

The Beauty of Contradictory: The Clouds of Aristophanes

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ABSTRACT – The Beauty of Contradictory: The Clouds of Aristophanes. Aristophanes, in its comedy, classifies Socrates as a sophist, in a complete reversal of how the philosopher appears in Plato's texts. Nietzsche also creates several Socrates masks to face him in different contexts. The purpose of this paper is to present two matters: evaluating the possible beauty in the exercise of contradictory by creating a new interpretation to make thinking, and connecting reflection with the educational dimension, updating the theme for our time. It concludes with the essay that creating, inventing is a fundamental condition because we are "[...] fruitful only at the price of being rich in antagonisms, we remain young only on the condition that the soul does not relax, does not seek peace" (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 35).

Keywords: Aristophanes. Socrates. Nietzsche. Clouds. Education.

RESUMO – A Beleza do Contraditório: As Nuvens de Aristófanes. Aristófanes, em sua comédia, classifica Sócrates como sofista, em uma completa inversão de como o filósofo aparece nos textos de Platão. Nietzsche igualmente cria várias máscaras de Sócrates para enfrentá-lo em diferentes contextos. O objetivo do artigo é apresentar duas questões: avaliar a beleza possível no exercício do contraditório ao criar interpretação nova para fazer pensar e conectar a reflexão com a dimensão educacional, atualizando o tema para nosso tempo. Conclui-se, com o ensaio, que criar, inventar, é condição fundamental, pois somos "[...] fecundos apenas ao preço de sermos ricos em antagonismos, permanecemos jovens apenas sob a condição de que a alma não relaxe, não busque a paz" (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 35).

Palavras-chave: Aristófanes. Sócrates. Nietzsche. Nuvens. Educação.

Introduction

The comedy *The Clouds* by Aristophanes, presents a singular beauty: its characters stage aspects of life to make us think. The text prioritizes a reflection on changes that are taking place in society, schools and education, indicating a transition from the archaic period to the classical period in Greece. The irony present in the text seems to bear similarities to our time: disputes and antagonisms, demonstrating that chaos and decadence have been among us many times.

Thus, in this article, we wish to update the meaning of Aristophanes' text, since we live in times of obsession with supposedly new discourses, but which, in fact, are captured by market demands, condemning the school in many of its most relevant pedagogical aspects. The purpose of this reflection is not to define in advance the best orientation for thinking about education, but to invite the reader to inhabit a horizon of multiple possibilities for thinking and interpreting, including antagonisms, from a methodological perspective anchored in Nietzsche, considering interpretative art as the basis for genealogy. According to Benoit (2011, p. 73), the term *versuch* designates a "[...] specific attitude and its main driver is dissatisfaction, doubt, suspicion about interpretations that present themselves as final", and, often, as supposedly progressive and new. Facing this condition requires a method, in the form of testing, experimentation, attempts, since the *versuch* becomes, then, "[...] a multiplication of hypotheses to be risked, tried, in order to better arrive at the same fact" (Benoit, 2011, p. 77). It implies going to war with that which insists on presenting itself as truth, wanting to settle down and no longer accepting that which moves, always calling for new reflections.

Aristophanes belonged to a social group guided by tradition and aristocratic values. The comedy's text demonstrates its estrangement from what presents itself as new, denouncing a kind of dissolution of a legacy from the past that seems to want to abolish the aristocracy, the myths, and many other habits already consecrated in the Greek world. He has an aversion to a new education based on philosophical rationality taken as the only expression of wisdom. Rhetoric, words, and persuasion become the main ingredients of politics. Aristophanes then realizes that specialized teachers of words are emerging, interested in training those who have the leisure to learn. In this case, it refers to the sophists, who even charged to teach, and all of this in the text is placed under suspicion. There was a process of decay of ancient beliefs underway, the decline of the aristocracy and the arrival of another rationality marked by the sophists, but also by Socrates, in the text placed alongside the sophists. At this point, how bold is Aristophanes?

He decides, in his text, to ironize the one who was worshipped by the Greeks: Socrates. Turns this character into a trickster, leader of the sophists. Turned into a cheater, because he invents a world, the world of ideas, anchored in reason and the art of persuasion. It also turns Socrates into a wise man of useless things, a worshipper of

clouds and everything that has no relevance to the community. *The Clouds*, the title of the comedy is a metaphor that designates a reference to a type of divinity shrouded in a smokescreen, whose function is to persuade everyone to look to the sky, disregarding what is concrete in people's lives.

In his text, Aristophanes recognizes and denounces what was affecting and creating a crisis of moral and political values in his time. His comedy is an attack on the change that is underway. An attack, even, on the changes planned for education. For the Greeks, theater occupied a formative, pedagogical role. Comedy capable of generating laughter also has, within it, the dimension of criticism. Most plays, both tragedy and comedy, participated in competitions at festivals to be selected and then performed. In this exercise of expression, the right to criticism was enshrined, a frank speech that even made caricatures of politicians, authorities, and philosophers. Revisiting Aristophanes seems to be a good practice for learning to be more critical and ironic with those who present themselves as saviors, in an effort to overcome our, at times, obsession with being protected, creating possibilities for effectively thinking about an open and free citizenship.

The context of comedy

What is underway is a change in the educational model; word experts, led by Socrates, are in a school called the *Thinking Place*, designed to educate and instruct people for this new era. In comedy, a character is created, a new version of Socrates. We already know that there are many versions of this philosopher in different authors, but in Aristophanes' comedy, he occupies a unique place. He becomes a sophist, a master of the new times, capable of teaching about just and unjust thinking, depending on the contingencies. The figure of Socrates is drawn by multiple impulses in comedy: he is rude in some judgments, he designates the non-existence of the Greek gods and reveals that the Clouds represent a god accumulating forces and impulses that, at times, flow into humans. We must learn to look at the clouds, look at the sky to understand divine designs. The school welcomes students with a wide range of needs. This text focuses on the story of the comedy, one student, and one father in particular.

Strepsiades¹, an elderly farmer was being ruined by his wife and his son Pheidippides, a horse fanatic. The father had serious difficulties controlling his son's spending, and heard about Socrates and his sophistries, with which he could make the worst seem better, which could be a solution to deceive creditors. He made a first attempt to place his son in Socrates' school, but was unsuccessful, his son rejected the invitation. A new type of education was already on the horizon, as the obedience and values of parents, present in the Homeric world, no longer achieved their objectives. Social demands were different, and the family values of the nobility did not contemplate the new demands of life that were being imposed. This is already a criticism of Aristophanes, who demonstrated his indignation with this other di-

rection for education and saw the sophists as cheats, eccentric in their use of words, relativizing values, political and ethical dimensions of a previous tradition.

The comedian classifies Socrates as a sophist, in a complete reversal of how the philosopher appears in Plato's texts, but there is a beauty in this exercise of contradiction, that is, daring to create new interpretations to make people think. For Aristophanes, the teaching of the sophists was practical, utilitarian in nature, centered on rhetoric and persuasion. To create the scenario, his text, in its provocation, creates characters: father, son, teacher, creditors, disciples implicated by a curriculum, fair and unfair thinking, to place the spectators before a world and evaluate it.

In Aristophanes, a question remains: how can we face the changes in educational purposes underway without giving up tradition? The model of Homeric education was guided by aristocratic areté, which meant the defense of a virtuous man combined with physical strength and the defense of his community.

Aristophanes, through the text, mocks what is taught in schools, many contents would be useless, such as knowing the intestines of mosquitoes, how they work, their limits. All this criticism, full of irony and exaggeration, asks: after all, what is a school doing? Teaching useless things when it should be focusing on forming people with moral values?

As the son gave up on attending school, he himself, the father, sought out these teachings of Socrates, but was unable to learn them. The father, upon encountering the school, finds the teachings strange; sometimes, it's the flea that's presented, the size of its jumps; other times, it's the mosquito and its measurements. After all, what's the point of this? Furthermore, Socrates is depicted on high, aboard a basket, and from above, accompanied by the gods, he contemplates the world. When asked about this, he responds:

[...] I would never have found celestial things exactly if I had not suspended my intelligence and mixed my subtle thought with the air, its fellow man. If, being on the ground, you were to observe from below what is above, you would never find it. For in fact the earth violently draws to itself the sap of thought. Even watercress suffers from this same evil (Aristophanes, 2012, p. 11).

The father then asks Socrates to come down and teach him what he needs to learn. He announces his debts, the terrible condition of having creditors chasing him and the hardship of spending on horses and his son, who loved them but did not know how to handle the business in which he was involved. Strepsiades then says he wants to learn about a type of reasoning that would convince the creditors to leave him alone. At this point, Socrates asks if his father wanted to know divine things and what they can do for human lives. In this case, you would need to establish relationships with *The Clouds*², they are the deities. The teaching process begins, but Socrates quickly realizes his father's difficulty in learning. He has no memory, he confuses and mixes up teachings, he doesn't understand celestial things, he doesn't

comprehend the measures of beauty, he says nonsense all the time. Finally, Socrates decrees: this man is ignorant, a barbarian, an imbecile, a clumsy man. The man still insists, saying he doesn't want to learn about the things being exposed; he wants to learn about unjust thinking to defend himself from his creditors. Socrates insists that he needs to learn about other things first.

Desperate, the father summons *The Clouds* and asks for advice, but the voice of the chorus indicates a way out: "Old man, we give you advice; if you have a son already raised, send him to learn in your place" (Aristophanes, 2012, p. 36). The father still argues that his son does not want to attend school, but he is pressured to assert his authority, and his son is summoned. He announces to his son a few things he would have learned: Zeus does not exist, the one who reigns is the Whirlwind welcomed by the clouds, generating the thought of the heights in connection with the subtleties of life. The son is shocked that his father believed these crazy men, but at his father's insistence, the son enters school. Ultimately, the text confronts the son with the question of fair and unfair thinking.

Fair and unfair thinking – the great lesson

FAIR: Come here, show yourself to the spectators, you cheeky one!

UNFAIR: Go wherever you want! For I will much more easily, speaking before the people, finish you off!

FAIR: Will you finish me off? And who are you?

UNFAIR: A reasoning...

FAIR: The weak...

UNFAIR: But I will defeat you who claim you are stronger than me...

FAIR: With what skills?

UNFAIR: Finding new ideas.

FAIR: Yes, it flourishes, because of these fools out there...

UNFAIR: Not foolish, but wise.

FAIR: I will finish you, miserably.

UNFAIR: Doing what, tell me?

FAIR: Saying what is fair.

UNFAIR: But I will answer and turn everything upside down...

For I affirm that there is no such thing as justice (Aristophanes, 2012, p. 40).

After several insults between thoughts, the leader asks them to be silent, as each one will be given the right to speak and defend themselves. Fair thinking should explain how the ancients educated, and unfair thinking should discuss the new education, so that the student can listen and choose what's best for their life. Fair thinking begins:

So I will tell you what ancient education was like, when I flourished in saying what is fair, and prudence was considered. Firstly, not a single boy should be heard whispering, not even a single 'a'; then, the residents of the same neighborhood walked the streets, well-disciplined, going to the zither teacher's house, without cloaks and in a line, even when it was snowing powdery snow. The teacher, in

turn, began teaching them to sing, with their thighs wide apart, either 'Terrible Pallas, destroyer of cities' or 'a far-off sound', sustaining the chords passed on by their parents. And if any of them acted foolishly or modulated his voice like those of today, in the style of Phrynis, so difficult to modulate, he was beaten with many blows, as if he were harming the Muses. In the gym teacher's house, the boys had to sit with their legs stretched out in front of them, so as not to show any indecency to strangers; on the other hand, whoever stood up had to smooth the sand, taking care not to leave the lovers any trace of their youth. In those days, no boy used to anoint himself under the navel, and thus a dewy down would bloom over his genitals, like a fruit, and no one would wet or soften his voice to approach his lover, prostituting himself with his eyes. At dinners, it was not permitted to serve oneself from the head of a radish, nor to steal fennel or selino from old people, nor was one to eat sweets, laugh out loud or sit cross-legged (Aristophanes, 2012, p. 43-44).

Already in the pronouncement of his thought, the unjust chooses to face all defense of the previous, relativizing the values. Everything that just thought defends, its antagonist claims is outdated, and, finally, asks: why defend modesty, censor speech in the public square? And he provokes: "Have you ever seen anyone gain anything from modesty? Speak, refute me with words!" (Aristophanes, 2012, p. 47). He further argues:

My boy, consider all that modesty entails and how many pleasures you must deprive yourself of: boys, women, card games, food, drink, laughter. Now, what good is life if you are deprived of all these? Well, I'll move on to natural needs. You acted badly, fell in love, and committed adultery, but you were caught. You are lost, for you are incapable of speaking. Live with me and enjoy life, jump, laugh, and find nothing shameful. For if you are caught in the act of adultery, you will tell your husband this: that you are not to blame. Then try to place the blame on Zeus, because he is also weaker than love and women... Now, how could you, a mortal, be stronger than a god?? (Aristophanes, 2012, p. 47-48).

In the text, Aristophanes prioritizes the debate around just and unjust thinking, showing the antagonism between them, and how one of the thoughts comes from traditional education and the other breaks away from the cultural legacy, wanting to anchor itself in another way of living.

The unjust logos defends the *weakest* reasons, moves away from values, laws and justice using rhetoric and intense persuasion to convince others. Faced with such teaching, the father returns to school and asks: did he learn the reasoning to get rid of creditors? Socrates' affirmative tone fully convinces him, and his father happily shares: "Very good! Long live Fraud, queen of the world!" (Aristophanes, 2012, p. 50). He could now free himself from any lawsuit. Finally, the son could then save him, after having ruined him; and the son, convinced that he had learned something, said: "[...] how sweet it is to live with new and ingenious ideas, and to be able to disregard established laws!" (Aristophanes, 2012, p. 60).

The son has learned enough to deceive the creditors, and the father is relieved to be rid of them. The comedy³ presents the courtroom where the son successfully defends himself against his creditors. Guided by a relative truth, by an ever-debatable justice system, the son, already enthralled by what he has learned, becomes, in effect, a sophist. He learned about persuasion and managed to defend himself against creditors, winning the disputed case. To celebrate the victory, the father organizes a party at his house, but the unexpected happens. In the middle of the party, the son celebrates his success and begins to mock the family's traditions, disregarding customs, and the festive atmosphere is completely compromised. Indeed, the son was not only a sophist in court; now he was also a sophist in his home life. It's clear he's lost his bearings, no longer defending right and wrong, and convinced that everyone must truly change the direction of how they orient their lives.

Finally, the situation ends badly when, using the same lessons, the son turns against his father, even beating him and proving that he is acting in this way out of justice. Once again, they go to court, this time the father, to sue the son who beat him. But once again the son wins, and his arguments are impressive: I needed to beat my father out of love, just as it happened to me in childhood, to learn to live according to the standards of the time. Now it's my father who needs to transform himself, to understand how to live in the present day, and that's why a certain amount of violence was necessary. The father realizes the terrible education that ended up capturing his son: he learned to do justice with unfair procedures, he forgot what is right, tradition, and he became a monster. He no longer recognizes the morality of customs. Disgusted, his father, Strepsiades, complains to the Clouds. He wants the law back. The world needs traditions; it cannot submit to the mirages of circumstantial desires. He realizes that tradition cannot be relativized, but his expectations are not met. So, he decides to set fire to Socrates' school, much to the dismay of many of the philosopher's disciples.

It is a text with an impressive pedagogical dimension, as it discusses the purposes of education, shows the dispute in different versions, and questions a new education that seems to want to devastate all tradition. So *young* that the son deduces that he can hit his father using new arguments.

The comedy is interpreted in many ways. Sometimes it is emphasized for its comedy-like character, other times it emphasizes the desire to remove Socrates's central role in Greek philosophy. According to some interpreters, twenty years before Socrates' trial/conviction, comedy could have been an intervening variable in the decision, since the philosopher educated young people in another direction. After all, the jury convicted him of subversion of youth and *atheism*. Others still leave on the horizon a question about the Socratic method, as it could connect with unjust thinking, or with just thinking, it would depend on the skills of the person presenting it, as well as the person listening to it.

Many questions arise: Is Aristophanes conservative? Why does Socrates become a sophist in the text? The question arises about the purpose of school, since it teaches things that have no impact on practical life? Why the shift away from values, and why is school so quick to embrace new social demands?

The text is very current; as similar questions are frequently encountered today. The school, incorporating supposed novelties very quickly, currently immersed in the learning processes, sometimes devalues teaching and the teacher, absorbed in fulfilling evaluation measures to define success or failure. Biesta (2020), in his work *The Rediscovery of Teaching*, claims to be a conservative in order to highlight teaching, the figure of the teacher, and to reject an entire educational discourse captured by market demands and utilitarian ends.

Aristophanes' text also addresses the issue of rethinking schools, their values, and judgments. It raises a necessary analysis of the use of laws and the extent to which they are used self-interestedly. It reveals contradictions in institutions, in people, especially in the figures of father and son. In our view, contradictions also exist in the figures of master and disciple. Thus, what Aristophanes offers, through his text, is a discussion about the direction of education in his time, using laughter and irony to, through reflection, make us think about the changes that are underway.

The text helps to understand how a public figure can be evaluated in different ways. Perhaps we can understand this strategy much more as a resource for thinking, and thinking with a certain lightness, even with irony, without imagining and believing that an authority will be recognized by everyone in the same way. Here we can recall the figure of Paulo Freire, interpreted in such different, not to say inconceivable, ways, considering the presence of the educator in the educational scenario. The way of seeing Paulo Freire is unfortunately not anchored in a theatrical scene to make one think, where irony and criticism could make sense. However, he was seen by many as an enemy of education because of ideas that those who criticize him have not yet fully understood.

Plato, despite being a reader of Aristophanes, rejects the criticism of Socrates in the comedy *The Clouds*. He is presented as a physiologist and sophist, distant from the city, art, and even a certain concern for a Greek education. This caricature of Socrates, for Plato, helped construct a distorted image of the philosopher.

Genealogy and *versuch*: the art of interpretation from all angles

To continue thinking about comedy, and taking as a criterion a genealogical analysis enriched by Benoit's proposal (2011), we continue with the text to make us think about why mediocre theses sometimes take hold among humans, incapable of elevating themselves to the status of criticism, even incorporating laughter and irony as in Aristophanes' text. For Benoit (2011), there is a connection between ge-

nealogy and *versuch*, which would be the method proposed by Nietzsche, articulating reason and body, placing a singular power in each of these parts. Benoit (2011) even revisits Descartes to argue that common sense means reason, the ability to think that every human being has and can designate: “[...] an attitude, a disposition, or more simply the ability to produce different theses” (Benoit, 2011, p. 64). In this understanding, the point is to defend that reason or common sense is a kind of “[...] active principle that encourages us to patiently weave bonds between concepts, with order and rigor, and, therefore, with method” (Benoit, 2011, p. 65). It can be seen here that the defense of thinking runs counter to impulsive, agitated speaking and evaluating; it seeks to value restraint and combat haste. However, Nietzsche also presents himself as dynamite, which explodes, using his hammer against everything and everyone.

Nietzsche declares his rejection of a public that, by becoming a herd, accepts and adapts to a kind of common sense, in this case, crude and mediocre. However, reason can also create new theses, and according to Benoit (2011), the best option would be to look for this in Nietzsche's definitions of true and false, ugly and beautiful, good and evil. We can follow Benoit (2011, p. 67), when he states:

Regarding the stock of available theses, Nietzsche is highly critical, insofar as he confers, surprisingly at first glance, a certain value on tradition, customs, and thus moral mores. On his part, there is no evident desire for a systematic rupture with a base of common ideas.

For Benoit (2011), Nietzsche is a philosopher with method, and this can be investigated in his writings. What happens is that your method has other spices, which sometimes is not enough to be recognized by other thinkers. In his method, he questions prescriptive language, the denial of the body, logic based on causality, lack of suspicion, explosive practices incorporated without any refined and selective spirit, “[...] only the fervor of the cause” (Nietzsche, 2001, p.83).

Valeria highlights, following Benoit (2011), that Nietzsche, even at a very young age, already produced a critique of language. In the text *Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*, he already analyzed with his method how words sometimes convert hypotheses into truths. We are faced with a trap: when using words, we can become immobilized by their meanings, and what other possibility would there be? Nietzsche also appreciates silence, being silent; but this is not enough, because there is also a philosophical ambition within him. In other words, a desire to transmit not just anything, but to be selective enough to differentiate oneself and, as Benoit (2011) points out, to dynamite that common sense that wants to repeat the theses already consecrated for

[...] rediscover the investigative power of reason (common sense as a faculty). The blind violence of dynamite would be attenuated, as if it were a matter of 'disorganizing' everything in order to better rebuild. This would move from the supposed destruction

to the perspective of renewal through a method, *Versuch* (Benoit, 2011, p. 73).

After all, what would *Versuch* be on the horizon of a method for thinking differently?

The originality of Nietzsche's method lies in transforming the aporetic conclusion into a fruitful starting point: can the same fact arise from multiple causes? Therefore, let us try to understand them. *Versuch* designates the test, the experimentation, the attempt, inseparable from the acceptance of *risk*. The collection of aphorisms then becomes a laboratory, even if its shattered appearance conceals it [...] So you think it is a work in pieces [Stückwerk], just because it is offered to you (and has to be) 'in pieces [Stücken]?'. From this perspective, the expression 'dynamiting common sense' can be preserved as long as we condition it to a correction of its meaning, which can be summarized as follows: to violate our evidence, but to violate it methodically – *Versuch* as essay, experimentation, attempt – with a concern for enrichment or deepening (Benoit, 2011, p. 74).

Nietzsche demonstrates impatience with that which rests forever, he prefers to rehearse his thought in other directions, he sees enigmas where many imagine truths reside, he avoids letting himself be captured by the predictable, by immediate consolations, he also avoids reducing his presence to the philosophical field, constructing only oppositions. The *Versuch*

[...] multiplies hypotheses: it is apparently a matter of going to war against what is static, and then *bombarding* a statement with adverse hypotheses. This procedure is, in its origin, similar to the gesture of throwing a stick of dynamite. But the similarity is only in appearance, as *Versuch* is also an art of welcoming (Benoit, 2011, p. 77-78).

The expression welcome or hospitality connected to *Versuch* means saying, in Benoit's analysis (2011, p. 78), which I share, that the Nietzschean method aims to concretize "[...] the art of interpretation from all angles". The explosive dimension is present in Nietzsche, but it always leaves room for another presence, which sometimes reveals itself subtly, creating openings for intuition and the concept. Nietzsche "[...] does not invite a return to raw sensuality: it is not a question of opposing sensuality to the capacity to conceptualize, but specifically of playing one over the other, of making them flexible, with a *plasticity* as a whole" (Benoit, 2011, p. 79). In this horizon, we need a *third eye and ear*, and in this entanglement with a curiosity for our own body, we reach our own genealogy. For Benoit, (2011, p. 79-80):

The philosopher-genealogist is a kind of doctor who listens to the body. In other words, genealogy is an art of listening. It invites us to *try* to listen to a phenomenon that is not often perceived for what it is, it encourages us to listen to what, at first glance, does not want to be said, hence the importance of what Nietzsche calls the 'third ear'. The method used is the percussion method, which consists of receiving the sounds that the body produces when it is hit by what we call a percussion hammer (a type of trick). The body effectively functions as a sound-

ing board: the emptier it is, the more noise it produces when listened to. This emptiness may be typical of moral discourse, which makes a lot of noise over nothing or little (moral discourse is based on fictions, according to idealist logic).

Benoit (2011) asks: does the genealogical *Versuch* move towards a hermeneutic reason? If this matters, we also need, in this context, to highlight that interpretation, for Nietzsche, does not only have an intellectual dimension: it is also an action. In *The Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche highlights the fine instruments of observation we have to consider. Regarding our senses, for example, the nose, and he even says ironically: no philosopher has spoken with respect and gratitude to this delicate instrument at our disposal. He can observe minimal movements, and “[...] we possess science, today, exactly to the extent that we have resolved to accept the testimony of the senses – to the extent that we have learned to sharpen them, to love them, to think them through to the end” (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 26).

Having the body as a guiding thread implies creating a sophisticated connection between body and sensitivity, or as Benoit (2011) points out, it is necessary to give impulses a spiritualization; and reason, a corporealization. Thus, Nietzsche is not an enemy of reason, but places it in another horizon, where the body and the senses are contained.

When Nietzsche questions the method and refers to common sense in the Cartesian sense, he expresses the incompleteness of this procedure, not as an irrationalist, but invites us to understand a *good bodily sense* (Benoit, 2011, p. 84), which defines the body as something that thinks and acts. Ultimately, what Nietzsche intends with his genealogy is an incorporation: bringing the material thread of life, the body, to interpret the movements of humanity. We can observe this in the text of the comedy itself: both in Socrates' school and in the father and son who attend it, there are bodies that think interestedly with a view to solving vital problems. How does this happen when we think more broadly about the issue? It is precisely at this point that Nietzsche's method offers, as resources, the senses of the body, a reason that expresses itself in a body that moves through many nuances that demand interpretation. For the most part, bodies move like explosives and desire immediate solutions, without any refinement or selection. Nietzsche, by highlighting the body, also criticizes this almost indecent haste that haunts us.

In the case of the comedy *The Clouds*, a reading based on Nietzsche could mean a reflection that seeks to explore the depths, the terrain of existence, to analyze the forces at play, when we are faced with the emergence of values and an obsession with maintaining them, or the obsession with incorporating other values simply for convenience. So, genealogy is interpretation, but with the intention of “[...] reinterpreting, inverting the meaning of the dominant interpretation” (Paschoal, 2000, p. 6). In this effort, and in the case of this article as well, when writing about comedy, with Nietzsche, we wish not to

[...] simply 'unmasking' philosophy or the philosophers' claim to truth; [...] The difference is that he does not seek to crystallize his perspective as a 'truth,' which would deny the game of perspectives, but to keep the game itself going, to keep it moving—if it could even stop. Nietzsche acts as an active will to power that makes the interpretative, that by saying 'yes' to the game itself wants to offer it the possibility of taking its next steps and thereby leading modern man to his self-improvement [sic] (Paschoal, 2000, p. 6).

The point isn't to prove any truth, but to engage with the game the text offers to keep thinking. After all, we continue to have schools that generally present themselves in different ways, offering very different educational possibilities.

From genealogy as the art of listening

I defend the thesis that Aristophanes is a precursor of Nietzsche's hermeneutics, we take words according to our will, to stick meanings to them that produce impacts. In these terms, Socrates, in Aristophanes' text, *becomes* a sophist, a historical paradox, considering the philosopher of maieutics. However, the text aims to provoke and announce that Socrates also advocates for a different kind of education. After all, what is the difference between words as content and the meaning they can acquire? Difference, simply put. It involves taking words trapped in one sense and exploding them into another. It's important to ask what the effect of the forces at play in a world in transition would be, to the point of expressing the origin and emergence of other values. It is about interpreting the text in these terms, entering the text to show the origin of new values, to what extent they are committed to a given morality to enter the game and produce a new interpretation to continue thinking.

Taking Aristophanes' text from an aesthetic perspective helps us discover the beauty of contradiction. Thinking from antagonisms, without the compulsion to find any fullness of truth. Taking the content as it interprets, thinks and reflects on conflicts present in humanity, when it becomes art, it becomes a classic, because regardless of time, it always has something to say and capture our thoughts.

At this point, I also highlight the book *In Defense of School, a Public Question*, by Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons⁴ (2013), that seeks to recall the meaning of school. For a long time, it was linked to the idea of progress, of guaranteeing a better future, but more recently it has been condemned, as if its practice were made up only of vices, ideologies, and unnecessary teachings. The authors' efforts do not endorse the condemnation of the school, on the contrary: They wrote the book to absolve her of any blame. They pertinently analyze the deschooling movement, a kind of fear of what happens inside schools, because it offers students the opportunity to have *free time* to reflect on knowledge and skills that seek to offer each individual potential, which can only be developed in educational institutions, unlike family and private spaces. They recognize that school was a historical inven-

tion, and that if not cared for, it may even disappear, but it can be reinvented. For the authors:

Reinventing school boils down to finding concrete ways in today's world to provide 'free time' and to bring young people together around a common 'thing'—that is, something emerging in the world that can be made available to a new generation. For us, the future of school is a public issue (Masschelein; Simons, 2013, p. 11).

The school's task is to introduce the world to young people, fulfilling certain pedagogical functions that may be very different from some private spaces: this is a great task. In this sense, teacher training is essential to make this free time something definitely very meaningful. The school, despite welcoming the youngest and offering them a creative space, does not have the purpose of producing well-being at any price, or rather, preventing the student from being demanded, from having to be satisfied in his interests.

The authors are anchored in Hanna Arendt, when they express the relationship with the world, and a world that has already produced knowledge, including already reformulated some through science. In this sense, Arendt calls upon the educator as someone who needs to assume his task with responsibility and authority. Thus, if school is sometimes seen as inadequate and boring, this needs to be observed considering educational purposes, and not simply contemplating immediate desires. Presenting the world implies organizing content, and not indiscriminately informing everything, but selecting, relating, creating challenges to think, without the false illusion of creating an ideal school, but showing its specificity in relation to other learning environments that have different purposes. It is not simply about defense, but about political-pedagogical articulation to guarantee some future for the majority of the population, and therefore the defense of public schools.

After all, what is school, according to the authors of the book? In short, it implies a suspension, that is, free time to remove the student from other social spaces and find, at school, another organization to encounter different subjects, and in a democratic experience, find an opening to other knowledge, now anchored in content, skills, and performances typical of those who need to learn to see, read, write, calculate, and communicate. At this point, a new horizon emerges that requires rigorous thinking.

Nietzsche (2001), when referring to knowledge, in *The Gay Science*, also highlights the flow of those who learn and know, without ever settling on a single perspective. I appreciate Ferreira's analysis (2014, p. 2), when he highlights: "[...] the human being flourishes, preserves himself through the connections and relationships he establishes with the world". From the philosopher, a special virtue is expected, to play with different perspectives, reflections of different views on concepts and their relationships, avoiding being trapped in any one of them. Finally, Ferreira (2014, p. 2) expresses:

Looking at things and putting all these perspectives side by side, contrasting them, confronting them, trying to prioritize one of them when necessary, and then, again, playing them against each other and perhaps reprioritizing. The true philosopher needs that comprehensive vision that allows him to look at something from above, from below, from the front, from behind, from within, from without, from every possible perspective, foreseeing its fruits, digging its roots. Why this aversion to genealogy, Nietzsche asks, is it up to us to embrace every perspective, the 'basic condition of all life'.

For Nietzsche (2001, p. 137), the fact of believing that our "[...] articles of faith, continually inherited" must always be preserved can end up hampering knowledge, converting it into truth. Articles of faith are necessary for survival, but that doesn't mean they've been endlessly tested: even error is preserved to protect life. However, none of them should prevent us from experimenting with the multiple possibilities of reading and being in the world.

Nietzsche's approach is, therefore, experimentalist, a method also very important for an educator. He, a philosopher, interacts with life, with words, characters, stories, hypotheses, philosophical provocations, affirmations, and negations. It is not possible to sustain any truth for convenience; we were not born to exploit truth. Learning and knowing also imply not accepting as true that which is not. Can we tolerate this?

The comedy *The Clouds* uses words for very singular purposes. Because it wants to make people think, it uses concepts in its own way, without seeking to establish a truth. Aristophanes rejects a new education circulating in his time, which, when exposed, shows signs of decadence. In these terms, words do not have, a priori, a meaning, but they gain meaning when something is about to be said.

Aristophanes uses words based on a desire to attach meanings to them that produce impacts. That is why Socrates, in Aristophanes' text, becomes a sophist, a historical paradox, considering the philosopher of maieutics. However, the text aims to provoke and announce that Socrates also advocates for a different kind of education, one that Aristophanes has reservations about. Thus, an important question remains: is Socrates a destroyer of fair education?

All our efforts, when taking Aristophanes' text, are also to make us think about the current dialogues about school, so often competing pedagogical projects and insinuating that there would be one that would be better, ready to guide our pedagogical life without any restrictions. Once again, Nietzsche (2009) can help when he suggests, in *On The Genealogy of Morals*, when summoning researchers of knowledge and warning: "[...] let us not be ungrateful to those who have completely changed the points of view of the human spirit", because "[...] the more different eyes we know how to employ for one and the same thing, the more complete the understanding of this thing, our objectivity, becomes" (p. 115).

Creative dimension of truth

The genealogical project, in Nietzsche, breaks with the assumption of a truth in itself to present the creative, inventive dimension of truth as art. Aristophanes is an artist, he delivers to the public a text invented for thought, demonstrating his suspicion about certain values and inviting the public to reflect on their suspicions. While attacking some values, he defends others, and at this point, he declares that he has more confidence in conservative values and their purposes. The text is anchored in the world, in history, in a society that seeks to preserve itself. Putting convictions and hypotheses into question with one's own style is, in fact, a manifestation of art. The exercise of criticism has an aesthetic dimension, but it is not limited to creating illusions or alleviating tensions: art is a style that promotes and facilitates confrontation (Constâncio, 2013) between different convictions. Art not only wants to imagine, it wants to modify and inquire about values and, to do so, it creates, as in the case we are analyzing, a character, which is Socrates, to confront it in its dimension of value and make us think about the impact of this on the community. Aristophanes dares to take a kind of idol from the Greek world and suspect his intentions. Thus, comedy must be seen as art, as daring, as invention, as provocation to thought.

Aristophanes and Nietzsche have something in common: they are provocateurs, they confront idols. They dare to affirm life with their own style, like Nietzsche (2009, p. 49), when he asks: “[...] would anyone like to look with me into the depths of the mystery where the fabrication of the ideal is hidden? On earth? Who has the strength for this?” He then observes and denounces that there are “[...] workshops that manufacture ideals and they all smell of lies and deception” (Nietzsche, 2009, p. 50).

Oliveira (2019), in his article, asks: what if Aristophanes was right? He further expands the question:

[...] Should Aristophanes' play really be relegated to just a way of mocking public figures, as was customary in ancient Greek comedies? Or did Aristophanes actually point out flaws in Socratic dialectic by equating Socrates with the Sophists? In other words, could we agree with Aristophanes to some extent when he shows Socratic dialectic to be similar to the Sophist method of persuasion? (Oliveira, 2019, p. 78).

Reflection on fair and unfair reasoning, anchored in the Socratic method, indicates that the one who teaches can prove the conditions of those who know nothing, and the questions reveal this condition. Oliveira (2019) indicates that, in this practice of questioning, counterpoints are absent, and since the one who learns knows nothing, he needs a reference; in this case, a door is opened to adhere to the knowledge of the one who is wise, both in the formulation of questions and in the direction he gives them. We are facing the risk of guardianship.

Socrates wants to teach that it is necessary to overcome opinion and seek knowledge, but this path seems tortuous, and it is the characters themselves who prove this: the father learns nothing and cannot follow the path towards knowledge. The son, however, learns, but incorporates the truth from outside, is susceptible to Socrates' guidance and takes it as guidelines for action. According to Oliveira (2019), it is not so much the Socratic method that is being questioned, but in fact, it is necessary to think about which audience can learn to consider the Socratic proposal. Oliveira (2019) assesses that the caricature of Socrates is a strategy by Aristophanes to affirm his nonconformity with the changes taking place, which threatened the moral and political traditions of the time, as they captured an audience that did not perceive the maneuvers implied by the teaching in question.

We can conclude that, in Aristophanes' text, there is an original criticism of Socrates, and it is worth noting that the criticism itself raises interesting questions about the method used in the school *The Thinking Place*. After all, would persuasion really be the most appropriate tool, considering that young people adhere to a life orientation as if they had accessed knowledge? According to Oliveira (2019, p. 88), "[...] History of Philosophy manuals disregard the disqualification of Aristophanic Socrates precisely because they present a distorted image of what Socrates actually was". This thesis can be challenged, as Aristophanes achieves much more than any disqualification, since he makes us think about a method, about who teaches, who learns and how to face a kind of deification of an idol that can also be challenged.

Plato, a reader of Aristophanes, criticizes the comedian for his interpretation of Socrates in the text *The Clouds*, but recognizes his originality to such an extent that Nietzsche (1998, p. 36) shares it with his reader:

[...] nothing makes me reflect more on Plato's reserve and sphinx-like nature than this *petit fait* [little fact], happily preserved: that under the pillow of his deathbed no 'Bible' was found, nothing Egyptian, Pythagorean, Platonic, – but rather Aristophanes. How could even a Plato endure life – a Greek life, to which he said 'no' – without an Aristophanes?

Yet another article addresses the power that Socrates would have exercised over his disciple Plato, as he was seduced "[...] by the rational precepts defended by Socrates, and persuaded by the objections that the latter makes to poetry and tragic art, he would have abandoned his own artistic origins to get closer to the master" (Mendonça, 2023, p. 47). For Nietzsche, Socrates would be

[...] as the personification of an inclination towards incipient decadence among the Greeks, and Plato would be someone who, under Socratic influence, would also have embodied this dissolving *pathos* of the instincts and would have transposed it to his own texts. In this sense, Plato could be considered a victim of Socrates, someone who would have left aside his noble origins and his inclination towards tragic poetry in the name of defending a rational and moral perspective par excellence (Mendonça, 2023, p. 48).

Nietzsche seems to re-edit Aristophanes' irony and provocation, creating a decadent Socrates, who denies the body and instincts, and yet captures Plato as a disciple. Nietzsche also wants to demystify an idol by evaluating the procedures and developments of an influence on a figure like Plato.

Following Aristophanes' example, Nietzsche provokes, ironizes and questions what right a master has to capture his disciple to the point of leading him to his own perspective?⁵ Under what conditions does a teacher demand this kind of fidelity? To what extent are schools today also workshops of ideals ready to capture disciples for their own expectations? Can masters escape these traps?

Conclusion

Aristophanes' comedy makes us think. In addition to its ironic and laughable dimension, the text makes Socrates a character and problematizes his role in the Greek world. Nietzsche (2006, p. 17) has similar arguments and, in *The Twilight of the Idols*, presents a chapter to discuss the "[...] Socrates problem!". This article is not about making any judgment, but about making people think, through the interpretations of classical authors who, ultimately, demonstrate the multiplicity possible when looking at a theme, a character, a philosopher to problematize, including, the dimension of truth and the creation of idols. In Nietzsche's work, he also sometimes excuses the character Socrates, frees him from criticism, and reveals his charming side, demonstrating that, beyond any definitive sentence, there is the defense of the right to produce criticism through art, giving way to other, supposedly more sophisticated illusions.

As Constâncio (2013, p. 278) warns us, in the field of criticism "[...] the maximum amount of truthfulness that we can bear presupposes a minimum of illusion". However, the will to truth lives among us, and it emerges from the will to appearance. Implicit in this condition is the perspective of art as a human practice, courageous and without moral prerogatives, capable of inventing ever more sophisticated illusions, arising from a critique that reevaluates and dismantles previous illusions and lies. Through art, new critical perspectives appear, opening up ever new possibilities for criticism. For Nietzsche, truth will always be the infinite result of feeling provoked to continue thinking, and the value of art, in the words of Constâncio (2013), promotes and facilitates the confrontation between the harshness of life, creating illusions to make us live.

Aristophanes was guided by a desire for truth, creating an artistic text, presenting the maximum possible veracity, while also creating a minimum of illusion, surrendering to appearance as a form of criticism. The comedian's text is concerned with the fact that there is no single truth, that Socrates' belief as a Greek idol does not correspond to the truth, and that it is the artists who show us that it is possible to live without the idea of a true, stable and fixed world. They help us understand that it is possible "[...] to desire to live in appearance" (Constâncio, 2013, p. 305). In this way, according to Nietzsche, it is

possible to shake the ascetic ideals still so present in the field of philosophy, but also in the field of education. Artists face what Nietzsche (2006, p. 25) called *mummy concepts*, which stuff ideas and characters, giving birth to idolaters of all kinds.

We, educators, also need to be aware of mummified concepts, as well as those hasty concepts that insist on adapting us to market demands. Schools today are under pressure of all kinds, and forming citizens implies conforming to the ideals of a society calibrated by economic and productive interests. School time was captured by other objectives, largely inserted in a utilitarian and pragmatic context. The school needs to face this trap, considering the theoretical contributions of Biesta (2020), Masschelein and Simons (2013) to suspend inadequate demands, and give the school the right to form individuals capable of interpreting and thinking from contact with tradition, daring to initiate and create new possibilities of being in the world, recognizing and producing the possible game of arguments, considering the just and unjust thinking that Aristophanes puts on stage, even evaluating its effects on practical life.

The dispute between pedagogical projects in our time, some of them insinuating that there would be one that would be the best, ready to guide our pedagogical life without any restrictions, deserves our attention and criticism. We are invited to investigate the multiple perspectives of discourse on what it means to educate, daring to place, on our stage, the enigmatic dimension of the world (also of the pedagogical world) and, therefore, never absolutely resolved. At this point, the articulation between the Nietzschean *versuch* and educational practice, implied by the experimental character, indicates the value of the body as an important ingredient of an intellectual formation to listen, give form and meaning to life, with a view to “[...] sculpting the real” (Benoit, 2011, p. 81), intensifying our power to confront idealistic discourses of all kinds that almost always want to present themselves as the ultimate ones.

The enigmatic nature of the world in constant change does not allow us to remain trapped in supposed truths. It is worth highlighting the beauty of ambiguity and uncertainty as a ferment of existence that allows us to create, to invent, because we are: “[...] fruitful only at the price of being rich in antagonisms, we remain young only on condition that the soul does not relax, does not seek peace” (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 35)⁶.

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Notes

¹ Consulted translations of the comedy by José Carlos Baracat Junior (2016) (org.) (Aristophanes, 2013) and by Gilda Maria Reale Starzynski (Aristophanes, 2013).

² The attribution of divinity to the Clouds is an invention of Aristophanes: they provide thought, argumentation and understanding, incredible narratives and circumlocutions, and the art of impressing and fascinating (definition taken from the foot-

notes of the comedy text itself in the translation by Gilda Maria Reale Starzynski – Aristophanes, 2012).

³ Information and sharing of a very relevant interpretation of the comedy can be accessed at the following YouTube address: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1zonChFs0Ok> (Escola de Filosofia, 2013).

⁴ Biesta, cited previously, follows the reflection of these two authors in defense of the school, the teaching process and teachers.

⁵ Steiner (2018, p.11) in his work *Lessons from the Masters*, asks: “What gives a man or a woman the power to teach another human being, where does this authority come from? And it reveals that there are three types of masters: 1) there are masters who destroy their disciples, psychologically and in rarer cases physically as well (teaching vampires); 2) just as there are disciples, pupils and apprentices who overthrow, betray and ruin their masters and, finally, 3) relationships that are exchanges, permeated by an Eros of reciprocal trust. What would the relationship between Plato and Socrates have been like?

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