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Parrhesiastic *Aufklärung* as Democratic Government of Self

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ABSTRACT – Parrhesiastic *Aufklärung* as Democratic Government of Self.

The dispute between modernity and postmodernity calls into question the emancipatory potential of reason and, to escape extremist positions on this, we argue that Foucault's reading of the Kantian question of *Aufklärung* offers not only principles to critically mark out the advances and limits of modernity but also arguments to think about the human formation inherent to *Aufklärung*. For Foucault, the Greco-Roman heritage of the Kantian *Aufklärung* shows that his own historical ontology is a tributary of the philosophical-practical tradition linked to *parrhesia-libertas*, which posits culture and education beyond the negation of modernity as a whole. Therefore, formation implies understanding the world in which one lives and the dual human condition of minority and majority.

Keywords: Post-Modernity. Kantian *Aufklärung*. Parrhesia. Formation.

RESUMO – *Aufklärung* Parresiástica como Governo Democrático de Si Mesmo. A disputa entre modernidade e pós-modernidade coloca em xeque o potencial emancipador da razão e, para fugir de posições extremistas acerca disso, entende-se que a leitura de Foucault sobre a questão kantiana da *Aufklärung* oferece, além de princípios para balizar criticamente os avanços e os limites da modernidade, argumentos para se pensar a formação humana inerente à *Aufklärung*. A herança greco-romana da *Aufklärung* kantiana, para Foucault, mostra que sua própria ontologia histórica é tributária da tradição filosófico-prática ligada à *parresía-libertas*, que põe cultura e educação para além da negação em bloco da modernidade. Assim, a formação implica a compreensão do mundo em que se vive e da dupla condição humana de menoridade e maioridade.

Palavras-chave: Pós-Modernidade. *Aufklärung* kantiana. Parresía. Formação.

Introduction

Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit (Kant, 1998, p. 53)¹.

The debate about modernity and postmodernity dominated the intellectual scene of the last two decades of the 20th century. The influence of such debate is still noticeable today, especially in the educational field. Many complex and controversial issues are associated with the topic, including the question of whether a postmodern condition actually exists and, if it does exist, what such condition means in relation to modernity itself. Have we effectively left modernity behind and, if so, what kind of modernity are we referring to? What are the main characteristics of the postmodern condition and what features does it assume in the educational field? If such a change has actually occurred, has it been a complete rupture or could it also be understood in terms of a continuity?

The polarization of the debate has not always taken a constructive route, which has often generated unproductive antagonism. On one side are the ardent supporters of the modern project and their belief in the emancipatory potential of reason. Such a belief is supported by the supposedly clear distinction between myth and rationality and by the optimism of a philosophy of history that defends human and social progress based on grand narratives. Despite this opportunity for a critical reason, this strong version of modernity – and this is one of its limits – fails to critically examine itself. Now, a reason that loses the ability to critically examine itself becomes self-sufficient and arrogant, which leads to dogmatism of worldviews. Such dogmatism is also manifested in the educational field, resulting in the authoritarian attitude of school managers and teachers, who, for supposedly already knowing everything, put the student and the managed in the condition of mere receptivity. In this way, in the name of the emancipatory ideals of modern reason, they continue to feed the state of minority and the distorted (corrupted) relationship between the government of self and others that such a state provides.²

On the other side are the defenders of postmodernity and their disbelief in the emancipatory potential of reason. As masters of suspicion, they rightly point to all the irrationalities committed in the name of reason. After the ideas of Karl Marx (1818-1883), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and mainly Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), we are led to think about other deeper and more complex dimensions of what has conventionally been called modern reason and, above all, of its destructive effects on the human condition, on the broader social and environmental orders. However, the risk of an extreme postmodern position, taken as an irreducible antithesis to modernity and which certainly distances itself from such masters of suspicion, is irrationalism. Therefore, this shows that a hasty farewell to modern reason can strengthen, against postmodern will itself, precisely those destructive aspects that such postmodern will intends to overcome. Its effects in the cultural field

can be even more destructive, since the unrestricted critique of reason can easily lead to cultural relativism and keep untouched the very state of minority that it intends to overcome. In addition, in the educational field, its criticism of the teachers' authority can contribute to unduly placing the student at the center of the pedagogical process, and thus foment the tyranny of the group that suffocates individual freedom (Arendt, 1994).

This image briefly-featured, almost in a caricatured way, of the debate between modernity and postmodernity as two irreconcilable opposite poles alerts us to the fact that such a debate can extraordinarily simplify questions, aiming to convince us about what we need to avoid, that is, that the truth resides only in one side or only in one of the positions. If we adopted such a stance, we would hastily position ourselves for or against one of the sides, without making the critical examination that the complexity of the debate demands. Therefore, we need not only to investigate more carefully what constitutes modernity, what its undeniable achievements are, but also and at the same time to identify its limits that need to be overcome. In this context, it is crucial to ground research on theoretical frameworks that can offer an adequate interpretation of modernity with regard to its advances and limits. Such support is even more important for the educational field, considering that the fads of the time are quickly included in the educational field.

In this essay, we will defend the hypothesis that Michel Foucault's (1926-1984) reading of the Kantian question of *Aufklärung* not only provides us with some important theoretical references for us to critically mark out the advances and limits of modernity, but also provides good arguments to think about the problem of human formation inherent to the matter of *Aufklärung*. Foucault becomes a paradigmatic reference because, although he has been mistakenly taken as a model of a hasty farewell to reason, he shows in one of his last courses given at Collège de France, titled *The Government of Self and Others*, the actuality of Kantian modernity understood as a matter of *Aufklärung*. By investigating the Greco-Roman heritage of the Kantian *Aufklärung*, Foucault shows how much his own historical ontology stems from a long tradition of practical philosophy – deeply linked to the Greco-Roman tradition of *parrhesia-libertas* –, which puts cultural and educational issues far beyond the negation of modernity as a whole.

We have sought to justify our hypothesis by dividing the essay into two parts. In the first one, we investigate, following closely *The Government of Self and Others*, essential aspects of the parrhesiastic inheritance of the Kantian matter of *Aufklärung*. In the second part, we seek to show not only how such heritage appears in the appropriative reconstruction that Foucault makes of Kant's short text *Was ist Aufklärung?* but also what formative aspects underlie the close nexus between historical ontology and the matter of modern *Aufklärung*. The articulation of the two parts of the essay is given by the parrhesiastic heritage of the Kantian *Aufklärung* and the way in which Kant, according to Foucault, creatively appropriates this heritage, transforming it into a consistent

way of understanding his actuality and himself, as a philosopher who seeks to understand actuality.

The Link between *Parrhesia* and *Aufklärung*

In the context of the debate between modernity and postmodernity, Kant is often reduced to a systematic thinker who founded the mode of transcendental criticism as a way of solving the problems of knowledge, morality and aesthetics. From the intellectualist interpretation of his thought springs a strong concept of reason that has nothing or little to do with the empirical, history or education itself, or that, when addressed by Kant are considered from a transcendental perspective: he asks only about their a priori conditions of possibility. This interpretation presupposes that there can be a clear distinction between the empirical and the transcendental and that it is up to philosophy to make the transcendental critique, that is, to point out the limits of a possible experience, but without necessarily having to make its own experience. Precisely from this springs the famous objection of Georg W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), exposed in *Enciclopédia das ciências filosóficas*: that Kant's transcendental critique of knowledge resembles the adage of the scholastic who thinks he can teach how to swim without having to go into the water (Hegel, 1999, p. 50).

We know today, after numerous critiques of the Kantian transcendental philosophy and its respective "analytic of truth", that the Kantian thought is not a prisoner of its own transcendental philosophy nor does it allow itself to be embroiled in a dogmatic concept of reason. Kant exercises, already within the scope of his systematic transcendental philosophy, the plural and comprehensive use of reason, which will have decisive effects to justify, from an educational point of view, the development of all human abilities, in all directions (Dalbosco; Doro; Salomão, 2021). In summary, from the reflective exercise of delimitation of the different uses of reason we can instructively learn how important it is to avoid dogmatism and the unreflective naïve belief in the emancipatory power of reason, because the ability to judge on one's own, by requiring constant reflective movement, prevents the absolute rest of reason, interrupting its natural inclination to be satisfied with its own immediate certainties. It was precisely for assuming such a stance as a fundamental philosophical conviction that Kant never tired of betting on the courage to think for oneself, taking such courage as the core of enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) that constitutes the critical posture capable of facing the minority of which every human being, due to laziness and cowardice, is self-culpable.

Nonetheless, along with the transcendental critique, there is a, so to speak, more modest historical, anthropological and formative critique, which does not intend to scrutinize in detail the different uses of pure reason and, even less, to indicate the place of other spheres of human knowledge. This historical critique springs from Kant's shorter writings and has to do directly with actuality problems and with the

questioning of the philosopher about himself as a subject that seeks to critically understand the present in which he takes part. Here, in the context of this critique, the subject needs to enter the water to be able to learn how to swim, because it is no longer a matter of a transcendental reason that can sovereignly indicate the conditions of possibility of experience without having to entangle oneself with the experience.³ Here there is a notion of historicity of reason and of the subject rescued by Michel Foucault, through his genealogical procedure, which is at the basis of the Kantian notion of critique and of his corresponding conception of modernity. Therefore, Foucault's historical ontology presents, through his original and creative interpretation of Kant, another idea of modernity that, in addition to not succumbing to certain criticisms of postmodernity, is interesting even to think about human formation today:

In this sense, we think that Foucault's interpretation of the Kantian *Aufklärung* serves not only his purposes of founding an ontology of the present, but also, at the same time, to exemplarily show the deep formative-educational problem that underlies the project of enlightenment as majority (*Aufklärung als Mündigkeit*) (Dalbosco, 2010, p. 218).

What does such a Foucauldian interpretation of Kant's thought consist of? The immense work produced by Foucault is the greatest witness to the fact that he always took classical philosophers seriously, taking from them a precious source of inspiration also to think about actuality matters. His careful investigation prevented him from making prejudiced and hasty judgments about this or that great thinker. Therefore, his intellectual seriousness is not done justice when he is classified as a postmodern philosopher, a supporter of the total antipode of reason, as if he had simply denied his link to the tradition of critical thinking. On the contrary, he himself acknowledged more than once his intellectual debt to the tradition of critical thinking that comes from modernity, as the following passage from *The Government of Self and Others* attests: "It is this form of philosophy which, from Hegel to the Frankfurt School, passing through Nietzsche, Max Weber, etc., founded a form of reflection to which, of course, I am linked as much as I can" (Foucault, 2013, p. 22)⁴.

In this context, with regard specifically to Kant, there are several moments in which Foucault analyzes the German philosopher, starting with his complementary thesis supervised by Jean Hyppolite (1907-1968), which consisted of an annotated translation from German into French of the Kantian writing *Antropologia de um ponto de vista pragmático* (Foucault, 2011).⁵ Furthermore, there is also an important moment in this dialogue with Kant, which is the conference "O que é a crítica?" (2017), given in 1978, at the French Society of Philosophy. This conference problematizes, in an entirely original way, the notion of critical attitude, postulating the link between criticism and virtue, which Foucault himself unfortunately does not adequately justify in the aforementioned conference. However, the idea of thinking the critical

attitude based on the reciprocity between criticism and virtue, given its reflective potential to think about practical problems of moral, political and educational nature, is carried out by several authors, among whom Judith Butler stands out (2013).

However, for the interest of this essay, we will refer to the 1983 course, titled *The Government of Self and Others*, because in this course we clearly find the role played by Kant in the formulation of historical ontology; Foucault takes this ontology as a philosophical basis for the intrinsic relationship between critical attitude and “spirit” of modernity. In the first hour of the last class of that course, after having dealt with the problematization of Kant’s thought in the first class and having gone a long way in several other classes, Foucault makes a disconcerting statement, revealing the main reason for his starting the course *The Government of Self and Others* by the philosopher from Königsberg. In Foucault’s own words:

In any case, I started this year’s course by Kant, because it seems to me that the text on *Aufklärung* written by Kant is for philosophy a certain way of becoming aware, through the critique of *Aufklärung*, of the problems that were traditionally, in antiquity, those of *parrhesia* and which emerged again in the course of the 16th and 17th centuries, and which became aware of themselves in the *Aufklärung*, in particular in this text by Kant (Foucault, 2013, p. 317).

The disconcerting core of this passage consists of understanding the philosophical exercise carried out by Kant in the short essay *Was ist Aufklärung?* (Barh, 1996) as the resumption and continuity of old *parrhesia*. In this way, the project of historical ontology not only takes up the Kantian *Aufklärung* but also makes it recede, go back, as a critical philosophical attitude, to ancient parrhesiastic knowledge. This disconcerting statement serves to delimit the debate between modernity and postmodernity and to help understand the critique of the present time, which historical ontology intends to make, as a continuation or extension of the exercise of thought that took place in previous times. Therefore, the nexus sought between *Aufklärung* and *parrhesia* shows, on the one hand, how far Foucault is from the caricatured image of the postmodern thinker who had hurriedly bid farewell to the ideals of modernity and, as a result, had given up the emancipatory power of reason. On the other hand, with such a statement, this nexus opens a promising path of investigation of the critical attitude as a result of the close link between *parrhesia* and *Aufklärung*. But what *parrhesia* and *Aufklärung* are being discussed? Where do they touch to constitute the critical attitude that Foucault places at the basis of his ontology of the present? What educational implications does this relationship of continuity between *parrhesia* and *Aufklärung* assume? These questions lead us to the heart of the research program carried out by the late Foucault with its respective idea of ethical formation of the subject, which was abruptly cut short by his early death⁶.

In this topic we will briefly investigate some aspects of the meaning of ancient *parrhesia* that directly influenced the Kantian *Aufklärung*, selecting just a few of the countless passages that make up Foucault's meticulous examination of the theme. *Parrhesia* is not a new theme in Foucault's work – it did not appear exclusively in the course of 1983, it had already begun to take shape in a more detailed way at least a year earlier, in *The hermeneutics of the subject* (2004), a 1982 course. In this course Foucault investigates the meaning of *parrhesia* in the Greco-Roman tradition, focusing on Socrates and Seneca. We are now interested, within the scope of this course, in the double meaning of *parrhesia* that we find in the second hour of the class on March 10, 1982, in which Foucault comments in detail on letter 75, of Seneca's *Letters to Lucilius* (2014).

The first sense of *parrhesia* that appears there is immediately linked to the problem of guiding the soul and the need for the presence of the other for such guidance. In this context, precise *parrhesia* proves to be useful for the “management” of the soul. But what meaning does this usefulness take on? Such usefulness reveals that the word heard needs to show its efficiency in practice, that is, in the actions of the subjects involved. Reconstructing Seneca's argument, Foucault concludes: “It is in experience that the effectiveness, the usefulness of the word heard, of the word that was transmitted by *parrhesia* will be measured” (Foucault, 2004, p. 489). By putting the problem in these terms, he is pleading a decisive philosophical question, namely, that the guidance of the soul is not only a problem of logos, of the rationally delivered discourse, but also and mainly of *ergon*, that is, of human practice and action. Therefore, in this first sense, *parrhesia* means the guidance of the soul that takes place through a special use of the word which demands from those involved in the dialogue, as we will see later, a commitment to act on what is said. Here we see embryonically anticipated the central problem of *The Government of Self and Others*.

The second sense seeks to further specify the nature of this government and, extracting it from Letter 75, Foucault presents frank speech and the courage to tell the truth as the constitutive core of *parrhesia*. When human relations between rulers and ruled reach this level of frankness, they enable freedom, that is, they make the subjects involved in the relationship free. This is why Seneca translates *parrhesia* into Latin as *libertas*. Therefore, here we have frankness as an indispensable condition for the freedom of the soul or, more specifically, of the subject of action. What frankness is this and where does it spring from in the relationship between rulers and ruled? It springs fundamentally from the *exemplum* given by the subject who commits himself, assuming in act what he says, constituting the philosophical *ergon* in its purest simplicity. According to Foucault: “The moment one says ‘I tell the truth’, one undertakes to do what he says and to be the subject of a behavior that obeys, point by point, the truth formulated by him” (Foucault, 2004, p. 492). It is now explicitly formulated what underlied the first sense of *parrhesia*, that is, that the coherence between speaking

and acting ensured by the *exemplum* is taken as the guiding thread of the relationship between rulers and ruled. And, towards the end of the aforementioned class, Foucault still takes the *exemplum* contained by *parrhesia* as a ferment in the relationship of shared lives, which allows permanently restoring the bond between human beings. This will be central in modernity, as we will see later, to think about the redistribution of the relationship between the government of self and others, thereby allowing the subversion of the vitiated relationship between unrestricted obedience and absence of thought, which characterizes the state of minority and which a strong, uncritical version of modern reason simply covers up or ignores.

In summary, *parrhesia* appears in this class of the 1982 course as a frank form of government of the human soul whose ethical-formative support basis is the *exemplum*. This *exemplum* as something that happens in action requires both rulers and ruled, above all, to put themselves in the action itself, permanently doing the reflective exercise of self; therefore, *parrhesia* demands from the subject his own constant critical examination. This notion, which will be deepened in the 1983 course, becomes, as we will see, the main legacy of the Kantian *Aufklärung*, insofar as it sustains and encourages the courage to think for oneself.

Considering the extension and depth of the course *The Government of Self and Others*, we can now make just a small cut, aiming to show in some of its passages the parrhesiastic origin of the Kantian critical attitude outlined in *Was ist Aufklärung?*, 1784. In the course of the various classes, seeking to reflect on the relationship between philosophy and politics and on what the role of the first in relation to the latter actually consisted of, Foucault reviews numerous ancient authors and texts, giving greater prominence to Euripides and Plato. Therefore, in the 1983 course, there is a greater specification of *parrhesia*, which is not the keynote of the 1982 course, that is, its political developments. “This is political *parrhesia*” (Foucault, 2013, p. 143). With this aim in mind Foucault deals in detail with the tragic poetry of Euripides, especially of *Ion*, whose main character bears the same name as the play. From his exhaustive commentary on this play and the detailed analysis of its characters, the following passage should be retained for our point:

In order for Ion to return to Athens and found democracy, he needs *parrhesia*. Therefore, *parrhesia* is, in the person of Ion, the very foundation of democracy, in any case its point of origin, its anchor point. For there to be democracy, there must be *parrhesia* (Foucault, 2013, p. 144).

The passage above states that *parrhesia* is a condition of possibility of democracy. It is true that at this same point in the text democracy is also posited as a condition of *parrhesia*, which thus establishes a circularity between the two: “For there to be democracy, there must be *parrhesia*; for there to be *parrhesia*, there must be democracy” (Foucault, 2013, p. 144). The core of this circle consists of reciprocal freedom and

the legitimate condition that subjects have to govern one another. However, understood in this higher political sense, democratic *parrhesia* contains a risk: “It is this political risk of the word that gives freedom to other words and assigns oneself the task of, rather than bending others to one’s will, persuading them; this is what constitutes the proper field of *parrhesia*” (Foucault, 2013, p. 98). Therefore, in its democratic political meaning, *parrhesia* consists of this frank speaking that provokes the manifestation of other words, not to dominate the subjects, but to convince them through the speech itself. Therefore, it can be seen that Euripides embryonically anticipates, in this play, a type of frank speaking that will be characteristic of the Kantian *parrhesia* of *Aufklärung*, insofar as Ion’s attitude minimally presupposes the political right to make democratic public use of reason, considering that such use needs to take place in frank dialogue between two or more people, aiming at the freedom of each one of them and ensuring that all of them can constitute themselves as subjects liable for their own actions. In summary, this tragic parrhesiastic knowledge contains two characteristics that will be crucial to the exercise of Kantian enlightenment as a search for majority: freedom in the public use of the word and the power to say it frankly.

This is what we can briefly say of the depth of this play by Euripides, without, of course, dealing fully with the detailed analysis of it provided by Foucault. Let us now focus on another aspect of *parrhesia* that Foucault extracts from Plato’s thought and which can also be seen as an embryonic anticipation of the Kantian *Aufklärung*. This aspect is found in the Letters, mainly in Letter VII (2008), which refers to the passage from logos to *ergon*, characterizing Plato’s formative attitude as a political adviser. Although the context here is of a tyrannical monarchy, it is important to note that the characteristics of *parrhesia* decisively help to define the profile and role of the political advisor, of his art of guiding the prince’s soul. From Foucault’s exhaustive analysis of Letter VII, it is worth retaining as a summary the following passage:

Parrhesia is, therefore, the activity that Plato recognizes and claims as being at the bottom, at the root of his activity as an advisor. He is an advisor, which means that he uses *parrhesia*, that *parrhesia* with all its characteristics that you have recognized: he commits himself personally, it is his speech, it is his opinion; such opinion takes into account both general principles and a particular situation, it addresses people as a general principle, but it persuades them individually (Foucault, 2013, p. 255).

As an advisor, Plato pledges his word, takes the prince in his individuality and in his specific conjunctural and political context, but also considers him in the light of general principles. Thus, a direction taken by the Kantian *Aufklärung* is clearly outlined here, insofar as Kant seeks to advise Frederick II. But he also seeks to express philosophical truth-telling in the public sphere, considering the writer (*Gelehrter*) who freely and frankly addresses his readers as an example of the critical public use of reason.

In summary, in a historical time very distant from ancient thinkers, Kant emphasizes the nexus between *parrhesia* and *Aufklärung* as decisive for thinking about the redistribution of the relationship between the government of self and others, with the aim of overcoming the vices inherent to the state of minority. However, similarly to ancient thinkers, he attributes to subjects a significant part of the responsibility for their own minority condition. Now, as we will see, it is precisely this recognition that gives the formative tone to the question of *Aufklärung*, making the courage to think for oneself its own motto.

Kantian Enlightenment as a Critical Attitude

In the previous topic, we briefly reconstructed the meaning of *parrhesia* that Foucault extracts from the *Ion* (2011) and the *Letter VII* (2008), showing that, although these two texts were written in very different historical moments, they have in common the notion of *parrhesia* as a free and frank use of the word, referring to the exercise of the subject committed with himself and with others. This ethical-formative demand inherent in ancient *parrhesia* is, in a certain sense, also the core of the Kantian *Aufklärung*.

Kant's critical thinking constitutes the watershed in modernity, as, by inaugurating a new way of doing philosophy, it gives rise to two great contemporary philosophical traditions, called by Foucault analytic of truth and history of veridiction. While the first tradition focuses primarily on the logical-semantic field of truth, the history of veridiction takes as its core the practical dimension of philosophy, whose ancient parrhesiastic origin consists in the "practice that it does, in its relationship with politics, the proof of its reality" (Foucault, 2013, p. 321). In this context, Kant's novelty became possible because he was able to critically retain aspects of the past philosophical tradition, offering the argumentative strength necessary for many of his ideas to live on beyond his time, heating up the philosophical debate of the following centuries. In this way, we find both in his main works and in his shorter texts the frequent presence of the long Greco-Roman tradition, especially with regard to his practical philosophy, of various themes of ancient Stoicism.⁷ The genealogical procedure adopted by Foucault allows us to understand the overlap between the classics of the philosophical tradition, putting the problem of the "history of thought" and its repercussion in contemporary culture far beyond the exclusionary debate between modernity and postmodernity. Now, it is precisely this procedure that allows him to see in Kant's thought one foot stuck in the past and another pointing to the future, insofar as he assigns to the philosopher the role of thinking about his own actuality and himself as a subject who thinks about such actuality.

This genealogy appears clearly in Foucault's interpretation of the text *Was ist Aufklärung?* by Kant. The genealogical procedure⁸ consists of two dimensions, one historical and another conceptual, which, by mutually implicating each other, become exemplary of the formative

way in which the researcher in general can face the classical text and other broader cultural productions. Foucault offers, in the historical dimension of his genealogy, albeit briefly, the cultural contextualization of the matter of *Aufklärung* presupposed by Kant. Foucault could only do so because he had deep knowledge of European modernity and specifically of eighteenth-century Prussian history. This procedure guides the first hour of the class on January 5, 1983, when the four reasons that make Kant's text interesting are exposed: the place and date of publication of the text, characterizing the notion of *Publikum* in Prussian society at the time; the encounter, in the field of the public sphere, of the Christian *Aufklärung* with the Jewish *Aufklärung*, marking the fruitful intellectual relationship of Kant with Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786);⁹ the emergence of a new type of question in the field of philosophical reflection, constituted by history as a source of problematization of the present moment; finally, the conception of *Aufklärung* as a cultural process that designates itself as a manifestation of a certain way of philosophizing which has a history prior to the 18th century and which extends far beyond it. In summary, these four reasons allow "making the genealogy, not so much of the notion of modernity, but of modernity as a question" (Foucault, 2013, p. 15). Therefore, it is genealogy in its historical dimension that allows us to understand why modernity has become a question of *Aufklärung*.

The historical dimension is linked to the conceptual dimension that allowed Foucault to investigate the very conceptual framework used by Kant to understand *Aufklärung* as a relevant issue of the present. It is in this second dimension of his procedure that he shows how it is possible and necessary to consider the text's internal argumentative constitution, dismembering and analyzing in detail its main concepts, reconstructing the meanings they have, and indicating how these meanings are linked to each other. As it is preceded by the historical dimension, the conceptual reconstruction is not satisfied only with the exegesis of the text. Guided by the notion of philosophy as a way of life, the procedure inheres to reality, aiming at the transformation of the very subject who carries out the reconstruction. This dimension of the conceptual analysis of genealogy appears more clearly in the second hour of the first class of the 1983 course, when Foucault begins a detailed examination of some of the most important passages in the Kantian text. It is in this dimension of the genealogical method that the author's astuteness and interpretative potential is shown, since he is faced with the requirement of having to choose and properly analyze the passages of the text investigated.

In this context, it is worth asking about the most appropriate criterion for choosing and analyzing passages in the text. Certainly, the decisive criterion lies in the prior and clear positioning of the question to be investigated. As his research problem consists of knowing what made *Aufklärung* become a matter of actuality that deserved philosophical effort on it, Foucault begins his interpretation of the first paragraph of the text *Was ist Aufklärung?* highlighting the concept of

passage (*Ausgang*) as an initial problematization of *Aufklärung* as an actuality matter. *Ausgang* characterizes *Aufklärung* itself well, firstly because it means a process (movement) that does not point to a determined and fixed end.¹⁰ Here Kant is seen as a thinker who opposes the predetermined and fixed teleological meaning of history and society. Secondly, because *Ausgang* adequately problematizes the human condition by considering it as a state of minority that is by no means natural and that, therefore, should not be conceived as such. Finally, at the end of the first paragraph of his text, Kant presents majority as the *Ausgang* of the state of minority, making majority rest on the courage to think on one's own (Kant, 1998).

Foucault considers all this still only as a matter of set, serving as a propaedeutic of the interpretation of the text. He then moves on to the specific questions, considering more closely the departure from minority to majority as something that makes *Aufklärung* a crucial problem of modernity, that is, of its own actuality. Now, it is precisely in the analysis of these questions that we find the legacy of ancient *parrhesia*. But how does such inheritance appear there effectively? Discovering and listing the steps of the answer to this question helps us to perceive not only the philosophical originality of Kant but also the originality of Foucault's interpretation. Furthermore – and this is our hypothesis – these steps make clear the formative basis inherent to the double constitutive dimension of the genealogical procedure. By providing this, such steps allow us to bring to the surface the very idea of post-humanist human formation that is already present, albeit latently, in modernity as a philosophical matter. We have identified three important steps in the Foucauldian genealogy – which we will briefly reconstruct below and which we also consider as part of our interpretive hypothesis.

The first step rests on the link pointed out by Foucault between coming out of minority and the exercise of critical activity. Such a link presupposes – and this is certainly its most interesting aspect – that the question of the government of self and others needs to be thought of analogously to the permanent critical self-examination of reason. More precisely, the problem of modernity emerges from the vitiated relationship between the government of self and the government of others. But what is the origin of this vice and what is it based on? It has to do with the fact that the superimposition of the direction of others on the use we could make of our own understanding (*Verstand*) or moral conscience (*Gewissen*) is due, in this case, not solely to the violence of an external authority, but to ourselves, that is, to a certain relationship we enter into with ourselves. This causes the problem to be inverted, making the subject place himself in the situation and feel responsible for it, that is, for what is happening around him and within himself. It is only when he becomes aware of this problem and assumes it as his responsibility that the subject begins to face this vitiated relationship more adequately. However, taking up the problem in this way means understanding the modern critical attitude in terms of the freedom and frankness afforded by the ancient *parrhesiastic* exercise. In this way, the presence of these

aspects of *parrhesia* makes the critical self-examination of reason be carried out in an ethical manner, that is, it makes the critical attitude as a definer of *Aufklärung* be freely and frankly guided.

The second step refers to the adequate understanding of the state of minority, since it is at the origin of the vitiated relationship between government of self and others. What does the minority state consist of and in what sense does it become the main obstacle for the government relationship to take place properly? According to Foucault, Kant defines the state of minority as an illegitimate relationship or undue confusion between two pairs, namely, between obedience and absence of reasoning, and between private and public. Both impose, each in their own way, a deficit in the subject's autonomy relationship with himself, making it impossible to form self-government. With regard to the first pair, a misleading belief has been consolidated: that obedience presupposes the absence of reasoning, that is, to be able to obey correctly, it is forbidden to think! This is typical, as Kant himself exemplifies in the text, of large institutions such as the army, church and state, in which the soldier, the priest and the tax collector demand that orders be carried out without reasoning. Now, it is the predominance of this social and political situation, characteristic of a vertical and authoritarian hierarchy, that further feeds the human propensity for laziness and cowardice, blocking the possibility of thinking for oneself.

In relation to public and private, the second pair that characterizes the state of minority, the distinction that Kant (1998) makes is subtle and can immediately lend itself to misconception. As Foucault (2013) warns, such distinction refers not to a state of affairs, but to human abilities and the way in which they are used. So, what would be the legitimate or illegitimate use of our abilities in both the private and public spheres? In what terms does the legitimacy or illegitimacy of such employment clarify the *Aufklärung* question? The private to which Kant refers is not, as one might imagine at first sight, personal use, in the private sense of what we could make of our abilities, but the professional use, as we are members of a certain institution that aims at the common good. For example, when preaching, the priest would not have the right to publicly disrespect the doctrine of the church aimed at the common good; or, when exercising his pedagogical role in the classroom, the teacher cannot mischaracterize the school in its public dimension. In this way, by acting still respecting the institution's rules aimed at the common good, the professional is making legitimate private use of his abilities.

And how does the public use of our abilities occur? It does not, of course, occur when we employ our abilities in the sphere of intimacy, where we can easily allow ourselves to be driven by our selfish interests; it does not occur in the professional sphere either, referring to this or that activity, whether economic, political or even educational. The public use we make of our abilities happens when we consider ourselves rational subjects and, adopting a comprehensive point of view – which goes far beyond the individual selfish subject and even the institutional

subject –, we address all rational beings, taking humanity as an end. Foucault summarizes the public use of human abilities in the following passage from the second hour of the first class of the 1983 course:

When do we constitute ourselves as a universal subject? When, as a rational subject, we address the set of rational beings. And it is simply there, in this activity which is precisely and par excellence that of the writer addressing the reader, it is at this moment that we find a dimension of the public that is, at the same time, the dimension of the universal (Foucault, 2013, p. 35).

In other words, the public use of human abilities takes place in the condition of a writing subject, because it is in it that the subject can exemplarily take himself as rational in the enlightened critical sense of the term and, precisely because of this, he can also consider all other subjects, his potential readers, as rational beings. As becoming rational becomes a decisive criterion for the enlightened subject, investigating its meaning is the central task of the very question of *Aufklärung*, which Kant addresses by attributing public and plural use to reason itself.

Therefore, in the first step we already find the link between the departure from minority and critical activity, and in the second step this link is deepened through the double movement that characterizes the state of minority. According to Foucault (2013), in this step occurs Kant's bet on the universal public use of reason that is made by the writer, whom is considered by Kant an exemplary representative of rational subjects. These two steps offer some favorable conditions to break the unrestricted obedience that characterizes the state of minority, at the same time pushing the human condition to majority. But what exactly does the state of majority consist of? In what sense does such a state provide for the critical public use of human abilities? These two questions lead us to the third and final step of Foucault's interpretation, which, despite already underlying the two previous steps, must now gain evidence in our own interpretation.

Foucault (2013) considers that – and this is the properly political aspect of the question of modern *Aufklärung* – the redistribution of the relationship between the government of self and others is an indispensable requirement to remove it from that vitiated environment characterized by the double negative dimension of the minority state. Therefore, this means that the democratic conception and procedure make it possible to subvert the authoritarian and brutalizing relationship between unrestricted obedience and the absence of thought. It is also in the democratic sphere that freedom of reasoning in the public use of reason is ensured, enabling the writer to make frank use of the word and thus consider himself and others as rational subjects, because it is in this condition that he can think comprehensively. All this is directly related to the human courage (ability) to think for oneself and can only be ensured by such an ability. This is precisely why Kant holds *sapere aude* in such high regard, putting it as the motto of the *Aufklärung* question. In summary, *Aufklärung* as a matter of modernity is characterized

by the passage from minority to majority, and such a transition begins when the human being assumes the courage to think for himself. As the basis of such thinking is the parrhesiastic demand for permanent self-examination, driven by the free and frank word that commits the subject in action, the redistribution of the relationship between the government of self and others gains a distinctly ethical emphasis. That is why – already in Kant and later and more clearly in Foucault – democracy only acquires political value in its ethical dimension, for only in this way can it transform into a fully socialized and intersubjective way of life, because it always involves the self and the other.

Conclusive remarks

We have sought to argue above that the richness and depth of the thought of the late Foucault escapes the narrowness of certain versions of the debate between modernity and postmodernity because his historical ontology justifies the critical attitude exercised through careful dialogue with the philosophical tradition. Such a dialogue allows him to retain that important core of the Kantian *Aufklärung* which has its roots in ancient, Greco-Roman parrhesiastic knowledge. The common problem of this great and diverse philosophical tradition is the way it seeks to reflect on the vitiated character of the relationship between the government of self and others, because the main evils that afflict humanity and that lead to authoritarian and exclusionary political positions specifically stem from the vices of this relationship. In this sense, both the Greco-Roman tradition and the Kantian *Aufklärung* attribute responsibility for part of the problem to the subject himself, especially when such subject refuses to make critical use of his own abilities. Now, as the major problem originates primarily from the vitiated relationship that the subject maintains with himself, the way out consists of rethinking such a relationship based on a level of freedom and frankness that allows the subject to face his own vices. However, he can only do so only with the help of the enlightened public (of the learned writer). In this sense, the Kantian courage to think for oneself is inspired by the frank talk of the master inherent in ancient *parrhesia*.

It is now time, as a conclusion, to highlight the post-humanist formative perspective that is inherent in the way Foucault interprets the Kantian matter of *Aufklärung*. We will briefly analyze two of the various formative aspects present in this question. First, the one that springs from the double dimension of the genealogical procedure. Both the historical and the conceptual dimensions teach the investigating subject (the reader) to interpret the text considering it both in its historical-cultural context and in its internal conceptual fabric. Conceiving the author in his context is a necessary, though not sufficient, step to be able to understand his ideas. This first step is propaedeutic and enables one to surrender first to his argument, understanding it from within. Now, the meticulous and persistent exercise of this double genealogical dimension makes possible the adventure of thinking for oneself, preparing the

subject investigating the classical text to become a critical reader, which allows him to think first with the aforementioned text, aiming, later, to go beyond it. In this way, the question of *Aufklärung* shows itself here at a high level of demand that is indispensable to make democracy happen as a way of life, namely, the formation of subjects who are capable of interpreting texts and, as a result, understanding the world in which they live.

The second formative aspect concerns the internal Kantian question of *Aufklärung*, highlighted by Foucault's own interpretation. As we have seen above, *Aufklärung* becomes a philosophical matter of actuality because Kant was able to adequately problematize the human condition as doubly marked by the state of majority and simultaneously by carrying with it the possibility of majority. The understanding of this ambiguity of the condition makes the question of *Aufklärung* a properly formative question. As the state of minority is not an insurmountable natural question – so Kant teaches us and Foucault emphasizes –, such a state can be broken by the exercise of critical thinking, whose formation presupposes the democratic redistribution of the relationship between government of self and the government of others. In this way, Kant anticipates, already at the beginning of modernity, an ethical-formative sense of democracy that will be crucial to the reflection of the problem of human majority done by countless thinkers of subsequent centuries, including Foucault. In summary, these authors show us that the ethical formation of an increasingly critically enlightened public is an indispensable condition for undoing the mistaken link between unrestricted obedience and the absence of thought.

From a specifically formative point of view, this leads to the critique of educational theories that are still based on the model of transmission of knowledge, which assign students a merely receptive role. Both Kant and Foucault, when questioning the automatic equivalence between obeying and not reasoning, open a clearing in the immense darkness in order to think about the issues of teaching and learning and the relationship between educators and learners in an enlightened way, that is, guided by the ability to think for oneself, presented by Kant himself as the watchword of *Aufklärung*.

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Notes

- 1 In the German original: "Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit" (Kant, 1998, p. 53).
- 2 On a critique of certain versions of humanism that spring from the strong and salvationist sense of modernity, see Júlio G. Aquino (2020).
- 3 The German thinker Jürgen Habermas develops one of the most genuine current philosophical efforts to think reason in a post-metaphysical horizon, which obviously implies the de-transcendentalization of reason itself. On this, see his work *Pensamento pós-metafísico* (*Nachmetaphysisches Denken*), especially the first part (Habermas, 1992, p. 11-60).

- 4 In a recent essay, Oswaldo Giacóia Junior critically reconstructs Jürgen Habermas' interpretation of Michel Foucault, striving to show the elective affinities between the two rather than their differences. In this sense, the genealogical perspective of the late Foucault that points to the historicity of the universal can put him in a more interesting line of dialogue with Habermas' thought (Giacóia Junior, 2013).
- 5 On an updated interpretation of Foucault's reading of Kant, encompassing the "passage" from anthropology to the ontology of the present, see Ricardo Terra (2003).
- 6 Many studies by Brazilian researchers address the Foucauldian ethical formation of the subject specifically in the educational context. See, among others, Alfredo Veiga-Neto (2016), Claudio A. Dalbosco (2019a) and Silvio Galo (2017).
- 7 The number of studies dealing with the relationship between Kantian moral philosophy and Stoic ethics is very large. As good examples of research on this topic, see the works of Maximilian Forschner (1998, p. 91-119) and Valério Rohden (2005, p. 233-248).
- 8 Considering the extensive literature on the Foucauldian genealogical method, see two essays – Raymond Geuss (2003, p. 145-156) and Martin Saar (2003, p. 157-177) – which are close to our way of addressing the matter.
- 9 Mendelssohn himself took part in the debate on the question of the *Aufklärung*, publishing an essay on the topic, also in 1784, in the same *Berlinischen Monatsschrift*, although Kant had no prior knowledge of this essay when he published his. In the aforementioned essay, Mendelssohn distinguishes *Aufklärung*, *Kultur* and *Bildung* (Mendelssohn, 1996).
- 10 For a critique of fixed teleology in the context of *Bildung*, see Claudio A. Dalbosco (2019b).

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