying, occasionally abandons studying and reading, being always busy and loaded with emergencies forgets what makes him a teacher: studying (Gallo and Espinel, 2021, p. 52).

It is true that such emergencies are often due to the need to run from one side to the other to guarantee a decent wage. This is a political issue that goes beyond the ethical dimension and should guarantee the conditions for it. It is possible to see another dimension of the *parrhesiastic covenant*. The *psychagogical* action of education has as an inescapable condition, which is the investment of social resources for its maintenance. But leaving aside that aspect for a moment, it is desirable that a teacher can question how to exercise his role as coherently as possible.



Another aspect that derives from the above, again refers to the dimension of the transmission of knowledge. What is being transmitted? The *parrhesia* shows once again (with Ranci re) that something is really taught that is not known. At this point, Diogenes does not transmit objective world knowledge, but makes critical remarks that lead the other to modify the relationship with himself, to take care of himself and to take a more elaborate and less idealistic awareness of his own position. In another work it has been suggested that *parrhesia* helps to assume the irreducible plot of one's own desire (Ortiz, 2022). This modulation of the concept can also greatly help the pedagogical task. While there are subjects in which the content is relevant (teaching to use a rasp, or a lathe, or teaching what law says, or parts of the human body), no teacher can believe himself capable of teaching everything related to a subject. But also, as mentioned before, nobody can know the possibilities of invention and appropriation that a subject can do with that which he is trying to teach himself. The educational task is simply to try to generate some connection between knowledge and what it can generate in the vital and singular plot of a person. In this sense, the notion of *parrhesia* can effectively compose with those concepts of pedagogy that aim to act by contagion, stimulation, and interest, rather than by the imposition of contents. This concept of contagion to think about the transmission of knowledge is from the Argentinian philosopher and educator Jorge E. Noro: "The classroom is a place of tension and dialogue, not propaganda. It is not a question of indoctrinating, imposing, forcing to repeat, or even of conquering (if this implies some kind of violence on the thought of the other), but of sharing, of contagious, of participating of the same common knowledge" (Noro, 2013, p. 18).

It may be necessary to make some distinctions, since the teacher seems to be the figure of authority within the classroom and the *parody* always circulates from the one who has less power to the one who has more. Recently, however, it has become apparent that the old links of disciplinary authority are becoming increasingly horizontal. Often it is the teacher's task to challenge the impositions of a majority common sense, which is why he must use the Socratic resources that aim to question what the other believes he knows, assuming the risks inherent in that situation. But often, there is also no shortage of teachers who continue to stand on a very high ground of truth and accept no other *truthful saying* than that which they themselves may utter. Here comes another dimension of the *parrhesistic pact* that perhaps can be thought of as a basic

approach to regulate classroom exchanges so that the experience can be mutually transformative.

Conclusions

This paper has traced the main topics of the philosophy of the last Foucault and its possible relation with educational practices. The task was complex, since it involves exposing an author with a very deep production and drawing a link with the pedagogical discourse. For this reason, a brief but rigorous tracing of the main concepts has been carried out, trying to point out the point at which they are linked to more traditional aspects of pedagogical studies. Clearly, each of these topics can lead to other developments that can deepen, modulate and extend the suggested linkages. The emphasis of this paper has been to point out the methodological and practical torsion that Foucault operates towards his latest studies. The recovery of ancient philosophy leads him to outline a way of thinking about a relationship with truth that is no longer understood solely from the point of view of domination. This twist allows us to complement his studies on power, which have had such an impact on the pedagogical discourse, showing not only the possibilities of deconstruction offered by philosophy, but also the effective possibilities of transformation and constitution of this method. The central thing of this operation was put in the concept of *psychagogy*. It marks a counterpoint with an essentialist pedagogy that does not question about the historical and relational condition of the agents involved in the educational process. From this point, *psychagogy* appears as a bet so that the person, in his contact with knowledge, can stop being what it is, enabling possibilities of invention and stylization in his own vital plot. The preceding arguments have shown that this concept can be extended to pedagogical practices without this implying their total denial. Stoic philosophy, as interpreted by Foucault, allows us to offer intuitions to transform the traditional pedagogical work (reading, writing, listening to a teacher) into elements of involvement and transformation of the person. Finally, parrhesia provides a solid conceptual reference for thinking about a link between teachers and students outside the submission that modern pedagogy implied, while also providing precise suggestions about the position of the educational institution regarding politics.



Notes

- 1 In this development, the sense and importance of Foucault's influence in the pedagogical field can be observed.
- 2 In their characterization of reproductivism, the authors Puiggros and Marengo make a statement that could typify the spirit of many of the Foucaultian texts: "The expansion of the school system seems to be more addressed at consolidating the capitalist mode of production or the perpetuation of the relations of domination than at the service of the democratization of society and its transformation into a different system not at the service of the exploitation of the labor force" (Puiggros, Marengo, 2013, p. 71).
- 3 As Paul Vene suggests, "So what is power? Foucault, incidentally, had no devilish idea about him. Let's lay out a grand-scale ideal kind of power. It consists of the ability to drive not physically the behaviors of others. It is the most common thing and the best shared thing; there is power in the family, there is power between two lovers, in the office, in the workshop and in the one-way streets. Millions of small powers form the society from which individuals form the loop" (Veyne, 2014, p. 105).
- 4 In this sense, Álvarez Yáguez points out: "That is why freedom always plays a role in power relations. There can be no radical and simple opposition between power and freedom, since on the one hand the power to exist has to do so in a field where not all actions are determined" (Álvarez Yáguez, 2016, p. 93).
- 5 In a work that addresses the relationship between subjectivation and power in its link with education, Graciela N. Flores and Ximena M. Villareal state: "there is space in education for the care of oneself and especially of others, that is the primary responsibility in the pedagogical link, as philosophers of education like Cullen or Mellich, among others, have raised. As for self-care, the Foucauldian approach proposes a lifestyle that opens the possibility of resisting the powers in the complex social fabric. Foucault (2012) considers that it is possible to invent 'other possibilities' of life, understanding that the fundamental task of our time is to dismantle the construction mechanisms of subjectivities and perform a type of action that rejects the subjectivation that has imposed for centuries Western culture" (Flores and Villareal, 2021, p. 17).

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