

Images of Preparation: from Greek ethics to contemporary formativity

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ABSTRACT – Images of Preparation: from Greek ethics to contemporary formativity. The article analyzes *preparation policies*, which entail a change in the comprehension, perceptions and dispositions of subjects through the idea of “elaboration of the self”. It deals with different takes on the idea of preparation, based on articles published in the Brazilian magazine *Veja*, and on meanings of preparation coming from the Foucauldian studies on Hellenic, Christian and neoliberal cultures. The analysis points to a Christian-neoliberal continuity in the construction of the contemporary notion of preparation which, indifferent to the aesthetics involved in the preparation of the self even among the ancient Greeks, constitutes itself upon an eminently labor-based nature that transforms the search for a full life into desires for a viable existence in market terms.

Keywords: Formative Discourses. Preparation Policies. Neoliberalism and Education.

RESUMO – Figurações do Preparo: da ética grega à formatividade contemporânea. O artigo analisa as *políticas de preparo* pelas quais são alteradas compreensões, percepções e disposições do sujeito mediante a ideia de elaboração de si. Aborda significados da ideia de preparo com matérias da revista *Veja* e de sentidos de preparação oriundos dos estudos foucaultianos da cultura helênica, cristã e neoliberal. A análise aponta uma continuidade cristã neoliberal na constituição da noção contemporânea de preparação que, alheia à estética envolvida na preparação de si mesmo entre os gregos, constitui-se por uma natureza eminentemente laboral que transforma a busca da vida plena em anseios por uma existência mercadologicamente viável.

Palavras-chave: Discursos Formativos. Políticas de Preparo. Neoliberalismo e Educação.

Introduction

In the years that closed the 18th century, Goethe (1917) conceded to Wilhelm Meister¹ what today amounts to an unthinkable right: that of considering finished his path of formation. “Hail to thee, young man! Thy Apprenticeship is done: Nature has pronounced thee free” (Book VII, Ch. IX, par. 24). A statement impossible to accept today, since we are immersed in discursive movements that confer to the notion of formativity the fundamental status of *unfinishable*. This becomes particularly visible in notions such as that of *lifelong learning* which, placed in the limelight after World War II², have been significantly strengthened in the last decades. As Stephen Ball (2013) reminds us, the current discourses in favor of lifelong learning work by the construction of an individualization through the management of existence; through the reduction of moral responsibility in the face of the utilitarian rise of contemporary rationalities – or via the construction of a different kind of morality, as we shall argue here; and through the construction of a discursivity that produces its statements largely based on criteria associated to the definition of social classes.

Therefore, there may be something highly valuable in the exercise of going somewhat deeper into what constitutes this endlessness of contemporary formation. Avoiding certain movement of naturalizing an aprioristic idea of formation, we try here to find indications about the way in which certain formative apparatus that “[...] is a mushy mixture of the visible and the articulable” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 38) of an age which gave to formation and its unfolding a series of new shapes was constituted upon this idea.

Endlessness seems to be but one of the elements that attends the idea of formation. Numerous authors have cast a careful eye on the complex and multifaceted contemporary formative aspirations, and reflections such as those of Noguera-Ramirez (2011) and Popkewitz (2001a) are particularly enlightening with regard to this theme. Adding to those voices, the authors of the present article put forward an analysis that focuses specifically on the construction of certain discourses cherished by the notion of formativity, starting mainly from the idea of preparation – an axial element in the constitution of different discourses about formation within the framework of current discursive regimes. Several rationalities impinge on this concept, performing transformations and raising tensions in its meaning, oftentimes in favor of specific forms of the government of subjectivities. It seems, therefore, possible to conduct a study on the preparation policies, if by *policy* we are to understand, with Deleuze (1998), the processes through which the force lines that constitute the subjectivities of an era – or the resistances to them – are put in motion.

We can understand preparation policies as the construction of certain social forms through which the understandings, perceptions and dispositions of the subject faced with the idea of the elaboration of his/her own existence are modified. We take the idea of preparation,

within this context, as a kind of analytic binder that brings together discourses that make the subject lean over himself (or over those who he somehow conducts) by virtue of some form of accommodation imperative to him – a reason why the discussions carried out by Foucault about the notion of the care of the self and its derivations are particularly valuable in this context, as we shall see. Therefore, the interest here is, more specifically, that of presenting certain discursive continuities and discontinuities that make possible to bring about a contemporary idea of preparation which, being above all of a labor-related and utilitarian nature, has been capable of colonizing many of our educational efforts. A look, therefore, upon certain movements of production of subjectivity fundamental to the educational aspirations produced within what may perhaps be called nowadays a formative apparatus.

An apparatus, for Foucault, emerges in the form of networks of relations capable of turning correlate discursive elements hitherto heterogeneous (Castro, 2009). Through an apparatus, statements of distinct natures, including scientific knowledges, architectural elaborations, moral precepts and specialized speeches – to cite only a few examples – are brought together, materializing specific and always multilinear forms of operationalization of knowledges. Not by accident, Deleuze (1990) will approximate this notion to the image of a tangle, seeing in the confused reliefs outlined by the power relations inherent to the apparatus the creation of a large heterogeneous landscape, full of discontinuities.

The formative apparatus is wide, disperse, and materializes in knowledges that spread well beyond the spaces formally dedicated to the investments on human professional formativity. The truths produced in the sphere of formation are placed in the mouths of specialists, in opinion columns or in the timelines of social networks; and capturing them requires an effort to follow certain historicity enmeshed in their production. It is, therefore, into this mesh of knowledges constitutive of the formative apparatus that we intend to go, with the aim of producing an analysis about certain continuities and displacements fundamental to the construction of a mode of understanding preparation, itself one of the founding elements of this apparatus, in our times.

We present initially a kind of contemporary discursive map of the idea of preparation of the subject, based on a group of pieces collected from a wide circulation Brazilian magazine, the *Veja*³ magazine. Next, we raise certain tensions in such rationalities, making use of some of Michel Foucault's texts containing fundamental reflections about the way in which the idea of preparation can be produced and modified along the historical strands with which the French philosopher works. Thus, in the way they are presented here, the statements made by *Veja* magazine serve two purposes: on the one hand, they allow to bring together, in a sort of diagram, some of the discursive forces that currently invest and attribute meanings to the notion of preparation; on the other hand, they serve as a platform for an analysis capable of tensioning such discursivity, with a view to other, historically situated, modes of consti-

tution of knowledges around this theme, into which the Foucauldian thinking may at some points delve.

The Notion of Preparation in *Veja*: formative times, crises multiplied

The notion of preparation is elaborated in the pages of *Veja* based on a long series of propositions of various natures that focus on and connect with prominent themes of the educational field. Such statements give substance to a discursivity which, already clearly visible in the 1990s, sustains itself through the use of rationalities still very much current, and common, as we shall see, to contemporary statements in favor of the preparation of the subject. They arise, for example, linked to global diagnostics seen in several pieces published during the years, for example, *A Revolução que Liquidou os Empregos* (1994, p. 88) [The revolution that exterminated jobs], which confers to business changes a status of worldwide revolutionary transformation; *Os Filhos da Bolha* (1995, p. 62) [The children of the bubble], with indications focused on the education of children, marked by concerns about certain attitudes from parents seen as excessively protective; *A Vida Com Instruções* (2008, p. 54) [Life with instructions], a kind of primer on the constitution of good behavior in the face of current needs, through reflections and advices based on the positive role of clear-cut order in the formation of future citizens.

Rather common to the series of pieces studied here is a production of the formative continuity so fundamental to contemporary discourses. But it is interesting to realize how this continuous ambience emerges frequently associated to the production of other modes of relation with the times of life, based on which the subject relates to the calls for preparation of the self and of the other. An example of that is the modern desire to produce manageable sequences and continuities in individualized existences, where one concocts temporalities in the preparation of those lives to be governed. Constructions that bring with themselves at least three fundamental movements – of discursive constitution of a necessary urgency, of an eternal insufficiency, and of a contingent pact –, which express specific temporal regimes fundamental for the truths around formation to be established nowadays.

The first temporal operation reified within the neoliberal notion of preparation is based on the shortening of the acceptable time between one formative event and another, throughout existence. Lopez-Ruiz (2007), based on concepts related to the Human Capital Theory, points to the establishment of a race where “[...] everything or nearly everything becomes an object of investment” (Lopez-Ruiz, 2007, p. 402), and where every person is capable of incrementing quantitatively his or her abilities through “constant investment” (Lopez-Ruiz, 2007, p. 410). At the basis of this ever-hasty enterprise lies the qualification inherently associated to the formative act itself.

The pressure for constant preparation is no stranger to the *Veja* reporters. For that very reason, the piece that focuses on the importance of electronic games in childhood (A Brincadeira..., 1992) legitimizes a specialized diagnostics capable of saying, in the words of a psychologist, that “[...] without contact with games the child will be in social disadvantage”, since “[...] children need these abilities to survive in a world more and more technological and computer-based” (A Brincadeira..., 1992, p. 94). Discussions like these will be recurrently formulated in favor of a preparation based on social urgency. More than simply competition-based, the continuous and urgent struggle towards preparation takes place against a backdrop of actual personal deficit, a lack of preparation in the face of what is already given as necessary, along the lines of what Rose (1998, p. 44) considers as one of the contemporary bases of the government of souls: the “[...] discomfort created by a normative judgement about the distance between what we can become and the incitement offered to overcome this discrepancy”. It is important to note that this individualizing discomfort produced in the pages of the magazine will be usually corroborated by reified economic statements as, for example, in the statements of one of the magazines columnists, based on a well-known educability phrased in accounting terminology: “As a general rule, the more one studies the higher the initial salary [...]. Indeed, the larger the educational stockpile with which we start our professional lives, the more we earn” (A Mágica..., 2013, p. 20). The discourses in favor of preparation that emerge from the pages of the magazine under study are mostly associated to the construction of statements focused on changes seen as necessary, which makes even more constant the claims for urgency and for radical changes in subjects’ existence. In texts that frequently associate unstable global realities to the emergency needs for new behavior, we see the appearance of elements that strengthen the labor meaning of the existences to be prepared: alerts such as “[...] the economy that is built upon ruins has many places, but they are reserved for those who have the energy and discipline to follow constant shifts in direction” (O Que Está... 1993, p. 90) find their place alongside indications of journeys that would culminate in a fuller and more efficacious preparation. The antagonism created between economically undesirable realities and individualized investments of a market-based character makes unquestionable the constant need for preparation, in labor terms, and the picture of a world in constant transformation will legitimize, for instance, the analysis that says that “[...] in the last 15 years businesses have changed so radically that management experts refer to this period as the revolutionary years” (A Revolução..., 1994, p. 88); it will also allow the establishment of correlations with personal transformations, stimulated by pieces that never fail to observe a visible context of alarming professional existence and the possible individualized ways out of it:

For the citizen, the plunge (caused by changes in businesses) was scary. If he has not already lost his job to a barcode, he is threatened by unknown requirements. They

want him to speak English fluently, because the manual, the client or the supplier are foreigner. They expect – better to say, demand – that he is computer literate, creative, flexible, restless. That, if they do not ask the candidate to a job whether, by any chance, he has had the interesting experience of living a few years abroad (Assombração..., 1998, p. 68).

From complex images like these, capable of imprinting a series of disqualifications onto a kind of universalizing problematic amalgamate, calls for correction are created; and from this century – which is the century of the unsustainable problems, but also the century of possibilities for improvements hitherto unthinkable – derive aspirations of urgency and radicality in the preparation of the human beings that inhabit it.

There are, therefore, fundamental discursive elements that make certain images from the external environment lean over the production of individualities, based on messages that align negatively qualified panoramas with urgent reforming needs. Whatever the nature of the social environments, what matters is that upon them discourses are constituted which provoke the “[...] conviction that everything is under reform, nothing is finished, in a situation of crisis of the institutions” (Passetti, 1999, p. 60) and also of the individual, as we can see from the journalistic pieces selected. Associated to formativity, the current nature of the alerts in favor of preparation engenders a relation between the character of social reconstruction and a management of the self taken as extremely necessary, to the point of allowing this interesting diagnostic from the expert: “A crisis, a profound crisis. Only that can save our education” (Você..., 2008, p. 74).

If in a first movement it is possible to isolate some discursive elements that provoke certain contraction in the times in the management of preparation, perhaps it is in a contrary movement, but somehow complementary to it, that we find another fundamental motto of the messages for preparation in our days. Alongside the urgency produced by the incessant and immediate need for preparation discussed so far, there is the constitution of a maximum temporal expansion formulated in the terms of a formative eternity also taken as unquestionable; a perpetuity fed by the constitution of a *fundamental insufficiency* that reverberates in the subjective existences, demanding as a counterpart an incessant process of preparation intensely focused on the individuals’ market viability.

The need for preparation becomes infinite, firstly through the production of multiple and complex formative demands that render unacceptable anything that lacks an effervescent dynamism. If life, above all labor-related, “is reduced nowadays to a constant process of learning” (O Que Está..., 1993, p. 88), it is because upon it we could constitute not just an endless repertoire of knowledges, but also a necessarily complex formative ideal that requires constant preparation:

The employee who does not speak English is never promoted [...] the computer illiterates can no longer be good doctors, lawyers, librarians, secretaries or air tickets sales people. [...] Companies want flexible employees. [...] Another current demand is labelled by business consultants as 'curiosity' (A Revolução..., 1994, p. 91).

There appears, therefore, at the basis of endless preparation, a moral constituted from a minimal *curriculum vitae* sufficiently wide, that points to capacities requiring a limitless preparation of uncertain outlines, such as *flexibility, curiosity, knowledge of the market, and general culture* – which can be taken as a demand from the workers themselves, visible in the speech of a lawyer interviewed by the magazine in the context of a piece that defended a review of labor legislation, conducted in 2017: “What businesses are more predisposed to negotiate, even to answer to claims from the millennials (people who became adults in the 2000s), is the flexibility of the working hours” (Agora..., 2017, p. 77). Produced as a requirement of the market or of the new generations, this flexible morality frequently ends up pointing towards a curricular parametrization of all the existence which, in the limit, converts every moment of life in a stage of preparation towards an ideal that is particularly productive precisely because it is unreachable. It will come as no surprise, therefore, that even the currently commonplace impossibility of parents of being with their children on a daily basis will be seen as an “opportunity for children’s development”, which in part “[...] is true, since they learn to make decisions and to solve small problems without adult help” (Solidão..., 1993, p. 57) – which clearly will be necessary to them in their future lives, qualified in labor-related terms. Under contemporary preparation discourses it is constantly in favor of market viability that the attention to the other and to other aspects of the developing life will merit their place and investments.

The labor-based morality constituted in the preparation policies more evident in our days feeds from so-called formative strategies that constitute, between the long duration of processes associated to basic or higher schooling and the brevity of daily events, time sufficiently long to guarantee the *feeling of formation* and sufficiently reduced to avoid the *feeling of completeness*. In the formative market, this is materialized in an endless profusion of courses that modularize the possibilities of acquisition and certification, under consumer forms ever more customizable. To the subjectivities, such strategies present a repertoire of various possibilities/necessities that turn the person under preparation into a careful collector of temporal sequences socially legitimized as *moments of formation*.

The presentation of multiple formative sequences points to the existence of an element inherent to the rationalities of endless preparation, which is perhaps the main responsible for its productivity: the establishment of an inescapable insecurity in individual preparation

that promotes continuous and direct attention to oneself, and whose fundamental operation is the disqualification of the preparation of the individual faced with the global reality. If one has always to speak of the new needs of the contemporary world it is because based on them one can affirm, for example, that such global demands “[...] are crystallized in the environment of businesses, and Brazilian students do well to be prepared for their requirements” (O Que Está..., 1993, p. 89). Reality becomes, in principle, reactive to those who do not place themselves under formation on a daily basis – notwithstanding the fact that even to those who are immersed in incessant formativity the equally endless exigency for preparation makes itself clear: “[...] in many businesses, older employees, trained for repetitive tasks in rudimentary machinery, are fired, and better educated employees are hired to deal with the newer and more complex equipment” (A Revolução..., 1994, p. 88), says one of those alert-pieces full of comparative schooling data and their relation to the number of employees in companies.

The present has, therefore, to be disqualified in favor of a future which, when achieved, will be again devalued, in an obstacle-updating cycle that incites continuity, turning existence into an aggregate of labor-related challenges to be faced. The multiplication of such requirements takes form also as a strategy of many of the pieces in *Veja* magazine, which often set up brief *guiding manuals* from which ways of being and acting are taught to help one become, or help to turn someone else, more market viable. Something that is visible in the clear example of a piece *Uma Bela Sinfonia Pueril* (2015), that, based on a discursivity of neuroscientific inspiration, produces a colorful picture of guidelines focused on the three first years of a child’s life, guiding parents based on the sequence: age – cerebral areas activated – what the baby does – what parents must do. Thus, between one and two years old, to make the most of the cerebral moment of the child, it would be time to “encourage the contact with a different language” (Uma bela..., 2015, p. 82); and between the ages of two and three, considering that “[...] it is at this stage that the behavior of the offspring will be sculptured”, it will be necessary to “impose limits in education” (Uma bela..., 2015, p. 83).

A third temporal operation made possible by the current visible preparation policies in the *Veja* magazine regards the establishment of a necessary state-of-pact in the present time derived from discourses produced from social participation. Not of an eternal nature, nor purely compressed in the urgency, this demand establishes a temporality contingent to the so-called *collective* needs, which, for being continually propagated from the already mentioned production of a context of generalized crisis, throw the subject into a game of maximum and collaborative attention under the emphasis of a state of participation derived from the pressure of the *now*.

The discourses of totality abound in the social calls in this magazine. Collaboration is, first and foremost, converted into a major instrument for the correction of direction in society; after all, “[...] the whole country, and not just its elites, need the educational impulse to make society break free from the quagmires of poverty” (*A Máquina...*, 1991,

p. 46). If it is through the risk of individual lack of preparation that subjects are kept manageable via the issue of insecurity, it is, on the other hand, through the incitement to participation that the same insecurity seems to work in collectivity.

A second result issues from the discourses of participation, which is the production of a necessarily systemic nature of actions proposed: because “[...] education is not just a government’s task, but has to involve communities, teachers, students and their parents, and can only gain substance if the nation as a whole becomes aware of the fact that without good schools everybody will lose” (Caminhos..., 1991, p. 31). The structural character that collective efforts acquire around the question of formation places the notion of preparation in a mathematically quantifiable and statistical context, giving to the very idea of collectivity an individualizing basis, which takes place through the definition of an ideal to be reached – from the production of averages that try to express numerically the formative acquisitions fundamental to all –, followed by the individualized attention through which each of the subjects of a population can measure him/herself. Currently, we are close to a peculiar notion of collective, which points to a society in which “[...] the rise of individuality signaled a progressive weakening – falling apart or tearing apart – of the dense web of social bonds that tightly wrapped the totality of life’s activities” (Bauman, 2005, p. 20); but which, on the other hand, seems to pay little attention to the power of the difference that emerges from the notion of the common (Biesta, 2013), based as it is fundamentally in universalizing discourses with aspirations to a homogenized participation. Under an outlook that is firstly “from all to each one”, what seems to be de-potentialized is the attention to forces coming from links established on the basis of the founding desires of a political body that goes beyond individual aspirations (Safatle, 2016); and collectivity therefore becomes nothing more than an aggregate of subjects attending to their own preparation who, in an individualized manner, are constituted amidst the groups.

The valuation of individualization in the collective sphere works in two layers. Firstly, a layer dedicated to the subject in his/her isolated aspirations for preparation. It frequently provokes a direct discouragement of common enterprises and of the forms in which, from them, social arrangements are organized (Bauman, 2001). The other process of isolation is carried out by the type of discursive operation, “central to govern differences”, that converts specificities into identities (Bampi, 2007, p. 33). As in the case of the piece that, by creating the group of the “overprotected children”, can argue that each one of them tend to be “timorous”, “sly”, “insecure” and “dependent”, prone to becoming adults that are “selfish”, “individualistic”, “with difficulties to establish relationships” and “to make choices” (Excesso..., 2010, p. 114). To bring preparation to a personal level, to create social identities to be prepared: together, these two levels of individualizing organization bring about feelings of collaboration, solidarity and tolerance that operate within the preparation policies.

Isolation through individualization and through identification allows movements that are fundamental to the techniques of government that insert the need for preparation into so-called collective processes. First, they make more fertile the discussions of a statistical order, producing a series of elements and producing, from the identity of groupings, their regularities (Traversini; Bello, 2009), which stabilize discontinuous flows “placing them in a field of objectivity” (Popkewitz; Linblad, 2001, p. 120). Statistical productions generate possibilities of management of existences based on estimates and probabilities that allow the construction of continuous plans between distinct discursive fields (Popkewitz; Linblad, 2001), as in the case of the school that, from the observation that “more than 30% of parents” who “had a certificate for one profession [...] ended up working at something else”, proposed to carry out actions through the Educational Guidance Service focused on children and based on the “reality that advances in the marketplace” (O Que Está..., 1993, p. 87).

Within contemporary collectivities, the localized groupings of existences to be prepared are also seen from the viewpoint of the modifications brought about by the “market dynamics”, which justifies the subtitle *School of Life* found in a piece talking about the way in which schools have followed the changes in the marketplace in the preparation of their pupils (O Que Está..., 1993, p. 87). It is, therefore, also in the name of this existence-preparation that many partners will intervene in the formative reality of individuals. The latter will bring together the large educational systems, the family and the teachers, sharing methodologies such as the *WebQuests*, in a caring – in the present case, associated to the selection of websites for children and youngsters – that “[...] can be adopted at home by parents” (Endereços..., 2002, p. 96). All of them together, always, in search of finalities of preparation susceptible of presentation via the countless graphs and alerts that populate the universalist and collaborative aspirations of world change.

Perpetuities, crises, complexifications. Many of the elements capable of circumscribing the notion of preparation referred to in the pages of *Veja* magazine come from knowledges reified in contemporary market-related discourses. But such discursivity is not isolated, and as such it has a historicity that, albeit discontinuous, is traceable, and circumscribes its condition of possibility, visibility and legibility. Foucault, particularly in the studies conducted in his last courses – focused on the complex relation between the production of subjectivities and the question of truth –, develops a series of reflections which may throw a different light on the question of preparation. Some of those reflections are recalled here in parallel with, or as a counterpoint to, the figuration of preparation as displayed in *Veja* magazine. They are, in this sense, analytic tools capable of inducing certain tensions, and of placing in evidence some continuities, so that one may observe which meanings we approach and which meanings we distance ourselves from in the construction of the hegemonic way of conceiving preparation nowadays.

The Notion of Preparation in the Aesthetics of Greek Existence: the *paraskheué* and the abruptness of the event

In one of his last courses at the Collège de France, Foucault (2006) delves into the complex relations, historically produced, between subject and truth. The historian of ideas at that moment was concerned with the way Greeks, particularly after Socrates, elaborated knowledges about themselves, creating “specific techniques” employed by men to “understand themselves” (Foucault, 2007, p. 224). The Foucauldian analytics, especially in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (Foucault, 2006), pays attention fundamentally to the notion of the care of the self (*epiméleia heautoû*), which “[...] remained a fundamental principle for describing the philosophical attitude throughout Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman culture” (Foucault, 2006, p. 8).

The relations between subject and truth such as outlined by Foucault appear linked to historical movements that sometimes come closer, sometimes move away from, two important philosophical questions: the way one may access truth and spirituality, which comprises “the necessary transformations in the very being of the subject” (Foucault, 2006, p. 17) that will allow this access. The movement away from them will typically ground modern thinking, to which the conditions of such access, distanced from any need for spiritual modifications, are based on formality and the objectivity of the rules of knowledge, and on extrinsic cultural and moral conditions that do not affect “[...] the structure of the subject as such” (Foucault, 2006, p. 18).

The Greek models of access to truth are rather different from that, with transformation of the self being always a fundamental element, although in many distinct ways. At the heart of Socratic and Platonic thinking, argues Foucault (2006), the idea of the care of the self appears directly connected to a circularity that connects it to the “knowledge of government as the government of others” (Foucault, 2006, p. 51). In the first two centuries of our Era, some Hellenic schools, particularly the Stoic, will accomplish important modifications in the structure of *epiméleia heautoû*, making, on the one hand, this care go beyond the idea of the simple “know thyself”, assuming the form of practical activities and exercises; and, on the other hand, they make the notion of the care of the self escape the sphere of the strict interest in the government of the Polis, taking as its main focus not the governance of the social sphere but the very relation with oneself in a kind of aspiration for “self-finalization” (Foucault, 2006, p. 258). To take care of oneself, through the carrying out of countless daily exercises – such as meditation, listening and writing, among others – became the motto in Stoicism of a culture of the self that already could be seen there to spread and universalize (Foucault, 2005).

To what kind of relation with the truth will, then, this structuring care in the relation with oneself point towards, as it moves away from the attention to the city to attention to oneself? The Foucauldian analy-

ses will observe that one of the main purposes in the exercises about oneself proposed by the Stoic masters to their disciples is that of bringing the subject to “will freely” (Foucault, 2006, p. 132), which in texts such as those of Seneca points to a willing that is not determined by external events, nor by one’s own (misleading) inclinations, but, rather, purely and simply by the search for “self-control, self-possession” characteristic of *sapientia* (Foucault, 2006, p. 134). The “self” to be constituted here will be therefore different from that of the Platonic model, in which access to truth was given by the remembrance of reminiscences seen by the soul in contact with the essences; but it will also be indifferent to a Christian model that, lasting strongly until the 16th century – but, undeniably, with contemporary reverberations –, will constitute a circularity between the Truth (of the sacred Text) and the knowledge of the self, reachable only through renouncing to oneself (Foucault, 2014).

The stoic transformation of the care of the self, via its “self-finialization”, will impart an aesthetic character to the search for truth, henceforth grounded in the possibility of “turning one’s life into a work of art” (Foucault, 2006), indifferent to aprioristic rules, rather full of a true discourse that affects it. The reach of truth will then be subjected to the incorporation, through exercises upon oneself, of messages selected by the subject in search of his/her perfecting, in a subjective spiritual exercise. Not an “objectification of the self in a true discourse” (Foucault, 2006, p. 401), as in the Christian discursivity that will gain momentum in the following centuries, but the “subjectivation of true discourse” (Foucault, 2006, p. 400) in the very experience of the subject. Foundation of an aesthetics of existence that will take Foucault, years later, to declare his certainty that one could not “[...] find any normalization in [...] the Stoic ethics (Dreyfus; Rabinow, 1995, p. 254), since the access to truth, in Stoicism, would always take place within the personal choice about the discourses to be incarnated by the subject, hence the lack of interest in that Hellenic school in supplying any universal model of behavior.

The Foucauldian reflections in the debate about the notion of *paraskheué* (preparation) among the Greeks and Romans will take place precisely within this sphere of the investigation of the Stoic ethics, an aesthetics of the self: virtuous form, much more than a model to be followed. The preparation of the self, fundamental element in the ancient ascesis, will happen mainly through the ability to adjust to the unforeseen eventness of the moment in which it takes place, “not in such a way as to outdo others, or even to surpass ourselves” (Foucault, 2006, p. 388), but as a way of becoming stronger than what may come to happen; a strength that comes not from the annulment of the event, but from the wisdom that consists in dealing with its intensities. This strengthening happens only through exercises capable of inscribing in the spirit the reasonable principles of behavior that the subject approaches, converting them in perennial certainties and, more than that, in equally stable *matrices of action*, capable of putting into play the most convenient answers to the events of life. To the extent that *paraskheué* is constituted in this relation between messages and behavior, it will be “the element

of transformation of *logos* into *ethos*" (Foucault, 2006, p. 394): a place of incarnation, in the subject, of the truths that, through his own decisions, constitute him.

Preparation, therefore, does not appear here associated to any kind of moralizing discourses around aprioristic truths. Perhaps that is why Foucault himself, in his analysis of the works of Seneca, highlights that that thinker, although understanding life as an endless path of preparation, does not put in a general way the fundamental question of Christianity about "preparation for what" (Foucault, 2006, p. 541). A question probably of secondary importance within a Stoic discursivity that establishes an art of living indifferent to universalist social codes. Departed from them, preparation takes on the sole function of making man less negatively susceptible to the coming events. But it is worth recalling here that we are not talking about an exercise of production of representations about what is to come, an exercise seen by the Stoics themselves with distrust. When discussing the practice of preparation exercises in the face of evils – the *praemeditatio malorum* –, Foucault argues that such practices, before constituting activities based on the representational construction of future situations, consist in actualization exercises, in the realization of the very possibility of the evil through experiences that allow the subject to enliven himself, but in a rather peculiar way, through a curious exercise of reduction of the evil to a passing factuality. Through it, the wounding sword will be nothing more than an instrument to cause a brief wound, the pain will be nothing more than something bearable and, if it is not, it will happen in the brevity inherent to the moment of death. Therefore, a "making present of the future" (Foucault, 2006, p. 572) that indeed will not take place through imagination, but through its negation, capable of reducing the reality of evil to its least possible.

The Christian Notion of Preparation: evil and penitence in the production of the good existence

Within the context of certain arts of life in the Greco-Roman world, preparation takes place, therefore, through a logic of elaboration of the self based solely *on the interest of outdoing the event* that justifies preparation; through an *aesthetic search related to a form of the beautiful life* elected by the subject himself and accessed in the incarnation/affectation of the self by the messages that compose it; and *by the making present of the time of the event*, made possible by the experiential actualization that simplifies the possible difficulties.

All that stands in sharp contrast to the calls for preparation, contemporary to those of the Stoics, but which originated from the Christian practices of the first centuries. In another of his courses – entitled *On the Government of the Living* –, Foucault (2014) will conduct a careful genealogy of the ways in which the relations between subject and truth emerged amidst a series of founding debates of Christianity and, he will say, of the very Western model of thinking. In this context, it is particu-

larly interesting to observe how the idea of preparation, disconnected from the subjective relation with an ethical truth proper to the subject – as with the Greeks – will be organized around a Christian morality that, since Tertullian in the fourth century, owes much to the systematic institution of the figure of the evil (Foucault, 2014). It is in the face of evil that a fundamental fear will be produced, through which “there must be constant anxiety in the subject’s relationship to himself” (Foucault, 2014, p. 117); and against it will emerge a “physical”, “corporal”, and “spiritual” gymnastics (Foucault, 2014, p. 121), fundamental to the preparation for baptism in the first centuries. In movements such as these what becomes visible is the shift in the notion of preparation, now established within a game between journey and reward, which has as its background the attention to the spiritual battle in which Christian life is then transformed.

In the crucible of the spiritual war founding Christian morality, to some extent inaugurated by the writings of Tertullian, intense mechanisms of preparation were put in place – focused on the preparation for baptism or for the catechumenal life that precedes the recognition of the subject as Christian (Foucault, 2014). The needs are then multiplied for “constant tests of truth” (Foucault, 2014, p. 146) that work as a kind of continual authentication of the good existence, made possible by the emergence of the relation between the mechanisms for the deliverance from the sinner’s faults and his salvation, which for Foucault (2014) makes the Christian church itself viable. Many of these trials will obviously be materialized in spiritual exercises which, contrary to those of certain Hellenistic schools, are grounded in the guarantee of a morally acceptable conduct, or of its rescue, faced with the social codes that originated Christendom. Practices such as prayers, fasting and alms will be brought together within a penitential statute that, in its unfoldings, will include a series of prohibitions, obligations and, mainly, of “reflexive acts” (Foucault, 2014, p. 181) through which the individual manifests his own truth – and from which public confessions and supplications are the most evident examples.

To these series of practices that brought about a Christian moral system we are all deeply indebted. Christianity, argues Foucault, is not the system of beliefs that introduces the question of the fault for the first time in Western history – the Greco-Roman culture, in fact, already knew it. But it is only with Christianity that the error – the individual distancing from the truth, therefore –, within this sphere of the problem of the evil, will be problematized in the context of the recurring falls throughout the life of the faithful. The Christian is, thus, a subject tied continuously to a set of practices necessary to demonstrate his repentance as the penitent that he will never cease to be.

The unification of the message of Christian Truth is, therefore, associated from its inception to the constitution of a universalizing and moralizing image of the evil, and to a perennial recognition of an insufficiency that implies in the movement of constant perfecting. It is not by accident, therefore, that Foucault will find in Christianity, and

not in the Greco-Roman practices, the basis of the relations between subjectivity and truth in the West (Foucault, 2014). As far as the problematizing of spirituality as transformation of the subject himself is dissociated from the question of access to the truth, and at the moment when this access is integrated to certain forms constituted as universal, and which end up giving shape to the *good existence*, new modalities of intervention on the self can emerge. And the objectification of the subject, developed within the Christian morality, as well as its relations with the idea of preparation, will to some extent be reified in many of its elements within the context of a historically much more recent process that seems to find its zenith in the neoliberal discourses.

The Neoliberal Notion of Preparation: echoes of Christendom and the materialization of the *Homo oeconomicus*

Since the last century, with the emergence of an essentially market-based State reason, new discursive elements bearing a peculiar moral meaning have constituted a perspective of strengthening of a notion of preparation rather distinct from the one that moved certain discursivities in the Hellenistic schools of the first centuries of our era, and considerably closer to the Christian model that lived alongside them for a certain period. A moral modelling of specific outlines, owing much to the rise of North American neoliberalism discussed by Foucault in his *The Birth of Biopolitics* (Foucault, 2008).

In his genealogical studies on the neoliberal forms of government of others, Foucault proposes the constitution of a figure which, in the context of the neoliberal model proposed by North American thinkers, seems particularly proficuous in the analysis of the new forms of conceiving preparation. Discussing directly the rise of liberalism in its North American variety – which, more than an economic system, is “[...] a whole way of being in thinking” (Foucault, 2008, p. 218) – the French author localizes the important image of the *Homo oeconomicus*.

Foucault (2008, p. 303) understands that the central element of the North American neoliberal outlook is the attempt to “[...] introduce labor into the field of economic analysis”, after its excessive abstraction effected by classical liberalism, as already criticized by Marx. In this context, movements such as the Human Capital Theory (HCT) proposed by Theodore Schultz in the 1960s at the University of Chicago would have reinstated the labor issue at the heart of human conduct. Indeed, by including everything that the man accumulates in himself – the “human wealth”, as Schultz will put it – into the economic calculations (Lopez-Ruiz, 2007), HCT accomplished an important feat in establishing what would become, for Foucault, one of the central issues of neoliberalism: that of knowing “how the person who works uses the means available to him” (Foucault, 2008, p. 307).

For Lopez Ruiz, one of the main features of the post-war economic discourses was the growing desire to make calculable the most diverse

acquired individual abilities, something that had already been partly accomplished by Nicholson in the 19th century with the distinction between “living capital” – the human ability element of the work – and “dead capital”. What Schultz’s reflections promote, however, is the conversion of this outlook upon the human/nonhuman antagonism into a different one that considers, from man himself, that which is particular to him, assuming the division between innate aptitudes and acquired ones, and showing special affection for the latter. Attributing incalculable value to the possible formative acquisitions, the human capital theory opens room for “thinking the human as a form of capital” (Lopez Ruiz, 2008, p. 136).

Repositioned at the center of analyses, the figure of the working man, seen particularly by the classical liberal theory as an object of supply and demand for his workforce, elevates the condition of economically active subject, which now leans over itself, as never before, based on chiefly labor-based criteria. In this process, the problematizing of the issue of labor suffers an important shift, since from the point of view of the subject his workforce will no longer be an abstraction, but the mediation between his aptitudes and the income derived from them – a relation between subjective *machine* to (self)manage in its abilities and productivity and the *earnings stream* to be acquired, as in Foucault (2008, p. 308). Hence, problematizations of two different natures – that turn out to be complementary to each other in the neoliberal discursivity – gain momentum. On the one hand, a series of questions about the appropriate labor conduct will take place, no longer just from the side of the use of the labor force by those who explore it, but above all from the perspective of the worker himself who, emerging as a new *Homo oeconomicus*, becomes “a sort of enterprise for himself” (Foucault, 2008, p. 225), managing oneself and the market-wide results that derive from his own action. Apart from that, considering the machinal labor of the worker reified by the neoliberal modalities of the government of the conduct, new exigencies will appear in terms of professional accomplishments for the improvement of the self, capable of opening way to countless professional needs – normally phrased in terms of capacitation to continue to work, since the mentioned human machine, as any other machine, “has a lifespan, a length of time in which it can be used, an obsolescence, and an ageing” (Foucault, 2008, p. 309). It is as if neoliberalism reiterated the Christian interplay between journey, attention to evil and perfecting of the self, only this time, obviously, recasting it in the context of the market-based production of the self.

We see, therefore, that the *Homo oeconomicus* as presented in the North American neoliberalism does not point simply to an *economification* of all behavior; it is, above all, a “network of intelligibility” (Foucault, 2008, p. 345) from which the subject constitutes himself. The Foucauldian studies will indicate how, from the emergence of neoliberalism, it is a whole way of understanding the figure of the State and of individuals, mainly, that will be permeated by essentially market-based logics; not just a question of privatizing ideals, but a plethora of market-based rationalities which, by disseminating themselves, introduce themes as-

sociated to the expansion of conditions of economic viability and of the management of useful time in the interstices of human behavior.

The neoliberal figure of the *Homo œconomicus* seems to inaugurate a new “interface of government and the individual” (Foucault, 2008, p. 346) based on the generalization of the “economic form of the market” (Foucault, 2008, p. 333), emphasizing a market-based apparatus capable of serving as the basis for more individualized outlooks upon contemporary existences. It is here that the notion of preparation appears as particularly useful to some emerging enterprises of a capitalistic character, in so far as reality and life itself, based on acceptable market-based criteria, must be then removed from their randomness and abruptness in the process of preparation for existence faced with the world, and potentialized as systematizable sequences of events (Lazarato, 2014), before which appears a man who is (self)programmable and once and for all inimical to the unexpected.

Final Inquietudes

Perhaps it is time to go back to the contemporary unacceptability of something like Goethe’s narrative of Wilhelm Meister. Much of what makes formative finitude once and for all impossible nowadays resides in its incompatibility with a labor mode of existence which, having some of its rationalities elaborated within a Western outlook tributary of Christian forms of relationship with the truth, takes a more radical form in the more recent outlining of neoliberalism, capable of secularizing certain messages and journeys in favor of salvation through a kind of market-based distension of its basis: after all, the *Homo œconomicus* still carries much of the Christian catechumen of the first centuries.

In the slow and discontinuous paths of the relations between subjectivity and truth in the West, some of the fundamental approximations and distancing to the production of this subject of the good market-based existence are visible. Indifferent to the aestheticization of the existence present in some manifestations of Hellenic culture, the discursivity that founds Christianity knew how to take from the Greco-Roman practices of the self much of its structure, but made to bear upon it whole moral constitution whose basis were grounded in the notion of evil and in the reiterated relationship of the sinner individual with himself in search of salvation through the statute of penitence. Through this Christian model, therefore, elements of a universalization of models of conduct, of insufficiency and continuity, were established, secularized and radicalized through a spectrum of acceptable neoliberal existence that remained grounded in certain *spiritual* work carried out through successive interiorizations of market-originated messages that modify contemporary individualities. And that was how sensations fundamental to the working of an individuality acceptable to the market were constituted: they go from different forms of feeling inadequate, of feeling updated, incomplete, and eventually transform the subject in a citizen in constant debt.

Amidst the current continuities and discontinuities of Brazil's neoliberal model, magazines such as *Veja* function as a kind of *lay Bible* aimed at the conversion of part of the population usually found at the top of the socioeconomic and cultural pyramid. Just like numerous other communication vehicles, *Veja* produces a discursivity in favor of the preparation of the self and of the other based on the establishment of multiple crises. The adjectives that follow the notion of preparation, as it is commonly expressed in official and mediatic discourses, denoting urgency, perpetuity and participativity, function in accordance with certain elements common to a discursive regime frequently visible in the fields of education and professional insertion. Moreover, they endow the relation between them with a model in which the labor form, elevated to a moral condition, now conducts the very existences to be (self)formed.

It should be noted that the kind of neoliberal ethics inaugurated in contemporaneity is a central element to the capitalist model of our days, grounded in flexibility, since it allows us all to engage with “a subjectivity flexible, experimental and processual” and that “our force for creation in its freedom of experimentation” (Rolnik, 2014, p. 18) is well-received and, more than that, desired and celebrated by the market. But such subjective relation policy allows equally that we be attentive, even at the very moment when we see ourselves as free subjects, to a set of “*prêt-à-porter* identities” (Rolnik, 1997): glamorized, seductive identity-based prosthetics, compliant to ideal forms of existence, more acceptable to the models of success presented to us on a daily basis. That is the case of the “entrepreneur of himself” (Delory-Momberger, 2015), who proposes to be actor and author of his own life, responsible for his actions and destiny, whose profile is drawn within the individualistic tendencies that infiltrated every social stratum and became imperative in modern society.

It is, therefore, also a discourse with extremely moralizing elements, capable of taking form from the moral attention upon one's own conduct, making emerge certain knowledges that, contrasted with the Hellenic aspiration for *paraskheué*, have a lot to tell us about the new potentials of this interface between the government of the self and the government of the others, which the preparation policies developed could bring forward, especially after the rise of the neoliberal model.

The discourses that focus on a neoliberal preparation are, firstly, those that point towards the reification of work. As we have seen, not just from a classical liberal theory focused on the abstraction of supply and demand of workforce, but particularly through the constitution of a working subject that becomes the element of major investment in economic discourses, now transformed into individual behavior to be verified. The rise of this *market-based ethos* characterized by the Foucauldian figure of the *Homo oeconomicus*, points to the attention to a world knowledge that, as also for the Greeks, is only legitimized when the knowledge sought after incarnates the subject himself. But, if among the Hellenic schools studied by Foucault the knowledge neces-

sary to ascesis is associated to the “[...] modality of knowledge (*savoir*) of nature in so far as it is philosophically relevant for the practice of the self” (Foucault, 2006, p. 291), in contemporary preparation the focus lies on the search for the universalizing needs of the market that now translate the *good existence* through criteria such as effectivity and productivity. Through an outlook fixated on the exterior, which recalls the Christian meaning of preparation focused on a Truth that now is that of the Market, times of deep individualization emerge – even when based on supposed collectivities –, through which the *labor-acceptable existence* is materialized into an individual journey, but paying attention to neoliberal moralities that should work as reference to the outlook of the subject upon himself.

Finally, it is worth underlining that the purpose of putting against one another forms of preparation applied in different historical periods, as performed in the present analysis, is an attempt to carry out an exercise in enunciation of struggles that, taking place around certain knowledges, produce the discourses of truth in a given era. It is, therefore, based on an interest in de-naturalization through the displaying of fissures and ambiguities that mark the legitimation of any element of knowledge, so clearly diagnosed in many of the Foucauldian analytical efforts. Specifically within the issue investigated here, it is worth noting an interesting possible analytical relation between the later courses by Foucault and those that, given in previous years, focused on the production of certain modern models for the government of men. The approximation between Foucauldian studies on the question of liberalism – as well as the theories that succeeded – and the reflections about certain ethical forms born well before the rise of the reasons of State can still be proficuous in the construction of leads about the way in which we become subjects in our times. It is the relation between the Foucauldian works that leads us to understand that preparing oneself today is, above all, becoming viable in market terms. Perhaps, we, educators of this time, should somehow be worried about that.

Translated from Portuguese by Jessé Rebello de Souza

Received on March 10, 2018
Approved on September 27, 2018

Notes

- 1 The protagonist of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (Goethe, 2006).
- 2 In fact, as Guimarães (2016) reminds us, there are far older documents that point to policies aimed at making the need for formal learning perpetual. Condorcet's writings to this effect date from the French Revolution, and there are official texts written at the end of First World War dedicated to the importance of the formation of adults throughout their lives. But, as the author herself notices, it is indeed after World War II that, driven especially by international organizations, this kind of discourse acquires new amplitude.

3 The choice of the *Veja* magazine was not arbitrary. A report circulated by the *Associação Nacional de Editores de Revista* (National Association of Magazine Editors) in 2009, for example, lists this magazine as the third largest information magazine in the world, pointing to studies that project its total number of readers at around 8 million (ANER, 2009). Based on this fact, the research from which the present article results analyzed complete editions of this periodical published between the years of 1990 and 2017, amounting to just over one hundred pieces of more relevance to the theme under study; among them we find the reports referenced here, listed at the end of the text.

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