

The body and the contemporary: between the pleasure principle, the asceticism and the *áskesis*^{1 2 3}

O corpo e o contemporâneo: entre o princípio do prazer, o ascetismo e a áskesis

El cuerpo y lo contemporáneo: entre el principio de placer, el ascetismo y la áskesis

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Abstract

This paper presents a debate about the status of the body in contemporary times. It starts from the premise that this object lies in the tension between the pleasure principle, as a result of the appeals of consumerist hedonism in today's society, and, on the other hand, of body asceticism, inherited from the secularization of the body formation of Puritan asceticism. In both records a relationship of heteronomy of the subject is seen in relation to the body and the world it inhabits. As an alternative to this heteronomous tension, a possibility of human body formation is postulated from the registration of the *áskesis*, in the way it was proposed by the French thinker Michel Foucault, when analysing the philosophical schools of Greek and Roman Hellenism.

Keywords: body, pleasure, control, Education of the human person.

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Resumo

O presente trabalho apresenta um debate sobre o estatuto do corpo na contemporaneidade. Parte da premissa de que esse objeto se encontra na tensão entre o princípio do prazer, fruto dos apelos do hedonismo consumista da sociedade atual, e, por outra parte, do ascetismo corporal, herdado da secularização da formação corporal da ascese puritana. Em ambos os registros se diagnostica uma relação de heteronomia do sujeito com relação ao corpo e ao mundo que habita. Como uma alternativa a essa tensão de caráter heterônomo se postula uma possibilidade de formação corporal humana a partir do registro da áskesis, nos moldes em que fora proposto pelo pensador francês Michel Foucault, ao analisar as escolas do helenismo grego e romano.

Palavras-chave: corpo, prazer, controle, educação da pessoa humana.

Resumen

Este artículo presenta un debate sobre el estatuto del cuerpo en la contemporaneidad. Se parte de la premisa de que este objeto radica en la tensión entre el principio del placer, fruto de los atractivos del hedonismo consumista en la sociedad actual y, por otro lado, del ascetismo corporal, heredado de la secularización de la formación corporal del ascetismo puritano. En ambos registros se diagnostica una relación de heteronomía del sujeto en relación con el cuerpo y con el mundo que habita. Como alternativa a esta tensión heterónoma, se postula una posibilidad de formación del cuerpo humano a partir del registro de la áskesis, tal como lo propuso el pensador francés Michel Foucault, al analizar las escuelas de helenismo griego y romano.

Palabras-clave: cuerpo, placer; control, educación de la persona humana.

Introduction

Admitting our historicity, a central dimension for us – “we are history”, says Octávio Paz – produces an ambiguous feeling. On the one hand, a sense of freedom, when we break away from preconceived models, ready to “put in practice”. On the other hand, we experience a feeling of insecurity generated by the constant need to make choices, to answer for them without certainties, and to live with the provisory nature of constant news. In the first case, our “discontent” arises from the excess of order and lack of freedom. In the second, it comes from the excess of freedom and the absence of order (Bauman, 1998). Within this panorama we live our human condition.

Coherent with the historicity before mentioned, human condition is also permeated by it; therefore, the human being is a “being”, it is not a fixed substance, it is a “being-in-the-world”, constituted in this relationship with the world, which is also historical – it is, therefore, a mutable being that reveals itself in singular contexts. We begin, then, by asking: what is the singularity of the contemporary world?

We would like to discuss some characteristics of this world, which some call postmodern or late modernity. For this, we will use Zygmunt Bauman’s introductory text of his book *"Postmodernity and its Discontents"*. The author takes as a reference Freud's thesis that civilization is built on an instinctual renunciation (Bauman, 1998). “Without coercion there is no civilization” says Freud (according to Bauman, 1998, p. 8), that is, left to ourselves, we do not become human, recalling Kant. Humans who seek their pleasures elaborating the instinctual energy in civilizational frameworks, and not in the animal world, in instincts.

Freud (*apud* Bauman, 1998) emphasizes that the pleasures of civilized life “come in a package deal (...) with sufferings, satisfaction with discontents, submission with rebellion” (p. 8)⁴. In this framework, the “pleasure principle” folds into the “reality principle”. Civilized man “has exchanged a portion of his possibilities of happiness for a portion of security.” (Freud, quoted by Bauman, 1998, p. 8). Which, obviously, generates a feeling of “discontent” (hence the title of Freud's work: *Civilization and its discontents*). Discontent that derives from an “excess of order” that has as its counterpart the “shortage of freedom”.

This structure went into crisis, called the “crisis of modernity”. A crisis on how to order the world. This is the contemporary framework in which “we are human”. In the words of Bauman (1998),

ours, however, is the time of deregulation. The reality principle has today to defend itself in the court of justice in which the pleasure principle is the presiding judge.(...) Compulsion and forced renunciation has turned from an irritating necessity into an unwarranted assault launched against individual freedom. (p. 9)

⁴ Translation note: Whenever possible, we have resorted to published English translations to the direct quotations, so as to keep the familiar terminology for English-speaking readers. However, the date and page numbers refer to those in the bibliographic references of the article.

However, this process must not be understood as a one-way movement, but from an ambiguous perspective: between, on the one hand, the prophecy of the end of certainties, based on the defense of differences (which do not always signal a horizon of dialogue), in the exaltation of bodily experimentation and in the radical critique of humanism, and, on the other hand, the professing of the need of absolute certainties to base social life, many of them referenced in (almost) religious beliefs or secularized principles. The empire of hedonism can also be understood from another point of view. Michel Foucault, in a text dated 1975, states that the logic of investment of power over the body changes, in contemporary times, from a logic of control-repression to one based on the principle of control-stimulation (Foucault, 1979). The apparent liberation of the body would become object of power by another way of normalization, this time guided by the investment in aesthetic principles, turned into moral values: “you must be beautiful!”, subjected to contemporary aesthetic values, assuming for this purpose a way of life defined in a heteronormative way. The author tells us:

The body thus became the issue of a conflict between parents and children, the child and the instances of control. The revolt of the sexual body is the reverse effect of this encroachment. What is the response on the side of power? An economic (and perhaps also ideological) exploitation of eroticisation, from sun-tan products to pornographic films. Responding precisely to the revolt of the body, we find a new mode of investment which presents itself no longer in the form of control by repression but that of control by stimulation. 'Get undressed- but be slim, good-looking, tanned!' For each move by one adversary, there is an answering one by the other. (Foucault, 1979, p. 105)

The Foucauldian diagnosis of the mid-1970s remains current and is certainly radicalized from the numerous practices of technical intervention in the body, as well as the medicalization of beauty (Poli Neto & Caponi, 2007). The body is also strained by a powerful investment of power, for its subjection to a normalized life, because it conforms to biomedical (hetero) normativity. Thus, these two poles must be understood as vectors of a field of tension in which the late-modern, or post-modern, project develops. This field of tension will be the object of the present text, signaling its lights and shadows. Still, we will tension these two poles with the idea of asceticism proposed by Michel Foucault, when analyzing Greco-Latin Hellenism.

About the present time and being contemporary

On the one hand, the present time seems to believe that we will be better off without the constraints of civility that education helps to promote. An illusion that thinkers like Kant and Freud did not support, as they believed that it is from this coercive exercise that the human emerges.

In this new scenario, any civilizing objective that “still” stands as worthy of being pursued and fulfilled can only be achieved “through individual spontaneity, will and effort” (Bauman, 1998, p. 9), reviving the belief in a so-called “invisible hand” that can compose the sum of individual delusions of ever more pleasure.

Regarding the contemporary world, which some call postmodern, or late-modern, Bauman (1998) states that: “postmodern men and women exchanged a portion of their possibilities of security for a portion of happiness” (p. 10). Fortunately, however, this exchange experience has taught us that, as Freud already stated, according to Bauman (1998):

There is no gain without loss, and the hope of an admirable purification of gains from losses is as futile as the proverbial dream of a free lunch – but the gains and losses proper to any disposition of the human condition must be carefully taken into account, so that the optimal balance between the two can be sought, even if (or rather because) hard-won sobriety and wisdom prevent us, postmodern men and women, from indulging in a fantasy about a balance sheet financial statement that has only the credits column. (p. 10)

Bauman, inspired by Freud, allows us to understand some characteristics of the present time that we live in. But what relationship do we have with this time? In other words, what does it mean to be contemporary? This question is posed by Agamben in one of his lectures, and we follow his position. The author seeks in Nietzsche a first understanding of the theme, who conceives contemporaneity as a disconnection and a dissociation with the present. According to Agamben (2009):

Those who are truly contemporary. who truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands. They are thus in (his sense irrelevant [inattuale]). But precisely because of this condition, precisely through this disconnection and this anachronism, they are more capable than others of perceiving and grasping their own time.. (pp. 58-59)

This noncoincidence does not mean a nostalgic appeal, an escape from its time, but a singular relationship with time itself, adhering to and distancing itself from a disjunction and an anachronism, says Agamben (2009), as he understands that “those who coincide too well with the epoch, those who are perfectly tied to it in every respect, are not contemporaries, precisely because they do not manage to see it; they are not able to firmly hold their gaze on it” (p. 59).

Further on, he tries another definition of the contemporary, in which he states that “the contemporary is he who firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as to perceive not its light, but rather its darkness” (Agamben, 2009, p. 62). It is important here to highlight what the author understands by “perceiving the darkness”. Trying to elaborate an answer, he affirms that a “contemporary” is one who “does not allow himself to be blinded by the lights of the century and manages to glimpse in them the part of the shadow, their intimate obscurity” (pp. 63-64). He is the one who feels challenged by the darkness of his time more than by the lights, which, in a way, seduces everyone. For this reason, the author states, “contemporaries are rare” (p. 65).⁵

About what it means to be contemporary, we can ask ourselves again: what obscure aspects does this light projected on the body hide? Costa, taking up the ideas of Ivan Illich, challenges the morality of the present time and denounces the subjection of the body to the universe of exchange and merchandise (Costa, 1995, p. 41). The idolatry of the body (“corpolatry”) and the universe of sensations that accompany it constitutes, according to this thinker, an obstacle to human freedom. He states that

the obsession with surviving and avoiding all suffering at any cost resulted in alienation from the world and from himself. We do not, of course, have to suffer unnecessarily or give up being happy. But when happiness becomes a mere interest for survival and the incessant pursuit of pleasure, the result is a perennial dissatisfaction with oneself, indifference to the other, and the emptying of the very meaning of life. The well-being of the body has become the discontentment of ethics. (p. 41)

This narcissism produces a perverse effect when detaching us from the tradition that constitutes us, which, despite criticisms we might have, laboriously established the human world, culture, and sociability built by the altruistic effort of recognizing someplace for the “we”. In this framework, however,

⁵ Proposing a diagnosis of our time, we could say that the spotlight of the present turns to the individual, producing the hallucination of individualism, and of the body, revered in its cult exacerbated in the so-called “corpolatry”. Light that obscures the human condition built with great effort between the lines of history.

the other doesn't matter. If he is a double of my socio-moral image, he becomes a purveyor of sensations, devoured on the edge of emotional vampirism; if he is a stranger, an unequal, his life or death means nothing to me. The desert is the destination of the “barter self” [emphasis in the original] and the body blinded to the world. (Costa, 1995, p. 42)

We can say that today we live in a new dualism, which advocates that the subject must have total control over his body to achieve the ideal proposed in a given society. The body becomes, hypothetically, a choice.

In addition to this, the notion of “normality” has undergone significant changes in recent times, a movement that points to a narrowing, which makes the pharmaceutical industry happy – after all, alongside the negative news that you are not “normal”, comes the “positive” news (for whom?) that there is a medication available to fit into normality. Christopher Lane, in an interview to *Folha de S. Paulo* (2008), gives us a good example: “The ideal of extroversion becomes a requirement. And those who are not extroverts feel strange, in need of some healing. Industry should alleviate suffering, but it generates new suffering”. Regarding the imperatives of normality, he adds: “People are happiest when they can express themselves as they are.” Imperatives of all kinds make this more and more difficult⁶.

Starting from the characteristic Bauman (2001) perceives in postmodern society, which “engages its members primarily in their capacity as consumers rather than producers.” (p. 90), we have some more aspects that interfere in our perceptions.

According to Bauman (2001), life organized around the role of producer tends to be normatively regulated, but, differently, life organized around consumption does not demand norms, being guided “by seduction, ever rising desires and volatile wishes - no longer by normative regulation.” (p. 90).

Following the proposition of distinguishing a “society of producers” and a “society of consumers”, Bauman states that the former places health as the standard to be achieved by its members, while the latter is guided by the ideal of *fitness*⁷. Although often taken as synonyms, as they envisage goals linked to body care, Bauman (2001) emphasizes that “health and fitness belong to two quite different discourses and appeal to very different concerns” (p. 91).

⁶ These imperatives are massively present in the images that circulate in our midst. Images that have a strong appeal in our social imaginary.

⁷ This notion is similar to the concept of healthism and bioascetic practices, as we will see later, based on Francisco Ortega's analysis.

Health, according to the author, is a normative concept, which allows us to delimit the “norm” and the “abnormality”, and also allows, even if approximately, to describe and measure a body and psychic condition compatible with social demands, which, in a society of producers, tend to be constant and firm. In the words of Bauman (2001),

“being healthy” means in most cases “being employable”: being able to perform well in the factory, to “carry the burden” [emphasis in original] with which work can routinely burden the physical and psychological resistance of the employee. (p. 91)

According to Bauman (2001), the state of “fitness” lacks solidity and cannot be precisely pinned down and circumscribed. “Being fit” means, according to the author, “means to have a flexible, absorptive and adjustable body, ready to live through sensations not yet tried and impossible to specify in advance” (p. 91). Being fit is always more power, unlike health, which is about following norms, “fitness is about the capacity to break all norms and leave every already achieved standard behind.” (p. 92).

As aptitude is, ultimately, unattainable, its pursuit has become, according to Bauman (2001), “state of perpetual self-scrutiny, self-reproach and self-deprecation, and so also of continuous anxiety.” (p. 93). This logic has “contaminated” our understanding of health and, as a result, Bauman states: “health-care, contrary to its nature, becomes uncannily similar to the pursuit of fitness: continual, never likely to bring full satisfaction, uncertain as to the propriety of its current direction and generating on its way a lot of anxiety.” (p. 94). This understanding led Ivan Illich (cited by Bauman, 2001) to state that “pursuit of health has itself become the prevailing pathogenic factor” (p. 94).

The body and inner-worldly asceticism

We believe it is important not to forget that the roots of the relationship with the body in modernity are also given by the tradition of the “work ethic”, a secularized expression of inner-worldly asceticism, a constitutive element of the Protestant ethic. It is interesting to remember at this point that the relationship with the body and with pleasures was guided at its birth by this ethical configuration, from the dispute between the Kings James I and Charles I and the Puritans, about the sports practice on Sundays. Max Weber reminds us that, aiming to

weaken the Puritan movement, which threatened the hegemony of the English royal power, King Charles I mandated the reading of the declaration known as “*Book of Sports*” in all pulpits and allowed sports practice on Sundays, with the expectation that bodily pleasures would override religious duties and jeopardize Puritan asceticism, thus diminishing Puritan non-observance and questioning of royal authority (Weber, 2004). However, the Puritan response did not take long, and, faced with the realization that the sporting phenomenon and the modern games were adversaries to be respected, sports practice was standardized and normalized, functionalizing sport for productive purposes, basing it on the principle of the ascetic life and the logic of work ethics. About sports practice in puritanical circles Weber (2004) says:

Sport was accepted if it served a rational purpose, that of recreation necessary for physical efficiency. But as a means for the spontaneous expression of undisciplined impulses, it was under suspicion; and in so far as it became purely a means of enjoyment, or awakened pride, raw instincts or the irrational gambling instinct, it was of course strictly condemned. (p. 152)

Following this track and reviewing it from the contemporary practices of muscular development, of body-building (literally “building the body”), Courtine (1995) points to the relationship of continuity of inner-worldly asceticism to the development of body practices today. In this sense, the author emphasizes that in contemporary times the body has become the first object to be “managed”, and that its presentation according to the parameters dictated by the body market, centered on strength and beauty, has become an imperative. Still, Courtine shows us that this movement takes place from the secularization of Puritan ethical principles that allow the displacement of man's salvation centered on the soul, to place it in the plane of the body and its potentialities, as a privileged place for the investment of the humans for salvation purposes, since health and muscular rigidity become synonymous with Christian moral righteousness, from the movement known as “Muscular Christianity”. Thus, leisure practices incorporate the principle of work at their core, which is not hedonistic, but very narcissistic. In the author's words:

This displacement of constraints presupposes another economy of enjoyments, a different division of pleasures and pains. The individual, without a doubt, expanded his action potential, and the body gained unprecedented freedom of movement. But if sports exercise is a joy, it is also a duty, which does not happen without assimilating its affiliation to religious practice. In it, the organism is the object of an anxious management. Health, in which the Puritans of yore saw as a good to preserve, tends to become the object of feverish activity. The appearance, which the Protestant ethic wanted to be austere, is the result of narcissistic work; the bodily wrapping becomes the result of obsessive attention, with quasi-religious rites of a profane cult. (Courtine, 1995, p. 102)

Although Courtine's analysis refers to a specific geographic context - the United States of America - and bodily practices, those of body-building, we understand that these can be considered a paradigm - in the Agambenian sense, that is, as a case that, taken from a series, is emblematic and representative of the entire series (Agamben, 2008) – of contemporary bodily practices and the relationship between man and the body in our world. Or, perhaps better, as one of the poles that create a field around bodily practices and the relationship of contemporary subject with the body.

Extending the previous analysis, it is important to emphasize that the body, object of practices of bodily asceticism and guided by biomedical normative ideals, is under what Ortega (2003) called practices of bodily asceticism, from which results the creation of bioidentities. In this context, the relationship with the body is guided by a subjection of the body (and the subject) to the dictates of biomedical “normality”, elevated to the condition of a moral imperative, whose observance becomes an obsession. In this register, contrary to previously indicated, pleasure became the status of moral evil, which must, at all costs, be avoided. The empire of healthism is guided by the idea that living is equivalent to following the biomedical norm as a social norm, the mode of production of biosociability in contemporary times. This empire is constituted by ascetic practices of control and regulation of bodies, of the government of the bodies. For Ortega (2003):

Ascetic practices imply processes of subjectivation. The modern bodily ascesis, the bioascesis, reproduce in the subjective dimension the rules of biosociality, emphasizing the procedures of corporal, medical, hygienic, and aesthetic care in the construction of personal identities, of bioidentities. It is the constitution of a self-controlling, self-monitoring, and self-governing subject. A key feature of this activity is self-assessment. The self that tests itself has in the body and in the act of testing itself the basic source of its identity. (p. 64)

Bioascetic practices are presented from the notion of autonomy, but this concept of autonomy is situated in the wake of the need: autonomy to “do good” is promoted, which means, for example, the duty to adopt an “active lifestyle”, to adapt and to submit to the norm. The subject becomes a permanently watchman of himself. This new mode of production of subjectivity does not exempt the model centered on the narcissistic individual, on the contrary, it is based on a logic of this nature, as it complexly combines narcissism and the imperative of discipline and body control. The author contrasts bioascetic practices with the ascetic practices of Greco-Latin Antiquity, precisely because of their individualistic and apolitical character, since

in them the Other⁸ has no place and the common world is emptied. The following words are eloquent: “We lost the world and gained the body. Interest in the body generates disinterest in the world. Muscle hypertrophy translates into social atrophy” (Ortega, 2003, p. 73).

We must also emphasize that, in this case, although we live in a clearly normative relationship with the body, marked by repression and the control of pleasures, we are not placed in a context in which the norm is considered as the result of the subject's elaboration in the relationship with the other. If the relationship with the body is based on imperatives that are secularized theological principles, it is not the human being who sets the norm, but the norm, presented as a divine mandate, always has a heteronomous character. Thus, the two poles, the exaltation of cost-less experiences of pleasures, at "zero cost", and the imperative character of managing one's own body from the imperatives of power and body beautification, are vectors that share a common element, i.e., to release from human responsibility the elaboration of a normative relationship with the body and its expressions and with the Other.

***Áskesis* and another way of relating to the body and life**

A problem that has been proposed in the debate on the education of the body is the issue of duality. We can see in this field a recurring criticism of dualism, which would have been inherited from the “Platonic-Cartesian” tradition, and is considered the cause of a big number of problems about the human education that takes place in the education of the body, and even denying any possibility of thinking human education from duality. This problem is present in the previous argument, which, on one hand, exalts the body without coercion and, on the other, only considers it as an object of control. We understand that the problem lies in how duality is formulated, and not in the fact that there is duality. And more, in the way subjectivity is involved in the conception of the way of life, which presupposes an ethical foundation in the constitution of the relationship between body and soul. When we think about the relationship between body,

⁸ When referring to the notion of “Other”, we do so from the understanding of the third domain of Foucauldian work, the “being-with-oneself” (Deleuze, 1992). In this moment of his work, the Other is conceived as the one that allows the subject to establish a different relationship with himself and with the world, which presupposes an opening to the Other's word and a permanent becoming other of himself. We are aware of the place that the revision of Lacan's work had in Michel Foucault's later thought. In this sense, we suggest consulting the brief but important text dating from 1981: *Lacan, the “Liberator” of psychoanalysis* (Foucault, 2014). The aforementioned notion is part of this movement, although the author himself does not refer to it in the Lacanian theoretical register.

ethics and subjectivity, we find in the concept of asceticism, or *áskesis*, as analyzed by French thinker Michel Foucault, a promising territory to be explored.

In the modern Western social imaginary, the signifier asceticism is strongly related to the idea of Christian asceticism – mainly the asceticism of the Catholic monastery and the inner-worldly asceticism formulated by Puritanism – and its secularized forms, as discussed above. However, the concept of *áskesis*, along the lines of classical Greek antiquity and Greek and Roman Hellenism, acquires a completely different meaning. Let us see what Foucault (2006) says:

Let's say, schematically, that where we moderns hear the question "is the objectification of the subject in a field of knowledge (*connaissances*) possible or impossible?" the Ancients of the Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman period heard, "constitution of a knowledge (*savoir*) of the world as spiritual experience of the subject." And where we moderns hear "subjection of the subject to the order of the law," the Greeks and Romans heard "constitution of the subject as final end for himself through and by the exercise of the truth." (p. 385)

Therefore, we have an antinomic relationship between the hegemonic notion of asceticism in the Western tradition, strongly rooted in modernity, and that coined by Greek and Roman Hellenism. In the words quoted here, we have the key understanding principles that guide Foucauldian reading: another relationship with truth, since in this conception truth is subjective from the practice of oneself - therefore, from exercises done in a disciplined and permanent way –; and another relationship with power (and with ethics), insofar as it is not an adaptation of the action to the moral and legal (and scientific) law, but the production of the self as an ethical subject, a folding of power over itself. Therefore, the third element of the Foucauldian triad, the subject, will also have a different configuration, as what emerges in this case is the *self* or *subjectivity*, the only word with a meaning more or less similar to the Greek *bios* (Foucault, 2016), based on to the reflected practice of freedom (Foucault, 2004).

When differentiating Christian asceticism (of cenobitic Christianity) from that of Hellenism, three elements are pointed out: 1) while Christian asceticism has as its ultimate objective self-renunciation, Greek philosophical asceticism aims to place oneself as object and end of the existence itself; 2) in Christianity, sacrifices and other acts that imply and carry out the renunciation of oneself are placed at the center of the practices, but in the practices of Hellenism, the subject seeks to endow oneself with something that does not possess, something like a defense equipment against the vicissitudes of life, to deal with the event, what the Greeks

called *paraskēuē*; 3) finally, while Christianity aims the submission of the individual to the law, Hellenism seeks to link the individual to the truth, to the truth of oneself, which does not imply the revelation or discovery of an essence, but the construction of oneself starting from the ethical relationship with the truth, handcrafted, in the relationship with the master and with friends, with those with whom existence is shared (Foucault, 2006, p. 400).

The duality pointed out implies two opposing figures that represent these two modes of subjectivation: the Christian and the Greek athlete. The figure of the athlete matters insofar as, in both registers, we are confronted with the presence of permanent training to face adversity, but the form and object of confrontation are diametrically opposed. The Christian athlete must overcome himself and be on constant alert, because he has an enemy always on the lookout, and that enemy is himself, because of the strength of the temptations of the devil, of the fallen nature, of the sinful character; on the other hand, the Greek athlete is an athlete of ancient spirituality, an athlete of life, of permanent practice, whose object is the transformation of himself, as well as being ready to fight against the event. For Foucault (2008): “The athlete of life equips himself through *logos*” (p. 95). This is the result of good asceticism.

Paraskēuē, which characterizes the athlete of the philosophical life, the equipment that allows dealing with the avatars of life, with what happens, is constituted by *logói* (discourses), conceived as rational embodied discourses (those that became part of the body) that allow the conduct of action, to the point of being part of the way of life. Thus, they make it possible to help the subject in the event because they are embedded in the way of living. Therefore, it is *logos* that we are dealing with, and not non-rational discourses. However, Foucault's movement at this moment is to treat rational life, not in the way that prevailed in the history of the tradition of Western thought as a technical-instrumental rationality, but to show another mode of rationality that includes the ethical-aesthetic dimension of existence, and in it the relationship between body and soul is situated in another way.

The *logói* we were referring to are not discourses detached from the materiality of life, but, on the contrary, they are “statements with a material existence” (Foucault, 2006, p. 389). It is worth pointing out that the discourse is a materiality, according to the French thinker. Thus, it is the real of discourse⁹ that is inscribed in the real, from its incorporation, of becoming a

⁹ In this case, we refer to the problem proposed by Foucault in the relationship between the real of the discourse, understood from the notion of games of truth, and the real. For the author, the real exists as such, and discourse

body, insofar as the principle of verification of the truth of the discourses is its resonance in the action, in the subject's way of living. Following the author: “As the word *logos* indicates, they are propositions justified by reason. Justified by reason means that they are rational, that they are true and constitute acceptable principles of behavior.” (p. 390). Here, rationality is not understood as an instrument that allows those who have it to carry out formal procedures for verifying the truth or falsity of propositions, based on a logical method, but as a constitutive dimension of the subject, from which it is possible the come-to-be of the subjectivity that is produced in the active incorporation of true rational principles.

These principles are not the result of a solipsistic elaboration, along the lines of a solitary hermit who, far from the urban world, elaborates knowledge about the world, similar to the representation of how the modern social imaginary would be. The asceticism analyzed by Foucault is only realized in the relationship between the master and the disciple, because it is in the relationship with the Other that asceticism takes place – never in the relationship of isolation with the world. For this, three techniques are indicated to be followed: listening, reading, and speaking. The disciple's relationship with the master is one of attentive listening, silence is a state that must be observed in order to enter into a relationship with the truth. Listening is what will allow you to collect the *logos*, what is said by the master of truth. At the same time, it allows the listener to be discerned and persuaded about the veracity of what is said, about the truth of *logos* (Foucault, 2006, p. 402). Correct

Correct listening will make it possible to keep the message so deeply that it will be possible *to have it at hand* when necessary, to face the circumstances that happen. It presupposes a body in a state of calm – which is not the same as a disciplined body –, a bodily state that allows the reception of the message, which not could be possible by a body in agitation.

is neither representation nor ideology, nor does it maintain a logical relationship with it. What is in question, however, is how at a given historical moment, and without any historical necessity, a given game of truth, which comes into force to define what counts as true and what is false, enters into a relationship with the real and has effects on it, becomes inscribed in it. The question posed by the author is: “Reality being what it is, what were the improbable conditions, the singular conditions that meant that a game of truth could appear in relation to that reality, certainly a game of truth with its reasons, its necessities, but reasons and necessities that are not simply the fact that the things in question existed?” (Foucault, 2016, p. 198). Here again we find a notion presented by Foucault, in which Lacanian echoes are heard, but not referenced, as we had pointed out in the previous note (see note 5).

The second technique, reading, differs diametrically from the understanding we have in modernity, because in this case it is not a matter of understanding the meaning of a text or of appropriating formal knowledge, but producing for oneself a set of true statements. Reading is, in fact, reading-writing, since it is in writing that the true propositions that oneself thinks are assimilated. Oneself writes to give shape in one's own life to what one thinks, leading to place the truth that one thinks in the soul and body, to make the true statement a habit or a physical virtuality. Foucault (2006) tells us about reading:

The exercise of reading was not something easy: it was not a matter of just reading, like that, at sight. You had to stress the words properly, you had to utter them in a low voice. So the exercise of reading, writing, and rereading what you had written and the notes you had taken was an almost physical exercise of the assimilation of the truth and the logos you were holding on to. (p. 432)

We see in these words the dialectical relationship between body and soul elaborated in this type of relationship with truth. The body is not a mere *res extensa* seen as an obstacle to knowledge, exclusively accessed by the soul. On the contrary, the body is the sounding board of truth, a condition of possibility for the truth to be embodied into existence, and an instance – if we want to use a term in a *sui generis* way – of verification of the truth, because the statement is only true when it is possible to be lived, when it bodily materializes in an action grounded in the ethical dimension.

Finally, the word. In this case, there is a clear asymmetric relationship in the use of the word. The disciple's place is that of silence, since the whole truth is found in the master's discourse (Foucault, 2006, p. 439). The exercise of silence is of fundamental importance for the development of *logos*, something that, for modern pedagogy and, particularly, for contemporary pedagogy, would seem contradictory, as it is mainly guided by a permanent incitement to speak, to express opinions. However, the use of the word by the master is not given by the statutory condition that he exercises, but by his moral exemplary. The master's authority comes from the way of life he leads, in the manner, for example, that Socrates had lived. The master's speech is frank speech, what Foucault, from the analysis of the ancients, called *parrhesía*. It is always produced for the education of the Other, based on the truth that the master considers it necessary for the disciple to receive:

It is the openness which makes us speak, which makes us say what has to be said, what we want to say, what we think ought to be said because it is necessary, useful, and true. (p. 440)

Therefore, the master's truth does not have a universal character and is said indistinctly to anyone, as in the case of a class in a modern school, but is addressed to a singular Other for whom the value of the enunciated truth for the its educational process, conceived as a becoming another from the relationship and the embodiment of the truth.

As a synthesis and complement to what we have just said, we consider relevant the words of Candiotta (2006):

In the process of subjectivation of truth from ascetic practices there is always an unfinished ethical tension between what someone has already ceased to be *and* [emphasis in the original] what they are becoming, in fact an ethics of restlessness irreducible to the anguish caused by the split of the subject of universalist morals. (p. 72)

Final remarks

Thus, we reach the beginning of this century with a panorama far from orderly, but in a state of liquidity, according to Bauman. In this liquefaction of the modern, trends emerge that lead us to confront the crisis of human condition and subjectivity in contemporary times. If, on the one hand, we see appeals to the unrestricted experience of body pleasures, on the other hand, we witness a project to control the body from its growing exposure and the need for its proper management, resulting from the imperatives of performance and beautification of the body. In both records, we face the problem of the constitution of human subjectivity in the confrontation with the place of the body in the configuration of the human - it is not without pain that subjectivity will be able to emerge, but neither will it be able to do it from the "iron cage" in which the body has become in postmodernity. Assuming and making positive the "discontent" resulting from the construction and institution of the norm as a condition can be a path in which oneself will always be subject to walking in a border space, to produce the present time. From there, we can move forward in the direction proposed by Agamben (2009) for those who intend to be contemporaries of their time:

This means that the contemporary is not only the one who, perceiving the darkness of the present, grasps a light that can never reach its destiny; he is also the one who, dividing and interpolating time, is capable of transforming it and putting it in relation with other times. He is able to read history in unforeseen ways, to "cite it" according to a necessity that does not arise in any way from his will, but from an exigency to which he cannot not respond (p. 72)

We understand that the Foucauldian analysis of Greco-Latin Antiquity can be a horizon of possibilities to think a different way for human education and the place of the body in this educational process – not a manual on how we should behave, but a space from which we can think critically the present and our relationship with it. Particularly, we understand that the inseparability word-ethics-body is a fertile human ground for thinking about becoming human in another way.

We hope with that, throughout this text, more diagnostic than propositional – even less prescriptive –, we have pointed some of the issues of those who live in the present time and undertake the task of confronting the present, seeking to show that lights produce shadows, and that, in the face of darkness, we need lights. In the ambiguities of this twilight, we live the perspective visibility of human finitude, seeking not to get lost in the darkness or blinded by the lights. An effort through which the, always temporary, human truths can emerge.

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