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TEACHER EDUCATION AND TEACHING AS PHRONESIS: BEING AND LEARNING TO BE

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Abstract: Inspired by the Aristotelian notion of *Phronesis*, we developed a reflection on teacher formation, in the perspective of learning as an exercise continuously done and redone, grounded on a reflexive and theoretical attitude. We approximated the concept of the contemplative life to one of the reflexive teachers aiming to advance toward praxis as a dialectic process of action-reflection-action, the background to pre-service education of teachers, which intertwines theory and practice as the horizon of a “living teaching”. This re-reading of Aristotle’s practical philosophy is followed by Hans-Georg-Gadamer’s interpretation, in his work *Wahrheit und Methode*, using the concepts of practical wisdom and *mimesis*, the productivity of the concept of experience, and Aristotle’s hermeneutic topicality, which structure the following text.

Keywords: Teacher education, practical wisdom, *mimesis*, philosophical hermeneutics.

FORMAÇÃO E DOCÊNCIA COMO *PHRONESIS*: SENDO E APRENDENDO A SER

Resumo: Inspirados na noção aristotélica de *Phronesis*, desenvolveu-se uma reflexão sobre a formação docente na perspectiva do aprender como exercício que se faz e se refaz continuamente, numa atitude reflexiva e, teoricamente, sustentada. Aproximou-se o conceito de vida contemplativa ao de docente reflexivo e, com isso, buscou-se avançar na direção da práxis como processo dialético de ação-reflexão-ação, pano de fundo de uma formação inicial de professores/as que entretece teoria e prática como horizontes de uma docência viva. Esta releitura da filosofia prática de Aristóteles faz-se acompanhar da interpretação que Hans-Georg-Gadamer realiza em sua obra *Wahrheit und Methode*, valendo-se dos conceitos de sabedoria prática, de *mimesis*, da produtividade

do conceito de experiência e da atualidade hermenêutica de Aristóteles, e que estruturam o texto que segue.

Palavras-chave: Formação de professores, sabedoria prática, mimesis, hermenêutica filosófica.

FORMACIÓN Y DOCENCIA COMO *PHRONESIS*: SIENDO Y APRENDIENDO A SER

Resumen: Inspirados en la noción aristotélica de *Phronesis*, se desarrolló una reflexión sobre la formación docente en la perspectiva del aprender como ejercicio que se hace y se rehace continuamente, en una actitud reflexiva y, teóricamente, sostenida. El concepto de vida contemplativa fue aproximado al del profesor reflexivo y, con eso, se buscó avanzar en la dirección de la praxis como proceso dialéctico de acción-reflexión-acción, trasfondo de una formación inicial de profesores/as, que entrelaza la teoría y la práctica como horizontes de una docencia viva. Esta reinterpretación de la filosofía práctica de Aristóteles viene acompañada de la interpretación que Hans-Georg-Gadamer realiza en su obra *Wahrheit und Methode*, utilizando los conceptos de sabiduría práctica, de *mimesis*, de la productividad del concepto de experiencia y de la actualidad hermenéutica de Aristóteles, que estructuran el texto que sigue.

Palabras clave: Formación de profesores, sabiduría práctica, *mimesis*, hermenéutica filosófica.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DOING AND KNOWING: PRACTICE AND THEORY DIALECTIC

On the theoretical side, we can expect what Aristotle presupposes for the development of “practical wisdom”: to have references to qualify our reflection on practice, which raises, from the outset, the question of the dialectic of praxis. There are two elements, inseparable from each other, involved in this formation process. On the one hand, “each one judges well the things he/she knows, and of these things he/she is a good judge. The one who has been instructed on a matter is a good judge of that matter” (EN I, 1095a 5)¹, which is a condition (not a guarantee) to reflect with propriety and depth in order to learn from one's own experiences, which is the other side of the same question. Aristotle then continues: these people still lack “the experience of the facts of life”, and theory is not enough, since they “are not even good listeners in this kind of matter”. The experience of the facts of life, however, does not depend simply on whether one has or has not lived through a particular situation; it depends on theory and living, but, as for the latter, on how it was experienced, because, as in the case of ethics, here “the defect does not depend on age, but

¹ Quotations from the Nicomachean Ethics are from the translation by Leonel Vallandro and Gerd Bornheim. São Paulo: Abril Cultural, 1984. (*Os pensadores* collection). We used the international convention for citing critical editions of classic works, which aims to make it easier for the reader to find the passage quoted accurately, regardless of language, publisher, date, page of the cited translation.

on the way of living and following one after the other each event that his/her passion confronts him/her with” (EN I, 1095a).

The validity of these ideas is recognized to think about the initial and continued formation of teachers, in the sense that access to theories needs to happen not only in view of practice, but to learn from practice. The two conditions go together², to recall the concept of “dialectical unity of Praxis” (FREIRE, 1976, p. 49). According to Aristotle, “one must have been instructed in matters of such a nature”, and, secondly, “one must have lived the facts of life” (EN 1095b) to be able to draw the lessons of practical learning through the attitude of *paying attention* and to reflecting, in an expression through the “contemplative attitude”.

Following this line of reasoning, theory only makes sense when articulated with the practice of formation. Theory as “preparation for” future practices is empty, and practice without a good theory is innocuous, because it does not serve to learn, to acquire practical wisdom. Only experiencing the facts of life can provide practical support for learning this type of knowledge, but, on the other hand, reflection on experiences presupposes that we have the intellectual conditions for it, that we have theoretical references that can qualify reflection and provide learning opportunities, in this case, of “being a teacher”.

As for its specificity, learning to be a teacher is similar to other learning, whether theoretical or practical. Usually, it starts with a mimetic process. It is necessary to have good examples to follow, so that, based on these examples, based on one's own practice and in confrontation with theory, one can build one's own way of being a teacher, becoming increasingly wise, prudent, and balanced in the face of concrete situations of everyday life. In the sequence, it is worth going back to the philosopher's wise considerations on the methodological issue, but with an epistemological background.

Human *praxis* has a specificity that distinguishes it from the merely theoretical work of the natural sciences and from the formal sciences, such as mathematics and logic. Learning, in practice, and the process of acquiring practical wisdom, as well as the nature of praxis itself, allows for a wide variety of possibilities and opinions. Aristotle refers directly to ethics and politics, and we place the process of human formation in general – education – at the center of praxis, because, by the author's definition, praxis is that activity through which one does not seek a quality of a product to be produced (*poiesis*) or the *episteme* on a matter of physics or astronomy, but it is the activity through which one aims at the “perfection of the agent itself”, in other words, human fulfillment, which he also called of happiness.

In this case, however, there is no way to decisively define what this achievement and a good and happy life consist of; there is no way of knowing, in advance, how and where to direct the search process. In this sense, the philosopher states:

² This is what one reads in the justification of many Course Pedagogical Projects (PPC- *Projetos Pedagógicos de Curso*), especially insisting not to leave the practice only for the final semesters, but also not to send to the internship field someone without the slightest general notion about education and about the theoretical-methodological implications inherent to practice.

[...] in dealing with such matters and starting from such premises, we must content ourselves with stating the truth only approximately and in general terms, and seek precision, in each sort of things, only so far as admits the nature of the subject. [...] it would be no less unwise to accept probable reasoning by a mathematician than to demand exact proofs from a rhetorician (EN 1094b).

In this citation, the author makes it clear that he adopts a methodology adequate to the nature of the subject and that he is satisfied with the possible conclusions within those limits. Currently, it could be said that this is the most important distinction that can be made between the quantitative, very specific to the natural sciences and statistics of teaching indices, for example, and the qualitative, in which a more flexible logic prevails, which the philosopher calls rhetorical. This rests on a distinction current in Greek culture, which had already been formulated by Plato and which Aristotle brings into practical philosophy.

On the one hand, in mathematics and the natural sciences, in which it is assumed to deal with what is constant, an exact form of measurement called “*poson*” is adopted, which is strictly quantitative. In human things, which are as they are, but which can be different because they depend on our deliberation and decision of action, a standard of measurement is adopted in order to seek and the just measure in relation to the thing, which is called “*poion*”. It is a way of measuring “in which the internal measure of the thing is reached, the adequate itself. This we know, for example, from the harmonious well-being, which we know as health” (GADAMER, 2000, p. 19). This is what characterizes the qualitative.

From this distinction, we can derive the difference between theoretical knowledge of natural things and practical knowledge of human things. Education, for example, is an activity like learning an art, in which one needs to constantly seek balance, like learning to ride a bicycle, with the difference that, after having learned this art, one can ride a bicycle mechanically. In the case of education, on the other hand, one must keep doing and learning all the time, looking for the right term on each occasion and situation, that is, one will never have learned all at once! This is how it is in every praxis, because in it one seeks something that one does not know precisely what it consists of. You must go on doing and learning; perhaps learning more that it is necessary to continue learning than learning how to do it from now on. In education, the hereafter is an open field to the unpredictable, challenge and risk; more of a historical adventure than a repetition of formulas that have already worked³.

This takes us back to Aristotle's understanding of learning, which is the learning of a way of being and is closely linked to the larger and more important ideal of life. After all, one who wants to be a teacher seeks to be recognized for “being a/a good/good teacher”, that is, to be recognized by others as someone who has achieved virtue in what they do; recognition that presupposes some implicit things, such as “being good”, as a quality attributed to what one does and, in this case especially, to what one is. We are therefore faced with the problem of precision that we mentioned earlier, because there is no definitive consensus on what good is regardless of the situation in question.

³ According to Gadamer (1998), the knowledge that is necessary there is a “good disposition of mind” (p. 481) that can be called “navigational intelligence”.

Aristotle, as can be seen, recognizes this problem of ethics and politics. According to the authors of this text, education is related, as it is understood that it is related to both, given that moral actions gain importance within the larger context of the polis. Ethics is fundamental, but the greatest good for the Greeks, and, consequently, the most important art, is politics, since it aims at the common good of society as a whole, and it is built by the individuals who dedicate themselves to it in a virtuous, fair manner and in a spirit of public gratuitousness. As human beings are not born predisposed to this, they need to be educated to seek, at the same time, the private good in the form of self-realization or happiness, and the common good; hence, for us, the essential politicality of education. Like the polis, which must “dedicate the best of its efforts to making citizens good and capable of noble actions” (EN I, 1099), education, in its essential politicality, is all permeated with this ethical padding of providing a formation for people with social sensitivity, a spirit of solidarity and collaboration and a sense of justice and respect for the dignity of each person. When one thinks in terms of public policies, education accomplishes what the State demands of it, but, on the other hand, a State with the minimum of sense expects education to aim at enabling each student to become a citizen capable of helping to build the common good and to seek his or her own self-realization. It is a matter of betting that there will only be a virtuous polis if its citizens are virtuous.⁴

RECOVERING *MIMESIS* THROUGH RECOGNITION

From the interpretation that Hans-Georg-Gadamer makes of the concept of mimesis in the book *Truth and Method – fundamental traits of philosophical hermeneutics*⁵, we can better understand the Aristotelian thesis that all learning, being it practical, theoretical, or technical, start with it. To clarify this, as we have already seen, the author makes considerations about “the game's way of being” (GADAMER, 1998, p. 190). Briefly recalling, something happens in the show that, in its back-and-forth movement, there is no predictable end, and the subjects of the game (show) are not the players. The actors are not the subjects, but the game/spectacle itself, which is played, regardless of the subjective will of each player/actor. In the case of the show, this becomes more evident, since primacy is continuously shifted from one side to the other, from the actor to the spectator, according to the course of the representation. The primacy belongs to the game, even though the players have prepared in detail to decide the game through their moves; in other words, there is no good game without strategies, meticulous preparation, repeated training, practical rehearsals, etc. In its happening, however, it is the game that leads the movement. This is completed in theatrical representation or the interpretation of a song, as it addresses the spectator. There, one realizes that playing is to be-in-play or, more precisely, the game is transformed into a configuration

⁴ In the current use of language, similar reasoning extends to health and education, for example, in expressions such as “healthy cities” and “educating cities”.

⁵ This book by Gadamer was first published in 1960. In 1999, the University of Tübingen published the complete works by Mohr Siebek Publishing House. Truth and Method is the first volume with the title: *Gesammelte Werke 1 – Hermeneutik I*. For citations in this text, we used the translation of Flávio Paulo Meurer, 2nd edition, Editora Vozes, 1998.

that opens to the spectator in the form of representation. The actor, the interpreter, remain in the process; he is released, while his performance continues. From this, he learns that nothing is definitively given. One must continue to learn, to do it again, and to remake oneself in this happening of the game, of the spectacle. In the dynamics of learning to be a teacher, something similar also happens.

When we think about the mimetic process of transformation into configuration and its consolidation into representation, we are led to admit “that something, at once and as a whole, becomes something else.” It is more than a modification, which focuses only on the “way” of being and does not change the substance of the thing. Saying that someone is transformed means that he/she is no longer what he/she was, and that what is represented now, in the game or in the show, is the truth. This is the case when it comes to the playwright and the composer, not just the actor and the interpreter, “neither of them has a being-for-themselves, which they affirm in the sense that their game would mean that they are only playing” (Idem). There is not just a disguise, a change in appearance, not least because, even in disguise, the person who disguises his/herself does not want to be perceived behind the disguise; he/she wants to be recognized as the other he/she is representing. The use of the “work of art way of being” is because, for Gadamer, “it is a totally transformed world, in the sense that something, at once and as a whole, becomes something else, so that this something else, which is as transformed, becomes its true being, in the face of which its previous being is null” (1998, p. 188).⁶

Aristotle (Poetics, 4, 1448b) affirms this when dealing with the concept of mimesis. Imitating, the child begins to play, doing what he/she knows and confirming him/herself. The pleasure in which the child fantasizes is not intended to be hiding, a simulation, to guess and recognize who is behind it, but, on the contrary, it is represented in such a way that only it is represented. What the child represents is what it should be, and if there's anything that should be guessed, it is exactly that. “What is there will have to be recognized, for example, Batman, Superman, and not Arthur, Pedro, or Carlos (GADAMER, 1998, p. 191).

The recourse of the way of being of the game as a spectacle (*Spiel*) is to show the structure of openness to possibilities and unforeseen events, or the thesis that “experience shows that nothing repeats in life”. Therefore, there cannot be a formula to be applied in a general way. If one takes this seriously, one can understand that even in the experience of being a teacher there cannot be a distinction other than a methodological one, between initial and continued formation/transformation, because, in the sense of phronesis, both happen in the form of experience, that is, as practical knowledge that results in this theory-practice dialectic process.

Whoever is in the teacher formation process is in a situation like that of those who are playing and who experience the game as a reality that surpasses him/her and that only gains its full meaning only when it is opened to the spectator's side, that is, in the representation (GADAMER, 1998, p. 185). The teaching experience is also like an open game, which is completed by becoming

⁶ Could this be the strength of the constant professional profile in the PPCs of teacher formation courses? Which does not mean that all pedagogy graduates from a course are “formatted” in the same mold. Let's see by continuing the reading.

a spectacle, that is, putting the spectator in the player's place. When this turnaround is taken as a fundamental trait of the way of being a teacher, everything happens because of those on the other side; it is for them, not for the player/actor, for whom and in whom one plays/represents. The other (spectator/student) has a methodological primacy, as it is for him/her that the content of meaning happens. In a way, the difference between actor and spectator is annulled because what happens there is a living phenomenon, which makes them equal: it is experience, openness, and learning. When this is not experienced in the aesthetic fruition of the interpretation of a song, for example, when this does not happen, it can be said that the representation was unsuccessful.

When the game turns into configuration, it is complete; the human game forms its real consummation in being art⁷, and, through it, the game reaches its ideality by showing that it (game/spectacle) has autonomy in relation to the player. From there, it is understood that mimesis does not consist in mechanically repeating what another person has already done, but in recovering the sense of knowledge/recognition that happens in that person, because “whoever imitates something lets it be there, what he knows and as he knows.” (GADAMER, 1998, p. 191).

The taste that children have in representing refers to the joy of recognition, in the sense that one can only understand the game of art given the “meaning of knowledge” that is found in imitation. Thus, in imitation, what is represented happens – it is the original mimicry relationship. Whoever imitates something, lets it be “what he knows and how he knows it” (GADAMER, 1998, p. 189). In the same way, “the game or the spectacle is such a transformation that for no one the identity of the one who plays (represents) continues to exist.” (*Idem*). The actors' subjectivity no longer exists as something apart, untouched; what exists is what they represent.

When, in *Poetics* (1448b), Aristotle states that “artistic representation makes even what is unpleasant seem pleasant”, he is pointing to the true meaning of the knowledge of mimesis: recognition. What is properly experienced in a work of art is “the extent to which we know and recognize something and ourselves in it”. And it is not a matter of revising what was already known. “The joy of recognition lies in the fact that we identify more than just what is known.” It is like that intuition that makes us realize that “this is new, and it is just the way it is”. “Knowledge reaches its true being and shows itself as what it is only through recognition” (GADAMER, 1998, p. 192). What is casual and secondary disappears in the recognition that takes place in art through representation, because “one now recognizes what is represented”. This is so because imitation and representation are not figurative repetitions but knowledge of the nature of what is represented. To show what this means, it can be said that imitation-representation is “ex-traction” (*Hervorholung*), which is also in the spectacle (linking): to imitate is to interpret (GADAMER, 1998, p. 193).

Thus, when considering that the representation of art is “the way of being itself”, it is understood that the recognition that is in the work is knowledge of the essence; or the essence of

⁷ Hence the difficulty of treating teaching as “work” in the sense of an automated *téchne*, in which the best that can happen is already anticipated in the idealized model. Teaching, the class as a living phenomenon, can always surprise positively or negatively, but, in any case, it is an event that always enables new learning.

the spectacle (game) and the work of art lies in representing itself⁸, in the sense that “through its representation, it addresses the spectators” (GADAMER, 1998, p. 194), in such a way that the spectator passes to be an integral part of the object (game, spectacle), despite all the distancing of counterposition. The work takes place in representation (execution and mimesis). That is why it is stated “I watched such and such a play”, and not “I went to see such and such an actor”. In this lies the truth of art, of the ludic, because the show only happens where it is represented. “The staging of a theatrical spectacle cannot be separated from the ludic as something that does not belong to its essence” (GADAMER, 1998, p. 195). The work is located in the execution, in the representation; is “*energeia* and *ergon*”. This is so decisive that “the being of art cannot be determined as an object of an aesthetic conscience”. On the contrary, “aesthetic behavior is more than what it knows about itself”. It is a part of the being process of its representation and essentially belongs to the game as a game (“*lupus*”: the lesson, the doing, the playing, the game, the ludic). It is not a matter, however, of satisfying a ludic need, but “of entering into the existence of poetry itself”. Or, conversely, “the poetic work only becomes a spectacle when represented”, when the very being of poetry is represented (GADAMER, 1998, p. 196).

It seems that the expression “transformation into configuration” is now understood. The game, the spectacle, is “configuration” because, even if it depends on it becoming represented, it “is a significant whole and, as such, it can be represented and understood in its meaning repeatedly.” On the other hand, the configuration is also a game (*Spiel*), which reaches its full being with each new one becoming represented. Gadamer (1998) thus accentuates the mutual belonging of both parties, against the abstraction of “aesthetic differentiation”. It opposes to aesthetic non-differentiation as a real constitutive element of aesthetic consciousness. This does not mean, however, that there is mechanical repetition between one representation and the other, since, each time, in a different and new way, the truth of poetry, of the play, etc. happens. It can be said that nothing repeats itself by repeating itself; therefore, there is no exact repetition.

How? “What is imitated in imitation, formulated by the poet (playwright), represented by the actor, recognized by the spectator, is so much what one has in mind, that in which the meaning of the representation resides, that, in the poetic form or the representation, they do not even come to be highlighted.” (GADAMER, 1998, p. 196). The differentiation between the poetic composition and its conception is secondary, because “what the actor represents, and the spectator recognizes are the formulations and the action itself (*energeia*), just as they were thought by the poet”: it is the double mimesis, when the poet represents and the actor represents, but what becomes existent in one and in the other is the same thing. That is, “the mimetic representation of the staging leads it to be-there” (GADAMER, 1998, p. 196)⁹.

Gadamer (1998) continues his argument by highlighting that “the double differentiation of the poetic work and its matter, and, of the poetic work and its staging,

⁸ This allows us to affirm the non-existence of an essentiality, in the metaphysical sense, alien to the historicity that permeates the phenomenon, in which we dare to say, nothing is hidden.

⁹ Shakespeare's Romeo and the one represented by the author are the same, even though there are many possibilities to represent him. When it is said that the actor acted in his own way, it cannot be understood that he did not represent the character, but that he raised a possibility of being like this.

corresponds to a double non-differentiation taken as the unity of truth, which is recognized in the game of art” (p. 196-197). This is so decisive that the spectator who reflects on the “conception that is the basis of the staging” or who intends to understand the staged fable from its origin, or even who reflects on the performance of the actor as such, “falls out of the effective aesthetic experience of the spectacle”. This possible differentiation is not of the aesthetic experience, it is of the art critic, who, to be so, needs to deprive him/herself of the right to experience because this would transform him/her by bringing him/her into the performance, from where he/she would no longer have the critic's objectivity that he/she is supposed to have. For those who live the experience, then, this is indifferent because a whole of meaning happens in this case, which is the happening of the truth of the work, in such a way that in this experience there is not even a possible difference between what happens on stage and what happens live, for example, a tragedy. Without this, there could be no “catharsis”. The different possibilities of staging and representing a certain character do not depend on the subjective variation of actors; it is sustained by the work itself. Variations in representation are subordinated to the correct representation standard (GADAMER, 1998, p. 198). Although this seems problematic, it must be accepted that a representation in any way, without being in tune with the essence of the character, does not make its truth. This has to do with a model to follow, and, in this specific case,

[...] the tradition that is created by a great actor, conductor, or musician, insofar as the model continues to operate, is not an obstacle to free creation, but it has merged in such a way with the work that the confrontation with this model evokes no less the later creative reformulation of every artist than the confrontation with the work (GADAMER, 1998, p. 199).

Similarly, there are many “correct” ways of being a teacher, just as there are many forms of correct representation, assuming a reference, without the “creative” licentiousness of the interpreter taking the dramaturgical or poetic work only as a motivation to produce random effects. Canonizing a given interpretation, however, also mischaracterizes the genuine task of interpretation, just as the mechanical and merely technical imitation of a model of being a teacher mischaracterizes the very being of teaching. When a “correction” is sought based on a fixed standard, “it does not do justice to the genuine bindingness of the work, which binds each interpreter in his/her own and immediate way and retains his/her disengagement through the mere imitation of a model” (GADAMER, 1998, p. 199).

On the other hand, it would also be false “to limit the freedom of the beautiful reproductive pleasure to exteriorities and marginal phenomena and, rather, not to conceive the whole of a reproduction, at the same time, as obligatory and free” (GADAMER, 1998, p. 200). In a sense, interpretation is a doing according to a previous one (Nachschaffen), but this does not mean that it mechanically follows a preceding creative act. The model is the figure of a created work that someone brought to representation insofar as he/she found meaning there. This is the meaning of the statement that shows that mimesis presupposes the recognition that the way of

being of the model makes sense.¹⁰ To assume, however, that there is a single correct representation would not do justice to the finiteness of our historical existence. Correct is every form of representation in which the truth of the work is realized, which exceeds a single model. That is why the essence of mimesis is not a mere demonstrative representation that could be mechanically repeated. Whoever imitates must emphasize something, and in this, he/she shows him/herself as an interpreter.

LEARNING TO BE A TEACHER: ARISTOTLE'S CURRENT HERMENEUTIC

*Phronesis*¹¹ is a knowledge of experience in the sense of having lived with intensity and with a reflective and contemplative attitude in order to learn from such experiences, which can be of a theoretical and practical nature. This attitude presupposes the necessary conditions for reflection to be able to become increasingly wiser and more experienced through this continuous dialectic between everyday experiences and the reflection that accompanies them¹². It must be clarified beforehand that experience is neither synonymous with sensations nor with mechanical repetition. This concept can be understood from the metaphor of Aristotle's "fleeing army", because, here and there, from the escape of the changing phenomena, one begins to perceive something common and, thus, little by little, through the recognitions that are piling up and that are called experiences, the unity of experience is formed. Through experience, one expressly disposes of what is experienced in the form of common knowledge (GADAMER, 1998, p. 177). Aristotle asks: Where and how does a fleeing army come to a halt? It certainly is not because the first soldier stopped or the second or the third. "We cannot say that the army stops when a certain number of fleeing soldiers have stopped running, nor when the last soldier has stopped. It is not with him that the army begins to halt, since it has already started long before" (GADAMER, 1998, p. 178).

There is no way of knowing or controlling and stating how it starts, continues, and finally, the army stops and returns to obey the command unit. This can be compared to *Phronesis*. Here, Aristotle's hermeneutic relevance is shown in helping to think about how is it possible to acquire practical wisdom. How do teachers learn to become wiser, more experienced? The implication of the two fundamental aspects of this learning has already been anticipated. On the one hand, one must experience and have the practice in order to learn lessons from it, but, on the other hand, the attitude of a reflective teacher assumes that one has good references, in a double sense, examples that inspire and theoretical support to be able to reflect on one's own and, thus, not needing to simply and all the time try to mechanically repeat the models that inspire. The

¹⁰ This idea supports *Bildung*'s central thesis: an education that aims to implement traits of an image of a human being that has some defined elements that cannot be ignored by the educator.

¹¹ In *Nicomachean Ethics* (1141b 10 and 1142b 30), Aristotle defines *Phronesis* as the ability to deliberate well in concrete situations and in the correct use of reason in ethical action, which seems to be expected from the practical wisdom of educators.

¹² This reflective attitude, however, does not mean a departure to the same degree that, for example, characterizes the art critic. It can be considered that it is a reflection "with" and not "on".

practical wisdom of being a teacher must be constantly accompanied by autonomy, in acting and thinking, so that learning is, in fact, something that promotes modes of subjectivation, of self(trans)formation.

In this sense, it is insisted that *Phronesis* is essential to true pedagogical work, to this teaching that assumes itself as education. What, however, does this have to do with the actuality of Aristotle? It begins with Gadamer's general idea that the core of the hermeneutic problem is that tradition must be understood each time differently, and that this puts the teacher before the relation between the general and the particular. Understanding is, in each circumstance, a special case of applying something general to a concrete and particular situation¹³. According to Gadamer (1998, p. 465), “Aristotle does not address the hermeneutic problem or its historical dimension but deals only with the correct appreciation of the role that reason should play in ethical action”, that is, in decision-making. In this case, as in all “praxis”, there is no formula to be simply applied or a model to be mechanically reproduced.

To understand the nature of praxis, it is opportune to return to Aristotle's distinction between it and the productive and theoretical know-how referred to in the opening pages of this article. The knowledge of educational praxis, which in its essence has the specificity of the knowledge of *ethos*, is also clearly distinguished from theoretical knowledge, from *physis*, in the sense that the latter tries to make explicit the laws that govern the phenomena of nature and that, according to the concept of the Greeks, are constant, while the knowledge of praxis refers to actions, whose norms of procedure are established by people and could be otherwise, since the criterion for deciding on right and wrong, good and evil, can only be defined broadly.¹⁴

Faced with the Greek model of “theory”, which is mathematics, the human sciences do not deal with something unchanged/unalterable, but with the knowledge of human beings about themselves, as agents. In this case, the human being knows that he deals with things that are not always as they are, as they can also be different. It is on this that Aristotle bases his claim that this type of subject involves a wide variety of opinions, and that knowledge, in this case, guides action, but it is prior knowledge that is itself in constant questioning. In this, it differs from theoretical knowledge and, equally, from technical knowledge. There is, likewise, a distinction between theoretical knowledge and prior knowledge of the *téchne*, which is also a knowledge of experience, but which is not enough for ethically correct decision-making or for “praxis” in general. There is, therefore, a great difference between knowing how to do “things” and the “knowing oneself” of ethical knowledge and political *phronesis*, since in them what is sought is not the quality of a product external to the producer, but the perfection of the agent him/herself as such, in his/her action. The similarity of the two kinds of knowledge for acting is considered. In the case

¹³ This allows us to assert that “there is no class of...”, as in the abstract, since, consistent with this theoretical perspective, the class is always linked to a context that is not external to it. The planning that precedes it cannot have the character of a script – “the proof of experience”. To use an analogy, it must be like an effervescent tablet that dissolves in water, blending in with the environment.

¹⁴ For a more detailed understanding of this distinction, see OLIVEIRA, Manfredo Araújo de. *Ética e sociabilidade*. 2nd ed. São Paulo: Loyola, 1996. p. 55: Aristotle; the specificity of practical knowledge; specifically notes 16 and 17 on pages 59 and 60.

of the moral decision, it is not just a question of applying prior knowledge, although it is also presupposed in this case.

In praxis, one is always trying to find balance, the right measure about the thing in question, the “*poion*”, knowing that what is in question are the teachers in the process of formation, following a certain model that they consider to be the best, since, in praxis, unlike *poiesis*, in which the external purpose of the “quality” of the product is sought, the objective is “the perfection of the agent him/herself”, without knowing precisely what that means: it aims at human achievement, which cannot be defined as a law of nature, as it depends on each culture, time and way of life. The problem posed by Aristotle (EN 1094b) is that the good does not have the same conceptual precision as a problem of nature and that one can only have a general definition of it, but always in relation to oneself in practical situations, a position that inspires Gadamer (p. 466), by stating that “the one who acts must see the concrete situation in the light of what is required of him in general”, and, in this case, “general knowledge that does not apply to the concrete situation remains meaningless”, and may even get in the way more than help in everyday decision-making.

For Gadamer (1998, p. 466-467), this requirement of practical knowledge gives moral relevance to the problem of method and requires a demarcation criterion between what can be the object of a mathematical, precise procedure, and what must be treated with a logic different from the merely formal one, which the Greek philosopher called rhetoric. So it is with respect to the definition of what is supposed to be the end that is intended in every action, the good (EN., 1.1094a). It is necessary to know what it consists of, so as not to be like “archers who do not know where their aim is”, but can only know it in outline. Later, the author points out that “we have to content ourselves with indicating the truth approximately and in general terms”,

For it befits the learned man to seek precision, in every kind of thing, only so far as the nature of the subject admits. It would be no less foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician than to demand exact proofs from a rhetorician (EN., 3, 1094b).

Following the example of ethics, therefore, in all praxis, in general, one cannot speak of accuracy, of a maximum level, such as that provided by mathematics. “Here it is a question of making the profile of things visible and helping, in a certain way, the moral conscience with this sketch of a mere profile” of the general criterion, that is, the good (GADAMER, 1998, p. 467), which serves as a mere help, because the subject of the action must know and decide for him/herself, for his/her moral conscience, using his/her reason to interpret the particular fact and apply the notion of good, so that his/her action has true moral value. Added to this is the condition that only those who have existential maturity are prepared to receive this special help, those who have already been educated in the exercise of the practical use of reason and have some experience of the nature of the subject or the specific problem they face. The two things are intertwined all the time – experiencing the facts of life and a certain general knowledge about the subject, which provide opportunities for a more rigorous reflection and, with that, can lead to practical wisdom, which is almost synonymous with experience: *Phronesis*.

Following the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1095a), Aristotle stated that one who has been well educated can judge well, but that this is not merely theoretical knowledge. One must have experience with the facts of life, and one who does not have it is not even a good listener in this type of subject. To avoid ambiguity, the author adds that, although young people are not prepared to discuss this type of subject, due to lack of experience, the “defect does not depend on age, but on the way of living and following one after another each objective that comes to one’s passion”¹⁵.

From this, Gadamer (1998, p. 467-468) warns that one cannot expect from this “help” more than it can give and that only those who have been educated or who already have practical wisdom can have a moral and constantly correct behavior. In the case of ethics and educational praxis, it becomes even clearer that it is a question of the hermeneutic problem of belonging between the interpreter and what is really in question. Here, objective knowledge, as in the natural sciences, is not possible, since the “known” affects the one who knows: “It is something he/she has to do”, based on his/her pondering and decision. To do so, he/she looks to him/herself for advice.

Aristotle lists a wide range of aspects to be taken into account to describe the phenomena and make the distinction between *téchne* and the art of application of the law by the jurist, which is characterized by “equity”, that is, in the “correction of the law” given the justice in the concrete case, in the face of which the law, even though it is the same for everyone, is “always different, because human reality is always different” and it is to this that the law is applied. Gadamer (1998, p. 476) emphasizes that this applies to human action in general: theories are not immutable truths that constitute an arbitrary ideal. The author's distinction between *téchne* and praxis also aims to show that technical knowledge can never suppress ethical knowledge, especially due to the peculiarity of the relationship between means and ends in the case of moral action. The good action in the technique is the one that is efficient to produce the sought-after end, but, in the case of ethics, this is not enough, because the action is morally good only if the means are virtuous. This is also the education case; depending on the specific case, the accent falls on the means rather than on the intended ends.

Another fundamental aspect of Aristotle's theory for teacher formation and acting is that he shows that practical knowledge is not simply teachable knowledge like *téchne* and theory, because it presupposes experience and it is a knowledge of experience. *Phronesis* is equivalent to experience, but of something very special, which is the capacity for pondering or, as he points out later, “along with *phronesis*, because, in virtue of reflective pondering, understanding appears”, but which is not enough for a good decision in front of the other. This is where a specifically human factor comes in: in addition to the disposition of mind, of practical wisdom, one has to want to do good, to be in solidarity with the other, since the other capabilities of “practical wisdom” can also be used to harm others, and “nothing is so terrible, so astonishing and even so terrifying as the exercise of genius capacities for evil” (GADAMER, 1998, p. 481).

¹⁵ This would be the case of an elderly person who did not learn from his/her experiences; he/she did not become an experienced person, because he/she lacked a reflective attitude to draw life lessons from experiences in order to strengthen him/herself with them and become more virtuous.

Aristotle clarifies the conditions for virtuous moral action, which is also taken as a reference for educational praxis, stating that an action is only good if the one who practices it is aware that his action is virtuous; he/she decides to do the action because he recognizes it as good and acts moved by a firm character (EN., 1105a-1105b). These conditions – knowing that the action is virtuous, acting voluntarily, and making the choice not out of mere self-interest but because the action is virtuous, acting with virtue, that is, with the firmness of character – are what differentiate virtuous action from actions that they simply aim to achieve good results, that is, from actions motivated by interest¹⁶. The human being, however, is not born with these virtues; he/she needs to be educated to understand them and make them constitutive of his/her moral character.

CONCLUSIONS

It is possible to disagree with several statements made by the philosopher Aristotle based on knowledge of various sciences that have developed in modernity. In the case of education, mainly the contributions of psychology and its derivations. It is not possible, however, to simply ignore Aristotle's contribution and actuality in posing the problem of human learning in general, which leads to a reinterpretation of some concepts and even to overcome one's preconceptions towards them. For example, the role of imitation, of repetition in all human learning, as constitutive of it, but in a different sense than the merely mechanistic one, which has prevailed since the advent of modern science and the manufacturing processes that result from it.

Another very current issue that makes one think is that the aforementioned philosopher already made an important distinction between epistemological procedures, when it came to mathematics and things governed by supposedly fixed laws (*Physis*), such as nature, and human things and the knowledge related to them, and between doing things that result in products separated from those who produce them and doing that aims at the perfection of the agent, between *poiesis* and praxis; a distinction that is in parallel with another one of a more methodological nature.

Recognizing the dignity of *phronetic* knowledge allows one not to fall into the temptation of wanting to establish an epistemic knowledge about teaching, a “context-proof” knowledge, as if it were an abstract object along the lines of the formal sciences. It also distances itself from technicism, which now, updated by new media, promises a practice devoid of ethical-political choices. *Phronetic* knowledge, it is important to point out, is a living knowledge, which is remade in each new situation. Its incompleteness is not a defect, but a virtue, a kind of antidote to an education that is always at risk of sclerosis.

Finally, considering the specificity of the educational task and formation for the exercise of teaching, led to a search, in the notion of *phronesis*, inspiration to overcome the polarity between episteme and *téchne*, showing that, although both are relative to education, as they are for

¹⁶ Analogously, it can be considered that the meaning of a republican school is not the success of students in evaluation processes (vestibular, Enem...), but the qualification of subjects who will deal with common issues in a public sphere. If, in achieving this objective, evaluative, meritocratic processes were used, they should not overshadow the greater meaning.

ethics and politics, they are insufficient to account for the complexity and dynamism of this extremely difficult responsibility, which is to welcome new generations with the intent of inclusion and renewal of the common world. Aristotle foresaw this; Gadamer helped to re-establish the potentiality of this thought; and it was up to us to revisit this tradition of thought regarding the challenges of the present time. It is hoped, with this, to contribute to a debate that should be shared by all those who believe in republican virtues, knowing that their potentialities and frailties are as finite as their artificers.

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